

EXPERIMENTS IN SOFT BALANCING: CHINA- LED MULTILATERALISM IN AFRICA AND THE ARAB WORLD

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Abstract

Multilateralism is a key feature associated with China's rise both at the global and regional level, particularly in South East and Central Asia. Consistently, China has opted for multilateralism to manage cooperation with African and Arab countries, establishing the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, and the Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum. Multilateralism has also been described as China's chosen balancing tool in the post-2001 world. If the role of multilateralism can be inferred from an examination of the principled meanings it embodies, my paper investigates how the said structures might allow such form of balancing. It argues that it can provide a social infrastructure to embed alternative principles and values to those associated with the prevailing configuration of the international system, criticised for its 'double standards' as far as sovereignty, trade liberalisation and third party intervention are concerned. By the same token, multilateralism can also reproduce such principles through the performance of its functions, thereby translating them into norms. I investigate this process by reference to the role of institutions in allowing the adjustment of actors' preferences through socialisation and learning, and the achievement of interdependent goals. I further suggest that the promotion of alternative norms represents an area of interstate cooperation in its own right, where the development of norms in such non-trivial areas as the constitutive principles of the international system (sovereignty and equality), the rules of the international trading system (mutual benefit and win-win), and human rights (primacy of the right of development) should be seen as a collective good.

Keywords: *China, Africa, Arab world, soft balancing, multilateralism*

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“The interstate system is a forum as well as a chessboard”¹

Introduction

China’s relationship with multilateral institutions² has been cautious and diffident for most of its communist history, fearing the machinations of hegemonic actors with unbridled ambitions. However, this attitude begun to shift with the election of Deng Xiaoping at the helm of the Chinese Communist Party, and has been accentuated at each leadership succession. This has been part and parcel of China’s opening up process, leading to her acceptance of peacekeeping in 1981,³ and later to the entrance to the World Trade Organisation in 2001.⁴ Goldstein has described multilateralism as a key element in the “diplomatic face of China’s grand strategy”, aimed at fostering reassurance, especially at the regional level.⁵ Following Zheng Bijian’s original announcement to the world of China’s “Peaceful Rise” at the 2003 *Boao Forum for Asia*, which was later systematized in a *Foreign Policy* article of the Fall of 2005, this has become even more pronounced. It has been identified as the instrument to steer a strategy for “transcend[ing] the traditional ways for great powers to emerge.”⁶ This strategic choice has indeed been regarded as a distinctively Chinese “alternate path” to global power.⁷

This choice has been explained as Beijing’s method for “managing relations with the superpower and work towards building the rules of a ‘new international order through multilateral security dialogue and with the cooperation of organizations.”⁸ For this peculiar quality, the strengthening of policies favourable to multilateralism has also been described as China’s chosen balancing tool

¹James Caporaso, “International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations,” in *Multilateralism Matters*, ed. Helen Milner & John G. Ruggie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 79.

² I am conscious of the definitional ambiguities between the concepts of institution, multilateral organisations, and multilateralism *per se* (For a treatment of the issue, see Lisa L. Martin, “Interests, Power, and Multilateralism,” in *International Institutions: An International Organization Reader*, ed. Lisa L. Martin & Beth A. Simmons (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); Lisa L. Martin “Interests, Power, and Multilateralism,” in *International Institutions: An International Organization Reader*, Lisa L. Martin & Beth A. Simmons (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001). Here I will follow Ruggie’s position, which takes multilateralism as a qualifier for institution (John G. Ruggie, “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution,” in *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, ed. John G. Ruggie (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 109), therefore as an institutional form itself. In turn institutions can be generically defined as “persistent and connected sets of rules, formal and informal, that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations” (Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal*, vol. 45:4 (1990): 731- 764).

³ Y. Zhang, “China and UN peacekeeping: From condemnation to participation,” *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 3:3 (1996): 1 – 15.

⁴ World Trade Organization. Press/243: *WTO successfully concludes negotiations on China's entry*. Geneva, 17 September 2001.

⁵ Avery Goldstein, “The Diplomatic Face of China’s Grand Strategy: A Rising Power’s Emerging Choice,” *The China Quarterly*, vol. 168 (2001): 842-44.

⁶ Zhang Bijian, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005.

⁷ Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions. Alternate Paths to Global Power* (London: Routledge, 2005); Guoguang Wu (ed.) *China Turns to Multilateralism. Foreign Policy and Regional Security* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁸ Christopher R. Hughes, “Nationalism and Multilateralism in Chinese Foreign Policy: Implications for South East Asia,” *The Pacific Review*, vol. 18:1 (2005): 127.

in the post-2001 world,⁹ a solution which can be seen as consistent with the 'soft balancing' thesis. As a result, Beijing has strengthened its participation in multilateral institutions both at the global and regional levels. In the face of the post-2001 US unilateralist turn, and the waning solidity of norms of sovereignty outside of the international democratic space, authors have also pointed to the very pragmatic importance of fostering norms that are more in tune with Chinese interests.¹⁰ Hence, China has gradually shifted its role from that of norm taker, moved by mere compliance, to that of norm broker, becoming a fully fledged entrepreneur. Since multilateral institutions have proved particularly effective in promoting normative change,¹¹ because of the *principled beliefs* they embed,¹² this explains at a very intuitive level the reasons for Beijing's paradigm shift.

This tendency has been observed most notably in South East¹³ and Central¹⁴ Asia. With some necessary distinctions, I argue that China has also opted for multilateralism to manage cooperation with African and Arab countries, creating the *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, and the *Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum (SACF)*. As rules (or norms) are often epiphenomena of underlying interests, multilateralism has come to represent an effective way for China to increase her power projection in the two regions, while sidelining direct confrontation with the superpower.

With an eye to the soft balancing hypothesis, the following essay strives to explain the balancing function of multilateralism by looking at the two latter cases of China's multilateral entrepreneurship. If the role of multilateralism can be inferred from an examination of the principled meanings it embodies,¹⁵ I argue the role of FOCAC and the SACF has to be seen as that of providing a social infrastructure giving permanence to embedded principles and values that stand in contrast to those associated with the present hegemonic configuration of the international system, particularly in regards to sovereignty, trade liberalisation and third party intervention. I investigate this process by reference to Caporaso's definition of the role of institutions.¹⁶

⁹ Zhiyuan Cui, "The Bush Doctrine: A Chinese Perspective," in *American Power in the 21st Century*, David Held & Mathias Koenig-Archibugi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Peter Van Ness, "China's Response to the Bush Doctrine," *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2005; Y. Jing-Dong, "Chinese Perspectives and Responses to the Bush Doctrine," in *Confronting the Bush Doctrine. Critical Views from South East Asia*, ed. Gurtov & Peter Van Ness (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁰ Chweng-Chwee Kuik, "Multilateralism in China's ASEAN Policy: Its Evolution, Characteristics, and Aspiration," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 27: 1 (2005): 102-122; J. Yuan, "Chinese Perspectives and Responses to the Bush Doctrine," in *Confronting the Bush Doctrine. Critical Views from South East Asia*, ed. Gurtov, & Peter Van Ness (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹ Amitav Acharya, "Multilateralism, Sovereignty and Normative Change in World Politics," in *Multilateralism under Challenge? Power, International Order, and Structural Change*, ed. Ramesh Thakur, E. Newman & J. Tirman (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2006), 105- 107.

¹² See John G. Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution," in *Multilateralism Matters. The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form*, ed. John G. Ruggie (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 30.

¹³ Christopher R. Hughes, "Nationalism and Multilateralism in Chinese Foreign Policy: Implications for South East Asia," *The Pacific Review*, vol. 18:1 (2005): 7-45; Chweng-Chwee Kuik, "Multilateralism in China's ASEAN Policy: Its Evolution, Characteristics, and Aspiration," *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 27:1 (2005): 102-122.

¹⁴ Marc Lanteigne, *China and International Institutions. Alternate Paths to Global Power*; K. Sheives, "China Turns West: Beijing's Strategy towards Central Asia," *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 79:2 (2006).

¹⁵ John G. Ruggie, "Multilateralism: the Anatomy of an Institution".

¹⁶ John J. Caporaso, "International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations."

Theoretical Perspectives on Multilateralism

China-led multilateralism in the two regions is hard to pinpoint from a theoretical point of view. At a heuristic level, the standard definition of multilateralism as “the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through *ad hoc* arrangements, or by means of institutions”¹⁷ appears diminutive. On the other hand, Ruggie’s notion of *substantive* multilateralism specifying that coordination happens “on the basis of certain principles of ordering relations among those states,”¹⁸ while fitting, is maximalistic. Whereas Ruggie sees *indivisibility*, *generalized principles*, and *diffuse reciprocity* as those constitutive principles, both the SACF and the FOCAC seem to depart from that kind of approach. As a baseline, the nature of relations is, if we can say so, more symmetrical than transitive,¹⁹ by which I mean that the two frameworks act more as funnels channelling relations between China and the pool of regional countries in a bidirectional way, than multidirectionally among the plurality of actors involved, which may look like a classical ‘hub and spokes’ model, making Ruggie’s criteria essentially marginal. As far as generalised principles are concerned, as will appear from the cooperation patterns reviewed, these really shape behaviour between China and each individual country alone, rather than among all of them. As to the other two, they are sidestepped by the very nature of the principles that underpin relations, which foresee flexibility and differential treatment to accommodate for the particular conditions of each country, as far as indivisibility is concerned; and an understanding of mutual benefit that transcends diffuse reciprocity.

Hence in the distinction between nominal and substantive multilateralism it would seem to be neither. In this way the two institutional settings do not reflect much of the theoretical baggage from which the whole lot of collaboration problems on which IR theory has elaborated descend. Yet, they do bring together “three or more states”, and they do rely on principled meanings to guide behaviour, which is what makes it a very *sui generis* kind of multilateralism.

At an explanatory level, the pre-eminent role of China’s initiative in both contexts points in a certain hermeneutical direction, suggesting the use of multilateralism to further state goals, and a determination to design it accordingly. This view of multilateralism is also the one purported by the rationalist school.²⁰ However, while rational calculations are an important part of the package, the centrality of ideational factors to the institutionalised nature of cooperation under the two *fora* suggests that a constructivist approach has higher analytical leverage in exploring the processes of identity construction and norm promotion that these frameworks apparently serve.

The patterns of multilateral design characterising SACF and FOCAC are better explained assuming that “rationality cannot be separated from any politically significant episode of normative influence, or normative change, just as the normative context conditions any episode of

¹⁷ Robert O. Keohane, “Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research,” *International Journal*, vol. 45:4 (1990): 731.

¹⁸ John G. Ruggie, “Multilateralism: the Anatomy of an Institution.”

¹⁹ In set theory, the transitive property describes relations in which if an element A has a relationship with B, and B with C, then A has a relationship with C. Symmetrical relations describe relations in which all elements of a set have only biunivocal relationships to one another.

²⁰ Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson & Duncan Snidal, “The Rational Design of International Institutions,” *International Organization*, vol. 55:4 (2001): 761-799.

rational choice.”²¹ As Wendt has argued, to explain the patterns of institutional design, it is fundamental to look at the underlying (cultural) structures that make choices rational.²² Hence, if those specific ideational/normative factors do play such a central part in the two institutions, it is in light of the prevailing normative characteristics of the international system they set themselves against. At the same time it is so because of China’s commitment to broaden their acceptance as valuable with an eye at transforming them into legitimate international rules.

There are two paths through which norms can emerge in the social world: one is through social interaction based on specific principles, which creates the intersubjective recognition of a shared identity through which they are consolidated into custom. The other is through the active promotion of discrete rules or principles to regulate and discipline behaviour among actors. In both cases institutions play a central role in promoting the convergence towards a shared understanding of social reality, and embedding and embodying the principles on which they are based. Norms therefore are taken to be the standards of conformity that guide, direct, or bind state behaviour, also creating expectations of appropriate behaviour in other actors.

Finnemore and Sikkink’s concept of *strategic social construction* well captures the goal oriented-nature that norm-promotion can take under one actor’s leadership within structured social contexts. In this train of thought, I argue that SACF and FOCAC represent “institutional platforms”²³ in which China, acting as *entrepreneur*, can facilitate such intersubjective processes ultimately directed to the making of full-fledged international norms. It goes without saying that this amounts to an attempt to reshape the international rules, so to make them more consistent with her own interests and values. As Hedley Bull noted “an important means to the legitimisation of rules is to have them endorsed by international assemblies.”²⁴

If, as Ruggie suggested, multilateralism emerges out of the projection of a “dominant normative orientation in the domestic practices” of a leading power, on which its leading co-members come to agree,²⁵ it seems that the two institutional settings are emerging out of a similar process, giving permanence to norms, and securing a wider numerical base for the legitimisation of her normative claim on the international arena.²⁶ Because of the following three roles of international institutions it may appear clearer why a multilateral approach may allow China to do so: first, it offers an environment for socialisation and learning that will lead actors to alter mutual preferences. Second, it can contribute to increase trust, by providing a framework through which

²¹ Martha Finnemore, & Catherine Sikkink, “International Norms and Political Change,” in *Exploration and Contestation in the Study of World Politics*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein et al. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 249. On the overlap between the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness in political science see also K. Goldmann, “Appropriateness and Consequences: The Logic of Neo-Institutionalism,” *Governance*, vol. 18:1 (2005): 35–52.

²² Alexander Wendt, “Driving with the Rear-view Mirror: On the Rational Science of Institutional Design,” *International Organization*, vol. 55:4 (2001): 1024.

²³ Martha Finnemore & Catherine Sikkink, “International Norms and Political Change,” 259.

²⁴ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 69.

²⁵ M.A. Levy et al, “The Study of International Regimes,” *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 1:3 (1995): 276; John G. Ruggie, “Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution,” 30.

²⁶ It should be noted that as a matter of fact, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are indeed inscribed in the Chinese Constitution of 1982. See footnote 5.

separate agents can achieve interdependent goals. Third it can promote norms, and their adherence.²⁷

Following the theoretical approach outlined above, this paper will look into the actual make-up of the two frameworks in order to examine how they perform on the three above functions thanks to a structured focused comparison.²⁸ Because such functions imply the underpinning of specified principles, finding that they are observed would indeed support the view that such *fora* are more and more becoming the focal points for the emergence of international norms, acquiring the desired balancing function.

This inquiry will use the three functions of multilateralism as a ‘model’ to bring to light the ways in which their performance by the two institutional settings concurs to institutionalise the principled meanings that underwrite them, in their dual nature as *rules of the game*, by which I refer to the intersubjective criteria on which interstate interactions are premised, and as an *issue area* for cooperation, by which I mean a sector where cooperation and coordination of policy actually occurs.

Their nature as rules of the game will be investigated in light of the extent to which the two *fora* promote a learning process, whereby the actors involved come to embrace and endorse similar outlooks and value systems. This is done by providing evidence in favour of the emergence of a shared identity, and of the convergence of policy positions. The sources of data in the first two cases will be official speeches and statements appeared on the press and on institutional websites from the countries involved, as well as, newspaper articles and press reports.²⁹

Their nature as an issue area will be investigated by reference to how the two *fora* contribute to the promotion of new norms. A better definition of this concept and the investigation will form the subject of the last part of the third section. Data sources will consist of the official documents of the *fora*, namely the Joint Declarations and Action Plans, to draw statements of policy positions and formulation of policy courses aimed at promoting new norms or altering existing ones.

The next section will briefly present the two case studies; the third section will proceed to the focused comparison of the two case studies on the three theoretical items here identified. Lastly, I draw some conclusions and relate them to the soft balancing thesis, tying the question to the broader issue of the growing primacy of soft-power in the 21st century.

²⁷ James A. Caporaso, “International Relations Theory and Multilateralism: The Search for Foundations,” 76-77.

²⁸ On Structured Focused Comparison see A. George and A. Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

²⁹ A methodological weakness that should be acknowledged as a potential source of bias is that the majority of my sources were Chinese due to the poor availability of African and Arab fonts, at least in translation.

The Case Studies

Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum

Institutional Features. Launched in February 2004 with Hu Jintao's visit to the Secretariat of the League of Arab States (LAS), the Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum (SACF) has since evolved into a rather effective cooperation instrument, with a moderate degree of institutionalisation.

In little more than five years, the SACF has blossomed as an original framework for multilateral cooperation between China and the 22 Arab countries making up the LAS, which acts as the single Arab counterpart to China.

The Forum is coordinated at the Ministerial level, through a Ministerial Meeting held biannually, which provides impetus and direction, and approves an Action Plan for the two year period. Two have been held thus far: the first one in Cairo in 2004, and the second in Beijing in 2006. A third Ministerial Meeting took place in Bahrain in May 2008.

Ministerial decisions are then executed by the Meetings of Senior Officials, which serve to stir follow up to the Action Plans. To date, four such meetings have taken place on a yearly basis since 2004. The fourth meeting was held in Cairo in July 2007, and came up with the demand for improved coordination mechanisms, which can be expected to announce higher degrees of institutionalisation in the future.

The SACF has also established collateral cooperative frameworks like the China-Arab Friendship Association, or the Arab-Chinese Businessmen Forum, which was set up following the first Action Plan, and has held two editions: in Beijing in 2005 and in Amman in 2007. Moreover, there are plans to establish an oil forum.³⁰

Discursive Features. This section will highlight the main elements characterising Chinese discourse regarding the SACF. Three such elements can be identified, suggesting China's important investment in the ideational/normative orientation of the Forum.

First, a great deal of emphasis is given to the values of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which are presented as having actually always represented the common currency of Sino-Arab relations. The notion of a shared past is stressed to convey this message, as can be found in the Chinese foreign minister's proclamation that "Looking back, we can summarize the 50 years of Sino- Arab relations as mutual trust, mutual benefit and mutual assistance."³¹

³⁰ "China and Arab states to hold 1st oil meeting", The Chinese Central Government's Official Web Portal, June 1, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/01/content_298000.htm (accessed August 15, 2007).

³¹ *China Daily*, "China and Arab nations sign action plan", June 2, 2006, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2006-06/02/content_606862.htm (accessed August 15, 2007)

The clear content of such principles was more clearly expounded by Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, in an address to the Second Ministerial Meeting, stressing the importance of *common development* as the basis of relations. Reviewing Sino-Arab relations, he noted that:

*“After fifty years of development, China-Arab relations have entered a period of maturity and stability and can boast a wealth of experience as follows: politically, mutual respect and equality; economically, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation; and culturally, mutual enrichment and complementarity.”*³²

A second element of China’s strategic practice is the emphasis on the notion of unity and harmony of interests between the two sides. Ambassador Song Aiguo, who chaired the Fourth Meeting of Senior Officials in Cairo in July 2007, suggested that China and Arab countries “share wide consensus in many areas of international affairs, and complement one another in the fields of economic cooperation and trade.”³³ But this only echoed the line given by Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing at the Second Ministerial Meeting, saying that “(...) common objectives and wide-ranging shared interests have enabled the two sides to strengthen cooperation.” And consider a previous statement by a further statement by Li according to which “No matter how the international situation changes, China has always been the sincere friend of the Arab world.”³⁴

Third, the evocation of a common past, of shared interest and the parsing of distinctive values are instrumental to the establishment of what is being defined as a *new* type of partnership. As observed by Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing at a joint news conference with two LAS leaders, “the meeting made it clear that ‘building a new partnership’ is the direction of future China-Arab relations.”³⁵

The title of the address given by State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan, “*Deepening Friendship and Strengthening Cooperation to Build a New-type China-Arab Partnership*,” speaks precisely to this connotation of Sino Arab relations. Interestingly enough, the speech contains 10 repetitions of the word *new*, including the title. This word is used to denote “new problems and challenges” that both sides must confront, a “new historical point” in response to which “China will work with the Arab countries to open a new chapter for China-Arab friendship and cooperation.” This is supposed to represent a “new-type China-Arab partnership,” for a “new era [of cooperation],” in which “we can revitalize our two ancient civilizations in the new era and make new contribution to the global cultural progress.”³⁶

³² “Deepening Friendship and Strengthening Cooperation To Build a New-type China-Arab Partnership”, Statement by Tang Jiaxuan, State Councillor of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the 2nd Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab Cooperation Forum, May 31, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t256775.htm> (accessed August 15, 2007).

³³ *East Day*, “Senior Chinese diplomat says Sino-Arab relations heading towards new partnership,” July 6, 2007, <http://english.eastday.com/eastday/englishedition/nation/userobject1ai2954798.html> (accessed June 13, 2008).

³⁴ *Xinhua*, “Forum promotes co-op links with Arab nations,” Sep. 16, 2004, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2004-09/16/content_1988163.htm (accessed July 15, 2008).

³⁵ Le Tian, “China, Arab nations sign action plan,” *China Daily*, June 2, 2006, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2006-06/02/content_606862.htm (accessed July 10, 2008).

³⁶ “Deepening Friendship and Strengthening Cooperation To Build a New-type China-Arab Partnership”, Statement by Tang Jiaxuan, State Councillor of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the 2nd Ministerial

Seemingly, the novelty resides precisely in the commitment to step up the principles of mutual benefit, or win-win cooperation, and non interference as the language for relations between the two sides. These are meant to be the premises for a strong partnership, for which President Hu Jintao outlined a tentative agenda as follows:

*Maintaining mutual respect, equitable treatment and sincere cooperation on the political front. Promoting economic and trade ties through cooperation in investment, trade, contracted projects, labour service, energy, transportation, telecommunications, agriculture, environmental protection and information. Expanding cultural exchanges. Conducting personnel training.*³⁷

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

Institutional Features. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was launched in Beijing in 2000 under President Jiang Zemin.³⁸ The Forum brings together China and the 48 out of 50 African countries that have diplomatic relations with China, and has rapidly developed since inception, into an all round cooperation and dialogue mechanism. Leaders of China and African countries have pledged to make FOCAC a new platform for closer cooperation, with a certain degree of institutionalization, and it now has its own website and logo.

Political direction of the Forum is provided at the Ministerial level, thanks to triennial Ministerial Meetings held alternately in China and a selected African country, which, after approving a Program for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development in 2000, are also responsible for adopting an Action Plan for the period in question. Three such meetings have been held so far in Beijing in 2000, in Addis Ababa in 2003, and once again in Beijing in 2006, while the fourth was held in Egypt in July 2009.³⁹

At the coordination level FOCAC is supported by the Meetings of Senior Officials series, five of which have been held so far. These include a ministerial level conference held in 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia, a meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia November 2002,⁴⁰ the fourth and the fifth were held in Beijing in August 2005 and November 2006 respectively, the latest one just ahead of the Third

Meeting of China-Arab Cooperation Forum, May 31, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t256775.htm> (accessed July 14, 2008).

³⁷“First Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum Ministerial Meeting Held,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to Canada, Sep. 15, 2004, <http://www.chinaembassycanada.org/eng/xwdt/t157646.htm> (accessed July 15, 2008)

³⁸ “Deputy President Jacob Zuma & Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma to Lead South African Delegation to the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 14 -16 December 2003,” South African Government Information, <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2003/03121509461001.htm> (accessed 14. 07. 2008)

³⁹ “Third ministerial meeting of FOCAC opens in Beijing,” The Central Chinese Government’s Official Web Portal, Nov. 3, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-11/03/content_431620.htm (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁴⁰ *People’s Daily*, “China-Africa Cooperation Forum SOM opens in Addis Ababa,” November 25, 2002, http://english.people.com.cn/200211/25/eng20021125_107430.shtml (accessed July 15, 2008).

Ministerial. The sixth Meeting was held in Cairo, Egypt on October 18-19, 2008 in preparation for the 2009 Summit.⁴¹

The FOCAC also includes a follow-up mechanism, based on an inter-ministerial committee between China and the African countries for implementing Forum Action Plans. Its establishment was stipulated in the 2000 “Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development”, and took effect in 2002⁴² following the ministerial consultation in Lusaka.

Imitated by some African countries, Beijing also established her own FOCAC follow-up Secretariat soon after the First Ministerial in 2000,⁴³ which is headed at the level of Secretary-General, by Ms. Xu Jinghu,⁴⁴ and consults regularly with the African diplomatic corps in Beijing.⁴⁵ As for the SACF a periodic entrepreneur’s conference also exists.

Discursive Features. The rhetorical and discursive practices around which China is building a sense of solidarity are similar to the ones deployed in the SACF context. Likewise, they revolve around three interrelated tenets: the evocation and celebration of a time-honoured relationship as a cementing factor between the two sides, a shared outlook on international affairs presuming identity of interests, and the novelty of the approach to cooperation. A fourth peculiar element actually characterises the discourse under FOCAC: the accent on economic development and the centrality of South-South cooperation to overcome the inequalities of globalisation.

An idea of the first tenet is given by a phrase pronounced by Premier Wen Jiabao to commemorate 50 years of diplomatic relations with African countries: “China and Africa are geographically far apart. But despite the vast distance, our bond of friendship and cooperation has remained strong and vibrant. (...) And we have forged a profound friendship between us”. On the same occasion, Wen further elucidated the idea stating that:

“China-Africa friendly relations, built on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, have stood the test of time and flourished. China and Africa remain good friends, good brothers and good partners, sharing both weal and woe and

⁴¹ “The Sixth Senior Officials Meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Is Held in Cairo, Egypt,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, Oct. 22, 2008, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t518952.htm> (accessed October 25, 2009).

⁴² “Establishment of Follow-up Mechanisms”, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/hxxd/hxjz/t157589.htm> (accessed November 2, 2008).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Report by Xu Jinghu, Secretary General of Chinese Follow-up Committee of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), at the 4th Senior Officials’ Meeting of FOCAC, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, August 22, 2005, <http://big5.fmprc.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zt/focac4thsom/t207956.htm> (accessed June 25, 2008).

⁴⁵ Report by Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, to the Second Ministerial Conference of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Addis Ababa, China’s Official Gateway to News and Information, December 15, 2003, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/focac/184464.htm> (accessed June 25, 2008).

*profound friendship. I am firm in the conviction that no matter how our world may change, the friendly ties between the Chinese and Africans will last”*⁴⁶

China’s 2006 Africa policy elaborated a similar concept, stating that “China-Africa friendship is embedded in the long history of interchange. Sharing similar historical experience, China and Africa have all along sympathized with and supported each other in the struggle for national liberation and forged a profound friendship”⁴⁷. For these reasons, it is claimed, the “China-Africa relationship is truly a model of equality and friendship for the international community.”⁴⁸

The second tenet is the shared interests which are said to originate from their common belonging to the group of developing countries, as can be observed in the tone of the 2000 Beijing declaration: “We also emphasise that both China and African countries are developing countries with common fundamental interests”. Which leads to the belief that “(...) in the new era, China and Africa have common development goals and converging interests, which offer a broad prospect for cooperation.”⁴⁹ But the former President Jiang Zemin even alluded to an outright common identity in his opening speech at the first FOCAC Meeting: “We have come to the conclusion after a review of the history of the past one hundred years that the Chinese people and the African people both treasure independence, love peace and long for development and that they are both important forces for world peace and common development.”⁵⁰

Thirdly, and as in the case of the SACF, shared interests, historical friendship, and a consolidated relationship based on the ‘trademark’ Five Principles is indicated as the source of values and principles to promote a “new type of strategic partnership.”⁵¹ This is reflected by State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan: “*China and Africa enjoy a profound traditional friendship. We have no conflict of fundamental interests. Rather, we share extensive common interests in safeguarding peace and promoting development. All this has made it possible and necessary to explore new ideas and put in place a new framework for the development of China-Africa relations in the new century.*”⁵² Such novelty is supposed to reside in the spirit of “consultation on an equal footing, enhancing mutual understanding, expanding consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting

⁴⁶ “Strengthen Traditional Friendship, Promote Common Development and Usher China-Africa Friendly Cooperation in A New Stage,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to the Republic of South Africa, June 22, 2006, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/zt/pd/t268440.htm> (accessed June 28, 2008).

⁴⁷ “People’s Republic of China. China’s African Policy,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, January 12, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t230615.htm> (accessed June 28, 2008).

⁴⁸ “Strengthen Traditional Friendship, Promote Common Development and Usher China-Africa Friendly Cooperation in A New Stage,” Embassy of the PRC to the Republic of South Africa, June 22, 2006, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/zt/pd/t268440.htm> (accessed June 27, 2008).

⁴⁹ “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2000, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zyzl/hywj/t157833.htm> (accessed July 10, 2008).

⁵⁰ “China and Africa-Usher in the New Century Together,” Speech by President Jiang Zemin of the People’s Republic of China at the Opening Ceremony of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Oct. 12, 2000, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zyzl/zyjh/t157712.htm> (accessed July 10, 2008).

⁵¹ “Beijing Summit adopts declaration, highlighting China-Africa strategic partnership,” Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, November 6, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zxxx/t279813.htm> (accessed July 10, 2008).

⁵² Speech by Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan at Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, Oct. 10, 2000, <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t24968.htm> (accessed July 11, 2008).

cooperation.”⁵³ The extent of the novelty is further clarified in the Joint Declaration announcing that “We hold that the establishment of a new type of strategic partnership is both the shared desire and independent choice of China and Africa, serves our common interests, and will help enhance solidarity, mutual support and assistance and unity of the developing countries and contribute to durable peace and harmonious development in the world.”⁵⁴

As anticipated, a fourth element emerges in China’s discourse: economic development. China esteems that economic globalization presents “Asian and African countries with rare opportunities as well as severe challenges,”⁵⁵ proposing that “we must proceed from our national conditions while mapping out plans for development.”⁵⁶ This means is that “developing countries [must] give full play to their advantages in natural and human resources, tap to the full their respective productive and technological potential, take advantage of the others’ strengths to make up for their own weaknesses, and achieve common improvement.”⁵⁷ In China’s discourse South-South co-operation has an important part to play, the strengthening of which “serves the immediate and long-term interests of both China and African countries.”⁵⁸ As suggested by Premier Wen Jiabao at the 2006 Beijing Summit, South-South cooperation is based on win-win economic cooperation, the scope of which is further articulated as the endeavour:

“(...) to carry out steps designed to assist African countries and other developing countries, such as offering zero-tariff treatment to some of their exports, increasing aid and debt relief. We encourage more Chinese companies to invest in Africa, participate in infrastructure building and agricultural development, transfer technologies and help Africa fully release the strength of its resources, enhance its competitiveness and strengthen its economy. We will expand trade with Africa and increase import from Africa. We take the concerns of some African countries on trade deficit and textiles seriously and are working to address these issues.”⁵⁹

⁵³ “The Second Ministerial Meeting of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Will Be Held,” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, Nov. 28, 2003, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceee/eng/dtxw/t111971.htm> (accessed October 25, 2009).

⁵⁴ “Declaration of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, 2006, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zyzl/hywj/t280370.htm> (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁵⁵ “Seize the Opportunity for All-round Cooperation and Common Development,” Speech by President Hu Jintao of China at the Official Dinner Reception of the Asian-African Business Summit 2005 in Jakarta on April 21, 2005, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, September 21, 2006, http://english.focacsummit.org/2006-09/21/content_933.htm (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁵⁶ Full Text of Hu Jintao’s Speech at Asian-African Business Summit Reception, April 22, 2005, China’s Official Gateway to News and Information, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/focac/184793.htm> (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁵⁷ “China and Africa-Usher in the New Century Together”, Speech by President Jiang Zemin of the People’s Republic of China at the Opening Ceremony of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zyzl/zyjh/t157712.htm> (accessed July 14, 2008).

⁵⁸ “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing, 2000, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zyzl/hywj/t157833.htm> (accessed July 14, 2008).

⁵⁹ “Strengthen Traditional Friendship, Promote Common Development and Usher China-Africa Friendly Cooperation in A New Stage,” Address by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the Opening Session of the China-South Africa Business Cooperation Forum, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to the Republic of South Africa, June 22, 2006, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/zt/pd/t268440.htm> (accessed July 14, 2008).

But more crucially, the point is made that China's partners should trust that "China never attaches any political string to its assistance to Africa or seeks any political privilege in doing so,"⁶⁰ because "We do not seek to export our own values and development models to Africa". Quite to the contrary, China pledges to "continue to speak out for the interests of Africa at international forums and support African countries (...)." ⁶¹

Assessment of the Two Frameworks

The scope of the SACF and FOCAC is evaluated below on the basis of the three functions that the adopted theoretical definition ascribes to international institutions: 1) the facilitation of a learning process among members; 2) the mobilisation of trust enabling the achievement of interdependent goals; and 3) the promotion of norms. Consistently, the two institutional frameworks will be evaluated in three different sections according to these three criteria.

Learning Process

I start from a broad understanding of social learning as implying both some degree of socialisation by an *entrepreneur* into the norms and principles it wishes to affirm, and a process of mutual accommodation and endorsement of respective preferences. To reflect this approach, the notion of learning has been broken down in two components: A) the extent to which Chinese discourse and norms, the essence of which was explored in the preceding section for each of the two frameworks, are becoming endorsed by partner countries. B), the extent to which the respective preferences of each side are endorsed by the other, and are thereby transformed into institutional positions.

A) The emergence of a shared identity

This portion will assess the impact of the Chinese discourse on African and Arab counterparts by considering the extent to which language, expressions and "policy images" are transferred to and internalised by the recipients of the discursive practices. This is done by reviewing speeches of African and Arab leaders or opinion-makers on the SACF and FOCAC respectively, or mutual cooperation in general. The review that follows, while partial, suggests a significant degree of internalization by actors.

⁶⁰"Strengthen Solidarity, Enhance Cooperation and Pursue Common Development", by Zhu Rongji, Premier of the State Council of China, 12 October 2000, China's Official Gateway to News and Information, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/focac/184410.htm> (accessed July 13, 2008).

⁶¹"Strengthen Traditional Friendship, Promote Common Development and Usher China-Africa Friendly Cooperation in A New Stage," Address by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the Opening Session of the China-South Africa Business Cooperation Forum, June 22, 2006, Embassy of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of South Africa, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.za/eng/zt/pd/t268440.htm> (accessed July 13, 2008).

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The presence of elements of Chinese discourse in the speeches and declarations of Arab leaders signals that they have internalised such elements as the innovative type of partnership, mutual benefit, and mutual understanding and agreement.

As to the element of an innovative partnership, LAS Secretary-General Amr Moussa hailed the idea of a new type of partnership, saying Hu's proposal was "a recipe for a successful relationship between nations." Moreover, he was reported to comment that "the potential is huge and we have great ambitions for these relations."⁶² Similarly, an article in the *China Daily* reported that "the two sides believed the SACF would be a new instrument for enhancing multilateral dialogue and co-operation between China and the Arab countries,"⁶³ the development of which, Moussa believes, the Forum will advance in the decades to come, not only on the political front, but also on economic and cultural ones.

On the element of mutual benefit, Morocco's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Mohamed Benaissa declared, on the sidelines of the 2006 Ministerial Meeting, that he sees China as the best partner for developing South-South relations.⁶⁴ Moreover, a presentation of SACF appearing on the website of the Council of Arab Ambassadors in China states that cooperation under the institution is based on equality and mutual benefit.⁶⁵

Lastly, Amr Moussa has stressed the centrality of mutual understanding and agreement, rather than conflict and groundless accusations to the relations between the Arab world and 'highly-valued Chinese civilization,' and the value of the Forum in facilitating civilization dialogues between the two sides, which are very important given the 'clash of civilizations' argument and its repercussions in the Arab world.⁶⁶

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Some remarks by African members of FOCAC show a certain degree of internalisation of the themes of the historical and principled nature of the ties, and for the prospects of common development, through mutually beneficial South-South cooperation.

⁶² "Arab League chief highly values China-Africa Co-operation Forum," Official website of the Beijing Summit and Third Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Oct. 19, 2006, http://english.focacsummit.org/2006-10/19/content_3258.htm (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁶³ *China Daily*, "Forum promotes co-op links with Arab nations," September 15, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.cn/english/doc/2004-09/15/content_374798.htm (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁶⁴ "La chine, meilleur interlocuteur et acteur pour développer les relations sud-sud," Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération du Royaume du Maroc, June 2, 2006, <http://www.maec.gov.ma/en/f-com.asp?num=3297&typ=dr> (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁶⁵ Arab Ambassadors Council in China, <http://www.arabembcn.org> (accessed July 15, 2008).

⁶⁶ *Xinhua*, "Interview: AL chief hails Arab-Sino relations," May 27, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-05/27/content_4609940.htm (accessed July 09, 2008).

As to the principles, Ghana's then-President John Kufuor appeared to wholeheartedly endorse the FOCAC spirit when he said "*we will talk openly and frankly to each other, with a view to explore better chances of getting benefits both on the African side and on the Chinese side*", he said: "*China should buy from Africa and Africa should buy from China (...) I'm talking about the win-win.*"⁶⁷

The historical roots were stressed by Professor Claudius Mararike of the University of Zimbabwe in an interview for Xinhua news agency:

"The relations between China and Africa must be understood in a historical context. China is not all of a sudden jumping onto Africa. It has cultivated these relations over a long time - before and after Africa's independence."

On that occasion, Professor Mararike even protested that "criticisms and accusations are merely an envy of the mutually beneficial ties China is building in Africa, especially in the economic sphere, which western countries were unable to match because of their control-based approach and mentality."⁶⁸ South African foreign minister Dlamini Zuma speech at the FOCAC maiden conference emphasised the principled and innovative characteristics of the Forum:

*"If ever there was practical embodiment of the spirit and principles of Sino-African solidarity and co-operation, it would be found at this Conference. We are grateful for the opportunity this platform presents us to affirm the long-standing and close relations between Africa and China, and more importantly perhaps, for the opportunity to establish a New Partnership for China-Africa co-operation from the 21st Century."*⁶⁹

With regards to mutual benefit, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika said that "the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) should become an effective platform for enhancing mutual understanding among the developing countries and further strengthening South-South cooperation."⁷⁰ Similarly, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, remembering China's historical support to Africans during decolonisation, emphasised the forum's role in promoting common development: "*Our main challenge now is not to fight colonialism, but fighting poverty and backwardness and achieving economic independence*", and that Africa needs the support of its friends to overcome this challenge."⁷¹

⁶⁷ "Ghanaian President Wishes Win-win China-Africa Cooperation," China's Official Gateway to News and Information, Oct. 12, 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/183706.htm> (accessed July 09, 2008).

⁶⁸ "China's Ties with Africa Root in Historical Friendship," China's Official Gateway to News and Information, Oct. 9, 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/183194.htm> (accessed July 08, 2008).

⁶⁹ "Address by Minister Dlamini Zuma to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation," Ministerial Conference 2000, Oct. 10-12, 2000, Beijing, <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2000/dzum1010.htm> (accessed July 08, 2008).

⁷⁰ "FOCAC to Become Platform for Enhancing South-South Cooperation," The Chinese Central Government's Official Web Portal, Oct. 14, 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/183934.htm> (accessed June 05, 2008).

⁷¹ "Meles : China-Africa Cooperation Enhances Trade," Newsletter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, No. 19, Nov. 2006, http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/Newsletter19/News19.pdf (accessed June 5, 2008).

B) The Convergence of Policy Preferences

This section reviews the mutual endorsement of respective preferences and interests by members of the two frameworks. Indicators of this trend will be represented by the policy attitudes and behaviours manifested by states. Based on the issues actually discussed under the two respective frameworks, I highlight below the instances where this dynamic can be pinned down: in the case of China this is represented by the question of Taiwan, while for Arab Countries these are regional security issues including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the situation in Iraq, and for African countries, these are essentially the situation in Sudan.

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Endorsement of the One-China Policy by Arab Countries. A distinct pattern of LAS involvement can be detected. During the skirmishes which arose between mainland China and Taiwan between 2005 and 2006, the LAS has solidly affirmed the One-China principle.

Following China's adoption and promulgation of the anti-secession law in March 2005,⁷² Said Kamal, Assistant Secretary General of the LAS reaffirmed the organisation's support to the law, stating that the League opposed any attempt of separation from China by Taiwan. Secretary-General Amr Moussa even praised the law as an instrument aiming towards the pacific reunification of China.⁷³ When, later on, Taiwan's then-president Chen Shui-bian announced in February 2006 that the National Unification Council (NUC) would "*cease to function*," the LAS strongly condemned the decision on the grounds that it would compromise peace, stability and security in the Taiwan Strait, and the whole Asia-Pacific region. Ahmed ben Heli, LAS Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs, indicated the positive value of the NUC and the National Unification Directives.⁷⁴ In September 2007, a LAS foreign ministers meeting adopted a resolution reiterating the organization's adherence to the One-China policy.⁷⁵

Support of Middle East Regional Security Issues by China: Iraq, the Peace Process and Terrorism. China has repeatedly signified its unconditional support for the Arab countries' "legitimate rights and national interests" in their region,⁷⁶ also expressing support for a nuclear-free Middle East, as conveyed by the joint communiqué of the 2006 Ministerial Meeting.⁷⁷ On the issue of Iraq, China has supported Arab countries by exhorting the Security Council to address

⁷² *China Daily*, "Anti-Secession Law adopted by NPC adopted at the Third Session of the Tenth National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China on March 14, 200x," March 14, 2005, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-03/14/content_424643.htm (accessed June 5, 2008).

⁷³ "La Ligue arabe réitère son soutien à la loi chinoise anti-sécession," China's Official Gateway to News and Information, April 6, 2005, http://french.china.org.cn/foreign/txt/2005-04/06/content_2167222.htm (accessed June 5, 2008).

⁷⁴ *Xinhua*, "Ligue arabe et de nombreux pays condamnent l'acte sécessionniste du dirigeant de Taiwan," March 4, 2006, http://www.french.xinhuanet.com/french/2006-03/04/content_224352.htm (accessed June 4, 2008).

⁷⁵ *China Daily*, "Arab League Resolution Reiterates One-China Policy," September 13, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-09/13/content_6103963.htm (accessed June 6, 2008).

⁷⁶ *China Daily*, "Forum promotes co-op links with Arab nations," September 15, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.cn/english/doc/2004-09/15/content_374798.htm (accessed June 7, 2008).

⁷⁷ "China, Arab states to step up anti-terror co-op: communiqué," The Chinese Central Government's Official Web Portal, June 1, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/01/content_297969.htm (accessed June 4, 2008).

their concerns and interests when considering resolutions on Iraq. China further stated that all nations' legitimate rights in Iraq should be taken into account, and that self-government should return to the Iraqi people.⁷⁸ In 2004, the PRC reopened her embassy in Iraq, and in May 2007, she participated to the International Compact for Iraq conference.

China has also lent her active support to the Arab peace proposal for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁷⁹ The 2006 Ministerial Meeting was attended by Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmud al Zahar, who stated on that occasion the Palestinian Government's engagement in studying the Arab peace initiative with a "serious and positive attitude."⁸⁰ In August 2006, China's Middle East Envoy called for new approaches to the solution of the Israeli Palestinian conflict,⁸¹ and in July 2007, the SACF Fourth Meeting of Senior Officials ended with a document highlighting the importance of restoring the "legitimate rights of Arab countries, with a focus on the Palestinian cause", stressing their support for all efforts aiming at establishing fair and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.⁸²

In response, Amr Moussa declared that Arab nations highly value the Chinese role in the region, and emphasized that the Arab world is willing to listen to China's views and positions on various international issues, "particularly at a time when various opinions are confusing the international community."⁸³

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Endorsement of the One-China Policy by African Countries. Back in 2000, Congo's President Sassau congratulated China's President for resuming sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macao, emphasizing that his Government has always held the One-China principle, and believed "China will solve the question of Taiwan at an early date and complete the reunification cause of the motherland."⁸⁴ More recently, President Al-Bashir reiterated that Sudan has always adhered to the

⁷⁸ "UN Urged to Address Arabic Concerns on Iraq," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Arab Republic of Egypt, May 26, 2004, <http://eg.china-embassy.org/eng/zagx/yamgx/t119245.htm> (accessed June 4, 2008); "UN Urged to Address Arabic Concerns," China's Official Gateway to News and Information, May 26, 2004, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/96430.htm> (accessed June 4, 2008).

⁷⁹ The view was expressed in: "Deepening Friendship and Strengthening Cooperation to Build a New-type China-Arab Partnership", Address by Chinese State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan to the Second Ministerial Meeting of the SACF in Beijing, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t256775.htm> (accessed June 4, 2008). The same support can also be found in the *Joint Communiqué* of the Second Ministerial Meeting, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/01/content_297969.htm (accessed June 5, 2008).

⁸⁰ "Palestine to study Arab peace initiative positively," Chinese Central Government's Official Web Portal, June 1, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/01/content_297179.htm (accessed June 6, 2008).

⁸¹ *Xinhua*, "China calls for new approaches to resume Middle East peace process," August 22, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-08/22/content_4994342.htm (accessed June 6, 2008).

⁸² *Xinhua*, "Meeting of Sino-Arab forum ends with final document," July 5, 2007, http://www.sinothaiyouth.com/spotlight/200707/t20070706_558221.htm (accessed June 7, 2008)

⁸³ *China View*, "Interview: AL chief hails Arab-Sino relations," May 27, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-05/27/content_4609940.htm (accessed June 24, 2008).

⁸⁴ President Jiang Zemin held talks with the President of the Republic of Congo, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, November 17, 2000, <http://www.chineseembassy.org/eng/topics/3713/3714/t19049.htm> (accessed June 24, 2008).

one-China policy and opposed any attempt to separate Taiwan from China.⁸⁵ Responses to the 2006 cross-strait spat demonstrated the extent of African support for the “one-China policy”. When in February 2006 the Taiwan authorities announced the decision to suppress the National Unification Council and cease the application of the “National Unification Guidelines”, the forty-seven African states that have diplomatic ties with China sided with the PRC, condemning the move. The condemnation was open and made its way to official FOCAC documents.⁸⁶

Support of African Regional Security Issues by China: the Situation in Darfur. The Darfur question shows that China has adopted a position that is fundamentally supportive of the Sudanese Government, namely to have an African force under African Union command and supported logistically and financially by the United Nations.⁸⁷ In general, China believes that “wisdom and creativity [are] needed to achieve peace”, and that the United Nations and the African Union both ha[ve] constructive roles to play.”⁸⁸ As President Hu declared during his 2007 tour of Africa, China’s position is developed along “four principles”, namely

*“to respect Sudan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity; to solve the issue by peaceful means and by sticking to dialogue and coordination based on equality; that the African Union and the United Nations should play constructive roles in a peacekeeping mission in Darfur; and to improve the situation in Darfur and living conditions of local people.”*⁸⁹

China’s actions have tended to reflect this position, and for example in 2004, the PRC worked to defuse a UN Security Council Resolution that would impose sanctions on Sudan’s petroleum sector, should the country have failed to restrain Arab militias from looting African villagers in Darfur⁹⁰. China ended up abstaining on that vote because support for it was too large, rallying 11 Security Council members, but the PRC Permanent Representative energetically declared he would veto any further sanction: “that’s the message.”⁹¹

Trust Building and Achievement of Interdependent Goals

This section investigates the capacity of the two frameworks to effectively deliver on substantive areas of cooperation. This is seen as an indicator of their ability to build on the principled

⁸⁵ *China Daily*, “Chinese President wraps up Africa tour,” February 11, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-02/11/content_806503.htm (accessed June 24, 2008).

⁸⁶ “Follow-Up Actions of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC),” Remarks by Mr. He Yafei, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to the Republic of Botswana, <http://bw.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t257860.htm> (accessed June 25, 2008).

⁸⁷ *People’s Daily*, “Sudan’s government reiterates position on int’l force in Darfur,” May 20, 2007, http://english.people.com.cn/200704/20/eng20070420_368163.html (accessed June 25, 2008).

⁸⁸ *BBC*, “Chinese leader boosts Sudan ties,” February 2, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6323017.stm> (accessed June 25, 2008).

⁸⁹ *China Daily*, “Chinese President wraps up Africa tour,” February 2, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-02/11/content_806503.htm (accessed June 25, 2008).

⁹⁰ *China Daily*, “China seeks helpful resolution to Darfur crisis,” September 17, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-09/17/content_375534.htm (accessed June 16, 2008).

⁹¹ *China Daily*, “UN adopts resolution on Sudan’s Darfur,” September 19, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-09/19/content_375722.htm (accessed June 17, 2008).

meanings that are said to underpin cooperation, highlighting mutual benefit to reach necessary levels of trust among the parties involved.

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There are three main areas where the results delivered by SACF are particularly salient: anti-terrorism, energy and trade. Significantly, such outcomes are presented in official discourse as the result of a distinct logic of cooperation. The following paragraphs will try to reflect this qualitative aspect of cooperation under the Forum.

In the field of anti-terrorism, the two sides have intensified relations and exchanges. An agreement to this effect was signed during the Second Ministerial Meeting, committing both sides to stepping up anti-terrorism cooperation at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels.⁹² Moreover, the 2006 Joint Communiqué, while condemning terrorism of any form, also opposes “linking terrorism with any specific nationality or religion,” going all the way to support the Saudi proposal on establishing an international anti-terror center.⁹³

The SACF is also acquiring an expanding role in the field of energy. Though there is a clear interest on the part of China, which is highly dependent on oil imports, and for which the Middle East has become the major single source of crude, an interest in energy cooperation is said to be mutual. News reports illustrate that if oil imports benefit China, Arab exporting countries see in China a trading partner that does not try to meddle or attach political strings as conditions for exchanges.⁹⁴ Moreover, such cooperation offers Arab countries direct access to the Chinese oil sector. Consequently, the 2006 SACF Ministerial meeting placed considerable focus on the question, hosting the first Sino-Arab Petrochemical Cooperation Seminar.⁹⁵ This proposed the establishment of a China-Arab energy forum, under the framework of the Saudi-based International Energy Forum (IEF) to discuss dialogue and cooperation on oil markets, supply security, oil price, trade and investment, “all for a better understanding and coordination of each other’s policies and interests.”⁹⁶ As a result, the 2006- 2008 Action Plan has vowed to establish such a dialogue mechanism, committing the sides to hold the first energy cooperation conference between China and Arab countries within the biennium.⁹⁷ In September 2007, a LAS foreign

⁹² *China Daily*, “China, Arab nations sign action plan” June 6, 2006, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2006-06/02/content_606862.htm (accessed June 16, 2008).

⁹³ “China, Arab states to step up anti-terror co-op: communiqué,” The Chinese Central Government Official Web Portal, June 1, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/01/content_297969.htm (accessed June 16, 2008).

⁹⁴ Jia Hepeng, “FTA to help diversify China’s energy sources,” *China Daily*, July 15, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-07/15/content_348779.htm (accessed June 16, 2008).

⁹⁵ Mr. Chen Jian Attending and Addressing the Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum, 2006 Sino-Arab Petrochemical Cooperation Seminar, Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, Sep.14, 2006, <http://chenjian2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/activity/200609/20060903151500.html> (accessed June 16, 2008).

⁹⁶ The proposal was delivered by Wu Lei, Professor of International Relations and Director of the Center for Energy Security and Strategy at Yunnan University, Kunming, China. His paper was published as an article referenced as: Wu Lei, “China-Arab Energy Cooperation: The Strategic Importance of Institutionalization,” *Middle East Economic Survey*, vol. 49: 3 (2006).

⁹⁷ China and Arab Nations Sign Action Plan, June 3, 2006, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in India, <http://big5.fmprc.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.chinaembassy.org.in/eng/zgbd/t256178.htm> (accessed June 20, 2008);

ministers resolution endorsed plans for China to host the first such conference, and for the second one to be held in Sudan.⁹⁸ The two sides agreed to set up a cooperation mechanism for energy affairs in June 2009.⁹⁹

In the field of trade and investment, the two sides intend to boost the level of exchanges. Two business meetings have taken place to this effect, one in 2005 and another in 2007, in line with the 2006- 2008 Action Plan. The latter meeting was carried out under the theme “*Deepening Cooperation - Partnership in Prosperity*”, and included private sessions between Arab and Chinese businessmen to discuss ways of bolstering trade relations and enhancing bilateral cooperation in fields as energy, housing, tourism, finance, and communications.¹⁰⁰ A trade facilitation seminar was held in Wuzhong City in August 2009.¹⁰¹ The two sides have great expectations, and commercial exchanges between the two sides have already incremented significantly. After decades of very slow progress, commerce between China and Arab countries has skyrocketed since 2001, reaching \$66 billion in 2005, up 42 per cent from the previous year at \$46.5 billion.¹⁰² China and the LAS have pledged to expand their annual trade to \$100 billion by 2010,¹⁰³ earmarking the sectors of investment, electricity, oil, culture, mass media and human resources in particular.¹⁰⁴ However, recent reports suggest that the 2010 target had already been passed in 2008, with trade volumes tallying \$ 132.8 billion.¹⁰⁵

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

The three main areas of cooperation involve the fields of political affairs, trade and natural resources. The patterns of cooperation show the effectiveness of the institution in building the necessary trust to allow both sides to achieve their respective preferences.

CCTV, “Sino-Arab Communiqué Signed,” June 2, 2006, <http://www.cctv.com/english/20060602/101131.shtml> (accessed July 16, 2009).

⁹⁸ *China Daily*, “Arab League Resolution Reiterates One-China Policy,” September 13, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-09/13/content_6103963.htm (accessed July 20, 2008).

⁹⁹ “Sino-Arab energy co-op mechanism to be built,” China Trade in Services, June 25, 2009, <http://tradeinservices.mofcom.gov.cn/en/local/2009-06-25/74970.shtml> (accessed Oct. 27, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ The conference was organized by the LAS, the General Federation of Arab Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, the Arab Businessmen Federation and Jordan’s Ministry of Economy and Trade in cooperation with the Chinese Council for the Promotion of International Trade (*Syria Times*, “Arab-Chinese businessmen conference in Amman. \$US 65 bln. trade exchange in 2006,” June 20, 2007, <http://syriatimes.tishreen.info/economy.asp?FileName=100218954220070620102619> (accessed June 20, 2008).

¹⁰¹ “Sino-Arab Trade Cooperation Seminar held in Wuzhong City,” *Ningxiaexpo.com*, Aug. 21, 2009, http://ningxiaexpo.com/english/NewsCenter/200908/t20090821_624597.htm (accessed Oct. 27, 2009).

¹⁰² International Monetary Fund, “Division of Trade Statistics Yearbook 2006” (Washington, D.C., 2006).

¹⁰³ *Xinhua*, “Trade with Arab League to grow,” June 2, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-06/02/content_4636386.htm (accessed June 20, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ *China Daily*, “Forum promotes co-op links with Arab nations,” September 15, 2004, http://www.chinadaily.cn/english/doc/2004-09/15/content_374798.htm (accessed June 20, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ “Arab League Chief: Sino-Arab Relations Are very much Valued,” Hunan.gov.cn, May 30, 2009, http://www.english.people.com.cn/Government/govNews/200906/t20090604_160598.htm; *People’s Daily*, “Sino-Arab trade ties to go beyond energy, resources,” April 24, 2009, <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6643826.html> (accessed Oct. 26, 2009).

In political affairs, FOCAC has facilitated China's support to African continental security initiatives in light of her commitment to seeing regional multilateral organizations take a wider role in all stages of the conflict management cycle.¹⁰⁶ In April 2003 this resulted in the PRC deployment of a peacekeeping force under United Nations leadership to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Moreover, China has since then sent 3975 peacekeeping personnel to UN missions in Liberia and especially Sudan,¹⁰⁷ where 435 Chinese peacekeepers are in service, including 275 military engineers, 100 transportation staff and 60 doctors, and dispatch of another 275-strong engineering unit is planned.¹⁰⁸ China has further deployed a fifth team of 375 engineers from the Jinan Military Command Area in February 2009.¹⁰⁹ But China's support is particularly strong with regards to regional initiatives for peace and security, informed by the belief that the "relevant organizations and countries [must be supported] in their efforts to independently resolve conflicts in the region."¹¹⁰ In this line, the PRC has donated \$600,000 to the African Union (AU), half of which was earmarked for supporting the AU peacekeeping mission in Somalia.¹¹¹ Support to the AU also comprises \$400,000 to aid its operations in Darfur,¹¹² and \$150 million to fund the extension of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, covering for the construction of a Convention Centre, new office space, and residences for senior officials.¹¹³ Moreover, China has offered peacekeeping assistance to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),¹¹⁴ and responded to demands for expanded cooperation by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).¹¹⁵ Moreover, China has pledged support for the African Union counter-terrorism convention, and establishment of a research centre on terrorism in Algiers.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁶ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, *Addis Ababa Action Plan 2004-2006*, Addis Ababa, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ "China plays active role in safeguarding peace, stability in Africa," Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Oct. 11, 2006, http://english.focacsummit.org/2006-10/11/content_3012.htm (accessed May 13, 2008).

¹⁰⁸ Su Qiang and Le Tian, "Peacekeeping - A Rising Role for China's PLA," *China Daily*, July 24, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/24/content_5442172.htm (accessed May 23, 2008).

¹⁰⁹ *China Daily*, "China organizes fifth peacekeeping team for Sudan," Jan. 19, 2009, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-01/19/content_7410770.htm (accessed Oct. 26, 2009).

¹¹⁰ *People's Daily*, "Chinese Official Lauds UN Peacekeeping Efforts in Africa," May 9, 2001, http://english.people.com.cn/english/200105/09/eng20010509_69482.html (accessed May 13, 2008).

¹¹¹ *China Daily*, "China to donate 600,000 dollars to AU," July 2, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/02/content_907379.htm (accessed May 12, 2008).

¹¹² "Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing Sends a Letter to the African Union Commission on the Darfur Issue," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, June 1, 2005, <http://new.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t179151.htm> (accessed May 12, 2008).

¹¹³ "African Union Headquarters to Grow After \$150 Million Deal With China," Government of South Africa Information Services, May 21, 2007; "Speech at the African Day Celebration and the Laying of the Foundation Stone for the African Union Convention Center," May 25, 2007, http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/Conferences/2007/May/25/speeches/China_final.doc (accessed May 13, 2008).

¹¹⁴ "China Offers Peacekeeping Assistance to ECOWAS," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Nigeria, Sep. 17, 2004, <http://ng.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t158027.htm> (accessed May 13, 2008).

¹¹⁵ *People's Daily*, "SADC to seek more cooperation with China," August 20, 2005, http://english.people.com.cn/200508/20/eng20050820_203539.html (accessed May 18, 2008); *People's Daily*, "SADC to further boost relations with China, India," August 16, 2004, http://english.people.com.cn/200408/16/eng20040816_153290.html (accessed May 18, 2008).

"Assistant Minister of Commerce Yi Xiaozhun's Meeting with Executive Secretary of Southern African Development Community (SADC)," Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, Dec. 28, 2004, <http://yixiaozhun2.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/activity/200412/20041200012023.html> (accessed May 11, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, "Addis Ababa Action Plan 2004-2006".

FOCAC has also committed China to support priority sectors identified under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD),¹¹⁷ such as the US\$ 500'000 grant given to fund a post-graduate training program for nurses and midwives.¹¹⁸

In the area of trade the FOCAC approach is consistent with the cooperation principles established, and is part of a comprehensive package including trade promotion, the reduction of tariffs, debt relief, and development assistance to ensure win-win.

The conclusion of agreements on Bilateral Facilitation and Protection of Investment, and on Avoidance of Double Taxation,¹¹⁹ were matched by China's concession of tariff-free treatment to goods coming from 28 African 'Least Developed Countries', based on a list of 187 tax items that to be elevated to 440 over the 2007-2009 biennium.¹²⁰ To address the problem of trade imbalance, China encouraged African promotional fairs and expositions in China aimed at facilitating their exports. As a result African exports to China have substantially increased, as shown by a diminishing trade deficit.¹²¹ Investment is accelerating too, thanks to bilateral investment protection agreements with 29 African countries and the establishment of *China Trade and Investment Promotion Centres* in 11 countries. This has allowed the creation of 490 joint-ventures in 49 African countries, in various fields, but also African countries to increase investments into China.¹²² As of 2008, 800 thousand Chinese businessmen and 800 Chinese companies were active throughout Africa.¹²³

The *China-Africa Business Conference* is a further initiative that witnesses the magnitude of the exchanges. The 2006 edition has resulted in the conclusion of 21 cooperation agreements for a value of US\$ 1 billion. Importantly, of the 400 participating entrepreneurs, not more than 150 were Chinese.¹²⁴ In May 2007, the African Development Bank held its Board of Governors 2 day meeting in Shanghai signalling China's intention to act as a catalyst in forging closer ties between Africa and Asia. As a result, trade between China and African countries reached a record \$106.8

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ "The Chinese Government Grants \$500,000 to Support NEPAD Nurses and Midwives Post-Graduate Training Program" (by Chinese Embassy in South Africa), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 27, 2006, <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zwjg/zwbdt265182.htm> (accessed June 13, 2008).

¹¹⁹ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, "Beijing Action Plan 2007- 2009," Beijing, 2006.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ "Talking Points for Consultation between Director-General Xu Jinghu and African Diplomatic Envoys in China," Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Dec. 23, 2004, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zxxx/t176324.htm> (accessed June 14, 2008).

¹²² "Talking Points for Consultation between Director-General Xu Jinghu and African Diplomatic Envoys in China"; Li Ruogu, "Promoting China-Africa Cooperation for Mutual Benefits, Exploring New Development Road for Mankind," (Presentation made at the "Experience-Sharing Program on Development between China and Africa" organized by the Chinese Government with support from the World Bank, May 20- 29, 2008, Beijing, China), <http://info.worldbank.org/etools/ChinaAfricaKS/docs/ppts/S5a-Li%20Ruogu-Promting%20China-Africa%20Cooperation.pdf> (accessed Oct. 27, 2009).

¹²³ Op. cit. Li Ruogu, "Promoting China-Africa Cooperation for Mutual Benefits, Exploring New Development Road for Mankind".

¹²⁴ "Talking Points for Consultation between Director-General Xu Jinghu and African Diplomatic Envoys in China," Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Dec. 23, 2004, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zxxx/t176324.htm> (accessed June 14, 2008).

billion in 2008, with an annual average growth rate of 30 percent in eight straight years.¹²⁵ This followed the previous increase to \$36 billion in 2005, up from \$27 billion in 2004.¹²⁶

By June 2002, moreover, China had cancelled 156 African debts totalling approximately \$1.4 billion, and signed debt exemption protocols with 31 of them. In addition, she has committed to support African countries in the implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. On the development assistance side, China has signed 245 agreements on economic assistance, targeting infrastructure, education, and welfare projects.¹²⁷

The field of oil and natural resources constitutes a, if not *the*, major issue of cooperation. In 2005, China became the second largest importer of African oil, overtaking Japan. Major operations are concentrated in Sudan, valued at \$3-4 billion (out of a \$10 billion commitment), where China is now technically the main producer, exporter and importer of oil;¹²⁸ and Angola, where they are valued at \$2 billion, or the equivalent of the PRC credit line offered through the Import-Export Bank of China (Exim Bank),¹²⁹ making the country one of China's top two suppliers with Saudi Arabia.¹³⁰ But in 2006, China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC) bought a 45 per cent stake in the Nigerian Oil Mining License (OML) 130 oil field near the Niger Delta, for a rough US \$ 2.3 billion.¹³¹ In 2008, China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) won a \$5 billion bid to develop oil reserves in eastern Niger, where proven reserves amount to 324 million barrels.¹³² In October 2009, a Chinese firm secured a major mineral and oil deal in Guinea to the amount of \$ 7 billion,¹³³

The Promotion of Norms

There are two ways that the SACF and FOCAC serve to promote international norms. The first is through the explicit formulation of principled stances and positions on international issues by resort to two main instruments: the Joint Declarations and Action Plans that stem from their respective Ministerial Meetings.

¹²⁵ Wang Le, "Sino-African trade has broader prospects," *China Daily*, Feb. 11, 2009.

¹²⁶ International Monetary Fund, "Division of Trade Statistics Yearbook 2006".

¹²⁷ "Report by H.E. Mr. Li Zhaoxing Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China to the Second Ministerial Conference of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum Addis Ababa," Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Dec. 15, 2003, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zyzl/zyjh/t157709.htm> (accessed June 15, 2008).

¹²⁸ Ytzack Schichor, "Sudan: China's Outpost in Africa," *China Brief*, vol. 5:21 (2005).

¹²⁹ *Irinnews*, "Angola: Oil-backed loan will finance recovery projects," February 21, 2005, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=53112> (accessed June 22, 2008).

¹³⁰ A. Izama, "Bringing China On Board," *The Monitor*, June 20, 2007, <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/chinainstitute/nav03.cfm?nav03=61789&nav02=57273&nav01=57272> (accessed June 22, 2008).

¹³¹ Chris Hogg, "China oil firm buys into Nigeria," *BBC News*, January 9, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4594058.stm> (accessed June 22, 2008).

¹³² "TIMELINE-Resource-hungry China invests in Africa," *Reuters*, Sep. 29, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/mergersNews/idUSLT57126020090929>, (accessed June 22, 2008).

¹³³ "Guinea and China 'agree big deal,'" *BBC News*, Oct. 13, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8304418.stm> (accessed Oct. 27, 2009).

The second one is, so to speak, implicit, and is the effect of actual cooperation based on those very principles, as outlined in the two previous sections. As to the definition of norms adopted above, norms can emerge out of the practice and reiteration of behaviour. This means that really, it is the logic or principles that underpin that behaviour that comes to represent the essence of the norm. The interesting thing to observe in this regard is that such norms are coherent with the discourse China has successfully embedded in the two frameworks.

Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum

In terms of explicit normative content, SACF is active in the promotion of norms on three main fronts: the indication of sources of principles of international conduct, the nature and dynamics of globalisation with an eye at promoting North-South dialogue, and the reshaping of the international system intended to affirm the recognition of cultural diversity.

As to the first element, even if the phrasing of the Joint Declaration restricts their application to cooperation between China and Arab countries, a distinct set of principles are indicated as the source of behavioural guidance:

“Cooperation between Arab countries and China is based on the following principles: the respect of the Charter of the United Nations, the Charter of the League of Arab States, the Five Principles of Peaceful coexistence, and other recognised principles of international relations.”¹³⁴

It should further be noted that the 2004 Cairo Joint Declaration stipulated that SACF members will coordinate for the promotion of new international principles within global institutions,¹³⁵ a provision that is likely to enhance the reach of norm promotion.

With respect to globalisation and the economic system, SACF encourages the:

“international community to deploy enormous efforts to reinforce North-South dialogue and reduce the gap between these two poles, in order to strengthen the process of globalisation, to reinforce cooperation and solidarity among states and to confront the challenges of globalisation in a positive and effective manner.”¹³⁶

Thirdly, at the level of the shape of the international system, it emphasises a vision for cooperation aimed at promoting the democratisation of international relations, the respect for the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. This is aimed at ensuring that *“each state has a right to participate in international affairs on an equal*

¹³⁴ Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum, Arab Ambassadors Council in China, Sep. 14, 2004, <http://www.arabembcn.org/arabic/relations/forum.htm> (accessed June 25, 2008).

¹³⁵ Joint Declaration of the Sino Arab cooperation Forum 2004.

¹³⁶ Joint Declaration of the Sino Arab cooperation Forum 2004.

*footing, recalling the right of each people to obtain its liberty, independence, sovereignty over their territory.”*¹³⁷

In this regard, particular weight is laid on aspects pertaining cultural diversity, where the two sides commit to:

*“Respect the cultural and civil specificities of the peoples and work to protect the diversity of human civilizations, and encourage the dialogue and the connections between civilizations to create a stable environment conducive to interstate cooperation.”*¹³⁸

Adding substance to words, a 2007 resolution of the LAS foreign ministers mandated its Secretariat to coordinate Arab and Chinese contributions in preparation for a seminar on Arab-China civilizations slated for December 2007 in Saudi Arabia, and supported that the second such seminar be held in Tunis in 2008.¹³⁹

In terms of implicit concepts, on the basis of the cooperation areas reviewed, normative principles that are being promoted include the increased role of regional actors to deal with and find autonomous solutions to their regional problems, which can be inferred from the support given by SACF to empower and endorse the Arab initiative on the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Another important principle is the support for an expanded notion of sovereignty that emerges from the way counterpart actors are rewarded and respected in reciprocal relations. This comes in support of the explicit defence of sovereignty promoted in official documents.

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

In terms of explicit normative content, we can identify the following four elements.

First, FOCAC is promoting alternative sources of principles to regulate and inform international conduct to complement the UN Charter and other universally recognized norms. The 2000 Beijing declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation states that:

*“The purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the Charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and other universally recognized principles governing relations among states must be respected.”*¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Joint Declaration of the Sino Arab cooperation Forum 2004.

¹³⁸ Joint Declaration of the Sino Arab cooperation Forum 2004.

¹³⁹ *China Daily*, “Arab League Resolution Reiterates One-China Policy,” September 13, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-09/13/content_6103963.htm (accessed June 24, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Beijing, 2000.

The 2003 Addis Ababa Action Plan, and the 2006 Beijing Action Plan further reinforce this point both in form and content, and to some extent, also the 2000 Programme for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development, which lists a number of principles considerably overlapping with the said ones, though without naming them.

Second, FOCAC is promoting a fundamental reinterpretation of the concept and notion of human rights, by giving prominence to the right to development. This is based on the belief that human rights must be historically, culturally, and religiously sensitive, and on the joint commitment to affirming this model in the relevant international bodies. The 2006 Beijing Action Plan states in this respect that:

*“The two sides welcomed the establishment of the Human Rights Council by the United Nations and resolved to enhance cooperation in the Council and make concerted efforts to ensure that the Council respects historical, cultural and religious background of all countries and regions and is committed to advancing dialogue among different civilizations, cultures and religions. The Council should place equal emphasis on both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, with priority given to the right to development.”*¹⁴¹

This echoes the approach introduced with the 2000 Beijing Declaration that stressed the recognition of diversity as well as respect for human rights, arguing that “Each country has the right to choose, in its course of development, its own social system, development model and way of life in light of its national conditions.”¹⁴²

Third, FOCAC is also addressing the rules governing the global economic system, with particular emphasis on the trade and development regimes.

The 2007 Action Plan “called on the international community to work actively to build an international environment conducive to poverty alleviation and common development”. This includes establishing a system of Official Development Assistance (ODA) free of political or economic conditionalities, and enhancing debt cancellation, based on the same criteria. With respect to the trading system, it called for the resumption of the Doha rounds, noting the need for:

“full consideration to be given to the development level and capacity of developing members. The special and differential treatment promised to developing members should be delivered to enable them to fully participate in the multilateral trade regime and truly benefit from it.”

FOCAC principles to address this point recommend the granting of preferential treatment to developing countries, and other solutions based on “South-South Cooperation and North-South Dialogue” to promote a “balanced and significant package of outcomes.”

¹⁴¹ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Beijing Action Plan 2007-2009”.

¹⁴² Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Beijing, 2000.

Fourth, FOCAC, more generally, aims to restructure the international system as a whole, since it is currently deemed “unjust and inequitable.” The 2006 Beijing Declaration states that:

*“We urge that diversity of the world should be respected and upheld, that all countries in the world, big or small, rich or poor, strong or weak, should respect each other, treat each other as equals and live in peace and amity with each other, and that different civilizations and modes of development should draw on each other’s experience, promote each other and coexist in harmony.”*¹⁴³

To address this state of affairs, FOCAC members strive to facilitate establishment of “a new world order which will reflect their needs and interests,”¹⁴⁴ through the innovation of the patterns of interstate cooperation, and the renovation of international institutions. To this end it calls for international institutions to “fully reflect the democratic principle governing international relations,”¹⁴⁵ envisaging, for example, a UN Security Council open to African membership, and reformed international financial institutions. The “democratization of international relations” needs creating “regimes and formulating relevant rules with a view to increasing the collective bargaining capacity of developing countries.”¹⁴⁶

In terms of implicit concepts that can be drawn from the patterns of cooperation, and the policy practices towards one another of the FOCAC members, there is first and foremost a strong, expanded, notion of sovereignty, as signalled by the mutual endorsement over the respective positions and attitudes on Taiwan or Darfur. A concern for sovereignty is confirmed by positions contained in the 2000 and 2006 joint declarations, and is complemented by the corollary notions of non-interference, and mutual respect for territorial integrity.

This is also coherent with the belief in an expanded role for regional actors in the maintenance of peace and security in their respective regions, independently of foreign interference. This can be seen in the remarkable degree of voice given to African regional institutions in various fields as development, economy, and security under the FOCAC framework.

Cooperation in the area of trade and economic development, on the other hand, is strongly premised on the principle of mutual benefit. The notion of win-win cooperation is now entrenched in state practice, defining the language of South-South cooperation, and likely to influence the future relations between FOCAC members and western powers.

¹⁴³ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Beijing, 2000.

¹⁴⁴ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Programme on China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development,” Beijing, 2000; Also, see Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Beijing, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” Beijing, 2000.

¹⁴⁶ Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, “Programme on China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development,” Beijing, 2000.

Conclusions

Having become the main conduit of Beijing's policy towards the Arab world and Africa respectively, the two *fora* have taken a unique role in the promotion of an innovative political discourse intended to outline a set of distinctive guiding principles – or principled meanings - for common relations. A couple of conclusions can be drawn about this multilateralist turn in China's policy towards the Arab world and Africa, and the scope of the so-called “new type strategic partnership” that China has spearheaded in those regions. A first remark to be made concerns the striking similarity between the two institutions in terms of governance, underlying principled meanings, and patterns and areas of cooperation. Their quasi-serial nature also suggests that the two institutions examined represent a *model* of foreign policy innovation serving a coherent design, and possibly a *grand strategy*.

Secondly, my case studies have shown that by performing the compound functions ascribed to multilateral institutions, the two *fora* can be considered as the focal points for the emergence of international norms. While such norms would in fact largely set out patterns for South-South relations, they may also be seen as aiming to establish standards that will eventually end up challenging norms and customs prevailing in the international system at the global level.

Significantly, the norms-promoting function of the two institutions explored in the previous section, targets the very normative foundations of the system in such non-trivial areas as the constitutive principles of the international system (sovereignty and equality), the rules of the international trading system (mutual benefit and win-win), and human rights (primacy of the right of development). Remarkably, this is reinforced by the commitment by co-members to coordinate policies and actions within global institutions and regimes. These are of course, the projection of Chinese interests –as a matter of fact, the promotion of norms is, in Chinese foreign policy no less of a strategic factor than the pursuit of material interests. However, the normative discourses supplied by China do seem to give rise to a certain degree of coordination among the different members, identifying this as an issue area of interstate cooperation in its own right. As such, the promotion of alternative norms should be seen as the production of a collective good, becoming identified with the interests of all parties concerned.

This proves that China has evolved into a sophisticated player, who is capable of using complex resources to mobilise other actors towards the pursuit of her grand strategy centred on the transformation of the international system towards multipolarism, a distribution of power more adequate to accommodate her emerging global role.

In turn it reflects Beijing's ability to shape the emergence of a growing consensus among the members of the two institutions, articulating a collective “developing world” vision for the international system and its desired normative underpinning. This so-called *Beijing Consensus*¹⁴⁷ is largely brokered by China's ability to promote a conflation between her own interests and those

¹⁴⁷ This notion refers at once to a recipe for economic development, and to ideas “about politics, quality of life, and the global balance of power”, (Joshua C. Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004); See also D. Thompson, “China's Soft Power in Africa: From the “Beijing Consensus” to Health Diplomacy,” *China Brief*, vol. 5: 21 (2005): 1.

of the developing countries she has associated with. The SACF and the FOCAC, by embedding the principles of the *Beijing Consensus*, are contributing to its institutionalisation, offering a set of policy and cooperation guidelines for economic development and political self-determination directly relevant to the real interests of developing countries. Such a *Beijing Consensus* is thus increasingly being framed as a viable alternative to the present shape of the international system that is increasingly perceived *and* labelled as representing the interests and culture of *others*. As conveyed by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in his address to the Second FOCAC Ministerial Meeting (2003): “hegemonism is raising its ugly head.”¹⁴⁸

Taking a step further, we can seek to estimate the theoretical and real-world significance of this emerging trend. Constructivist theory postulates that because the structure of the international system is associated with given cultural values that are internalized by state actors, any change in the collective identity of the subjects identifying with that culture, and therefore of the culture itself, will lead to a transformation of the very structure, by causing the breakdown of an old identity and the emergence of a new one. This implies that the day the majority of state actors will cease to identify with the existing normative foundations of the international system (rooted in specific cultural values), and replace them with new ones, the system itself will inevitably shift towards a new form.¹⁴⁹

It is too early to tell if the SACF and the FOCAC by themselves have the transformative potential to fulfill this constructivist predictive hypothesis: the two institutions are too young, and more empirical research will have to be done. In addition, at least three factors of uncertainty remain: whether the emerging shared identity is indeed sustainable, that is, whether China will live up to her Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that are the basis of the two institutions and of the emerging shared identity over the long run. This brings in the element of China’s credibility as the guarantor of the mini-lateral systems she designed: as a matter of fact, as Ruggie observed, multilateralism is a *demanding organisational form* that will require China to leave behind the historical legacy of a *minimax* approach to multilateralism.¹⁵⁰ Another is the challenge of *generalising* not only the principles, but also the actual relationships, from bidirectional to multidirectional and diffused among all the members involved. A last factor is to see how deeply China’s co-member states have internalised the norms embedded in the two institutions, and how far they will go in reproducing them.

Yet, what does appear quite visibly is that the whole enterprise falls within a coherent Chinese design of *strategic social construction*. This is defined as the effort of one player to persuade the other player to alter its utility function in ways that reflect the normative commitments of the norms entrepreneur.¹⁵¹ Through this mechanism agents can effect political change. In

¹⁴⁸ “Let us build on Our Past Achievements and Promote China-Africa Friendly Cooperation on All Fronts – Address,” by H.E. Premier Wen Jiabao at Opening Ceremony of the Second Ministerial Conference of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Addis Ababa, December 15, 2003.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 338.

¹⁵⁰ Samuel S. Kim, “International Organisations in Chinese Foreign Policy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 519:1 (1992): 140-157.

¹⁵¹ Martha Finnemore & Catherine Sikkink, “International Norms and Political Change,” 270.

constructivist theory, political change is the result of the achievement of tipping points, following which threshold cascades are generated.¹⁵²

The soft balancing literature defines it as “non offensive coalition building to neutralize a (...) potentially threatening power.”¹⁵³ That literature has postulated that soft balancing essentially operates through the mechanisms of territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signalling of resolve to participate in a balancing coalition.¹⁵⁴ However there is nothing inherently soft in such measures. But more significantly, T.V. Paul has indicated that, short of posing a direct military challenge, soft balancing is an instrument through which second-tier major powers are able to challenge superpower at the level of the legitimacy of its policies.¹⁵⁵ In addition, the soft-balancing literature seems to imply that the measure it describes applies to punctual situations, rather than describing system-wide processes.

However, mindful of the English School postulate, according to which international society is based on a set of rules and norms associated with a given balance of power,¹⁵⁶ I propose to sharpen and to broaden the scope of the soft-balancing thesis. To sharpen it in order to relate it to the specific meaning of balancing at the level of norms; and to broaden it to relate it to more general dynamics affecting the interests of an actor involved. So redefined, soft-balancing becomes equivalent to a dialectic between opposing efforts at strategic social construction. On another level, it can be linked to the mechanism of norm contestation through which actors aim at undermining or displacing an accepted intersubjective meaning or norms, through the formulation of competing discursive interventions that challenge the meaning of norms embodying *conflictive interpretations of values*.¹⁵⁷

In this vein, the normative relevance of the three functions performed by multilateralism as an organising form, and its ability to offer a social infrastructure that can give permanence to embedded principles and values, and potentially the achievement of threshold cascades, can explain its choice as a balancing tool.

I suggest that the two institutions that formed my case studies, as part of a broader pattern of multilateral engagement that China is leading across various regions of the world, underpinned by the same type of normative principles, can be explained in light of this framework.

As a concluding thought I wish to briefly relate my understanding of soft balancing to the broader issue of soft-power theory, which formalises a model of state influence based on the tools of persuasion and cooptation, which can be simplified as the ability of “getting others to want the

¹⁵² Ibid., 271.

¹⁵³ T.V. Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance,” in *Balance of Power. Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T.V. Paul et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 14.

¹⁵⁴ Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States,” *International Security*, vol. 30:1 (2005): 36.

¹⁵⁵ T.V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security*, vol. 30:1 (2005): 59.

¹⁵⁶ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*; E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis 1919-1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

¹⁵⁷ Antje Wiener, “Contested Compliance: Interventions on the Normative Structure of World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 10:2 (2004): 190.

outcomes that you want.”¹⁵⁸ It appears that such a form of power operates through a mechanism very similar to that of strategic social construction, namely through the alteration of the utility functions of the targeted actors. In this sense, soft power is key to soft balancing as it expresses the means through which an actor can seek to advance its significant normative interests, in the presence of a prevailing or rival normative (and cultural) configuration.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2005), 5.