Beyond Fuelling the Dragon: Examining China’s Foreign Policy in Sudan from a Constructivist Perspective

Elizabeth Tadros

Abstract

In 2005 the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) officially ending Sudan’s second civil war, and paving the way for the secession of South Sudan in 2011. Since then China has adopted an increasingly engaged role in promoting peace and security in Sudan and South Sudan. While China has vested commercial interests in both countries, through its extensive ties to Sudan’s oil industry, China’s more engaged role in Sudan and South Sudan cannot be reduced to mere economics. By grounding an assessment of China’s foreign policy in Sudan within its broader historical progression since the end of the Cold War, it is argued that underpinning China’s evolving foreign policy has been a gradual, yet significant shift in China’s self-identity and its global image. As China has developed in the past two decades and become increasingly integrated into the international arena, China’s world view has seen the primacy of multi-polarity wane in favour of multilateralism. Guided by a constructivist approach to international relations this paper argues that informed by its shifting identity, China’s interests have evolved as it gives precedence to projecting a ‘responsible’ image within the global community. In Sudan, China’s ‘responsible’ image has been undermined as it becomes entrenched in the domestic political economy of conflict through the politics of the ruling elite in Khartoum. As a result, China has had to adapt its foreign policy to align with its evolving identity.

Key Words: Sudan; China; Constructivism; Oil diplomacy; Development
Introduction

i) Background

Since establishing the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, trade between China and the continent has increased from $2 billion in 1999 to $166.3 billion in 2011, as recently stated by President Hu Jintao at the 5th Ministerial Conference of FOCAC in Beijing (Hu 2012; Taylor 2006: 937). Denis M. Tull (2006: 459) argues: ‘Given the impressive scale and scope of its engagement, China’s return to Africa may turn out to be one of the most significant developments for the region in recent years.’ Framing China’s expansion into Africa has been its projected identity as ‘leader of the global South’ (Alden et al. 2008: 8). As underlined by President Hu Jintao: ‘China is the world’s largest developing country, and Africa is home to the largest number of developing countries in the world’ (Hu 2012). Tull argues (2006: 462): ‘Although an emerging economic superpower, China continues to portray itself as a developing nation, at least to African audiences.’ The primacy of China’s claims to the ‘developing world’ are diminishing however: ‘While African leaders may nominally accept this formulation, the rationale that they give for co-operating with China more often reflects their acknowledgement of China’s status as an emerging global power with superior capital, technology and political resources’ (Alden and Alves 2008: 46).

As China now claims the second largest economy in the world after the United States, China’s growth and overseas expansion has received widespread attention in the West (The Economist 2011). Traditional undertones of a ‘threat’ perception are still present in Western discourse, however a recent shift has seen an increased emphasis on China to comply with the role of a ‘responsible stakeholder’ (The Economist 2005; Zoellick 2005). As stated by Robert Zoellick (2005: 1):

‘For the United States and the world, the essential question is- how will China use its influence? To answer that question, it is time to take our policy beyond opening doors to China’s membership into the international system: We need to urge China to become a responsible stakeholder in that system.’

In defining ‘responsible stakeholder’ Zoellick (2005: 3) maintains: ‘All nations conduct diplomacy to promote their national interest. Responsible stakeholders go further: They
recognize that the international system sustains their peaceful prosperity, so they work to sustain that system. In its foreign policy, China has many opportunities to be a responsible stakeholder.’

Alden et al. (2008: 23-24) argue that China is responsive to Western ‘threat perceptions’ and ‘has sought to counter this discourse of fear with its own declaration that China’s rise to prominence would be peaceful.’ As stated by Deng (2006: 186): ‘It has become a scholarly consensus that contemporary Chinese foreign policy has countered its negative reputation through a commitment to building a cooperative, responsible image in the international society.’ Upon review of Chinese discourse, Chengxin (2009: 33) maintains, ‘Chinese official discourse is increasingly emphasising “responsible governance.”’ Explaining China’s increasingly engaged role in Sudan, it is argued that Chinese discourse reflects a ‘classical liberal’ perspective, ‘highlighting a positive role, emphasizing the benefits of rising trade and economic growth for peace in Sudan’ (Large 2009: 612-613). As stated by Liqun (2010: 38-39): ‘By integrating itself into the international marketplace and international society through its reform and opening-up policy, it has gradually changed itself into an insider of the international system, become a status quo state and thus no longer seeks to overthrow the current international system.’ In projecting a more ‘responsible’ image, Chinese discourse has moved away from ‘multi-polarity’ which guided China’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, towards greater cooperation within a multilateral world system (Liqun 2010: 41).

In Sudan this is illustrated in part by ‘a seemingly gradual shift away from its categorical support for non-intervention in domestic affairs to one in which it supports the African Union position (and with that the West) on the necessity of a peacekeeping operation’ (Alden et al. 2008: 22). Following the development of Sudan’s oil industry, China’s economic engagements expanded significantly throughout the 2000s. China’s relationship with Sudan developed on the basis of non-interference in the post-Cold War era, however over the past two decades China has become increasingly entrenched in Sudan and South Sudan’s domestic politics (Kuo 2012: 4). As China’s interests are increasingly challenged by its engagement in Sudan, there can be seen shift away from the traditional rhetoric and principles upon which Sino-Sudan relations developed. As argued in a report published by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA 2008: 1): ‘Recent events in Sudan suggest that it is not Africa that is changing under the weight of entreaties by the world’s new super power but rather that it is Chinese foreign policy that is being reshaped by Africa.’
ii) Aims and objectives

The first objective of this research is to examine how China’s relationship with Sudan has evolved from the end of the Cold War in 1989 through the CPA period from 2005. The focus is primarily on the political and economic ties between Beijing and the Government of Sudan. With an understanding of Sino-Sudan relations, the second objective of this research is to critically assess the reasons for China’s changing foreign policy. Adopting a constructivist approach to the analysis of foreign relations and political policy, this research aims to go beyond mainstream international relations theories which emphasise the material factors informing national interest and foreign policy, to assess how China’s interests have evolved as a result of its increasingly entrenched role in Sudan and its growing identity as a ‘rising power’. As China has developed over the past two decades, its self-identity and global image have evolved. As a result, China’s interests have similarly evolved, as have the expectations of it. After the signing of the CPA there has been more pressure on China, from within Africa and without, to adopt a more proactive role in promoting the resolution of conflict between Sudan and South Sudan. In a context of external pressure and a shifting self-identity, China has sought to re-align its relationship in Sudan and South Sudan to accommodate its evolving interests and identity.

iii) Justification

China is Sudan’s most important external economic partner (Large 2009: 613-614). Among the premier locations for China’s ‘go global’ strategy in Africa, Sudan has set precedents for China’s engagements in Africa more broadly (Large and Patey 2011: 30). It has also been one location in which the challenges of China’s increased engagement in the continent have been most pronounced. Assessing how China responds to its challenges in Sudan should contribute to an understanding of what is informing China’s foreign policy. However it should be noted that Chinese policy makers maintain there is no uniform ‘model’ of development (Power and Mohan 2010: 3). This is further justification for a country-specific analysis of China’s engagement in Africa. Assessments of Sino-African relations which treat Africa as homogenous fail to appreciate how relational factors inform China’s foreign policy. On the other hand, assessments which presume China is an ‘exceptional’ global actor, fail to reflect the similarities between Sino-African engagement and that of others, particularly Western powers, in the continent (Power and Mohan 2010: 3).
iv) **Methodology and Theory**

In order to assess the causes of China’s gradually shifting foreign policy in Sudan, this paper adopts a constructivist approach to the study of international relations and foreign policy. Walt (1998: 44) maintains that: ‘Constructivist theories are best suited to the analysis of how identities and interests can change over time, thereby producing subtle shifts in the behaviour of states and occasionally triggering far-reaching but unexpected shifts in international relations.’ Distinguishable from realist and classical liberal theory, constructivism offers an alternative approach to understanding and examining state policies and actions. Constructivism is best understood as an analytical approach to international relations, rather than a theory (Hopf 1998: 172). This dissertation adopts the approach of conventional constructivism, which posits that, ‘the central issue in the post-Cold War world is how different groups conceive their identities and interests’ (Walt 1998: 41). As further argued: ‘Although power is not irrelevant, constructivism emphasizes how ideas and identities are created, how they evolve, and how they shape the way states understand and respond to their situation’ (Walt 1998: 41). In assessing the reasons for states’ actions, it is necessary to look beyond the power politics and economic interests that frame mainstream international relations theories, to understand how ideas and identity evolve and shape state interests. As explained by Walt (1998: 40): ‘Whereas realism and liberalism tend to focus on material factors such as power or trade, constructivist approaches emphasize the impact of ideas. Instead of taking the state for granted and assuming that it simply seeks to survive, constructivists regard the interests and identities of states as a highly malleable product of specific historical processes’.

Mainstream theories are reflective of Western interpretations of international relations and can be restrictive for an analysis of Chinese foreign policy and discourse which often presents views outside the dominant perspectives (Qin 2010: 144). For example, as outlined by Qin (2010: 144): ‘In international relations, the West often defines a state as a “rogue state”, and takes action against it by diplomatic, economic, and military means. The Chinese dialectics, on the other hand, may hold that states are in the on-going process of international relations and hence their identities are changeable.’

**Methodology**

As the objective here is to determine how China’s identity has come to inform its shifting foreign policy in Sudan, it is necessary to examine the relevant Chinese and global
discourses because as Walt (1998: 40) maintains: ‘discourse reflects and shapes beliefs and interests, and establishes accepted norms of behaviour.’ This research will draw on primary sources from media, policy statements and policy debates within China and without. It is also necessary to examine the actions taken by China and the other significant actors involved to assess how a shift in identity and ideas has informed behaviour. Primary data is supported with the use of secondary sources from the scholarly literature on China’s identity, its Africa engagements and North/South Sudan politics.

This paper is organised within a chronological timeline in an effort to illustrate how China’s foreign policy and engagements in Sudan have evolved in time. The first chapter provides an outline of China’s early foreign policy, prior to its developed relationship with Africa in the post-Cold War era. The objective here is to underline how China’s early identity and worldview informed the foundations of its foreign policy. The second chapter will examine the post-Cold War period, from the rise of the National Islamic Front in Sudan in 1989. Within this period Sino-Sudan relations developed bilaterally between Beijing and Khartoum, and reflected a shared identity within the ‘Third World’ and mutual opposition to the intrusive policies of the dominant powers. The third chapter examines the period of China’s expansion in Africa in the early-2000s. In Sudan, Chinese engagement expanded significantly following the development of Sudan’s oil exporting industry in 1999. It is argued that the impacts of Chinese engagement have conflicted with China’s rhetoric of offering a ‘new’ development opportunity to Africa based on ‘mutual benefit’. The final chapter begins with the signing of the CPA in 2005 (UNHCR 2005), and examines China’s evolving relationship with the Government of Sudan and South Sudan. It is argued that following its economic expansion, China has become increasingly entrenched in Sudan and South Sudan’s domestic politics. As a result of China’s growth and rising identity as a ‘global power’, expectations of it to adopt a more proactive role in facilitating peace and security have increased from within South Sudan, Africa and the international community more broadly.

**Soft Power**

The term ‘soft power’ is attributed to Joseph Nye and was developed in reference to the United States in the post-Cold War era (Nye 2010: 12). Nye (2010: 12) explains that following the collapse of the Soviet Union the U.S. dominated both militarily and economically, however ‘conventional wisdom’ referred to the US in decline; this raised the question as to what determines state power beyond the material emphasis of mainstream
international theory. ‘Soft power’ is defined by Nye (2010: 12) as ‘the use of attraction and persuasion rather than the use of coercion or force in foreign policy.’ Three main ‘resources’ of a country’s ‘soft power’ are defined by Nye (2010: 12) to include; ‘its culture (where it is attractive to others); its values (where they are attractive and not undercut by inconsistent practice) and its policies (where they are seen as inclusive and legitimate in the eyes of others).’ The latter category, political policy, is the easiest source of ‘soft power’ for the state to control (Nye 2010: 12).

The concept of ‘soft power’ has not traditionally been a focus in Chinese policy discussion. As Suzuki (2010: 199) argues, in the post-Cold War period ‘any concerns with China’s growing power was related to its military, or “hard” power.’ More recently, ‘soft power’ has become increasingly significant. Firstly, as the prevalence of war between nations diminishes, so has the significance of ‘hard power’ or military strength lessened; and secondly, and most significantly for this research, ‘soft-power’ has provided a means ‘to allay fears that China is a rising power with intentions of upsetting the international material and normative status quo’ (Suzuki 2010: 200-201). Among the sources of China’s ‘soft power’, Suzuki (2010: 201) refers to a ‘Beijing Consensus’, whereby China promotes with its development partners a model for mutual development, unrestricted by mainstream neo-liberal ideology, and based on an adherence to non-interference and respect for state sovereignty (Suzuki 2010: 202).

What is particularly significant for this research is the claim that China’s ‘soft power’ is losing influence within the development world, as Suzuki (2010: 207) argues, ‘the PRC and its enterprises’ ruthless quest for natural resources, coupled with exploitation of local workers, has resulted in a considerable rise in anti-Chinese sentiments’.

v) Limitations

‘Constructivism’ is an approach to the analysis of international relations and not a theory and as such does not presume any causal links with which to guide analysis, but rather allows the space to examine a range of possibly influential factors. As argued by Hopf (1998: 197): ‘The advantages of such an approach are in the nonpareil richness of its elaboration of causal/constitutive mechanisms in any given social context and its openness…to the discovery of other substantive theoretical elements at work. The cost here, however, is the absence of a causal theory of identity.’
1. China’s Early Foreign Policy

This chapter examines the evolution of China’s foreign policy within its historical context in order to highlight how China’s world view and identity came to inform its early engagements in Sudan. Emerging from a history of ‘humiliation’ from foreign interference, China was critical of the power politics dominating international relations (Dingding 2009: 417). China promoted a world view based on ‘peaceful coexistence’ and ‘mutual development’, and identified itself within the ‘Third World’ (PRC 2000a). As Africa failed to provide the markets to facilitate China’s development, China extended its ties with the West in the 1980s (Taylor 1998: 46). However following Tiananmen Square and the end of the Cold War, Sino-American relations in particular would decline under the emergence of ‘neo-liberalism’ and ‘democratisation’ (Taylor 1998: 447). Western criticisms re-committed China to ‘Third World solidarity’ and the ‘Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.’ This came at a time when African leaders were under increased pressure to adopt political reform (Taylor 1998: 447). It is in this context that China’s relations with Africa, and Sudan more specifically, developed in significance.

1.1. The Rise of the CCP and the ‘Three Worlds Theory’

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power under the direction of Mao Zedong with the objective to position China as a ‘progressive’ force within the international arena (Alden and Alves 2008: 45). Informing China’s foreign policy at the time was its recent history of ‘humiliation’ under foreign interference (Dingding 2009: 417). Among the significant developments in China’s foreign policy was the expression that ‘China was ready to establish diplomatic relations with all countries which are willing to observe the principles of equality, mutual benefit and mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty’ (PRC 2000a: 1). The ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ which would ground China’s early foreign relations with India and Burma and frame China’s policy with Africa, distinguished China with the claim that they are ‘diametrically opposed to power politics which have been in dominance in international relations over the last few years’ (PRC 2000a: 1). China’s commitment to sovereignty was not only based on ‘self-interest’ but as argued by Carlson (2006: 223), ‘also drew on the historical memory of past transgressions against China’s sovereignty rights.’

The cultivation of China’s identity was a priority with Beijing which emphasised China as a member of the developing world (Alden and Alves 2008: 44). While initially aligned with
the Soviet Union, China’s ‘revolutionary’ identity led to the development of the ‘Three World Theory’ which Alden and Alves (2008: 45) explain ‘placed China as a leading developing country in contrast to the hegemonic pretensions of Moscow and Washington and their putative allies.’ As expressed by Harris and Worden (1986: 1), writing in the late 1980s; ‘According to one authoritative Chinese statement, not only does China belong to the Third World because it “has shared the same historical experience with other Third World nations,” but “strengthening [its] unity and cooperation with other Third World nations is [China’s] basic foreign policy”’. Harris and Worden (1986: 1-2) stated however that among the ‘markers’ of development, including per capita GDP and economic growth, China was comparatively ahead of other developing countries. China’s identity with the Third World is thus derived, as argued, from China’s own claims to it (Harris and Worden 1986: 2). While an ‘amorphous group’ the ‘Third World’ is defined as: ‘A political term that has come to mean those developing and less-industrialized countries opposed to political and economic domination by the superpowers and the developed world’ (Harris and Worden 1986: 2).

Among China’s national interests has been its ‘One China’ principle, in which it is maintained, ‘Taiwan is an inalienable part of China’, and further that, ‘the One-China Principle has been evolved in the course of the Chinese people’s just struggle to safeguard China’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its basis, both de facto and de jure, is unshakable’ (PRC 2000: 1). By supporting rebel movements in Africa’s post-colonial era, China pursued its interest to expand the political legitimacy of the CCP and Beijing (Alden and Alves 2008: 48; Saferworld 2011: 5). As argued by Alden and Alves (2008: 47): ‘Without UN membership and lacking United States recognition (which maintained the diplomatic posture that the Republic of China on the island of Taiwan was the legitimate government), Beijing realised that newly independent countries in the former colonial world were both natural allies and a potential solution to its legitimacy problems.’ Between 1967-1976, $142 million worth in Chinese arms was exported to Africa (Alden and Alves 2008: 48). Following China’s ascension in the UN, its engagements in Africa began to ‘normalise’ and bilateral state diplomacy was prioritised (Alden and Alves 2008: 51). China’s engagement with Africa declined in the 1980s as China was increasingly critical of Africa’s slow development: ‘Africa’s failure to develop its economies efficiently and open up to the international market militated against Chinese policy aims’ (Taylor 1998: 445). Driven by an interest for ‘economic modernisation’, China shifted its foreign relations to the West and Japan (Taylor 1998: 444). In the 1980s, China’s relations with the West were largely
cooperative; however following the events at Tiananmen Square the discourse in the West that ‘China was being remade as a Chinese imitation of the West’s self-image’, would be replaced by a critical stance, with an emphasis on human rights and governance (Taylor 1998: 466).

1.2. The ‘West’ and Tiananmen Square

As published at the time: ‘The United States, Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden all issued statements deploiring the shooting of hundreds of demonstrators by the Chinese army’ (The Register-Guard 1989). In addition to official condemnation, protests amassed across the United States (The Register-Guard 1989). The United Nations Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, issued Resolution 1989/5, entitled, ‘Situation in China’ (UN 1989). Beijing’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Li Luye, responded in defence, stating: ‘The use of the United Nations forum by a small number of Western countries to interfere in China’s internal affairs constitutes a complete violation of the purposes of the United National Charter and the norms governing international relations’ (UN 1990: 4).

Since Tiananmen Square the issue of human rights has been at the forefront of Sino-US policy debates (Taylor 1998: 446-447). China’s position, which is argued is shared by African leaders has been that: ‘human rights such as “economic rights” and “rights of subsistence” are the main priority of developing nations and take precedence over personal, individual rights as conceptualised in the West’ (Taylor 1998: 448). China’s relationship with Africa following the end of the Cold War would develop in the context of deteriorating Sino-American relations. As stated by Taylor (1998: 447): ‘Whilst Tiananmen Square ended China’s “honeymoon” relationship with the West, Africa’s reaction was far more muted, if not openly supportive…As a result, the developing world was elevated in Chinese thinking to become a “cornerstone” of Beijing’s foreign policy.’

1.3. Third World Solidarity

China reaffirmed the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ as guiding its foreign policy with Africa (Taylor 1998: 451). These are: ‘mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity’, ‘mutual non-aggression’, ‘non-interference in each other’s internal affairs’, ‘equality and mutual benefit’ and ‘peaceful co-existence’ (PRC 2000). China further
distinguished itself from the dominant powers by promoting a policy of ‘aid without conditions’, marking a significant contrast to the ‘Structural Adjustment Programmes’ (SAPs) promulgated by the mainstream donors; ‘In the light of the persistent stress which economic and political conditionalities have forced on African governments, it is hardly surprising that the Chinese stance on the issues of sovereignty is gratefully acknowledged by African governments’ (Tull 2006: 467).

Deng (2006: 186) argues China’s commitment to the ‘Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ was a strategic choice made to counter the rise of the ‘China Threat Theory’, which maintained: ‘A dangerous Chinese expansionism has manifested itself in power, intentions, and behaviour…and the aggregate material power accruing from the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy is likely to lead to greater military prowess and aggressive foreign behaviour.’ In the post-Cold War era, with the rise of neo-liberalism and ‘democratisation’, China’s growth without political liberalisation, enhanced Western perceptions that China’s rise would threaten the established order (Kristof 1989: E3). While realist theory interprets a ‘threat identity’ favourably, as contributing to national security by enhancing a ‘reputation for action’ and ‘deterrence credibility’, as Deng (2006: 188) explains, such arguments do not account for the post-Cold War context, defined by U.S. hegemony, in which he states: ‘The prospect of confronting a hostile U.S.-led coalition is the worst kind of strategic nightmare.’ The ‘Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ was a means to project China as non-threatening to the West and to present the global South with an alternative partner.

Opposed to power politics and interference, China’s early foreign policy was predicated on China’s identity within the ‘Third World’. Aware that aggressive policies would enhance its ‘threat image’ within the U.S., the post-Tiananmen Square era marked a significant period in the cultivation of China’s ‘soft power’ with the developing world and the international community. The basis of China’s ‘soft power’ with the developing world was founded on a shared identity within the ‘Third World’, a mutual interest to develop without the restrictions of Western conditionalities, and the principles of ‘Peaceful Coexistence’.


Sino-Sudan relations developed significantly in the post-Cold War era, following the rise of the National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudan (Large 2008a: 94). Sudan’s second civil war had already begun, however, conflict heightened in the 1990s with the development of Sudan’s oil industry and the increasingly aggressive policies of Sudan’s ruling elite (Saferworld 2012).
Relations between China and Sudan developed bilaterally between Beijing and Khartoum and through party ties between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the National Islamic Front (NIF) (Large and Patey 2011). International isolation and mutual interest drove China’s early engagement in Sudan, underpinning which has been a shared identity with the ‘Third World’ and commitment to non-interference and state sovereignty.

2.1. Sudan: Civil War and the National Islamic Front

Sudan gained independence in 1956 and has since experienced a history of conflict and political instability (Saferworld 2012: 89). After signing a peace agreement in Addis Ababa, conflict resumed in 1983 marking the start of Sudan’s second civil war which lasted until the CPA in 2005 (Saferworld 2012: 89-90). This war has claimed the lives of over 2 million people and displaced more than 4 million people in South Sudan (Saferworld 2012: 90). On the causes of Africa’s civil wars, Ayers (2010: 155) argues that the emphasis in the literature on ‘internal’ factors omits the role that global actors have in contributing to Africa’s conflicts. As argued (Ayers 2010: 155): ‘The sources of the production and reproduction of political violence and war are to be found not only in the “internal” characteristics of individual states but in their globally and historically constituted social relations.’ Ayers (2010: 156) maintains that to understand the dynamics of political violence in Sudan it is necessary to examine three interrelated factors: ‘the technologies of colonial rule which (re)produced and politicised multiple fractures in social relations’; ‘the major role of geopolitics in fuelling and exacerbating conflicts within Sudan and the region’; and ‘Sudan’s terms of incorporation within the capitalist global economy.’

Among the root causes of Sudan’s instability has been a history of ‘poor governance and marginalisation of the periphery by a centrally controlled state’ (Saferworld 2012: 93). According to Ayers (2010: 158), this system of marginalisation can be traced to the colonial structure of indirect rule, imposed in Sudan’s peripheries. As well as indirect rule, Ayers (2010: 159) describes a policy of ‘institutionalised neglect’, whereby, ‘intent on maintaining the separation of north and south, the “Southern Policy” mandated regional qua racial segregation, whereby the South was to be developed along “African”, rather than “Arab” lines.’ As a result of colonial rule in Sudan ‘far greater disparities prevailed between the north and the south than had existed at the close of the Mahdiyya’ (Ayers 2010: 159).

In 1989, Hassan al-Turabi led an Islamic revolution to overthrow the coalition government ruling Sudan, which was appearing to be compromising in favour of the Sudan People’s
Liberation Army/ Movement (SPLA/M) (Woodward 2011: 40-41). The ambition of the NIF to promote a ‘Muslim Commonwealth’ in the region, led to a period of turbulent foreign relations which would see Sudan internationally and regionally isolated at the time of President Bashir’s rise to power (Woodward 2011: 46). It was in a context of isolation, and ‘renewed war against the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/ Army (SPAM/A)’ that Sudan’s relationship with China developed in significance (Large 2008: 96). As with the first civil war in 1956, the marginalisation of the South by the central government in the North was a significant factor in the second civil war and remains a continual feature of Sudan’s internal violence; ‘The overarching cause of the civil war remained the same as before it: a historical consistency of oppressive government from Khartoum promoting regional marginalisation and exploiting social divisions’ (Patey 2007: 1000).

2.2. China and the NIF

Emerging from a decade of development and growth, China’s interest in the 1990s was to establish its ‘rightful place’ within an international system dominated a hegemonic power; the United States (Cheng and Shi 2009: 91). In distinguishing China from the mainstream donors, Beijing’s emphasis on tailoring development to meet local needs has been part of China’s ‘soft power’ strategy within Africa. As published in the early 1990s concerning China’s ties with Kenya, it was stated; ‘On domestic affairs, President Moi said Kenya was guided by its own policies, based on the people’s way of life and local realities. He had at the same time commended China for its similar policies which had enabled the country to grow in peace and stability…The Chinese foreign minister commended President Moi for guiding Kenya to assume an important role in the region. He also emphasized that every country must formulate its development based on the local realities’ (Daily Report 1990: 1). Taylor (1998: 447) argues that Africa’s alignment with Beijing was driven in part by ‘the self-interest of African elites under threat from democratisation projects’ and ‘Third World solidarity and resentment at Western “neo-imperialist” interference in the affairs of a fellow developing country.’

In keeping with China’s commitment to state sovereignty Sino-Sudan relations developed bilaterally between Beijing and Khartoum. As reported at the time (Daily Report 1990b: 1); ‘The Chinese official told [the Sudan News Agency] that bilateral relations are based on mutual cooperation and affirmed that Khartoum and Beijing hold identical views on international and bilateral questions.’ As noted (Large and Patey 2011: 24); ‘In
foregrounding political equality, state sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual benefit, these relations have been managed on the basis of a different set of principles from those deployed by Sudan’s more established international partners.’ In addition to high level diplomatic ties between government officials in Beijing and Khartoum, party ties developed significantly between the Chinese Community Party and the National Congress Party (NCP) of Sudan through ‘rituals of rhetorical solidarity and expressions of support’ (Large and Patey 2011: 25). As Large and Patey (2011: 25) further argue; ‘This strand of political relations also testifies to the significance of non-material links, and NCP interest in China’s political experience.’ Military co-operation has further been a defining feature of Sino-Sudan relations between Beijing and Khartoum (Large 2008: 95). While initially Khartoum questioned turning to China, ‘the Chinese government’s principle of non-interference in internal affairs, and opposition to the political condemnation and pressure mobilised against the NIF regime, was welcomed by Khartoum, as was China’s offer to construct an oil refinery’ (Large and Patey 2011: 10).

2.3. China, Sudan and Oil

In the early 1990s, Sudan presented to China ‘untapped economic potential’ (Large 2008a: 96). ‘Not under the control of major Western oil companies, Sudan represented a strong opportunity for China and played a significant early role in China’s strategic energy expansion abroad’ (Large and Patey 2011: 10). As Taylor (2006: 943-944) argues; ‘China has been pursuing an “outward-looking oil economy” since around 1995.’ The drivers most associated with China’s ‘oil diplomacy’ are firstly, rising domestic demand as a result of China’s development; and secondly, a ‘long-term’ objective, ‘to position China as a global player in the international oil market’ (Taylor 2006: 938). The leading companies of China’s overseas oil expansion are; CNPC, SINOPEC and CNOOC, which are argued, ‘remain principally the tools of Chinese government strategizing’ (De Oliveira 2009: 85).

While the underlining causes of conflict are debated, it is widely agreed that oil has been a key factor since the oil explorations were conducted by Western companies in the 1970s (Saferworld 2012: 90). As argued, ‘The start of oil production raised the stakes, with adverse consequences for those in close proximity to actual or potential oil producing areas. Tribal divisions, competition for land, land degradation, poverty and inequality have fuelled many subsidiary conflicts, which persist in a number of the states of South Sudan’ (Saferworld 2012: 90). Patey (2007: 1002) states, ‘Oil development exacerbated the North-
South civil war by representing an economic prize for Khartoum that held aggravating consequences for conflict dynamics at national and local levels.’ As Large (2008: 104) argues, Sudan’s oil industry contributed to the shift in Sudan’s state interests from a ‘revolutionary Islamic project’ to a ‘self-interested pragmatic regime.’ As outlined by Human Rights Watch (2003: 37);

‘In the 1990s the government embarked upon a more sophisticated displacement campaign, through the use of divide-and-conquer tactics: it bought off rebel factions and exacerbated south-south ethnic differences with arms supplies…Campaigns of killing, pillage, and burning, enabled by government troops and air support for their southern allies who served as front troops, cleared the way for Western and Asian oil corporations to develop the basic infrastructure for oil extraction and transportation: rigs, roads, pumping stations, and pipelines.’

Sino-Sudan relations developed in a context of mutual isolation and driven by a shared interest, on the one hand for political legitimacy, and on the other, to develop Sudan’s oil industry. Underpinning this relationship was China’s self-identity as a member of the ‘Third World’, and a shared opposition to the power politics of the West. China’s bilateral relationship with Khartoum and its extensive role in developing Sudan’s oil industry through the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), compounded by the aggressive policies of the NIF, has seen China since become increasingly entrenched in the domestic politics of Sudan and South Sudan (Large 2009: 617). The following chapter will examine how China’s engagements in Sudan and in Africa more broadly, evolved following the development of Sudan’s oil industry and the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000.

3. The New Millennium, 2000-2005

From the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 official Chinese rhetoric has emphasised a ‘new type of China-Africa strategic partnership’ based on ‘mutual respect’ and ‘mutual benefit’ (Hu 2012). The declaration of 2006 as the ‘Year of Africa’ and the release of ‘China’s Africa Policy’ further elevated Sino-African relations (Alden et al. 2009: 3). While a ‘new’ relationship, the rhetoric of old has remained. As stated; ‘China, the largest developing country in the world, follows the path of peaceful
development and pursues an independent foreign policy of peace’ (PRC 2006: 1). As China has expanded its economic interests into Africa, attention in the West has increased. China’s relationship with Sudan has been amongst the most contentious, with criticisms growing following the outbreak of conflict in Darfur, and in the lead up to the Beijing Olympics (Budabin 2011). Significantly, as the implications of Chinese engagement in Sudan and Africa more broadly, become apparent, anti-Chinese sentiment within the continent has grown, undermining China’s interest to present Africa with a ‘new’ and ‘alternative’ development partner.

3.1. China’s ‘return’ to Africa and ‘go global’ strategy

As stated in a speech by China’s Foreign Trade Minister in 2000; ‘With the strengthened economic power and raise level of opening up of China, we will encourage Chinese enterprises to go global, better utilize international and domestic resources and markets, and realize the integration and combination of “attracting foreign investment” and “going global”’ (Shi 2000: 1). As argued; ‘Central government support for Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) has been an important factor in directing foreign direct investment in Africa’ (Alden et al. 2008: 7). In resource-rich countries, China operates a model of ‘resource-guaranteed infrastructure loans’ by which its commercial interests are often extended along with aid and development packages, delivered by Chinese businesses benefitting from access to ‘generous lines of credit’ through the state (International Crisis Group 2012: 9).

Official Chinese discourse frames its engagement with Africa as; ‘A new type of strategic partnership…featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange’ (PRC 2006: 1). This is informed by the view that ‘the legacy of colonialism and continued neo-colonial interference in African politics by Western countries are the leading factor of unrest in Africa and that internal issues cannot be solved by externally imposed solutions’ (Kuo 2012: 3). As Tull (2006: 465) argues, the ‘power’ of China’s policy with Africa ‘is enhanced by a subtle discourse which posits China not only as an appealing alternative partner to the West, but also as a better choice for Africa.’ Alden and Large (2011: 21) maintain; ‘Beijing operates a distinctive normative mode in conducting its foreign policy relations with Africa: resting on an historically-informed framework…reinforced by contemporary rhetoric emphasising political equality, mutual benefit, sovereignty, non-interference and “win-win cooperation”’. China’s ‘historical rhetoric’ it is argued ‘acts not only as a description of the foundation for past relations but
also as an assurance to African leaders that, despite Chinese emerging superpower status, it will retain the outlook and interests of fellow developing countries’ (Alden and Alves 2008: 46). In Sudan, the Merowe Dam is illustrative of the ‘soft-power’ dimension to China’s ‘go-global’ strategy. For Sudan’s elite, the Merowe Dam tapped into a historically informed interest to control Sudan’s water resources, ‘transform Sudan, once again, into the breadbasket of Africa and the Middle East and diversify its economy away from a dangerous dependence on oil’ (Verhoeven 2011: 128). For Africa, it represented an alternative model of development, amidst a widely held critique against ‘liberal political-economic Western agenda’ (Verhoeven 2011: 128). Led by the state-owned conglomerate Sinohydro, the construction of the Merowe Dam represented the export of China’s model of development, based on ‘the high modernist idea of “economic growth through big infrastructure”’ (Verhoeven 2011: 125). Verhoeven (2011: 125) underlines this significance, stating; ‘Big dams symbolise not only the rapid intensification of ties between China and African countries but also the growing “ideological” influence of Beijing on the political–economic vision of African elites.’ While Chinese engagement is well received by Africa’s elite, it is argued China’s alternative ‘political-economy model’ is regarded as, ‘the biggest ideological threat the West has felt since the end of the Cold War’ (Gill and Huang 2006: 21).

3.2. Critiques

Official discourse in the United States, since the end of the Cold War has depicted China’s growth as a ‘threat’ to U.S. power and economic interests (Deng and Wang 1999: 3). China’s expansion into Africa’s energy and extractive industries has received widespread attention, but as argued of China’s overseas oil developments; ‘In the short run the diversion of the output of these fields to China would have a negligible effect on global energy availability and prices. And in the long run, given China’s interests in lower cost energy, Chinese firms are likely to invest at least as much as alternative owners in expanding oil and gas production…which, of course, benefits the United States and all other energy importing countries’ (Bergsten et al. 2006: 113). De Oliveira (2006: 166) argues a similar point that China’s overseas oil development should be regarded by Western companies as an ‘opportunity’ as it will inevitably develop more global energy sources.

China’s foreign policy is further criticised for promoting ‘rogue aid’ whereby it is argued; ‘By pushing their alternative development model, such states effectively price responsible aid programs out of the market exactly where they are needed most. In place of those programs,
rogue donors offer to underwrite a world that is more corrupt, chaotic and authoritarian’ (Naim 2007: 1). As critically stated (Tull 2006: 476):

‘Beijing uses the pillars of its foreign policy, notably unconditional respect for state sovereignty and its corollary, non-interference, in the pursuit of its interests, be they energy security, multipolarity or the ‘One China’ principle. To achieve these goals, Beijing is prepared to defend autocratic regimes that commit human rights abuses and forestall democratic reforms for narrow ends for narrow ends of regime survival.’

In a recent tour of Africa, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized that the United States promoted human rights and democracy ‘even when it might be easier or more profitable to look the other way’, adding ‘not every partner makes that choice, but we do and we will’ (The Guardian 2012: 1). These comments were criticised in Chinese media, and seen to be a deliberate attempt to undermine China’s Africa relations (Reuters 2012). As Breslin and Taylor (2008: 58) maintain, ‘Material interests have long dictated the capitalist West’s responses to the issue of human rights when it related to China and in this regard, Sino-African ties’, further arguing this is why the issue of human rights has once again been raised ‘as new Chinese actors come into competition with Western corporations in Africa’ (Breslin and Taylor 2008: 58). Similarly, Ricardo De Oliveira (2006: 166) argues that while the West does have a ‘moral dimension’ to its foreign policy in Africa, the oil sector has never been included in this; ‘What is presented as an illiberal departure from Western procedure and prescription is in fact mostly the ‘business as usual’ approach followed throughout the region’ (De Oliveira 2009: 108).

3.3. The impacts of Chinese engagement on Sudan

The economic impacts of China’s engagement in Sudan have been significant. As remarked by Large and Patey (2011: 16): ‘Sudan’s imports from China have risen sharply by over 640% since oil exports began in 1999, averaging over US$900 million a year to 2009.’ Oil now accounts for more than 90% of the total value of Sudan’s exports (James 2011: 57-58). China receives 83% of Sudan’s total oil exports, however as Large and Patey (2011: 14) are right to underline, this accounts for less than 1% of China’s total energy consumption. Chinese interests and activities expanded in Sudan into hydropower, construction, transport infrastructure, and services (Large and Patey 2011: 20). While China’s engagements began
through a centralised system of investments, it is noted ‘from a predominately state-backed process involving key national oil companies, the profile of Chinese business engagement has evolved to feature a greater variety of businesses, ranging from the larger state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to small and medium enterprises and independent entrepreneurs’ (Large and Patey 2011: 20).

Beyond oil, Sudan’s economy has not seen many significant improvements, and as James (2011: 61) argues; ‘Despite the massive scale of its post-oil economic transformation, oil still only accounts for around 7% of Sudan’s nominal GDP’, a percentage it is argued is diminishing. Writing on China’s impacts in Africa more broadly it is argued; ‘Although the diversification of trading partners is an encouraging sign, African countries have to recognise that China will not per se have a positive impact on their economies’ (Tull 2006: 472).

Firstly, Chinese investment into Africa’s extractive industries has come at the expense of diversifying local economies (Taylor 2006: 956). As has been reported, between 1996 and 2004 there have been no significant changes in the share of manufacturing-value added (MVA) in Africa’s GDP (Kaplinsky 2008: 4). Secondly, China’s increased commercial presence has undermined local economic activity increasing competition for local producers (Kaplinsky 2008: 6).

Oil investments since 1999 have exacerbated local grievances, and heightened North/South disparities in Sudan (Large and Patey 2011: 188). Moro (2011: 70-71) underlines; land dispossession without compensation, environmental damage, a lack of local consultations, and heightened conflict as new infrastructure, such as roads and airstrips, facilitated the activities of the Sudanese Armed Forces. While Chinese companies claim to be balancing these ramifications with development assistance, building schools and health care facilities, Moro (2011: 73) argues these claims are refuted by local populations. As further stated, ‘Some development projects have indeed been implemented by oil companies but their positive impacts, if any, are limited. Such projects have been implemented without consultation with the intended beneficiaries, and are mostly small philanthropic interventions’ (Moro 2011: 85).

3.4. Assessing China’s ‘alternative’ role

More arguments are being forwarded that rather than presenting an ‘exceptional’ role, China’s ‘asymmetrical’ relationship with the continent has meant, ‘China is replicating more established patterns of Africa’s unfavourable relations with external partners’ (Alden et al.
As stated by Claphman (2006: 3); ‘Despite the claim that both China and Africa are part of the “developing world”, this is a deeply unequal relationship. South Africa apart, there is no African economy that can even begin to engage with China in the way that China is engaging with Africa.’ As argued by Tull (2006: 471); ‘Judging from its most important partners, Beijing’s economic interests in Africa do not vary from those of Western states. This seems to suggest that rapidly growing economic exchanges between Africa and China will neither fundamentally alter Africa’s asymmetrical integration into global markets, nor will they reduce Africa’s dependence on a few price-volatile primary goods that account for 73% of its overall export revenues.’

Rather than presenting Sudan with an alternative development opportunity, Chinese investments contributed in facilitating the aggressive policies of the Government of Sudan. Large and Patey (2011: 181) argue; ‘China’s engagement blends into a longer history of top-down, centralised disempowerment and impoverishing “authoritarian development”’. In Sudan, a system of ‘petro-patronage’ exists, whereby rent-seeking elites have maintained power through the revenue accrued from oil exports (Large and Patey 2011: 180). Taylor (2006: 956-957) defines ‘enclave economies’ as ‘economies that export extractive products concentrated in relatively small geographical areas’. Where the ‘rents’ accrued from exports are concentrated with a small elite ‘the system fundamentally fails to promote economic growth and development’ (Taylor 2006: 957). As Taylor (2006: 957) remarks; ‘In such circumstances, affluence and underdevelopment can go hand in hand’. This has been the case of Chinese engagement in Sudan, however as rightfully maintained; ‘This is a general problem that all actors interacting with Africa’s resource-rich states much consider and manage. And in this regard, western companies have been no better than others, in spite of their much longer engagement’ (Taylor 2006: 957). In Sudan, oil revenue has transformed Sudan’s regime into a ‘Corporation with an unrestrained lust for wealth and power’ (Large and Patey 2011: 181). As it seems, Chinese engagement has not radically altered Sudan’s prospects for development, but rather become part of an established structure of marginalisation by an authoritative elite.

3.5. The Impacts of Sino-Sudan engagement for China

 Particularly significant has been the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment within Africa (Saferworld 2011: 13). Here we recall the statement by Suzuki (2010: 207) that the influence of China’s ‘soft power’ is declining as China’s overseas policies become increasingly criticised within
African societies. As argued; ‘The dumping of cheap Chinese imports and the displacement of local products, especially clothing and textile, has aroused growing anti-Chinese sentiment and popular resentment’ (Le Pere 2008: 31). In Zambia, it is remarked, ‘labour standards in Chinese businesses become so highly politicised that in 2007 an opposition leader campaigned on an anti-China ticket’ (Saferworld 2011: 14).

China’s entrenched role in Sudan’s internal politics has significantly challenged China’s engagement and foreign policy. As critiqued; ‘Following a top-down economic development approach, Chinese economic assistance…has encouraged elitism, deepened social and class divisions and widened corruption’ (Askouri 2007: 72). China’s relationship with Khartoum, and the impacts that investments have had for local populations has meant China is increasingly linked with the politics of the Government of Sudan. Askouri (2007: 81) remarks that China and Sudan are ‘joining hands to uproot poor people, expropriate their land and appropriate their natural resource.’ In 2007, when Darfur rebels attacked an oil field, and abducted two workers, quoting the head of the rebel group in Kordofan, it was reported, ‘The latest attack is a message to the Chinese companies in particular…the Chinese companies are the biggest investors in the Sudanese oil industry’ (Osman 2007: 1). In 2008, nine CNPC workers were kidnapped in Southern Kordofan (Reuters 2008: 1). Insecurity threatens China’s commercial interests and undermines its claims to ‘peaceful development’ (Holslag 2009: 25).

Insecurity and China’s entrenched relationship with Khartoum has seen regional pressure on China to take a more proactive stance on security in Sudan increase, particularly as the conflict in Darfur crossed into Chad. As Holslag (2009: 25) argues, ‘In Sudan, China’s traditional policy of non-interference was contrary to the expectation of other African nations that Beijing would contribute to the stabilization of Darfur.’ As further argued; ‘Following the establishment of diplomatic ties with Chad in 2006 and the consequent oil deals, the government in N’Djamena made it clear to Beijing that the infiltration of rebels from Darfur into its own territory had to stop’ (Holslag 2009: 25).

China’s engagement in Sudan has also positioned it as the focus of international criticism. The ‘Save Darfur Campaign’, which later coined the term ‘Genocide Olympics’, targeted China in an attempt to pressure Beijing to act more responsibly in Sudan (Budabin 2011: 139). Among the criticisms raised was China’s ‘international patronage’, as Large and Patey (2011: 190) state which was; ‘particularly important in relation to Khartoum’s external handling of the war in Darfur, with China delaying and diluting UN Security Council
resolutions pressuring Khartoum to end the hostilities.’ As argued, ‘The China Campaign was successful in crafting a persuasive argument that China could play a key role in ending the conflict in Darfur. It tapped into China’s growing interest in conforming to international norms around humanitarianism and peacekeeping’ (Budabin 2011: 156). Further criticisms have emphasised China’s role in assisting the Government of Sudan through arms trade and military cooperation. China has been among Sudan’s most consistent arms suppliers (Saferworld 2011). Between 2002 and 2005, ‘when Khartoum was attempting to crush military rebellion in Darfur…China was the largest reported supplier of military weapons and small arms to Sudan’ (Large 2008a: 98). As argued (Large 2012: 8);

‘Such developed support for northern Sudan’s NCP-run security state did not cohere comfortably with Beijing’s professed support for peace…Besides their direct impact on military capability and civilian welfare, or influence in shaping popular Sudanese associations of China with robust support for Khartoum, arms transfers render Chinese interest in Sudan themselves indirectly vulnerable to unintended, often violent consequences of military blowback.’

Drawing on SIPRI data, Saferworld (2011: 50) reports that between 2000 and 2009, $143 million worth of weapons (excluding ‘small arms and light weapons’) was exported to Sudan by China. China has also facilitated in building three weapons factories outside of Khartoum, with the assistance of Germany and Iran (Saferworld 2011: 50; Shinn 2008: 170). It should be noted however that China is not Sudan’s only arms supplier. For example as published in the Saferworld Report, China and Conflict Affected States, arms transfers from China to Sudan between 1997-2010 valued $210 million, while from Russia in the same period amassed to more than $750 million (Saferworld 2012: 98).

A target of both local opposition and external activism, China has become increasingly entrenched in Sudan’s domestic politics. As Large (2011: 161) argues; ‘The previously benevolent abstraction of an altruistic People’s China in Sudan underwent a transition as its oil intervention became more tangibly entwined in the country’s multiple civil wars. China’s role in Sudan’s oil-fuelled conflict followed…an entrenched, violent political economy.’ The co-option of Chinese activities into Sudan’s ‘violent political economy’ has undermined Chinese rhetoric as offering a ‘new’ partnership based on ‘mutual benefit’ and challenged China’s ‘soft power’ with the international community, based on the ‘Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’. As China has sought to counter growing sentiment against its engagements, a gradual shift is being realised in its foreign policy with Sudan.
The following chapter will examine China’s evolving foreign policy in Sudan and South Sudan. As will be argued, China has witnessed a gradual shift away from its bilateral commitments with Khartoum to extend ties with South Sudan. Similarly, Chinese policymakers have become increasingly critical of the policies of Khartoum and more cooperative with the international community on promoting peace and security within Sudan and South Sudan. This has seen China become more vocal on the need for peace, and more active within UN peacekeeping missions. This reflects a significant departure from the previous decade’s relationship with Khartoum, framed by the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and managed through exclusively bilateral ties.

4. The CPA period; 2005-2011

The signing of the CPA between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) prepared the way for the secession of South Sudan in 2011. Sudan and South Sudan are presently economically dependent on the same oil resources, located predominately in South Sudan and along the border (James 2011: 66). Since the signing of the CPA China has expanded its ties with the Government of South Sudan. From maintaining predominantly bilateral ties with Khartoum, the secession of South Sudan has required China to adapt its foreign policy. China’s oil investments in South Sudan are often underlined as driving China in the South. In addition to expanding its ties in South Sudan, China has adopted a more proactive role in promoting peace and security, first in Darfur and most recently in South Sudan. While insecurity has threatened China’s economic interests in Sudan, these alone do not explain China’s evolving relationship with Sudan and South Sudan. Examining China’s foreign policy within the broader context of its evolving identity and global image, it is concluded that China’s more active engagement reflects a broader shift in which its evolving identity has heightened external expectations, and enhanced China’s interest to project a more ‘responsible’ image within the international community.

4.1. The CPA

The CPA, signed in 2005 by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), marked an official end to the civil war which began in 1983 (Saferworld 2012: 89). Although unity was prioritised, the CPA laid the foundation for the referendum and secession of South Sudan in 2011 (CPA 2005). Oil had been a significant factor in Sudan’s politics since the 1990s, and continues to factor in the post-conflict period.
Negotiation is necessary between Juba and Khartoum as explained, ‘at independence in July 2011, landlocked South Sudan took with it two-thirds of the region’s oil, but the pipelines and processing facilities remained in Sudan’ (AFP 2012: 1). Six months after independence, South Sudan shut down oil production as negotiations with Khartoum failed to reach a resolution (NYT 2012). Although negotiations have resumed and an oil agreement has been made, a deal is yet to be reach on the most divisive of issues, including the future of the Abyei region (Xinhua 2012).

4.2. Beijing’s new ties with South Sudan

Beijing initially promoted a resolution which would maintain Sudan’s unity and arguably China’s established position with the North (Woodward 2011: 47). However, as the possibility of secession become more readily apparent, Beijing adopted a ‘hedging strategy’ as Large (2011: 157) argues. Diplomatic ties were extended at first through a ‘friendship visit’ in March 2005, between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and China in Beijing (Large 2008a: 102). The ‘quasi-state status’ of the Government of South Sudan, enabled Beijing to extend diplomatic ties without compromising its position on bilateral diplomacy and state sovereignty (Large 2008a: 102). However, as stated in a report published by the International Crisis Group (International Crisis Group 2012: 1); ‘Because Beijing’s relationship with Sudan was previously channelled almost exclusively through Khartoum and its ruling National Congress Party (NCP), it has had to build a relationship in the South, particularly with the ruling Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement (SPLM), from the ground up, while reassuring Khartoum that it has no intention of leaving old friends behind.’ As Large (2009: 620) argues, ‘Relations that developed between China and the SPLM-led Government of South Sudan after 2005 thus represented a political departure of note in the history of its relations with Sudan.’

The sentiment in South Sudan has been ‘that Beijing had underwritten an autocratic regime, helped facilitate the devastation and economic exploitation of the South and aided in preserving the country’s fundamental centre-periphery problem’ (International Crisis Group 2012: 2-3). The targeting of Chinese oil workers in South Kordofan in 2008 illustrated the dangers for China of this perception within South Sudan (Saferworld 2012: 121). Despite lasting legacies of China’s entrenched history with the Government of Sudan, Juba was ‘pragmatic’ in its decision to engage with China, acknowledging the benefits investments could bring (International Crisis Group 2012: 4). In a briefing by Saferworld (Kuo 2012: 4)
it is stated; ‘Officials in Juba admit that during their civil war with the North, they saw China as an ally of Khartoum. After the CPA, the SPLM/A had concerns that China might interfere with the transition. When this did not materialise, it became apparent to Juba that China had a major role to play in South Sudan’s development.’

China still maintains a comparative advantage to Western donors, as argued, ‘the red-tape, conditionalities, pace, and risk-aversion often associated with Western partnerships appear no match for the efficiency, speed, value, and perceived ‘no-strings-attached’ model offered by China’ (International Crisis Group 2012: 8). In framing its new relationship with South Sudan, a number of key themes from China’s Africa policy were applied, including an emphasis on ‘a sense of shared historical experience at the hands of imperial powers’ (International Crisis Group 2012: 4). Similarly, China’s Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi affirmed that the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ would guide China’s engagement in South Sudan; ‘China’s bedrock principle of non-interference-under which the South suffered during the war-is now welcomed in Juba as an attractive standard of engagement’ (International Crisis Group 2012: 4).

China’s extension into South Sudan has required a shift in its predominately bilateral relationship with Khartoum. As Taylor (2006: 955) argues, the nature of the ‘patrimonial’ oil states with which foreign investors often deal, is they are ‘actually relatively weak on the ground where the oil is being exploited.’ Whereas western oil companies make deals with actors outside the state, China’s bilateral ties with Khartoum have not served to protect its interests (Taylor 2006: 955). The CPA and secession of South Sudan has required China to extend its ties beyond its tradition bilateral relationship with Khartoum.

4.3. From ‘business is business’ to ‘influence without interference’

Since 2005 China’s stance on non-interference in Darfur has evolved. As maintained by Large (2009: 619), Beijing adopted a strategy of ‘influence without interference’ featuring ‘respect for sovereignty, private persuasion’ and ‘close consultations’ (Large 2009: 619). On prominent example was China’s role in ‘negotiating’ with Khartoum to allow the transition of the peacekeeping mission from the African Union to the UN in 2007 (Large and Patey 2011: 31). Srinivasan (2008: 64) argues that China’s engagement in Sudan’s internal conflict evolved from ‘business is business’ between 2004-2006, in which China maintained its ‘apolitical’ role in Sudan’s internal dynamics, ‘wielding its veto card’ to block UN Resolutions on Darfur, to more active engagement in pressuring and persuading Khartoum to
comply with the objectives of the international community. As Kuo (2012: 3) maintains; ‘Given that neither the AU nor the West had much leverage over Khartoum, Beijing deserves to be commended for its diplomatic efforts.’ Secondly, as Large (2009: 619) argues, there appeared a ‘greater willingness of Chinese representatives and senior leaders to express more public, if guarded, criticism of the NCP.’ As reported of a meeting between Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing and President Bashir in 2006, ‘Li said that China understood Sudan’s concern with regard to the UN Security Council Resolution to deploy peacekeepers in Sudan’s Darfur region, and held the position that any deployment of UN peacekeepers in Darfur should first get Sudan’s permission’, however it was further added, ‘China hoped Sudan would display flexibility over the issue in order to maintain peace and stability’ (People’s Daily 2006: 1). Another example of Beijing’s firmer stance with Khartoum was President Hu Jintao’s ‘four principles for resolving Darfur’, prescribed in 2007, which Large (2009: 620) argues reveals, ‘Beijing appeared to have reasserted its position in relation to the NCP and to have become more willing to resist its demands.’

4.4. China’s role in peacekeeping

In addition to taking a more active stance on Darfur, China’s political role in regards to North/South tensions has grown significantly since the CPA; ‘From being an observer at the CPA signing in January 2005, Beijing came to be a de facto CPA guarantor. The CPA endgame witnessed a significantly more involved and evolved Chinese role’ (Large 2011: 3). As argued in a recent report published by Saferworld (2012: 106); ‘urging the SPLM and NCP to “adhere to peace and restrain themselves”, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has made a sharp break from China’s usual silence about the domestic behaviour of the Sudanese regime.’ China’s commitments to peace have come through increased multilateral cooperation. China has been active in the UNMIS peacekeeping mission in Sudan and in the UNMISS mission in South Sudan (Saferworld 2012: 110). As exclaimed in their report (Saferworld 2012: 110); ‘In October 2011, the areas of Sudan and South Sudan accounted for 36 percent out of China’s total worldwide contribution of personnel to UN Peacekeeping Operations.’ China’s commitment to peacekeeping is not limited to the Sudans, as stated, ‘In 2005, China ranked as the fifteenth largest contributor of peacekeeping personnel to the United Nations’ (Gill and Huang 2006: 22). As argued, ‘Growing evidence suggests that China seeks to play a more responsible and cooperative role in international affairs. It has made a more serious effort to conform to international norms on some sensitive issues’ (Gill and Huang 2006: 22-23).
4.5. Commercial drivers of China’s more engaged role in South Sudan

The dominant discourse emphasises China’s commercial interests in driving its shifting foreign policy within Sudan and South Sudan (Saferworld 2012: 105);

‘Although from a Chinese perspective, the swift rapprochement between Beijing and Juba has been felt to be consistent with the principle of engaging with the newly emerging sovereign power on the basis of non-interference, it has been widely attributed in the West, as in South Sudan, to the growing realisation that after secession the majority of Sudan’s oil would lie in South Sudan.’

Supporting this argument, it is stated that China extended commercial ties with South Sudan prior to official diplomacy between Beijing and Juba (Barber and Yuhua 2012: 7). Insecurity is affecting Chinese business interests, as James (2011: 67) argues, ‘There are suggestions that community and tribal action around some of the oil fields has deterred the Asian national oil companies’. For Beijing, this instability ‘reduces its diplomatic manoeuvrability and ability to maintain the policy of non-interference’ (Holslag 2009: 26-27). For China, maintaining bilateral relations with Khartoum has not helped to secure its interests in the oil regions. As Taylor (2006: 954) argues, ‘After all, what are the implications for China’s stance on non-interference in domestic affairs if a “sovereign” African state chooses to expropriate resources and materials owned by a Chinese corporation?’ In their recent report, it is claimed by the International Crisis Group (2012); ‘China’s primary interest in South Sudan is, without question, oil and other commercial investments’ (International Crisis Group 2012: 2). Large and Patey (2011: 185) argue that China’s motivations in Sudan have evolved from an interest to forge ties in the early 1990s to its present interest to ‘maintain, protect and expand.’ This has required a ‘new diplomacy’ as China must adapt its foreign policy in Sudan to reflect the challenges presented by the activities of Khartoum and China’s subsequently politicised role (Large and Patey 2011: 184). As such ‘the Chinese engagement has become more deeply involved in Sudanese politics, and this process has made the option of an engagement rationalised as and premised upon non-interference increasingly hard for Beijing to sustain coherently’ (Large and Patey 2011: 186).

4.6. Beyond Fuelling the Dragon

Although commercial factors play a role in China’s shifting engagement in Sudan, economic interests are not sufficient to provide a robust explanation for China’s evolving foreign policy.
With regards to China’s shifting position on Darfur it is argued (Large 2008: 7); ‘Darfur cannot be reduced to a matter of oil and natural resources, though these have played a role…the actual proven reserves have not been extensive.’ As concluded by Alden and Alves (2008: 43);

‘A focus on crude economic instrumentality does not fully capture the prevailing rationale behind Beijing’s utterances on its Africa policy. In fact, what is at stake…goes beyond standard diplomatic coverage for an interest-based foreign policy, but more fundamentally an attempt to reconcile China’s self-imposed identity as a developing country with its emergence as a global power.’

The following will examine the factors beyond the oil and commercial interests, underpinning China’s more politically engaged role in Sudan and South Sudan. While China has long maintained its ‘apolitical’ model of investment, it is argued that the position formally stated by Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong in 2004, that ‘business is business’ is no longer practical; ‘The belief that China should have no role in the politics or conflicts of Africa has had to be modified due to more extensive and deepening Chinese interests on the continent, Western pressure and rising African expectations of Beijing’ (Kuo 2012: 3).

Firstly, expectations that China should adopt a more proactive role in promoting peace and security have increased from within Africa and South Sudan significantly, as a result of China’s expanding interests and growing influence. This has required a re-evaluation of the policies upon which China’s ‘soft power’ has been developed. Because of the extent of China’s vested interests in Sudan and South Sudan and Beijing’s membership on the UN Security Council, China has been perceived as the country which can exert the most influence (Saferworld 2012: 102). As expressed by Holslag (2009: 33); ‘African partners do not attach much value to China’s diplomatic schizophrenia and the complex image of an economic giant, political dwarf, and minor military player it projects.’ The primacy of China’s role in South Sudan is illustrated by the actions of the leader of the SPLM/A, Dr John Garang; ‘According to one prominent South Sudanese journalist, China approached the SPLM/A as early as 2004. By this time the party’s leader, Dr. John Garang, according to the same source, had already facilitated the formation of a party position which recognised the importance of engagement with China, due to its influential position on the UNSC and its potential to stymie South Sudan’s self-determination’ (Saferworld 2012: 105). China is not perceived in South Sudan as an ‘apolitical’ player (Saferworld 2012: 105). As expressed by a civil society activist in
South Sudan’s Upper Nile state; ‘China should use its influence to stop war in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. These wars have a direct impact on the South. Lots of refugees from the Nuba are now in Unity State. The only way to get peace is to influence Khartoum. China is the one’ (Saferworld 2012: 107). Similarly, ‘From Juba’s perspective, Beijing has demonstrated its political muscle over Khartoum by persuading President al-Bashir to accept a UN-AU hybrid force in Darfur. As such, Beijing has the interest, leverage and influence to force Khartoum to arrive at a settlement on the current impasse’ (Kuo 2012: 4).

Secondly, in addition to pressure from within South Sudan, a shift within Africa’s regional organisations towards greater alliance with the international community on questions of non-interference and sovereignty has required a re-evaluation of China’s Sudan policy. As argued; ‘The progressive pathway taken by the African Union and ECOWAS in regard to the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts is particularly at odds with Beijing’s political concepts, for both organisations claim far-reaching prerogatives, including military intervention, in order to prevent or terminate large-scale human rights abuses and crimes against humanity’ (Tull 2006: 476-477). Similarly, as China’s influence has grown, pressure has increased from the African Union for China to adopt a more proactive role in promoting security (Holslag 2009: 34). As argued by Gill and Huang (2006: 23), as the legitimacy of China’s ‘soft power’ is based on how it reflects shared values, ‘to the extent that soft power rests on legitimacy, China must also take growing international commitment to human rights into account or else undermine its international standing at a time it is trying to portray a more benign image.’ As Large (2012: 9) argues of China’s participation within UN peacekeeping missions in Africa; ‘Geared towards supporting the UN, this also serves to embody and mobilise a positive image of a humanitarian China actively supporting peace. This can be directed outwards to Africa and the world, as well as to legitimate and enhance domestic support in China for Chinese foreign policy in Sudan, or Africa more generally.’

As previously stated, ‘foreign policy’ is the easiest ‘resource’ of ‘soft power’ for a state to change (Nye 2000: 4). As argued by Liqun (2010: 39); ‘China’s perception of its own international role is driven to a great extent by outside factors.’ Thirdly, Western discourse, and the emphasis on the role of a ‘responsible stakeholder’ has ‘triggered vigorous domestic discussions on China’s international role...in spite of the criticism such discourse generated in China, it prompted Chinese scholars to reflect on China’s role and responsibility in world affairs’ (Liqun 2010: 39-40).
Fourthly, China’s evolving foreign policy in Africa is informed by its new interests as a result of its changing identity (Power and Mohan 2010: 15). As stated; ‘Multipolarity, anti-hegemonism and non-interference are the old concepts of a relatively weak and isolate China. The new concepts of a strong and globally engaged China-peaceful rise, win-win diplomacy, and harmonious world- are more consistent with multilateralism, not multipolarity’ (Power and Mohan 2010: 15, quoting A. Shimbun 2008: 12). ‘China’s foreign policy as a whole is by and large considered to be more dynamic, constructive, flexible and self-confident than was the case during the preceding decade’ (Tull 2006: 460). China’s shifting engagements in Sudan and South Sudan must be contextualised within the broader shift in Chinese policy discourse and debate, towards a focus on ‘globalisation’ and ‘great power responsibility’, which can be seen in the late-1990s and early-2000s (Kim 2006: 281). As claimed; ‘the rise of China as a responsible great nation in the international community-the notion that China’s sense of responsibility to the world is commensurate with its status as a great nation- is said to be a major change in Chinese foreign policy’ (Kim 2006: 281).

While Chinese discourse reflects a gradual flexibility on its guiding foreign policy principles, the ideas which have informed these principles, such as ‘third world solidarity’, retain significance within the global South. As Nathan (2008: 5) argues, there is a shared sentiment within the global South against the oppressive, interventionist policies of the dominant powers;

‘A posture of unity and solidarity, forged in the heat of struggles against colonial rule, remains a political imperative for governments that are weak, insecure and buffeted by internal and external challenges. Notwithstanding their differences and disputes, these governments usually close ranks when they are under pressure from the West.’

Similarly as maintained by some Chinese scholars, ‘China has a historical responsibility to promote south-south dialogue and cooperation’ and ‘non-interference in internal affairs based on mutual respect should be a guiding principle’ (Liqun 2010: 43-44). Although it is maintained; ‘As China integrates further into the international system, more Chinese scholars have taken the view that sovereignty is a historically constructed concept. History changes, and so accordingly does the idea of sovereignty’ (Liqun 2010: 44). Carlson’s (2006: 225) review of Chinese discourse traces a ‘flexibility about sovereignty and intervention’ to Chinese law journals in the early 1990s and international relations research. This shift was taking place within a broader shift within international norms for humanitarian intervention.
As Carlson (2006: 234) argues, the ‘flexibility’ in definitions of sovereignty was occurring within a context of the broader shift in international norms toward humanitarian intervention; and while international norms have influenced discussions on foreign policy, ‘their influence was only felt through the prism of older, more deeply entrenched, and largely domestic normative constructs.’ As such, in questioning whether China is ‘socialising’ into international norms, Carlson (2006: 235) argues; ‘the “new learning” that is taking place has occurred within the context of earlier ‘lessons’ that have made Chinese elites particularly sensitive about ceding any aspect of Chinese sovereignty.’

While Beijing has adopted a more engaged role in resolving the conflict between the North and South, ‘Chinese authorities remain reluctant to play the leading role in the resolution of conflict between South Sudan and Sudan’ (Kuo 2012: 3). China’s multilateral approach to its security dilemma conflicts with realists assumptions that a rising global power would promote its security unilaterally (Hoslag 2009: 23). As Hoslag (2009: 33) argues; ‘Beijing is well aware of the dichotomy between its weak and strong identities and is reluctant to demonstrate any independent military capacity. Such a show of strength might reduce its diplomatic manoeuvrability, increase resistance from African nations- just as Washington is now experiencing- and raise suspicions elsewhere regarding Chinese intentions.’ Supporting peacekeeping enhances China’s ‘soft-power’ by providing an illustration of China’s rhetoric of ‘peaceful coexistence.’ China is most likely to continue to ‘bandwagon’ on international security concerns, as a means to balance the tension within its shifting identity, however as Hoslag (2009: 34) concludes; ‘China’s self-perception is also in transition. The “Century of Humiliation” is far behind and is being replaced by a national attitude of confidence and assertiveness…As China sees its diplomatic leverage expanding geographically from the Strait of Formosa, via Asia to the rest of the developing world, its ability to deal with emerging security issues is likely to follow suit.’

Conclusion

China’s foreign policy in the post-Cold War period was framed by its self-identity within the ‘Third World’ and a commitment to sovereignty and non-interference, informed by its history of ‘humiliation’ at the hands of external powers. As China has grown in the past two decades the salience of its ‘developing’ image has rescinded. Since 2000 China’s official rhetoric has underlined a ‘new’ partnership with Africa, based on economic cooperation and ‘mutual benefit’. However, as has been the case in Sudan, the rhetoric of ‘China’s Africa Policy’ has
not been realised on the ground, as Chinese engagements are co-opted into Sudan’s domestic political economy. In Sudan, this has undermined China’s projected image as a ‘peaceful’ developing country, and as such undermined its ‘soft power’ with the international community and within Africa. Following the CPA, and in a context of mounting criticisms of China in Africa, China has adapted its foreign policy in Sudan so as not to be isolated with the regime in Khartoum. While Sino-Sudan relations developed bilaterally, on the basis of mutual interest, China’s interests have changed as its identity has evolved. As has been argued, China’s foreign policy is highly relational and reflective of both its self-identity and the perceptions of it in the global arena. As China is increasingly perceived as a ‘global power’, and as expectations of it to be more ‘responsible’ increase from the international and African community, China’s foreign policy has witnessed a gradual shift in Sudan towards greater alignment with international norms. As Chinese policy-elites become more confident in the role of China as a rising power, the pragmatism of the principles which traditionally framed Sino-Sudan relations has diminished. As a result, China has adopted a firmer stance in opposition to the policies of the Khartoum, and a greater commitment to promoting peace and security within the region.

Drawing on its approaches to the challenges presented by Sudan, China appears to be projecting itself more as a ‘status quo’ power than a ‘revisionist state’, however as Iain Johnston (2003: 49) concludes, as the ‘quality and quantity of revisionism in a state’s policy are not static’ it is possible that China’s ‘revisionist’ nature may return in the future. China’s identity is evolving as it claims a larger role within the international arena. The assumption that China shifting foreign policy in Sudan and South Sudan is driven primarily by its need to protect its commercial interests firstly overstates the significance of these interests, and secondly fails to appreciate the impact that China’s evolving self-image and global identity have had in informing its policies in Sudan and South Sudan.

References:


