China and Africa: a study on China’s adherence to the principle of non-interference and its conception of human rights in Africa

by

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Abstract

China’s role in Africa has come under increasing scrutiny, the last three decades. Research has shown that China’s approach to Africa with regard to its in principle of non-interference and human rights has received much criticism. This study aims to determine how China’s policy has changed in response to these criticisms. Building on existing research, it asks: Has China’s policy with regard to non-interference and humanitarian intervention changed in response to criticism aimed at its role in Africa, and if so, how?

A document analysis of Chinese foreign policy documents was conducted to analyse Chinese rhetoric with regard to non-interference and human rights. Additionally, a case study of Sudan and South Sudan was carried out. The analysis demonstrated that China has taken up a more proactive stance in humanitarian intervention, but showed consistency towards its adherence of the principle of non-interference. Where I saw consistency in the document analysis, I witnessed a flexible and often ambiguous application of the principle of non-interference in the case study. Driven by conflict and international criticism, China had to show adaptability in order to protect their economic interests and at the same time mend its damaged international reputation. Further research is needed to find to better determine what type of data or documents are representative of Chinese foreign policy intentions and more research could be done on the different policies China has towards different African countries.
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Introduction

On the 11th of April 2019, Sudan’s dictator Omar al-Bashir was ousted, bringing to an end one of the longest rulerships of Africa. International praise was aimed at the well-organized and non-violent nature of the movement that brought about Bashir’s removal after four months of protesting. Hope grew that Sudan could finally make a transition to an inclusive and civil form of government (Crisis Group, 2019). This positivism was quelled relatively quickly after it became clear that the old military regime, which still was in power effectively, demonstrated little effort to bring about actual change. Peaceful protests continued demanding the imposition of a civilian transitional government, but were followed by a brutal crackdown by the security forces, which reportedly had sent out the infamous Janjaweed militias, responsible for many human rights abuses in Darfur during the mid-2000s (Feldstein, 2019).

Events like these raise international debate on state sovereignty and human rights. In how far should state sovereignty be respected when human rights are at stake and when should the international community intervene? Two major powers in the world have rather differing views with regard to this debate. China and the United States, who are currently embroiled in a trade war, have clashed often on the international stage on issues related to international intervention and human rights. The case of Syria being one of the most recent examples. UN proposals sponsored by the West to sanction the government of Bashar al-Assad for its human rights abuses have continually been vetoed by China, who appeals to its principle of non-interference, which calls for respect for state sovereignty and opposes to interference in other countries’ affairs (Zhou, 2017).

Africa is one of the global stages on which this debate continues. China’s role in Africa has been subject to increasing analysis, particularly in the last 30 years when its engagement with the continent started to grow rapidly (Alden, 2005). The scholars Aidoo and Hess concur with this view and argue that China’s non-interference policy has received much criticism from the West and others. The policy is seen as an opportunistic and inconsistent tool used by China to secure its access to Africa’s markets and resources (2015). Furthermore, they argue that although China has shown consistency in supporting its own rhetoric with regard to non-interference, in practice the application of the policy has been subject to change. According to Aidoo and Hess, this can be ascribed to Africa’s diversity with regard to nations with differing economic and political structures (Aidoo & Hess, 2015). In line with the statements of Aidoo & Hess, Large argues that China’s non-interference policy came under increasing pressure during its involvement in Sudan. He states that China’s adherence to the policy of non-interference became increasingly problematic in Sudan were it had become politically embedded in Sudan’s regime through the oil industry. Large states that criticisms aimed its controversial part in the Darfur conflict had driven to China to reassess its role in Sudan (2008).

The aim of this research is to update our already existing understanding of how China’s policy in Africa has changed with regard to the principle of non-interference and its view of human rights. As of now there has not been enough research on Chinese rhetoric in policy documents focusing on its response to criticisms, in my view. Furthermore I aim to update our knowledge of China’s involvement in Sudan and South-Sudan, which is by many scholars seen as the most significant expressions of Chinese involvement in Africa. Increasing our knowledge of how China operates in Africa and how its responds to criticism can help us better understand what drives Chinese engagement in Africa. Consequently, this can potentially increase the possibility of cooperation with China in helping Africa develop in a sustainable manner with respect to human rights.
This bring us to the research question of this thesis, which is as follows: Has China’s policy with regard to non-interference and humanitarian intervention changed in response to criticism aimed at its role in Africa, and if so, how? I will answer this question by conducting a document analysis of Chinese foreign policy documents produced in the period between 2000-2018 and a case study of Chinese involvement in Sudan and South Sudan in the period between 1989-2018.

The structure of the research will be as follows. In the theoretical framework I will discuss the existing research upon which I will build my research. In the methodology chapter I will elaborate on the structure of my research and the exact data which has been subject to my analysis. This will be followed by the document analysis and the case study. In the conclusion I will formulate the answers I found on my research question and reflect upon the research.
Theoretical Framework

The aim of this research is to identify how China has changed its policy towards non-interference and humanitarian intervention in response to criticism, and if so, how? Before I can answer this question it is of great importance that we identify and define the variables and concepts in this research. Before I define China’s current foreign policy in Africa, we should investigate how China’s relation with Africa has developed over the years and what its policy has been like towards the continent. Then we will elaborate on the different criticisms China has received regarding its alleged support for authoritarian regimes. Consequently an assessment of these criticisms will be made.

The discourse regarding Chinese involvement in Africa, but also in other regions of the world has been dominated by Western skepticism. Many Western countries are concerned about whether Chinese projects are genuine attempts to help develop recipient countries or that they are ways of expanding economic and political influence (Tan-Mullins, Mohan & Power, 2010). In this discourse, it is often assumed that Western aid is superior to Chinese aid in terms of effectiveness and morality. Moreover, Chinese development aid is seen as undermining the effectiveness of Western aid and damaging African development in the long term (Mohan & Power, 2009). However, these forms of Western aid have also faced criticisms. (Condon, 2012). Western aid is typified by conditionality where loans are only given on the condition of democracy promotion and corruption reduction (Condon, 2012). Chinese aid lacks this conditionality and is based on principles of non-intervention and respect of sovereignty (Condon, 2012). African leaders generally have responded more enthusiastically than the West to Chinese aid. They have been optimistic about the potential of this different form of aid. Some African civil society groups, however, are more wary of Chinese meddling and fear for the negative effects Chinese influence can have on governance, economic development and human rights (Samy, 2010).

Global history of China in Africa

A country’s aid policy and its broader foreign policy are inseparably linked with one another. Therefore in order to understand Chinese development aid in Africa we must get to know China’s foreign policy goals in general (Samy, 2010). In a research done by Alesina and Dollar it was found that aid conducted bilaterally was determined equally as much by political and strategical considerations as by recipient needs or policy performance (Alesina & Dollar, 2000). This is not any different in the case of China. China has provided foreign aid for a plethora of reasons, both for its own political, economic advancements as well as recipient needs (Samy, 2010).

Chinese-African relations can be divided into three periods. The first period began a couple years after the founding of the Chinese People’s Republic in 1949 and lasted until 1978. China supported several African countries in their fights for independence and provided economic assistance in what they saw as a battle against colonialism and imperialism (Samy, 2010: Alden & Alves, 2008). These Chinese-African relations were typified by its predominantly anti-imperialistic ideological nature.

Two issues determined Chinese-African relations in this specific period: the worsening relationship with the Soviet-Union and the necessity to garner support from African nations that did not recognize Taiwan in the UN. In exchange for agreement with Chinese political views, African countries would receive development aid (Samy,2010: Tu, 2008). In the 50’s developments of great importance took place, developments that would shape Chinese foreign policy very strongly. In 1954
the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru came up with the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” following from meetings regarding border disputes between the two countries. These five principles were: non-interference, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, mutual non-aggression and peaceful coexistence (Aidoo & Hess, 2015). Non-interference would come to be one of the most central facets of Chinese foreign policy and an important principle of South-South solidarity and the Non-Aligned Movement as will be elaborated on later (Aidoo & Hess, 2015). After the affirmation by 29 countries at the international conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 the Five Principles gained in international significance and would later be adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Non-Aligned Movement, which is considered an offspring of the Bandung Conference, came to existence in 1961. It started as a movement that was comprised of primarily of what were then referred to as Third World nations, which gathered outside the UN system. The topics that were discussed within the movement were political and military questions regarding the Cold War and international security at large. Moreover the movement concerned itself with issues about North-South cooperation and economic development in the Third World (Volker, 1985).

In 1960, then Prime Minister Zhou Enlai initiated the implementation of eight principles that would steer China’s foreign aid directed at developing countries. These principles were based on the Five Principles set out by Enlai and Jawaharlal:

- Equity and mutual benefit; respect of sovereignty of recipients and non-imposition of conditions;
- provision of grants or highly concessional loans and flexibility in repayment; focus on self-reliance and independent economic development; small investments yielding quick returns; provision of high-quality equipment and material at international market prices; ensuring that technical assistance is transmitted to recipients; and similar treatment for Chinese and recipient experts. (Samy, 2010 p. 78-79)

The second period of Chinese-African relations that lasted from 1979 to 1999 was characterized by its pragmatism. After the opening up of China’s market under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese economy began to flourish and other economic partners than Africa became important (Japan and the USA). Deng Xiaoping was the leader of China from 1978 to 1989. Under his rule China was subject to extensive market-economy reforms. In this period, Africa’s strategic importance also waned due to the end of the Cold War and with it the Sino-Soviet rivalry (Samy, 2010).

The third and current period began around 2000 when the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was brought to life. This renewed interest in Africa coincides with high Chinese growth rates. In the period between 1997 and 2006 the worth of Sino-African trade increased from US$5.7 billion to US$56 billion (Jakobson, 2009). Numbers from China’s Commerce Ministry have presented that bilateral trade between China and Africa has been growing 28% per year for the last 10 years (Siu & Mcgovern, 2017). As of 2014, its trade value almost doubled reaching US$221.9 billion. In 2007, the China-Africa Development Fund was created to boost Chinese direct investments and with them create export markets for Chinese goods and labor (Siu & Mcgovern, 2017).

Alden identifies four factors that compel China’s current engagement in Africa: its drive to resource security, the search for new markets and opportunities for investment, symbolic diplomacy and development cooperation and the creation of strategic partnerships (2005). The search for new export markets and natural resources is a facet of China’s broader policy of upholding an image of a peaceful, constructive and liable super power (Jakobson, 2009: Siu & Mcgovern, 2017). However,
that is not China’s only motive. Political motives stay prevalent just as China’s history in Africa has shown. One of these political motives is China’s promotion of the so called ‘one China’ recognition policy. This policy is aimed at preventing Taiwan to gain a diplomatic foothold in Africa (Alden, 2005). The ultimate goal is to make African countries cut off diplomatic relations with Taiwan and recognize the People’s Republic of China as the only legitimate China in the UN. This ongoing competition between Beijing and Taipei was illustrated by China’s invitation of eight African countries that recognized Taiwan to second ministerial conference of the Forum in China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2003 (Alden, 2005).

**China’s non-interference principle in Africa**

As stated earlier, the principle of non-interference has been the spearhead of China’s foreign aid policy since the 1960’s. What exactly does this idea non-interference entail? Adhering to the principle of non-interference means that one should not interfere in the internal affairs of a other country, respect internal as well as external sovereignty, abstain from using political or economic pressure in order to force a country to comply to certain demands and steer clear of any passive or active involvement in the overthrow of an incumbent regime (Aidoo & Hess, 2015).

The principle of non-interference or non-intervention has its roots in the idea in international relations of equal sovereignty of states and the right following from it to exclusive sovereignty. International Customary Law underpins the principle and it has been elaborated on extensively in the Charter of the United Nations, that is supported by nearly every independent nation in the world (Osondu, 2013). The principle of non-intervention has often been viewed upon positively throughout the largest part of the global South. However, in the West, it is often regarded as an opportunistic tool of China used to get a stronger foothold in Africa and with it greater access to the continent’s resources and markets (Aidoo & Hess, 2015).

From the 1950’s to the 1970’s, China had been involved in military and political interventions, for the largest part in Korea and Southeast Asia, in which the country had been supporting regional communist movements, in Vietnam for instance (Pang, 2009). This means that China had not strictly been adhering to the principle of non-interference. However, since the late 70’s and in the entire 80’s China has not played any name worthy role in international interventions (Pang, 2009).

Since the 1990’s China’s idea of non-intervention has been subject to change. While still propagating the principle of non-interference, China has steered clear of opposing every Western initiative to international intervention. In 2001, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) developed a new doctrine: “the responsibility to protect” which is often abbreviated to R2P. The basic principle of R2P is as follows:

State sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself ( ...) Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect (ICISS, 2001, p. XI).

At first Chinese scholars were skeptical of this new doctrine. They feared that this new doctrine could make it easier for Western powers to legitimize international interventions. However, step by step the consensus on R2P started to change and it was regarded as a middle way between staunch
devotees of the right of humanitarian intervention on the one hand and supporters of the principles of state-sovereignty and non-intervention on the other. Chinese officials however strongly opine that R2P is only to be executed under strict conditions. They argue that it should only be carried out under the condition of a UNSC mandate (Pang, 2009).

Aidoo and Hess argue that China’s non-interventionist attitude towards authoritarian and non-democratic regimes is seen as a mode to ensure continuous access to oil and other resources. China’s aim is to differentiate its economic and political policy from Western policies towards Africa (2015). Given Africa’s history with colonial rule and its domination by Western powers, China’s goal is to present its current relations with Africa as diametrically opposed to previous Western colonial relations with the continent. Official Chinese statements regarding Sino-African relations often emphasize the respect for state sovereignty and non-interference as the most important principles in the international system. Another sentiment often expressed among Chinese scholars and observers regarding these relations is the mutual history Africa and China share in their battle against colonialism and their struggle against poverty (Jakobson, 2009). This sentiment is often used as a way of explaining and justifying its current relations with the continent (Siu & Mcgovern, 2017). The policy of non-interference is of paramount importance in upholding this image.

The authors Aidoo and Hess suggest that China’s employment of the non-interference principle is subject to variation and its implementation has started to differ depending on its context. They argue this is due to Africa’s changing political and economic landscape since the beginning of the 2000’s (2015).

An integral part of China’s adherence to the principle of non-interference is due to its different conception of human rights that contrast with the Western idea of human rights (Taylor,2007:Qi, 2005). Historically seen the Chinese view on rights was based on ideas that citizens have the obligation towards each other to build a strongly developed society and country together. Consequently China’s contemporary view on human rights is based on a communitarian view in which social solidarity and the creation of harmony are the central tenets (Taylor, 2007:Qi,2005). Western conceptions of human rights in which states should guarantee individual freedom stand in stark contrast with Chinese ideas. These western ideals are often even seen as threatening to social harmony (Taylor,2007). In the Chinese view, subsistence is the most fundamental right and goes before any other civil or political right. Moreover, the Chinese argue that stability is a “prerequisite for the enjoyment of all rights. The need to ensure economic development and stability justifies limitations on the exercise of civil and political rights. This view is widely supported by Chinese citizens, and by the majority of citizens in poor developing countries around the world” (Peerenboom, 2005:p.80).

Before 1989 China’s human rights record had not yet come under scrutiny. There was even a positive image of China regarding human rights in the West. Part of this was due to China’s praise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Taylor, 2007). After China’s transgressions on Tiananmen Square China’s human rights issues became subject of international discussion. Concurrently China’s interest in the continent of Africa resurged (Taylor, 2007). Beijing loathed the way it was criticized and saw these criticisms as a way of interfering in its affairs and as an attempt to stifle China’s modernization (Taylor, 2007: Peerenboom, 2005).

This led China to court countries that we’re not critical of China’s human right’s record and did not support Taiwan. Li Peng’s message of non-interference (prime minister of China from 1988 until 1998) resonated well with numerous African leaders which were under pressure of pro-democracy movements and conditionalities from international financial institutions (Taylor, 2007). Li Peng
proclaimed that: ‘no country is allowed to impose its will on other countries ... They are not allowed to interfere in the internal affairs of the developing countries, or pursue power politics in the name of “human rights, freedom and democracy” (Taylor, 2007, p. 140).

**Criticism (authoritarianism and human rights violations)**

Chinese influence in Africa is often viewed upon with a lot of skepticism, as stated earlier. Criticisms are often pointed at Chinese development aid and investments as being undermining of Western development aid and supportive of authoritarian regimes. Additionally it is often argued that China’s involvement in Africa has an adverse effect on the promotion of human rights. By providing repressive regimes with resources and putting their own economic interests above the advancement of human rights China has been complicit in the violations of these rights it is opined (Taylor, 2008). Other criticisms expressed argue that Chinese meddling in Africa is a new form of colonialism where the continent is being exploited without gaining anything from it for itself (Dollar, 2016). As stated before this research mainly focusses on criticisms regarding Chinese idea of non-interference which often translates to tacit consent for authoritarian regimes.

China’s support for certain African authoritarian and repressive regimes has been perceived as very problematic. In particular, the cases of Sudan and Zimbabwe are often held up of examples. China has propagated its policy of non-interference and no strings attached forms of development aid, however the country has proven to be politically involved in Africa as well (Mawdsley, 2007). Recent examples are the threats carried out that Beijing would cut diplomatic ties with Zambia if the opposition candidate Sata were to be elected in the 2006 General Election. Moreover, China has loaned Mugabe money, helping him in sustaining his repressive security apparatus. Another loan of $2 million provided to the Angolese Dos Santos regime aided it in dodging demands by the IMF for providing more transparency on the origins of oil revenues (Mawdsley, 2007)

Criticisms towards China’s involvement are not only of western origin. Various African leaders have had views that are not in line with China’s interests. Moreover they have been wary of China’s human rights record. Taylor argues that China’s policies posed a threat to efforts that were aimed at promoting human rights and good governance (Taylor, 2007). An example of this is the so called New Partnership for Africa’s development (NEPAD). This initiative which was launched in Abuja Nigeria in 2001, is a socio-economic development program of the African Union aimed at promoting democracy and human rights in Africa and is subscribed to by various African countries (Taylor, 2007). China has expressed public support of the initiative and in 2003 was even invited by then president of Mozambique Chissano to take up a leadership in implementing it. Particularly salient is that in public statements in which China’s role in NEPAD was discussed, words of democracy and governance are not uttered, regardless of their centrality to the initiative (Taylor, 2007).

We have seen that China prioritizes development before political and civil rights, because it views economic development as a prerequisite to these rights (Peerenboom, 2005). This contrasts strongly with what is expressed in the NEPAD initiative. In paragraph 79 the following is stated:

“Development is impossible in the absence of true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance. With the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, Africa undertakes to respect the global standards of democracy, [of] which core components include political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties and workers’ unions, fair, open, free and democratic elections periodically organised to enable the populace choose their leaders freely.” (Taylor, 2007: p.72).
From this citation we can conclude that the view of the African countries which subscribe to what is stated in the NEPAD initiative is diametrically opposed to what China propagates regarding development. In the view expressed in NEPAD, political and civil rights are conditions that have to be present before sustainable development can be brought about. These opposing views and China’s adherence to the principle of non-interference and state sovereignty incited concerns in Africa. The main concern is that Chinese interference potentially could re-establish all the negatives the NEPAD is trying to get rid of. This is fed by the idea that China’s economic power props up African authoritarian elites, who’s interests are the exact opposite to what is stipulated by the NEPAD, namely staying in power (Taylor, 2007, 2008: Alden, 2005).

The case in which China’s role in Africa has come under most scrutiny is the case of Sudan. China’s policy towards Khartoum has been focused on non-interference since 1959, as it has been with most countries. But since the 1990’s China had become increasingly intertwined with the regime particularly through the oil industry, a given that contradicted its claims to non-interference (Large, 2008). China’s state-backed investment in the oil industry are part of efforts to build a well-functioning oil industry in Sudan. These efforts would prove to be successful and the China National Petroleum Corporation’s (CNPC) role in Sudan would be a critical phase in the global expansion of the Chinese oil sector. (Large, 2008). However the oil development in Sudan during the 1990s was far from a clean business and was strongly associated with armed conflict. The sector was often targeted by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the rebel group fighting for South Sudanese independence, together with other groups. This led to a militarization of the oil sector which had an effect on conflict dynamics in Sudan and consequently worsened the suffering of Sudan’s civilians (Large, 2008). The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) together with Nuer and Arab Baggara proxy forces attacked Nuer and Dinka populated areas which were interesting for oil exploitation. This made oil companies which were operational during these events in Sudan complicit with the violations of human rights by the Sudan government, the CNPC included (Large, 2008). Additionally in 2003 rebels from Darfur started a revolt against the Sudanese government. This led to a massive crackdown and counterinsurgency campaign by Khartoum and allied militias (Crisis Group, 2017). The close ties China had with the regime once more led to Western criticisms that China was funding and defending a genocidal regime (Taylor, 2008).

Part of this criticism is China’s highly controversial arms export to Sudan. China is the only major weapon exporter that does not subscribe to any multilateral agreement, that stipulates certain guiding principles that aim to protect human rights with regard to arms exports (Taylor, 2008). China has arguably supplied the Sudanese air force with a $100 million worth of fighter planes. The motivation behind these exports is twofold. By providing these weapons to the Sudanese government the Chinese state accrues profits from its sales and at the same time this policy helps protect Chinese interests in Sudan’s oil industry (Taylor, 2008).

China denied that it played a role in the Darfur War, however fearing that the situation would lead to the damaging of its international image Beijing initiated actions to end the war. In 2007 Beijing pushed Sudan’s president Bashir to allow UN peacekeepers into Sudan by threatening with a withdrawal of support in the UN. Additionally Chinese diplomats had a pivotal role in creating an agreement that would lead to a hybrid mission with peacekeepers from the UN and the African Union (Crisis Group, 2017).
Methodology

In order to find out how China has changed its foreign policy in response to criticisms regarding its support for authoritarian regimes in Africa I conducted qualitative research into Chinese foreign policy in Africa. The research consisted of both a document analysis and a case study of Chinese engagement in Sudan respectively in the period (2000-2018) and (1989-2018). For the document analysis, I drew on documents from The Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and other Chinese foreign policy documents on Chinese engagement in Africa. To develop the case study, I drew on secondary literature with a focus on non-interference, conflict in Sudan and South-Sudan, Chinese oil development, and Chinese foreign policy in Africa. In this chapter I will elaborate on the structure of my research by giving an overview of the methods I used and which types of data were subject to my analysis. Additionally I will discuss the validity and reliability of the research.

Document analysis

Hsieh and Shannon define qualitative content analysis as: “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:p. 1278). The main focal point in qualitative content analysis lies on language as a tool of communication with a focus on the content or contextual meaning of a text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In this research, I used a particular form of qualitative content analysis: document analysis. Document analysis is a way to systematically analyse and review documents. In document analysis it is required that data is observed and analysed to be able to gain understanding and to discover the meaning of texts. The ultimate goal is to develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Documents that can be subject of analysis are: event programs, organisational and institutional reports and other public records. Document analysis is often used in combination with other forms of research, in this case, a review of prior literature and a single case study (Bowen, 2009).

Document selection

To carry out the document analysis, I analysed 10 documents relating to Chinese foreign policy. The lion’s share consisted of FOCAC documents, which have been complemented by Chinese White Papers on regarding China’s foreign policy in Africa. All these documents are publicly accessible and can be found on the website of the FOCAC and the website of the Chinese government.

The Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a multilateral platform for collective consultation and dialogue. It was founded by Chinese and African leaders in 2000 with the goal to solidify Chinese-African friendly cooperation under the new global circumstances created by globalization and to promote mutual development (Jansson, 2009). The rhetorical focus predominantly lies on mutual benefit, equality and South-South cooperation. FOCAC is a crucial component of China’s policy towards Africa.

Another integral part of Chinese foreign policy are the so called White Papers on China’s African Policy. These white papers are authoritative reports that are aimed at informing the general public about certain policies. The white papers that have been subject of this analysis were the ones that focused on human rights issues, Chinese foreign aid and China’s specific policies towards Africa.
With this method, I aimed to identify how China’s discourse on its foreign policy in Africa changed in particular with regard to its principle of development aid, non-interference and human rights. This strategy is particularly helpful in analysing Chinese discourse, because these documents come directly from the Chinese government, meaning that there is no interference from third parties.

Analysis of documents

Data analysis

For the document analysis of FOCAC and other foreign policy documents I used the program “Atlas.ti” which assists in coding paragraphs and helps in finding key words related to my research question. My overall research question pointed at the documents was: Has China’s rhetoric regarding non-interference and the sovereignty of states changed? In order to answer this question I used the following sub questions in analysing the documents:

- Has China changed its (official) stance towards humanitarian intervention, and if so how?
- Has China changed how it talks about human rights in Africa?

In order to be able to analyse the documents in a structured manner I made use of multiple coding words relating to Chinese foreign policy. These were: non-interference, mutual benefit, win-win situation, humanitarian intervention, double standard, common development, human rights, fair and effective progress, good governance, economic development, social development.

Case Study

I complimented the document analysis with an in-depth case study of Chinese involvement in Sudan. Gerring defines a case study as: “the intensive (qualitative or quantitative) analysis of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), where the researcher’s goal is to understand a larger class of similar units (a population of cases) (Gerring, 2008: p.296). A case study is a study with the objective to learn something about a broader population by studying one or more cases in depth (Gerring, 2008). In this research I opted for the use of a case study research, because, by analysing Chinese involvement in Sudan rigorously, I aimed to get an in-depth view of China’s foreign policy in Africa. The case of Sudan is seen as the most significant expression of Chinese involvement in Africa, making it a significant target of analysis (Large, 2007).

“In order for a focused case study to provide insight into a broader phenomenon it must be representative of a broader set of cases. It is in this context that one may speak of a typical-case approach to case selection. The typical case exemplifies what is considered to be a typical set of values, given some general understanding of a phenomenon. By construction, the typical case is also a representative case” (Gerring,2008:p.649). As Gerring states, the typical-case method is a means to create a causal model of a particular phenomenon of interest. In this method, the researcher has already identified a certain outcome (Y) and potentially has a certain hypothesis as to how X has led to Y (Gerring, 2008). In this particular research, I already had an idea of a certain outcome. As we have seen in the theoretical framework China’s development aid policy and broader policy towards Africa has been subject to change. Furthermore, I already had a certain hypothesis regarding this outcome. I hypothesized that criticisms (African as well as Western) pointed at Chinese involvement with African authoritarian regimes in a certain extent have driven China to change its development aid policy, leading it to take the principle of non-interference less absolute and with that opening
room to more cooperation in international humanitarian intervention. By many scholars the case of Sudan is seen as a typical case were China’s foreign policy was influenced by international pressure.

The aim of this study is to use the case of Sudan in order shed more light on how China’s aid policy has changed over the years. China’s involvement in Sudan is seen as one of the turning points in China’s changing foreign policy with regard to Africa. In 2003 rebels from Darfur started a rebellion against the Sudanese government. This incited the regime led by Bashir to start a brutal crackdown. At the meanwhile China had close economic and political ties with the regime, mainly through the oil industry. Consequently this provoked Western criticisms that China was funding and protecting a genocidal regime (Crisis Group, 2017). Although China denied that it was culpable in the Darfur War it feared that the situation in Sudan would damage its international reputation. From then on, China’s involvement with Sudan and later South Sudan would be subject to many changes.

Secondary data

For the case study, I used secondary data pertaining to Chinese involvement in international oil development, oil development in Sudan and South Sudan and the Chinese role in conflicts between and in these countries. I obtained this data from Google Scholar and the library of Radboud University.

Validity and reliability

Triangulation

The use of different methodologies to analyse the same phenomenon is called “triangulation” (Denzin, 1971). By triangulating different sources of data and using multiple methodologies the researcher aims to find convergence and validation. Moreover the use of multiple sources and different types of methodologies is useful in eliminating biases that can occur when using solely one source of data (Bowen, 2009).

The aim of using multiple methodologies in my research was to eliminate possible biases that could be present when using just one method. As Patton argues, triangulation is there to contribute to the verification and validation of qualitative analysis (Patton, 1999). In this research I used methods triangulation in which the aim is to examine the consistency of certain findings produced by different data collecting procedures, in this case a document analysis and a case study.

Potential bias

There is a possibility for bias seen the fact that I already have formed a certain hypothesis based on the theoretical framework. Confirmation bias is the most pervasive form of bias in research and occurs when a researcher has formed a hypothesis and uses data to confirm that belief. In my case that would entail that I would solely focus on data that confirms my hypothesis that China’s foreign policy towards African has changed in response to criticisms. In order to ameliorate this bias I must be able to continually re-evaluate my own impressions and challenge possible assumptions and hypotheses I pre-defined.

Limitations

When your aim is to research changes in foreign policy you would ideally want to see internal government documents because these are genuine expressions of the intentions of a government.
Particularly in the case of China these are very difficult to obtain, because these are highly classified. I therefore chose to analyse public documents, because these are also expressions of certain policy intentions. Yet, due to their public nature you will never be sure whether policy intentions are genuine or are just rhetoric. Moreover, the majority of documents I analysed are joint documents between African members of FOCAC and China, which means that Chinese rhetoric most likely will be different from its rhetoric in other contexts. On the other hand these documents do provide a researcher with an idea of what kind of image of itself a state wants to convey to the outside world. Therefore these documents are of high value in researching Chinese rhetoric with regard to its foreign policy in Africa.
Document Analysis

In this document analysis the main research question is: Has China’s rhetoric towards non-interference and humanitarian intervention changed in response to criticism, and if so, how? This question will be addressed by answering three sub questions, namely:

1. Has China changed how it talks about human rights in Africa?
2. Has China changed its (official) stance towards humanitarian intervention, and if so how?

The period that will be analyzed will stretch from the first FOCAC declaration in 2000 until its most recent declaration in 2018. I chose this period because in this period Sino-African relations intensified rapidly for numerous reasons as was set out in the theoretical framework. At the same time, China’s role in Africa came under more and more scrutiny, making it an appropriate period to focus on in this research.

Chinese discourse on Africa

Before we can turn to the analysis it is of importance to put Chinese discourse on Africa in context. The basis on which Chinese foreign policy is built are the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles are as follows: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Aidoo & Hess, 2015). Another integral part of Chinese foreign policy discourse, especially with regard to Africa is the idea of so called South-South cooperation. The idea behind this is that developing countries have many natural resources and huge market potential and that by supporting each other this can lead to mutual benefit. China sees its own development model as potential pathway for other developing countries and by sharing its own experiences it hopes to benefit other developing countries (Delgado, 2015).

The South-South cooperation approach follows from three assumptions. Firstly, China sees itself as a developing country. Despite having experienced very large economic growth in the last 50 years, it is still not seen as a fully developed country (Delgado, 2015). Secondly, due to China’s perception as a more developed country amongst developing countries, it sees itself as more aware of the plight of these countries and as a role model to them. Thirdly, China propagates an alternative mode of cooperation as compared to Western cooperation models. China promotes a “no-strings attached” form of cooperation, entailing that it does not expect certain behavior from other states in exchange for cooperation (Delgado, 2015). These principles and assumptions form the red line through China’s foreign policy towards Africa.

Declaration on first FOCAC meeting

In order to analyze how Chinese discourse has changed over the years, we should determine a certain starting point. The period that will be analyzed will stretch from the first FOCAC declaration in 2000 until its most recent declaration in 2018. In this period Sino-African relations intensified rapidly for numerous reasons as was set out in the theoretical framework. In the same period, China’s role in
Africa came under more and more scrutiny, making it an appropriate period to focus on in this research.

The FOCAC declarations are joint statements of China and the African members of the Forum, thus expressing the views of the FOCAC as a whole. The first Ministerial Conference was held from 10 to 12 October 2000. Prominent attendees were China’s then president Jiang Zemin and Vice President Hu Jintao, President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia and President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria. Additionally more than 80 ministers from China and 44 African countries were present (FOCAC, 2000).

In the first declaration, we can identify the principles and ideas that are typical for Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. In it they declare that states must adhere to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and that no country has the right to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs, no matter the circumstances (FOCAC, 2000). Furthermore, the declaration sets out that the North and South should strengthen their cooperation on the basis of equality, stressing that disputes between states should be resolved through non-violent means such as negotiation and consultation. States should refrain from the use or threat of force and should not impose other coercive measures (FOCAC, 2000).

In the document, it is laid out that China and the African countries see a central role for the UN as a whole and the UN Security Council more specifically in facilitating world peace and security. They also argue that developing countries should be represented better in the UNSC and pose that Africa should be granted a seat in the council:

> The primary role of the UN Security Council in safeguarding world peace and security should be respected and enhanced (...) The developing countries should be more adequately represented in the UN Security Council and international economic and financial institutions so as to fully reflect the democratic principle governing international relations. In this respect, we call for the recognition of the legitimate place due to Africa in the Security Council and the organisations and specialised agencies of the United Nations system. (FOCAC, 2000: paragraph 3)

Regarding human rights, the members of FOCAC declare that the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms should be respected. They also stress that each country has the right to determine its own path of development and social system. Furthermore, countries with all different historical and cultural backgrounds should have the right to determine their own approaches to promoting and protecting human rights. Perhaps the most salient statement regarding human rights is that “the politicization of human rights and the imposition of human rights conditionalities on economic assistance should be vigorously opposed as they constitute a violation of human rights” (FOCAC, 2000: p.3).

When speaking about the resolution of conflicts, China does not specifically speak about its own role in humanitarian intervention. It does specifically call upon the UN to give special attention to the resolution of conflicts in Africa and appreciates the sub-regional cooperation and sense of African Unity following from the establishment of the African Union (FOCAC, 2000).

So what can we conclude from this declaration? We can see that China sees a role for itself as a front man for the developing world and calls upon this grouping of countries to work together in order to bring about mutual development. Yet, we also witness a call upon the “North” or the developed world, to strengthen their dialogue and co-operation with the South on the basis of equality. This can be interpreted as a suggestion for Western-Chinese co-operation in Africa. This idea is reinforced by the statement that developed countries, in the view of FOCAC members, have the responsibility to
provide developing countries with financial, technological and other forms of support, Africa in particular (FOCAC, 2000).

Another indirect call towards the West is the one regarding human rights. From the quote, we can conclude that China is staunchly opposed to interference in other countries on the basis of human rights violations and sees the imposition of conditionalities for economic assistance as breaching of humanitarian law. Perhaps most salient is that China does not speak about its own specific role in the resolution of conflict.

Below I draw on my context analysis to shed light on how China’s discourse in FOCAC has evolved from this point onwards.

Has China changed how it talks about human rights in Africa?

In the theoretical framework, I distinguished that China has a different conception of human rights in comparison to the West. Whereas the West stresses that states should guarantee individual freedoms for its citizens, the Chinese idea of human rights focuses on the obligation of citizens to build a strongly developed society together. China’s view is based on a communitarian view in which social solidarity and the creation of harmony are the central principles (Taylor, 2007: Qi, 2005). In the Chinese view, western individual freedoms and rights are subordinate to social harmony and economic development and are often even seen as undermining of those (Taylor, 2007: Qi, 2005).

In the first declaration, I determined that China subscribed to the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, at the same time China stressed that every country has the right to determine its own path of development and social system. Additionally, it posed that countries also have the right to choose their own approaches to promoting and protecting human rights. Has this stance on human rights stayed the same over the years or has it been subject to change?

The second Ministerial Conference was held in Addis Ababa Ethiopia, on 15 and 16 December 2003. It was attended by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, six African presidents, president Alpha Oumare Konare of the African Union and the representative of the UN Secretary General. Additionally, over 70 ministers from China and 44 African countries were present at the conference. What is particularly salient in the Addis Ababa Action plan is that human rights or freedoms are not even mentioned once. The lion’s share of the document focuses on cooperation between African countries and China in the field of economic and social development. This can most likely be ascribed to the fact that China prioritizes economic development over the provision of individual freedoms and rights. This follows from the reasoning that before a state can guarantee civil and political rights and freedoms it has to warrant that its citizens are able to sustain themselves (Peerenboom, 2005). In the theoretical framework we witnessed that the African view is not that homogeneous regarding the prioritization of human rights. However, in the NEPAD it is explicitly stated that the presence of political and civil rights is a prerequisite for sustainable economic development (Taylor, 2007). This shows that there is a certain ambiguity present in Sino-African discourse surrounding development and its relationship towards human rights.

In November 3 to 5, 2006 the first FOCAC Summit and third Ministerial Conference was held in Beijing. Prominent attendees were President Hu Jintao and the heads of state or government of 35 African countries. The summit produced the 2007-2009 Action Plan which sets out the projects members of FOCAC aim to develop in the coming years. In this Action Plan human rights are discussed again. Both sides express their appreciation of the establishment of the Human Rights
Council by the UN. Both the African countries and China state that they aim to make sure that the Council will respect historical, cultural and religious backgrounds of all nations and regions in order to advance dialogue between them (FOCAC, 2006). In the view of the FOCAC members the Council should place equal importance on both civil and political rights on the one hand and social, economic and cultural rights on the other. In their view priority should be given to the right to development. “The double standard and the practice of politicizing human rights issues” is also touched upon (FOCAC, 2006: paragraph 4.3) This could be a reference to Western criticisms pointed at China’s role in Sudan, which China sees as hypocritical. The perception of the Chinese is that the West is using human rights issues as a way to justify interference in other countries, which in their view is unlawful (FOCAC, 2006). In the Sharm El Sheikh Action Plan 2010-2012, this position is repeated. The same goes for the Johannesburg Action Plan and Declaration and the most recent Beijing Action Plan and Declaration (2019-2021).

In 2016, the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China issued a white paper on the right to development in which it elaborated on China’s philosophy and practice with regard to this right. In this document, Chinese views of human rights are extensively discussed and it explains why China puts so much emphasis on economic and social development, more so than on civil or political rights (The State Council Information Office, 2016).

In the White Paper, it is posed that from the Chinese viewpoint the right to subsistence and development are the primary rights, basic human rights. Underdevelopment and poverty are the biggest impediments to human rights, thus without the production and supply of goods it is almost impossible to effectuate any human right. According to China the right to development should be secured because this right is a prerequisite for the realisation of economic, social, cultural and the obtainment of civil and political rights.

The rights to subsistence and development are the primary, basic human rights. Poverty is the biggest obstacle to human rights. Without the production and supply of material goods, it is difficult or even impossible to realize any other human right. Development is a means of eliminating poverty. It provides necessary conditions for realizing other human rights, and releases human potential. Safeguarding the right to development is the precondition for realizing economic, cultural, social and environmental rights, and obtaining civil and political rights. China appreciates the articulation in the UN’s ”Declaration on the Right to Development” : "The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. (The State Council Information Office, 2016: paragraph I.)

Furthermore, China opines that it plays a leading role in the common development of all other countries in the world which all have the same right to development. It therefore aims to support developing countries especially the least developed countries in reducing poverty and improving people’s well-being.

In the document China, lists its numerous efforts to advance human rights. It states that it participated in the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations, facilitated the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and defended the principles stipulated in “The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights”. China prides itself on the fact that has been the one that has facilitated the passing of the resolution on the new concepts of human rights and the resolution of the right to development (The State Council Information Office, 2016). Additionally, China emphasizes its cooperation with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNHCR) stating that it has been supportive of its resolutions on the right to development and has assisted in the UNHCR’s global debate on realizing the right to development (The State Council Information Office,
All of these efforts are in collaboration with the UN and shows the importance China attaches to this institution. This is expressed in a Chinese government position paper on the United Nations:

The United Nations plays an indispensable role in international affairs. As the most universal, representative, authoritative inter-governmental international organization, the UN is the best venue to practice multilateralism, and an effective platform for collective actions to cope with various threats and challenges. It should continue to be a messenger for the maintenance of peace, and a forerunner for the promotion of development. A reformed UN with a bigger role to play will serve the common interests of humanity. (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN: p.1)

The issue of human rights is not extensively discussed in the Chinese foreign policy documents, with the White Paper on the Right to Development as an exception. The lion’s share of the documents is focused on economic development cooperation with Africa, a subject which is comprehensively discussed. The fact that human rights are discussed relatively little could be ascribed to the different views on the importance of civil and political rights between the West and China. China’s position is that stable economic development should be in place before the issue of civil and political rights comes to play. In this light, is not strange that China focuses more on economic development in these FOCAC document given that fact that it is dealing with African countries that are still developing. Countries in which many citizens are having an extremely hard time in providing a livelihood for themselves. Additionally, this rhetoric is likely to resonate well with authoritarian regimes in Africa, which could interpret a discourse focussing on civil and political rights as threatening to their position.

Across the various documents, I saw a strong consistency in the way China spoke about human rights. It became clear that China’s focus in its relations with Africa lied on the improvement and tightening of economic relations and that human rights in western sense of the word has lesser priority at least in this stage of development of African countries. Thus with regard to human rights I could not detect a significant change in China’s rhetoric between the years 2000 and 2018.

**Has China changed its (official) stance towards humanitarian intervention, and if so how?**

In the Addis Ababa Action plan (2003), the members appreciate China’s participation in African peacekeeping operations and express the hope that China will intensify its role in these operations. China poses that it will continue its participation and will strengthen its cooperation with African states and sub-regional organizations and will provide financial and material assistance in the area of logistics. From this, we can see that China is increasing its participation in conflict resolution in Africa, albeit cautiously (FOCAC, 2003).

In 2003, the war in Darfur started. International pressure on China mounted due to its role in facilitating the war efforts of the Sudanese regime in the region, making the country directly complicit in war crimes committed there (Large, 2008). This pressure prompted China to reassess its role in the conflict, particularly after 2005. In the 2004, “National Defense White Paper” China’s part in international security cooperation is touched upon. What stands out is that in “Appendix III Major Military Exchanges with Other Countries 2003-2004” multiple exchanges with Sudanese military officials are mentioned which hint at China’s military involvement with Sudan (China’s National Defense White Paper, 2004). This proves that China not only provided the Sudanese regime with much needed revenues for the sustainment of its military apparatus through the oil industry. The
country also actively involved itself with military affairs, providing high-rank military officers with strategic advice.

In the 2007-2009 Action Plan (2006) Darfur is not explicitly mentioned but the members reiterate their commitment to push the international community to help in the resolving of African conflicts. Furthermore, China stresses that it will do its best to improve cooperation with Africa in preventing, managing and resolving regional conflict.

In the document called “Implementation of the Follow Up Actions of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” written in 2009, China is becoming more explicit about its exact role in humanitarian intervention in Africa by stressing its role in in UN peacekeeping operations in the continent. Additionally, China’s involvement in Darfur is explicitly pointed out. In the period stretching from 2000 to 2009, we can perceive a shift in Chinese rhetoric with regard to intervention in African conflicts. In the beginning of the 2000’s, China is rather reserved about its part in international conflict resolution and primarily sees an assisting role for itself in these particular operations. Mostly after 2005, we can see that China is becoming more explicit about its activities surrounding the war in Darfur and taking up a more proactive stance, most likely due to international pressure aimed at its role in this particularly violent conflict:

China continued to take an active part in the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa. Since the Beijing Summit, China's deployment of peacekeeping troops and police to Africa has totaled 6,281 person-time, with 1,629 Chinese soldiers and police officers remaining in service in six UN peacekeeping missions in the region. China actively supported post-war reconstruction in relevant countries and strengthened cooperation with them on the establishment of the UN Peace Commission.

In order to support the efforts of Africa to maintain regional peace and security, the Chinese Government appointed a Special Representative on African Affairs, actively participated in the resolution of, and strengthened, with the African side, consultation and coordination on Darfur and relevant issues of significance to peace and security in Africa. (FOCAC, 2009: paragraph 7.)

In Sharm el Sheikh Action Plan (2009), the Chinese government restates its commitment and its support to the UNSC and speaks out its aim to continue to support UN peacekeeping missions and post-war reconstruction processes. (FOCAC, 2009). What speaks the most from this action plan is the stressing of China’s appreciation of the concept and practice of “Solving African Problems by Africans”. The Chinese government expresses its commitment to aiding African countries in peacekeeping theory research, peacekeeping training and other forms of supporting peacekeeping capacity in Africa (FOCAC, 2009). This demonstrates China’s focus on the role of African agency in African conflicts and is line with its principle of non-interference. China is generally opposed to Western political interference in Africa, with the exemption of UN-backed missions. By strengthening the ability of African countries to resolve conflict by themselves, China is possibly intending to diminish the support for Western interference in the continent. Perhaps, for this reason the Chinese government is very supportive towards the African Union, which is expressed numerous times throughout the FOCAC documents:

The Chinese Government appreciates the concept and practice of “Solving African Problems by Africans”. It will continue to support the efforts of the AU, other regional organizations and countries concerned to solve regional conflicts, and will intensify cooperation with African countries in peacekeeping theory research, peacekeeping training and exchanges and in supporting the building of peacekeeping capacity in Africa. (FOCAC, 2009: paragraph 2.6.2.)
From the Sharm El Sheikh Summit until the latest Beijing Summit of 2018, China’s commitment towards anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden is repeated. Although China is generally opposed to Western interference in African affairs, it has successfully worked together with the US in an UN-approved anti-piracy mission since 2009. In this mission there was direct communication between US and Chinese marine officers on the tactical level (Christoffersen, 2009). This cooperation between the US and China can perhaps be explained by the fact that piracy was a Somali affair but also an international problem and negatively affecting economic relations strongly. Due to its international nature and UN approval the interference of the US was lawful and allowed for cooperation between the US and China. In my view this shows that China sees military involvement in a functional way.

In 2012, the Fifth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC was held in which the Action Plan for the years 2013 to 2015 was discussed. Both members point out that in their view challenges confronting peace and security are mounting. They, therefore, once again stress the importance of cooperation in the field of peacekeeping operations. In order to enhance cooperation, China promises to launch the so-called “Initiative on China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security” (FOCAC, 2012). The goal of this initiative is to provide the African Union with technical and financial support for its peace-support operations. In line with previous declarations, both members speak out their support for their efforts in “independently resolving regional conflicts and strengthening democracy and good governance and oppose the interference in Africa’s internal affairs by external forces in pursuit of their own interests” (FOCAC, 2012: paragraph 2.6.2).

In the two most recent summits, being the FOCAC Johannesburg Summit of 2015 and the FOCAC Beijing Summit of 2018 we cannot distinguish any notable differences in rhetoric with regard to humanitarian intervention. Once more the need for intensive cooperation between Africa in the field of conflict resolution is stressed. China also endorses the principles of multilateralism while opposing interference in other countries affairs or using the threat of force. Both sides stand for fair and reasonable development and aim to stand up for the rights and interests of developing countries. What also stands out is that China remains consistent in its promise of providing assistance without political conditions over the years (FOCAC 2015, 2018).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, my analysis suggests that there is a strong consistency in the way China speaks about human rights in foreign policy documents ranging from 2000 to 2018. The issue of human rights is not extensively discussed in the documents with the White Paper on the Right to Development as an exception. I ascribed this to the fact that China has a different prioritization of human rights and sees the right of development as the basic and primary right. Once stable economic development is established the issue of civil and political rights come to play in the Chinese view. Hence, the largest part of the documents discussed primarily focus on the improvement of economic cooperation between China and Africa. This discourse is most likely to resonate well with authoritarian regimes that could interpret a rhetoric that focuses on the advancement of civil and political rights as threatening to their position. The message conveyed in the parts that did discuss human rights stayed the same over the years, focusing on the universality of these rights, but at the same time stressing the that every country has the right to determine its own approach to defending these rights without interference of other countries. Thus with regard to human rights I could not detect a significant change in China’s rhetoric between the years 2000 and 2018.
Regarding humanitarian intervention I noticed some changes in China’s rhetoric. In the beginning of the 2000s China is fairly reserved when speaking of its own role humanitarian interventions and mainly focusses on its assisting role in African conflicts. In the period from 2005 to 2009, during the war in Darfur, I witnessed a shift to a more a proactive discourse on China’s role in humanitarian intervention. This can most likely be attributed to increasing pressure towards China’s controversial role in the conflict of Darfur. Taking up a more prominent role in the resolution of African conflicts and particularly Darfur, could be seen as a way for China to mend its damaged international reputation. In the following years we see a China that continually expresses its commitment to UN peace missions and puts much emphasis on strengthening African capacity in conflict resolution. I argued that this could be interpreted as a strategy to reduce the support for Western interference in Africa. However I argue that there is a consistency in China’s adherence to the principle of non-interference, at least in its rhetoric in these particular documents. Throughout the documents China keeps on stressing the sovereignty of states, while opposing interference in other countries affairs or using the threat of force.
Case Study Sudan

The case of Sudan is seen as the most controversial and most significant expression of Chinese engagement with Africa (Large, 2007). Chinese involvement in this particular country is by various scholars seen as one of the turning points in China’s altering foreign policy approach with regard to Africa. This chapter will consist of an in-depth analysis of Chinese affairs with Sudan. The primary focus will lie on the time frame ranging from the 1989 until now, because in this period China’s role in Sudan became increasingly significant. The focus of my analysis will be in addressing the following questions: How has Chinese involvement with Sudan and later South Sudan developed? and Has China’s rhetoric towards non-interference and humanitarian intervention changed in response to criticism, and if so, how?

Early stages

Chinese engagement with Sudan was fairly minimal before 1989. Although it had symbolic relations with the African country since 1959, China had a restricted role in Sudanese affairs. After Sudanese independence in 1956, Chinese-Sudanese affairs consisted of the provision of Chinese aid, along with some trade in cotton. This changed when intensive oil operations took off in the periode between 1989 and the late 1990s (Large, 2009: Holslag, 2007). What the Chinese often refer to as an “all-weather” friendship has thus been developed relatively recently (Large, 2009).

China’s increasingly thickening economic and political relations came about after the seizing of power by the National Islamic Front (NIF) on the 30th of June 1989 (Large, 2009). The coup carried out by Islamists was led by Brigadier General Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who has recently been overthrown (Collins, 1999: Medani, 2011). Before the overthrow, these Islamists had been side-lined by widespread popular support for a quick resolve to the Sudan’s political crisis and civil war. The goal of the Islamists was to stop any peace agreement from happening that would prevent the implementation of Sharia law and to halt the influence of pro-democracy forces, which were increasingly growing in the government (Collins, 1999: Medani, 2011). Bashir and the NIF annulled the North-South ceasefire, implemented a stricter Islamic legal system and banned all other political parties and secular institutions (Medani, 2011). At the time Sudan was also in the middle of protracted armed conflict with rebel groups in the south. This rebellion, which started after 1983 was led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) with at its head John Garang (Large, 2009). After the taking of power by the NIF this war became progressively more cruel. Refugee camps in the south were bombed by the government air force, and militias allied with the NIF started displacing and killing southerners (Medani, 2011). This conflict lasting until 2005 would lead to over two million deaths and the displacement of four and a half million people (Large, 2009).

China’s growing role in the Sudanese oil industry

The NIF’s form of political governance was characterized by its project of political Islam and deep authoritarianism, which was connected to the idea of the cultural dominance of the ruling elites. This was a recurrent theme throughout post-colonial rule in Sudan and had led to the regional marginalization and exploitation of social divisions and eventually to many conflicts (Large, 2009: Patey, 2007). The NIF’s domestic actions in the form of the imposition of increasingly more Islamic
policies and their aggressive expansionist ambitions resulted in multiple crises and troubled foreign relations. These politics would eventually lead to Sudan’s isolation in the Middle East and an ever-growing international pressure towards its aggressive domestic and foreign policy (Large, 2009; Patey 2007). Western oil companies which were omnipresent and had developed the indispensably vital oil sector, were pressured by their respective governments to halt their activities in Sudan due to the NIF’s human rights violations (Patey, 2007; Large, 2008; Kobrin, 2003). These disinvestment campaigns did not have much effect on the power of the NIF, however. The flow of revenue that the state received from oil would not be interrupted because, the “void” (other actors would still stay active in Sudan but in a less extensive manner) left by Western oil companies would swiftly be filled by Eastern economies (China, India, Malaysia). These countries aimed to secure much-needed petrol resources for their quickly growing economies. In particular, China the one with the most urgent need for energy resources being the first (Patey, 2007; Alden, 2005).

Sudan’s increasingly isolated status in 1990’s and its unexploited economic potential made Sudan an investing opportunity of very high interest for China. China’s interests in Sudan were welcomed by the NIF, as they had few options available for developing its oil industry. The NIF’s strict Islamist policies, association with state sponsoring of terrorism and supporting of Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War increasingly added to its isolation in the Middle East and the rest of the world (Large, 2008; Alden 2005; Kobrin, 2003). This even exacerbated after the UN Security Council and the US imposed sanctions on the African country in respectively 1996 and 1997 (Kobrin, 2003; Large 2008). This isolation was seen by China as a chance to secure its much needed energy resources in an African country that was not dominated by Western companies, at least not anymore. Because of the potential pay-off, China was willing to take the risk involving itself with a country that was known for its unstable political situation and its proneness to violent conflict. The possible benefits to Chinese business simply outweighed the potential risks (Large, 2008).

The NIF government had specific requirements that it wanted to be met before evaluating and considering potential takeovers by international companies of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), which is the main oil consortium in Sudan. First, companies willing to take over should have the proper finances to exploit and develop the oil resources. Second, after purchase, the main priority should be the construction of an export pipeline. The largest Chinese oil firm, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) met these requirements and by offering the government to build a refinery pro bono eventually won the bid (Patey, 2007).

In December 1995, Chinese-Sudanese oil cooperation took off when then President Bashir obtained a reduced rate loan of RMB 1.15 billion provided by the Chinese government. This was part of deal between the Bank of Sudan and the China Exim Bank that would finance oil development. In return, the CNPC had the permission to transfer profits made back to China unrestricted and it would free from any domestic taxes (Large, 2007 & 2008; Patey, 2007; Alden, 2005). In the same year, the CNPC purchased the former Chevron concern Block 6 in Western Kordofan, located in the centre of Sudan and would slowly take over Sudan’s oil industry (Patey, 2007). Chevron, one of the biggest American oil companies, was the first to discover oil in Sudan, but left the country in 1992 because of worsening relations between Khartoum and Washington.

By 1997, the CNPC had gained a 40 percent share in the GNPOC. Other shareholders were the Malaysian Petronas (30 per cent), the Canadian Talisman (25 percent), and the Sudanese company Sudapet (5 percent). The goal of the CNPC and the other companies was to advance the oil industry in southern Sudan which had fallen behind due to the absence of a well-developed infrastructure. The China Petroleum Engineering and Construction Company which operated in name of the CNPC
had the task to build this infrastructure and build the export pipeline connecting the Sudanese oil industry to the global market as was demanded by the NIF (Large, 2008: Patey, 2007).

In 1999, Sudan exported its first oil from Port Bashair. This event was a milestone showing the successful strategy of the government of Sudan in courting China to develop its oil industry. For the Chinese, the development of the oil industry in Sudan had also proven to be a successful enterprise and its engagement in the country would mark the beginning of a vital phase in the international enlargement of the Chinese oil sector (Large, 2008: Patey, 2007).

In the development of the oil industry in Sudan, the Sudanese and Chinese goals have clearly overlapped. Sudan and China mutually benefited from their cooperation. China’s policy of non-interference suited the NIF’s strategy with regard to oil development in Sudan. Its “no strings attached” policy starkly contrasted with the pressure politics and conditionalities of Western powers, particularly the US (Large, 2008).

**Oil revenues and conflict**

The oil industry was still far from a clean business in Sudan and was inseparably linked to violent conflict. The oil sector was frequently target of attacks by the SPLA and other rebel groups. Oil development had become a military affair, effectively functioning as a catalyst to the suffering of civilians (Large, 2008: Patey, 2007: Rone, 2003). The Sudanese army started depopulating areas that were rich with oil in the South by using militias allied with the state and the bombing of villages. Khartoum exploited already existing ethnic tensions by giving Arab herdsmen implicit permission to attack and plunder the communities of African Dinka and Nuer tribes in the southern parts of Sudan. The government of Sudan was intent to prevent rebel groups in the south acquiring the possibility to extract resources and recruits from these communities. By doing this it aimed to prevent the SPLA from creating a power base in the north and south by uniting poor and marginalized tribes, which could potentially give them access to the oil reserves (Large 2008:Patey, 2007). Raiding southern villages became the primary source of income for these Arab herdsmen, due to the scarcity of economic opportunities in the country. Grievances in the southern regions grew rapidly and would eventually lead to violent counteractions.

The capacity of Khartoum to terrorize southern communities grew parallel with the increasing oil revenues, which provided it with the possibility to purchase more firepower in the form of Antonov airplanes and helicopters (Patey, 2007). The government increasingly gained access to areas with oil-development potential. This could partially be ascribed to its success in exploiting tribal divisions between Nuer and Dinka in the ranks of the SPLA. Violence following from this led to more and more civilian displacement, consequently opening space for the oil industry (Patey, 2007). While these atrocities took place the, Sudan’s oil industry kept on running and developing undisturbed. International oil companies were of paramount importance to Khartoum in the conversion of natural resources to revenue (Patey, 2007). The international companies provided Khartoum with revenues essential in the sustaining of its violent military campaign in the South, without these companies the regime could never be able to uphold its military power. The tacit consent with the atrocities committed and its provision of revenue to the regime made the CNPC and other oil companies complicit with these war crimes (Large, 2008).

All of the above demonstrates that there indeed was a direct link between violent conflict and the exploitation of oil in Sudan. China and more specifically the CNPC played a pivotal role in the
exacerbation of conflict by sustaining the ability of Khartoum to pursue its extremely violent campaign in southern Sudan, by providing it with much needed revenue. Its sustainment of Khartoum’s military power made it directly complicit with the human rights abuses carried out by the regime. Its involvement in the oil industry was not in line with its adherence to the principle of non-interference which it upheld to the outside world. The Chinese objective of securing a steady supply of oil had created a political economy in Sudan its exploitation of oil resources provided the NIF with revenues from which they could consolidate their military and political power, which was essential to the survival of its authoritarian regime, making China’s involvement inherently political (Large, 2008, 2009).

China’s close ties with NCP

As I elaborated on in earlier chapters China’s development aid policy in Africa is centred around the principles of non-interference, mutual benefit and mutual respect. This was no different in Sudan, at least according to the Chinese government. Towards the outside world, China held up an image of a strictly economical Sino-Sudanese cooperation. In reality, the adherence to the principle of non-interference had come under strain and was even actively contradicted by China in Sudan witnessed by its increasingly growing embeddedness in Sudanese war time politics (Large, 2008: Mohan & Lampert, 2012).

According to Chinese government rhetoric, the principle of non-interference is the ideal way of conducting business with other countries without being involved in politics. The Chinese approach is inherently political however and “clearly depends on an ability to navigate political waters. Nor is it static and will necessarily be progressively enmeshed in politics as business develops, and in the process entails an informal but integral logic of political negotiation” (Large, 2008:p. 98). In the view of the Chinese government, politically involving itself with the Sudanese government was the only way to protect its oil investments in the country. Political instability or even regime change were detrimental to Chinese interests as will be shown.

The CPA and the start of the war in Darfur

The symbiotic relationship between the NIF, which became the National Congress Party (NCP) in 1998, and China continued into the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. During this time, political relations between the Chinese and Sudanese governments were characterised by close ties between the NCP, the Communist Party and corporations (Large, 2008, 2009). Particularly China’s military ties with Sudan resulted in criticisms internationally. Both US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the time and UN special envoy to Sudan Jan Pronk pointed out China’s reluctance to put pressure on Khartoum as the main impediment to stopping the war in Darfur (Shichor, 2007).

During this period, China provided the Sudanese regime with multiple arms transfers and assisted in setting up arms manufacturing in northern Sudan. China’s involvement in the provision of arms was most salient in Darfur.

The war in Darfur started in the same years that the NCP and SPLM were involved in peace talks that would eventually lead to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005. The United States, Norway and Great Britain played a pivotal role in brokering this deal (Medani,
The CPA was designed to achieve political stability by negotiating agreements between ethnic and military elites and with this create elite power-sharing systems. These power-sharing systems involved a process of continuing bargaining between elites with the goal of realising a transition to stable social relations (Medani, 2011: Murray & Maywald, 2005). The CPA led to the creation of an autonomous region of South Sudan and the incorporation of southerners in the central government in a coalition with the NCP (Medani, 2011: Murray & Maywald, 2005).

The CPA proved to be far from comprehensive, however, and unable to guarantee sustainable peace. The oil-driven development, which was almost solely concentrated in Khartoum and Sudan’s economic heartlands, strengthened Khartoum’s patronage capabilities. This drastically changed the social structure of the country and with it social dislocation. Consequently, grievances about Darfur’s political and economic side-lining incited the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) to take up arms (Large, 2012: Medani, 2011). Khartoum responded by starting a large-scale counter-insurgency campaign in the western region of Sudan. UN Comtrade statistics showed that during Khartoum’s crackdown on the rebellion of Darfur between 2002-2005, China was the biggest supplier of weaponry to Sudan (Large, 2008). In the period between 2003 and 2006 China’s small arms transfers to Sudan surmounted to a worth of $55 million. In the period between 2004 and 2006 China even supplied 90% of Sudan’s small arms purchases (Apple, 2008). Moreover a report by the UN Panel of Experts in which the use of arms in Darfur was investigated found that the majority of ammunition used in the conflict was either produced in Sudan or China (UN Security Council, 2006:37). This shows that China’s role in Sudan indeed was not a merely business related venture and that it played an active role in facilitating the NCP’s war efforts in Darfur. Moreover, Chinese claims of the positive effects the oil industry had on Sudan’s development as a whole are nullified by its role in exacerbating unequal development in Sudan (Large, 2012). A challenge frequently associated with oil is that oil revenues can create internal problems by increasing internal tension or even conflict due to desire to monopolize oil resources and the failure to make an equitable distribution of oil revenues (Shankleman, 2011). Sudan, is a typical example of a rentier state. In such a state the created revenue, coming from the oil industry in this case, remains in the hands of the government. This revenue is then used to buy the support of elites through patronage systems (Shankleman, 2011).

Revenue derived from the oil industry gave the Sudanese regime the ability to set up patronage systems aimed at creating political acquiescence amongst Sudan’s elites. Thus, China which was responsible for the production of a large share of the revenue flowing to the regime had a very important role in shaping the political structure of the country giving it considerable leverage over the regime. Even though human rights abuses were committed on a large basis China would continue to support Khartoum.

**China's shifting role**

Even though China would continue to have close ties with the regime in Khartoum, the nature of its role would start to change during the war in Darfur. International criticism and pressure pointed at the long lasting and extremely violent nature of the conflict pushed China to publicly exert more influence on the Sudanese government with regard to Darfur (Large, 2008, 2009). For the West, China’s support for Khartoum was seen as the main impediment to stopping the war in Darfur. In 2005, Robert Zoellick the US Deputy Secretary of State issued a statement criticising China for doing business with an oppressive authoritarian regime that was involved in a vicious civil war. Zoellick posited that China should take its responsibility: “… China should take more than oil from Sudan- it...
should take responsibility for resolving Sudan’s human crisis. It could work with the United States, the UN and others to support the African Union’s peacekeeping mission, to provide humanitarian relief to Darfur, and to promote a solution to Sudan’s conflicts. (National Committee US-China Relations, 2005) (Lee, Chan & Chan, 2012).

Initially, an African Union mission was the only effort which was allowed by the NCP to enter Sudan and operate in Darfur. Khartoum’s constant refusals of more extensive and internationally supported missions were supported by China. Although the AU’s mission had proven to be unable to defend citizens in Darfur Beijing would continue to propagate its stance that it would not support any international missions without the green light of Khartoum (Zhengyu & Taylor, 2011).

A US campaign calling for a boycott of the Beijing Olympics, which was part of a larger international human-rights backlash was another reason for China to reassess its role in Sudan (Large, 2008: Lee, Chan & Chan, 2012). Aware that the situation in Darfur was detrimental to China’s international reputation, the Chinese government appointed special ambassador Liu Guijin in May 2007. He would function as a special representative for the Darfur Issue and African affairs (Crisis Group, 2017). His appointment was part of a strategy aimed at mending China’s damaged international image and at the same time promoting Chinese interests through a more proactive diplomacy (Large, 2008).

Although China was trying to improve the international perception of its actions in Sudan, the rising super power would still continue on protecting the sovereignty of Sudan as well as strengthening economic links with the regime. Yet, it would exert increasing pressure on the NCP government in the form of its support for a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur, which was heavily opposed by Bashir (Large, 2009). This was part of a broader parting from its previous attitude towards Sudan’s government. Chinese officials started to show that they were prepared to express public criticism towards the NCP in the form of recommendations of possible solutions towards the conflict in Darfur. This was particularly symbolized by President Hu Jintao’s four principles, announced in 2007, that were aimed at resolving the conflict in Darfur. According to Large (2009). Chinese official discourse which was mainly state-directed was changing and language addressing the plight of the Sudanese people started to get incorporated. Which was demonstrated by President Hu Jintao’s four principles aimed at resolving the conflict in Darfur in which he stresses the importance of improving the living conditions of the people of Darfur (Large, 2009).

China’s changing role was also demonstrated in its larger aid programme and its greater responsiveness to key issues with regard to Sudan. China actively made efforts to make its aid programme in Darfur more extensive and intensive (Large, 2008). This was witnessed by its growing role in the provision of humanitarian assistance and the building of schools in Darfur. The Chinese government actively publicised these programmes and emphasized its role in the economic development of Darfur and Sudan at large. In the view of the Chinese, this economic development was instrumental in resolving conflict. However, China’s previous role in economic development in Sudan had proven to be one of the main drivers of marginalisation and underdevelopment and consequently conflict (Large, 2008: Lee, Chan & Chan, 2012).

In the period surrounding the events in Darfur we can identify China’s ambivalence with regard to its policy in Sudan. On the one hand it was aware of the negative effects that the atrocities committed in Darfur have upon its interests. The conflict strongly impeded China’s capacity to further develop its business and energy interests in Sudan as well as damaging China’s international reputation as a trustworthy business partner. On the other hand China was reluctant to give up its stance on non-interference which was an integral part of its foreign policy. We therefore can witness that China operates somewhere in the middle, upholding its rhetoric of non-interference in public while at the same timing increasing pressure on Khartoum to be more open towards a UN intervention.
China and South Sudan

After the CPA, Sudan and South Sudan had different governing systems which required the Chinese to reassess its policy towards both countries. The semi-autonomous role South Sudan had gained allowed the Chinese government to establish relations with the SPLM, the formal government of South Sudan. China’s oil concessions in the southern region and the approaching referendum about potential secession in 2011 had driven China to improve these relations. Although China’s and the SPLM’s interests had clashed before, both entities showed interest in engaging with each other both recognizing the potential benefits of cooperation for the region (Large, 2008). Moreover, South Sudan was also aware of the fact that China could veto its potential independence in the UN Security Council. Good relations with China were of paramount importance in achieving this secession (Large, 2012).

The formalization of official ties between Juba and Beijing came about when China’s consulate in Juba was established in September 2008. This opened the way for intensifying aid and investment programmes. This assistance was featured by the construction of schools, hospitals, water wells and support for agricultural production (Large, 2012). Between 2005 and 2011, China’s stance on potential secession changed. Previously a staunch supporter of Sudan’s unity, China was now an advocate of a smooth transition towards two Sudans. China’s efforts to forge good business and political relations with South Sudan had proven to be successful. Driven by an anxiety to lose investments as consequence of Southern secession, China had successfully gained a foothold in Juba, establishing fairly good relations with the SPLM (Large, 2009, 2012).

After South Sudan’s secession, war broke out between the SPLA and the NCP in 2011. China assumed that the economic interdependence between the two countries would facilitate a non-problematic separation and prevent Juba and Khartoum from fighting following the secession (Verhoeven, 2014: Le Billon & Savage, 2016). The unilateral cessation of the oil production by the SPLM, following from deadlocked talks over transit fees with North Sudan proved that this was certainly not the case. This led to huge losses for Chinese oil companies and showed Beijing that a resolution to the conflict was urgent.

South Sudan was a very unstable state in which all the revenue earned from the oil-industry directly flowed to government elites. This patronage system had created an extensive militarization, because the ones who had the most military power were the ones most likely to get government positions (Large, 2016). This was demonstrated by the fact that president Salva Kiir used the promise of government positions as a way of pacifying his political rivals (Large, 2016).

In 2013, a political crisis within the high leadership of South Sudan broke out, ultimately leading to civil war. This crisis was incited by accusations aimed at Riek Machar (vice president) who allegedly was leading a coup against Salva Kiir (president) (Large, 2016). The war formed a major impediment to Chinese development programmes, which eventually were halted. China’s oil interests were also severely threatened by the conflict and forced the country to get more involved security and political wise once again stepping away from its principle of non-interference. The fighting put the lives of Chinese workers in South Sudan at direct danger, leading to CNPC and other smaller Chinese companies to evacuate its employees (Large, 2016). Other Chinese citizens fled on their own initiative. The debate between Chinese officials was whether or not they should completely leave the volatile country. Withdrawing would mean that China would lose its ability to protect its oilfields and other investments. Moreover, it would also entail that China would lose its ability to use economic
and political leverage to change the situation for the better. It therefore chose to stay in order to be able to keep influence in the whole situation (Crisis Group, 2017: Large, 2016).

For China South Sudan was a real-life experiment to test in how far the non-interference principle could be stretched. In contrast to conflicts in Asia, events in Africa are not extensively covered in Chinese domestic media. This gave the Chinese government the chance to act in a low-key manner in South Sudan (Crisis Group, 2017). Consequently the Africa Department of the foreign ministry had more possibilities for certain policy initiatives and to influence conflict resolution (Crisis Group, 2017: Large, 2016). The case of South Sudan was seen as an opportunity to experiment with ways to resolve conflict in a “Chinese manner” (Crisis Group, 2017).

**Chinese aspects of conflict resolution in South Sudan**

Chinese conflict resolution in South Sudan is characterised by different aspects. First, China mainly see itself as a facilitator of talks by bringing all the different parties to the negotiation table, using its political and economic leverage. However, proposing certain solutions or terms in agreements is also gradually incorporated in Beijing’s mediation repertoire (Crisis Group, 2017: Large, 2016). This facilitating role was demonstrated by its involvement in setting up talks between Sudan and South Sudan who were embroiled with each other over support of one another’s insurgents. (Crisis Group, 2017). Although the talks between South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) did not lead to concrete resolutions the effort was seen as a success. By showing that Sudanese meddling in South Sudanese affairs were damaging to Chinese interests and concomitantly Sudanese economic interests China eventually established a dedication to oil security in both Sudans (Crisis Group, 2017). Another aspect of Chinese conflict resolution in South Sudan is that China is opined that ‘African problems require African solutions’. This entails that Beijing puts high priority on the leading role of initiatives of African parties and aims to keep Chinese meddling to a bare minimum (Crisis Group, 2017). This is demonstrated by the fact that China is more likely to support Africa-related UN Security Council resolutions when they are backed African members.

Chinese mediation in South Sudan is also typified by its opposition to sanctions. In contrast, Beijing typically prefers persuasion behind the scenes. When sanctions are discussed by Western powers China often plays a mediating role, showing that its aversion towards sanctions is perhaps more nuanced. In July 2015, a US sponsored resolution was put forward that stipulated targeted sanctions at moderately high-ranking commanders. Beijing agreed that it would not veto these sanctions provided that the US would refrain from sanctioning higher officials (Crisis Group, 2017).

Perhaps one of the most essential differences between Western and Chinese views on ameliorating conflict are their respective ideas of the role of governance. The West generally sees the imposition of democratic institutions as a way of addressing the root causes of conflict. China however sees tackling underdevelopment as the best way to conflict resolution. In the Chinese view, its own model of governance is better suited to achieve this. The hybrid between a planned and market economy under one-party rule fits Africa better in the view of China. This model seems more attractive because the Communist Party devoid of active dissent is able to make decisions and mobilize resources quickly (Crisis Group, 2017: Verhoeven, 2014). While discretely propagating its own model, China intends to minimize the influence of Western values and ideas in South Sudan and East Africa as a whole (Crisis Group, 2017).
Conclusion

Over the years China’s policy with regard to Sudan has been subject to many changes. China’s close ties with the Sudanese government during the war in South Sudan and Darfur showed that its adherence to the principle of non-interference became ambiguous during and after the 1990s. China’s non-interference framework when strictly adhered to, did not allow for China to protect its commercial interests overseas. However international criticism towards China’s interwovenness with a regime that continuously breached international humanitarian law pushed Beijing to change its policy in the African country. Primarily for self-interested reasons pointed at protecting its oil investments China took up a more proactive role in resolving conflict in Sudan. This was witnessed by its more public criticisms of the NCP regime and its role in pressuring Bashir to allow a UN mission into his country.

Chinese involvement with South Sudan after its independence demonstrated that China was willing to adopt an increasingly active role in resolving conflict once again. South Sudan proved to be a project to see how far the principle of non-interference could be stretched and as a way for China to present itself as a global superpower. China’s interpretation of non-interference remains flexible, but a rough outline can be noticed during its involvement in South Sudan. China sees involvement in conflict as legitimate when it is authorised by the UN and regional and local consent is given. Additionally the goal of involvement should be to bring every party to the table without meddling with political outcomes. Thus, illegitimate are interventions that are intended to influence political outcomes, imposing certain governance types or influencing domestic politics in general. Furthermore, unilaterally decided intervention without UN and regional consent is out of the question for Beijing.

Although China argues against the imposition of certain government types it has been quietly propagating its own form of governance in South Sudan and East Africa at large. China has noticed that East African governments are more interested in China’s governing and development model than Western models. For this reason, China has been promoting its ideas through trainings and other forms of exchanging of information at the same opposing actions that propagate Western ideas and values. It is likely that the principle of non-interference will prove to be increasingly malleable and flexible due to China’s growing role in the global arena and international conflict.
Conclusion

This research aimed to identify if China’s policy with regard to non-interference and humanitarian intervention in Africa has changed and if so how. Based on a qualitative research consisting of a document analysis and a case study we can conclude that China’s policy has evolved over the years with regard to its adherence to the principle of non-interference and its conception of human rights. There should be made some nuances however. From the document analysis I conclude that China showed a strong consistency in the way China spoke about human rights, primarily focussing on the right to development. For this reason the largest part of the FOCAC documents were focused on economic development. Human rights such as political and civil rights had lesser priority in this discourse. I ascribed to this to the different prioritization of human rights by China. However, what is particularly salient about this is that the majority of countries present in FOCAC also subscribed to NEPAD in which civil and political rights are seen as prerequisite to sustainable development. This shows that there is a certain ambiguity present towards human rights from both sides participating in FOCAC.

With regard to humanitarian intervention I noticed significant change in China’s rhetoric. In the period from 2005 to 2009, during the war with Darfur I saw a shift to a more proactive discourse on China’s role in humanitarian intervention. I argued that China, driven by international pressure, sought to take up a more prominent role in international conflict resolution to mend its damaged international reputation. It is important to note China attributes a lot of importance to the UN as a multilateral platform from which all collective international action should depart, including humanitarian intervention. Anything that does not, is unlawful in the Chinese view. So I have seen a shift to a more proactive discourse of China towards humanitarian intervention, strongly supportive of conflict resolution missions, provided that they have a UN mandate.

From the case study I conclude that China’s adherence to non-interference started to become ambiguous, in the 1990, witnessed by its close political ties with the Sudanese regime through the oil industry. Driven by international pressure as well as self-interested reasons aimed at protecting its oil investments China took up a more proactive role in conflict resolution in Sudan. China had to show adaptability in order to protect its economic interests and at the same time mend its damaged international reputation. The case of South Sudan showed this once more. South Sudan was seen as a project to demonstrate conflict resolution the Chinese way, while testing in how far the principle of non-interference could be stretched. I concluded that China’s application will be increasingly flexible and malleable due to its growing role in the global arena.

With this improved understanding of Chinese involvement in Africa I aimed to contribute to increasing the possibility of Western cooperation with China. This with the goal to help Africa develop in a sustainable way with respect to civil and political human rights.

While researching the question arose in how far the FOCAC documents were representative for China’s foreign policy intentions. Further research could focus on ways to better determine what type of data or documents are more representative of Chinese foreign policy intentions. Furthermore, although the case study has given a good insight of Chinese involvement in Sudan and South Sudan, questions arose towards the generalizability of these cases. The research showed that China “grew” into Sudan and South Sudan policy wise, relying on a method of trial and error. This demonstrates that China does not have one specific strategy towards Africa, but that it depends on the context in which China operates. Future research could focus on mapping the different policies China has towards different countries in Africa.
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