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„China in Sudan – Non-interference as fading key element of Chinese engagement in Africa as evidenced in the Darfur conflict”

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Für meine Eltern
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Es war mir ein Bedürfnis, die folgenden Worte auf Deutsch zu schreiben, denn „matters of the heart“ werden einfach leichter in der eigenen Sprache zu Papier gebracht.

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*Wien, Jänner 2014*  
*Katharina Schreiber*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMIS</td>
<td>African Union Mission In Sudan</td>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</td>
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<td>CNPC</td>
<td>China National Petroleum Corporation</td>
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<td>CPECC</td>
<td>China Petroleum Engineering &amp; Construction Corporation</td>
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<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPA</td>
<td>Darfur Peace Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIB</td>
<td>European Investment Bank</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FLN</td>
<td>Front de Libération Nationale</td>
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<td>FOCAC</td>
<td>Forum on China-Africa Cooperation</td>
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<td>GNPOC</td>
<td>Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoNU</td>
<td>Government of National Unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoS</td>
<td>Government of Sudan</td>
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<td>GoSS</td>
<td>Government of Southern Sudan/ Government of the Republic of South Sudan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<td>ICISS</td>
<td>International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty</td>
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<td>IISS</td>
<td>International Institute for Strategic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>Institute for Security Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>JEM</td>
<td>Justice and Equality Movement</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOFCOM</td>
<td>Ministry of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>National Congress Party</td>
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<td>NIF</td>
<td>National Islamic Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONGC</td>
<td>Oil and Natural Gas Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDOC</td>
<td>Petrodar Operating Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSPOC</td>
<td>Red Sea Petroleum Operating Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAF</td>
<td>Sudan Armed Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Save Darfur Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sinopec</td>
<td>China Petrochemical Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLM</td>
<td>Sudan Liberation Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Sudan Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPLM</td>
<td>Sudan People’s Liberation Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPLA</td>
<td>Sudan People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMID</td>
<td>United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNPoA</td>
<td>United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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1. Introduction

1.1. Research interest

During the past two decades, China’s role in the international community was subjected to significant transformation processes. Rapidly accelerating economic growth rates and increasing political influence have catapulted the country among the most powerful nations in the world. With its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), Beijing secured its place among the mighty. Despite its growing global influence and economic power, however, the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s principal foreign orientation is directed towards the developing world – China still identifies itself as a developing country and continues to nurture a “victim mentality” that portrays its role as suffering from western domination.

This “dual identity” has Beijing caught in a triangle between the aspirations of a global superpower, a profound conscientiousness towards tradition as well as an ideological alliance with developing countries. Considering also accelerating globalization processes and growing interdependencies that the PRC is currently exposed to and increasingly intertwined with, it becomes evident that the country is confronted with new challenges both internally as well as externally.

Especially the PRC’s deepened profile on the African continent exemplifies how a status of rising international influence and prestige as well as the pursuit of strategic interests abroad may also incite a growing exposure to risks. China’s intensified presence there has always been strictly based on a non-interference policy. Recently, however, this has not prevented it from getting drawn into local turbulences.

The challenge number one that China is currently facing is therefore a profound “non-interference dilemma”: Beijing increasingly finds itself torn between the country’s traditional and identity-establishing emphasis on non-interference and state sovereignty, on the one hand, and the realization that constructive participation and an active positioning in global crises might be necessary to boost its image within the international community, on the other.
In Africa, the PRC has already experienced the downside of its rigid stance on non-interference and the perceived absoluteness of state sovereignty, as this has increasingly attracted international scrutiny and damaged its reputation as the self-portrayed great “benevolent power” (Medeiros 2009: 8). Primarily, this wave of criticism is mostly owing to China’s contested cooperation with African regimes that the West castigates as “pariah states”.

Particularly in Sudan, this has led to finger pointing and the general condemnation of non-interference as leading policy of the PRC’s overall Africa approach. In light of the decades-long Sudanese civil war – and continuing Chinese arms sales to the government in Khartoum – Beijing’s passive stance in conflict resolution as well as its obvious political support for the Sudanese regime created a profound collision with the West: Where the latter accuses Beijing of supporting an authoritarian regime at the cost of human rights and the suffering of the civil population, all of this under the pretext of economic cooperation, the former sees its role as the last guardian of Sudan’s sovereignty and defender against external intervention and US-American unilateralism.

Nevertheless, even Chinese policymakers had to realize eventually that its indifferent and non-involved position may prove to be detrimental to its desire of being internationally recognized as a great responsible power: Ultimately, the Darfur quandary exposed the limits to the PRC’s until then quasi-omnipotent principle of non-interference. As will become apparent, the case of China in Sudan, especially during the Darfur crisis, therefore represents an ideal example to illustrate its current foreign policy dilemma as stuck between its positioning as a benevolent great power and the safeguarding of both its national and international interests – all while trying to hold on to its principle of non-interference.

In this sense, my initial research interest for this thesis was especially triggered by the following statement: “As China emerges as a global power, Beijing’s relations with governments such as Khartoum and its response to situations such as Darfur represent a test of China’s claim to be a “responsible great power” and its self-proclaimed trajectory of […] peaceful development.” (Srinivasan 2008: 56)

The question arising at this point is therefore whether or not China’s non-interference principle is currently at the brink of radical transformation – or even dissolution. In the scope
of this thesis, I will therefore explore what transformation processes the PRC’s non-interference principle has been exposed to during the Darfur crisis, towards which other concepts it may be evolving, and what impact this could possibly have on its overall Africa policy.

1.2. Research questions and hypotheses

China’s engagement in Sudan, particularly its multifaceted role during the Darfur crisis, entails important notions for the future alignment of its position on non-interference and its general outreach to Africa. In this sense, I intend to provide a detailed picture of the foundations of the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership so as to subsequently find out what characterizes China’s position there and which challenges it was exposed to in the course of the Darfur conflict. My aim is to connect these findings to possible repercussions on and transformation processes of the PRC’s non-interference principle. By this, I hope to gain sufficient insight to see whether or not non-interference is indeed a fading key element of China’s engagement on the African continent.

The general focus of this thesis shall therefore be directed at China’s presence in Sudan. In this regard, I will present a historical perspective to outline the origins of this strategic partnership as well as the PRC’s large-scale involvement in the country’s oil sector starting in the early 1990s. In order for me to embed these findings into a more comprehensive perspective, this scope of analysis shall be accompanied by a general characterization of China’s foreign policy approach and developmental outreach to Africa.

My aim is to assess which consequences the principle of non-interference entails both for Beijing’s approach to international relations as well as its presence on the African continent. In this sense, I will strive to depict what implications and consequences the non-interference doctrine entailed for the outcome of the Darfur conflict and ultimately, for China’s reputation within the international community.

The concrete research questions of this thesis are therefore as follows:

What characterizes China’s presence in Sudan and which transformation processes was this relationship confronted with in the scope of the Darfur conflict?
Which consequences did the Darfur conflict entail for China’s principle of non-interference in Africa?

My current state of research allows me to hypothesize that China’s foreign policy doctrine of non-interference serves mostly to protect the Republic’s own interests abroad. The individual case of Darfur, however, will reveal the limitations to this approach, as in the face of new challenges and risks China had to acknowledge that non-interference was detrimental to its desired portrayal as a responsible world power.

Given the PRC’s increasing entanglement in global affairs, and, inevitably, conflicts, it is simply logical for the West to demand that China steps up and assumes the kind of responsibility that comes both with its significant level of influence on the African continent as well as its self-appointed status of a major benevolent power.

Simply put, “[a] policy of non-interference is not a credible policy for a nation that wants to be respected as a responsible global power”. (Jakobson cited in Pang 2009: 248)

I consequently assume that Darfur triggered a policy shift in Beijing’s overall Africa policy. Furthermore, I presume that the Darfur crisis bears great potential to incite China to take on a more active stance in international conflict resolution and to recognize the importance of multilateral or regional organizations (such as the United Nations or the African Union) in this endeavor. In this sense, I believe that China might stretch its policy of non-interference as much as its ideological convictions allow it in order to meet its international responsibilities and, most of all, guarantee the fulfillment of its interests.

As I hope will become apparent in the scope of the following chapters, the case of Darfur represents an emblematic example of the PRC’s first careful advances towards a deviation from its prior quasi-omnipotent principle of non-interference. The PRC’s increased commitment to international peacekeeping, for instance, is the first major indicator for this.
1.3. Scientific relevance

As I am sure most researchers affiliated with International Development Studies would agree, the case of China in Africa no longer represents an untreated object of investigation. Extensive literature was published within the past ten years or so to analyze the intensification of Sino-African ties and the consequences this strategic partnership implies for “established” western actors and their long-fought for standards of development cooperation on the continent.

We all became familiar with the term South-South cooperation, and learned to appreciate it for the new level of independence and self-determination this framework appears to provide developing countries with. We also are familiar with the cleavages between “North” and “South” as well as “West” and “East”, and their respective approaches to development, which became apparent especially in consequence to China’s rise on the African continent. However, this shall not be the subject of my thesis.

Throughout my studies, I was fascinated by the extent of the topic of China in Africa. One can easily get lost in the manifoldness of this topic, which exercises the mind of researchers and policymakers alike. My personal approach, my personal ambition for this thesis was therefore to come upon a research angle of the Sino-African relationship that is relatively recent and constitutes an important contribution to the field of development studies. I am confident that the chosen case of China in Sudan will allow me to live up to these requirements, and I hope that it will fascinate this thesis’ readers as much as it captivated me.

Especially in light of increasing incidents of multilateral peacekeeping operations in contemporary political hotspots, China’s non-interference approach became an aspect to international conflict resolution that necessitates a detailed examination. This essentiality is even more evidenced in light of the Darfur crisis, where non-interference appears to have obstructed international efforts to bring a halt to ongoing violence. I therefore chose the case of Sudan and the Darfur crisis as paramount example for the PRC’s eventual realization that clinging to its non-interference principle solely out of obligation towards tradition and ideology was not advantageous in the long run.

Both the PRC’s economy and international influence grow steadily, Chinese policymakers put considerable effort into branding their country as responsible world power, and the PRC
has, now more than ever, vital interests abroad. The question I am consequently raising is whether the non-interference principle is beneficial in safeguarding these factors or, to the contrary, will stand in China’s way in its ascent on the international staircase.

We will see how the Chinese response to this question turned out in Sudan – and which predictions in regard to the future of non-interference in Africa can be made. I strive to illustrate these careful changes in detail and to explore possible new diplomatic directions China’s non-interference principle might lean towards.

1.4. Applied methods
I hoped to verify my hypothesis in reference to the country study of Sudan by basing my methodological approach on qualitative data analysis. In light of the vast array of research material that addresses the subjects of interest in my individual case, I approached the endeavor of responding to my research questions primarily by means of literature reviews and content analysis.

In specific, I employed primary sources like declarations or statements by relevant actors, held within the framework of or in reference to multilateral conferences. I further operated with official documents like UNSC resolutions, reports of human rights organizations, public releases by state embassies, or the Chinese government’s White Papers. Most of all, however, my analysis relied on US-American, European, and Chinese scholars whose work relates strongly to this thesis’ topic. Insights drawn from international media reports shall also be incorporated in my literature review.

As a student of interdisciplinary social science studies, I am aware of the fact that reality is “constructed” and that there is no such thing as true objectivity. I therefore based this thesis’ methodological approach on the work of Johan Galtung (Galtung 1978), who has created a revolutionary approach to knowledge acquisition within the fields of International Relations, Peace Studies, as well as Development Studies. (cf. Galtung Insititut 2014)

In specific, I am referring here to his term of “tripartite science” which consists of data, theories, and values. In this regard, according to Galtung, what is most important for the work

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1 Such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) ministerial conferences or United Nations assemblies.
of a scientist is not that he or she believes in the values that are necessary to attain knowledge. Rather, the empirical, critical, and constructive analyses should move towards each other as this is the only way to facilitate a critical analysis of society. (cf. Galtung 1978: 93)

Furthermore, I oriented my methodological approach towards the twelve distinguishing features of qualitative research as defined by Flick, Kardoff, and Steinke. Most noteworthy for my case are a motif of contextuality, incorporating the perspectives of the concerned parties, reflexivity of the researcher, having a case analysis as starting point, and, most importantly, perceiving reality as constructed. (cf. Flick/Kardoff/Steinke cited in Kuckartz 2012: 17-18)

Finally, I applied the principle of a hermeneutic data analysis to my case study of China in Sudan, which aims at comprehending, but not explaining human behavior. In essence, the method of hermeneutic interpretation assumes that visual perceptions and individual mindsets always influence our scientific perspective. It is therefore fundamental to question one’s own academic and/or personal background and external influences so as to get as close to an integral way of viewing things as possible. Johann Martin Chladenius’ concept of “viewing points” falls in line with this methodological approach. (cf. Ramberg/Gjesdal 2005)

In this regard, a “hermeneutic circle”, “the movement back and forth between the parts and the whole of the text” (Ramberg/Gjesdal 2005), serves as adequate example to emphasize this line of thought, as it reminds us of the fact that before we start examining a research field, we already dispose of a certain pre-knowledge. What we do not know will be completed by further study. (cf. Ramberg/Gjesdal 2005).

Especially within the discipline of development and social science studies it is imperative to be aware of one’s own background and environment, as these preconditions essentially shape one’s way of looking at things and interpreting results. I therefore consider it crucial to emphasize that I am consciously trying not to let my analysis be blurred by a Eurocentric\(^2\) angle. As there is generally a “tendency to demonise and over-determine China’s role by

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\(^2\)“Focusing on European culture or history to the exclusion of a wider view of the world; implicitly regarding European culture as pre-eminent. (Oxford Dictionaries 2013a)
Western critics” (Power/Mohan 2011: 43), I will deliberately exercise caution not to be influenced by this kind of rhetoric.

Considering also that due to language barriers my research has been confined to English, or, occasionally, German documents, it is even more vital to keep the aspect of a certain academic incompleteness in mind – as I unfortunately do not master Mandarin. To a certain extent, my analysis is therefore limited.

Furthermore, I am not raising the claim for a generalization of the results of my research, as the political, economic, and military actions of China in Sudan can be applied to other (African) countries only to a limited degree. However, it is obvious that states formulate their foreign policy doctrines and developmental policies according to a defined framework of their political values and economic interests. Consequently, a consistent conduct in international relations can be assumed, which further implies a homogenous behavior of Chinese state actors in Africa.

In order to avoid conceptual or terminological ambiguity, I shall clarify and determine the terms used within the scope of this thesis. In addition, due to reasons of uniformity, I would like to point out that this thesis was written in US-American English. I am aware of resulting inconsistencies as several citations are composed in British English. Due to academic correctness, however, I preferred to leave them as they were in their original version.

Finally, it seems important to emphasize that when speaking of the global “North” as opposed to the global “South”, I am applying these terms according to Renu Modi’s definition:

The term ‘South’ has been used as a generic concept to classify countries that are in binary opposition to the category of the ‘North’, whereby the former is a group of countries that are underdeveloped while the latter refers to those that are developed, industrialized and have a higher level of economic and financial infrastructure.

(Modи 2011: 1)

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3 The most pertinent example here would be Zimbabwe.
1.5. Theoretical framework

As I assume that China’s presence in Sudan is spurred by economic modernization incentives, and that its approach to development there embraces primarily the notion of industrial development, I will refer to modernization theory as conceptual and theoretical basis of the Sino-Sudanese partnership.

In addition, I aim to embrace a postcolonial perspective so as to gain subjacent insights into China’s developmental approach to Sudan. This will allow me to further analyze the historical origins of this relationship as founded in shared experiences of colonialism and foreign domination. As will become apparent, this colonial past’s repercussions are still felt at present and have contributed significantly to the marginalization of Sudan’s peripheries. In relation to this, I will refer to Gunnar Myrdal’s approach of “circular causation in a cumulative process” in order to explain Darfur’s economically and politically deprived status.

The concepts of South-South cooperation as well as Christopher M. Dent’s “development relations” shall be addressed within the theoretical section of this thesis as possible alternatives to a modernization-based development approach.

1.6. Structure

This thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 presents China’s contemporary foreign policy concepts and ideological frameworks. The PRC’s external relations as well as the traditional pillars its approach to international relations rests on will be outlined. Special emphasis will be put on the portrayal of the non-interference principle.

Chapter 3 depicts China’s role as a donor on the African continent. The main characteristics of Chinese development cooperation in Africa will be presented and be compared to the OECD’s aid regime so as to find out about differences and/or similarities between these two blocs within the African aid architecture.

Chapter 4 provides a historic overview of Sino-African ties starting in the 1950s and culminating in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), whose latest ministerial conference was held in 2012.
Chapter 5 gets to the heart of things and presents an outline of China’s strategic partnership with Sudan. Special emphasis will be laid on its role in the country’s oil sector as well as on being an ideological ally in times of western isolation.

Chapter 6 creates a theoretical framework in which the Sino-Sudanese partnership will be analyzed in reference to economic modernization theory. Gunnar Myrdal’s theory of “circular causation in a cumulative process” will describe Darfur’s chronic status of “underdevelopment” and marginalization. This will be followed by a fundamental critique of the modernization narrative and the attempt to establish alternative concepts of South-South cooperation and development relations as different theoretical concepts to the Chinese development approach in Sudan.

Chapter 7 jumps back to China’s present involvement with the Sudanese regime and addresses the somber aspects of this strategic partnership: Both the militarization of oil development as well as the PRC’s arms transfers to Khartoum will be analyzed within the scope of this section.

Chapter 8 is dedicated to the events surrounding the conflict in Darfur. It will particularly concentrate on China’s role and shed light on the increasing constraints its principle of non-interference was confronted with. Furthermore, the strategies that initially characterized Beijing’s passive and uncooperative position, hindering international conflict resolution efforts, will be outlined. This chapter will also, however, draw a comprehensive picture on the metamorphosis that transformed both China’s role in Sudan as well as its non-interference principle.

Chapter 9 deals with the repercussions of the Darfur conflict on the PRC’s non-interference policy and drafts a careful portrayal of the adaptations this principle is currently approaching.

Finally, Chapter 10 addresses China’s recent diplomatic handshake with the newborn state of South Sudan.
2. China’s external relations

China’s current role in world affairs is of contradictory nature: Its rise to a global economic and political power during the past two decades has become today’s reality, and at the same time its official status is still that of a developing country. Beijing’s international position can thus be characterized as caught between the aspirations of an evolving world power with significant influence on the globe on the one side, and its role as a member of the developing world on the other.

The gradual establishment of the PRC as a great power entails new opportunities, new responsibilities, but also the exposure to new risks – its current status is therefore ambiguous.

In this context, what shall be of special interest here is how China assesses its own standing in international relations, and how its foreign policy orientation responds to the PRC’s gradual repositioning as another major power in the global system. The aim of this chapter is therefore to outline China’s external relations and the ideological pillars that they are based on. In particular, I intend to focus my research on the principle of “non-interference” and the consequences that this foundation of Chinese foreign policy implies for the PRC’s engagement with other nations and multilateral institutions.

2.1. China as a global actor – between “victim mentality” and “super power” status

China’s experiences of foreign occupation, especially the forced opening of its economy by the British in 1839 that sparked the Opium War, which went on until 1842, and led on through “a century of humiliation” (Meyer 1999), have significantly shaped the PRC’s political perception of the world. They were also crucial for the constitution of the country’s role in international affairs and the concrete orientation of its external relations.

It therefore comes as no surprise that various authors believe that China currently is in the “process of reclaiming its lost status as a ‘great power’ – Evan S. Medeiros calls this process “National Revitalization”. (Medeiros 2009: 7) With this term, he describes the majority of the Chinese public predominantly referring to earlier periods such as the Han, Tang, and late Ming/early Qing dynasties, when China used to be a “highly advanced, culturally sophisticated, technologically developed society that contributed significantly to the global
economy and [...] was internationally revered and respected”. (Medeiros 2009: 8) According to this perception, the PRC at present would consequently be in the process of restoring its “rightful place in the world as a great power”: “[...] China is currently returning to this past role as a benevolent great power, and in doing so is correcting the historical aberration of China’s decline over the last 150 years since the Opium War of the 1840s.” (Medeiros 2009: 8-9)

There is another perspective among Chinese scholars and national public opinion that is of outspoken importance to the formulation of Chinese external relations today. It addresses the perception that China is “a victim of ‘100 years of humiliation’” by western powers and Japan, which “invaded, divided, and weakened” the country until Mao Zedong proclaimed the People’s Republic of China in 1949. (Medeiros 2009: 10) This victim mentality obviously has great impact both on China’s national identity and how it perceives its place in the international system, as well as on the legitimization efforts of the Chinese Communist regime. (Medeiros 2009: 10) Moreover, the PRC’s self-perception as a victim of western interventionism has engendered a characterizing “sensitivity” in regard to the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. This has essentially influenced the importance that the principles of equality, mutual respect and non-interference entail for Chinese diplomacy. (ibid.)

These principles also entail importance for the research interest of this thesis, as they represent the decisive factor to allow a characterization of Chinese diplomacy as meeting other countries at eye level and renouncing any form of international hierarchies: In the eyes of the PRC’s leadership, all countries are equal. As past centuries of European imperialism and colonialism around the globe as well as failed, top-down approaches of western countries and institutions in the developing world have demonstrated, the Chinese perception of being on an equal footing with every other country in the international arena stands in stark contrast with western notions of foreign engagement. Obviously, the PRC’s victim mentality has significantly shaped the Chinese approach to international affairs.

But what about China’s rise to a global economic and political power, a fact that scholars hypothesizing about such Chinese “victim mentality” couldn’t possibly just have overlooked? Medeiros has the answer to this question: According to his research, in recent years, the PRC’s victim mentality has been changing and evolving, leading to the discussion of possibly
adopting a “great power mentality” among Chinese officials and scholars. However, “the victimization theme persists and is common in nationalist rhetoric on China’s foreign affairs”. (Medeiros 2009: 11)

Generally speaking, we can classify today’s China as caught between its unaltered prevailing status as a development country and its growing transformation towards an international power of economic and political influence and prestige. The PRC’s current economic growth and continuous ascent to a potential world power notwithstanding, the Chinese official position on its status in the international community is that of a developing country, as hard as it may seem to believe. This becomes evident when consulting the Chinese government’s White Paper on China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation in 2010, where it is officially noted that “China is the largest developing country in the world”. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2010) Three years later, in August 2013, the PRC’s leadership again reaffirmed the country’s continuing process of development: “China, the world's largest developing country, has maintained forward momentum in its development.” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2013)

China’s current intermediate position between that of a developing nation and its simultaneous rise to a position of global economic and political power represents a certain “dilemma” which started in the 1980s. At the time, the PRC leadership found itself entangled in a conflict between either prioritizing the necessity of fostering China’s internal development or tending to the foreign policy aspirations that came with its status as a rising global power: “China’s dilemma was that it was a developing nation with limited resources and high internal demands, but it was also an aspiring world power with global interests […].” (Yu 1988: 858)

Twenty years later, this situation is more or less the same: Both the Chinese leadership and academic discourse are dominated by the belief that China is a country characterized by a “dual-identity”:

On the one hand, China is a great nation for its long unbroken history, its contribution to the progress of civilization, its vast territory and population, and its significant geographic location. China’s greatness is also rooted in its permanent membership in the UN Security Council and in its nuclear capacity.
On the other hand, both political elites and ordinary people understand that today’s China is still a poor country; its levels of economic development and technological progress lag far behind those of Western countries and some of its Asian neighbors.

(Wu 2001: 293)

A consequence of this dual-identity syndrome is the emergence of both internal as well as external problems. Addressing these problems, Wu Xinbo has outlined the PRC’s current difficulty to act in accordance with both identities. As the author’s research has shown, externally, within world affairs, China sometimes seems reluctant to act in accordance with its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and therefore as an aspiring world power. As a consequence, such behavior may incite other nations to regard the PRC as “parochial power” (Wu 2001: 294) and may lead other actors within foreign affairs to not take the PRC’s international position seriously. Internally, China’s inability to act with more visible influence in international affairs induces a certain frustration within the major public and creates the impression that China is “far from being accepted as a great power”. (Wu 2001: 294)

As we can see, China still has a long way to go, both internally as well as externally, before a lasting acceptance of its status as a world power of global and political influence may be within close reach. Actions, instead of words, will have to be taken by the Chinese leadership – the PRC will gradually have to comply with international norms and contribute its share, as all global powers do, to multilateral institutions. That includes responding to international crises and playing a more significant role in global conflict resolution and peacekeeping – such as in Sudan. And that may also include a deviation from China’s hitherto supreme principle of non-interference. Exactly this shall be my subject of interest in the following chapters.

2.2. Core interests and diplomatic priorities

By outlining the PRC’s core national interests and diplomatic priorities, I aim to provide a detailed picture of the underlying motivations that characterize Chinese foreign policy. In this sense, I hope to make visible the official strategies shaping China’s basic approach when engaging with other countries. Particular emphasis shall be laid upon its distinguishing principle of non-interference, as this will be of further importance to this thesis’ research interest when I take a closer look at the PRC’s engagement with Sudan.
2.2.1. Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence

In general, Chinese external relations are based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which were officially proclaimed in 1954 by then-Premier Zhou Enlai and again reiterated in the course of the first Asian-African Conference, the Bandung Conference, in 1955. In 1982, the Chinese constitution incorporated them as a foundational element and until today regards them as “fundamental principle for China in fostering and developing friendly relations with all the countries in the world”. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Lesotho N.D.)

Precisely, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence consist of:

1. Mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity
2. Non-aggression
3. Non-interference in each other’s internal affairs
4. Equality and mutual benefit
5. Peaceful coexistence

(Taylor 2006: 18)

Until today they have remained the guideline for China’s foreign policy behavior, as can be seen from the PRC’s White Paper on China’s Peaceful Development of 2011: “China will continue to promote friendly relations with the other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

Their importance for the general research interest of this thesis are again constituted within the element of equality that binds China to meeting other countries at eye level as well as the complete absence of any expansionist or non-peaceful behavior or meddling with the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. For the PRC’s policy-makers, this characterization stands in clear opposition to western ambitions of spreading its canon of values and sphere of influence. Especially the African continent has been a venue for these contrasting approaches to clash.
2.2.2. Current foreign policy strategies and goals

In the government position paper mentioned above, the Chinese leadership has outlined its current foreign policy value propositions as well as its core state interests. Most importantly, they include state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

Related to this, Evan S. Medeiros’ classification of three overall terms in the PRC’s core diplomatic interests shows clear overlaps with the official statement made in the White Paper. His definition locates three core interests at the heart of China’s foreign and security policy since 1949:

1. Sovereignty and territorial integrity
2. Economic development
3. International respect and status

(Medeiros 2009: 13)

For the research interest of this thesis, Medeiros’ third core interest of Chinese foreign policy is particularly important and shall be further elaborated on because of the following statement:

China cares about its image because it wants to be accepted as a member of the international community and does not like being ostracized or otherwise isolated, especially in international institutions.

(Medeiros 2009: 17)

Here, one can see clearly how much Beijing aspires to be internationally recognized as an international power that can be trusted and cooperated with. This desire dates back to the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident in 1989, when the Chinese Communist regime faced political isolation and economic embargoes from the West because of its violent crackdown of student and civil society demonstrations.

Not only did this event “embarrass the Chinese government”, but it also “produced the most sincere denunciation in the developed world regarding the actions of the Chinese leadership”. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 750) As a consequence from the West’s condemnation of the Tiananmen massacre and its scrutinizing look on Chinese human rights records from then on,
the PRC’s leadership was confronted with harsh isolation from the developed world and found itself excluded from the West’s trading floors and diplomatic corps. Who did it turn to in response? Africa – of course:

Facing the unwanted perspective of becoming a pariah in the ashes of the cold war, China launched a diplomatic offensive targeting the third world, and Africa in particular, in an attempt to realign its international relations and circumvent isolation from the developed world.

(Alden/Alves 2008: 53)

Especially its relationship with Sudan will demonstrate how shared experiences of western isolation have significantly contributed to the nurturing of China’s strategic partnerships with contested African regimes.

Given that there was practically no other way to turn during this period, China purposefully renewed and intensified its focus on its African partner countries – no matter their international status or human rights records – as a way to spruce up its image within the developing world and find consolation in bilateral trade agreements.

In this sense, the Chinese reaffirmation of its Third World identity is best explained in Naidu and Mbazima’s words, whose research has shown that “[t]he fragile relations with the West […] compelled Beijing to reconsider its relations with the developing world. This meant re-elevating the status of the Third World in China’s foreign policy thinking”. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 750)

At this point one should be able to see clearly how China repeatedly used its status as a developing country in order to secure its self-proclaimed role in the international community and to counterbalance the occidental power bloc. Obviously, such “Third World Identity” contributed significantly to Sino-African cooperation: Given that both African pariah states such as Sudan as well as the Chinese regime felt their power base threatened by western condemnations of their poor human rights records and lack of fundamental rights, it was easy for them to once more fall back on their shared experiences of imperialism and colonialism. (Naidu/Mbazima 750)

Consequently, mutual interlinkages based on a common past and a common identity between China and African developing countries were further deepened and should further strengthen the PRC’s focus on countries that were also neglected by the West as preferential partners for
South-South Cooperation. “The anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonist rhetoric was revived, and has remained as a rhetorical device in the PRC’s foreign policy.” (Taylor 2006: 62) Therefore, as will eventually become evident at a later point of this thesis, Sino-Sudanese ties should be viewed within the context of a shared colonial heritage and the necessity to make up for western economic and political alienation.

In this sense, the Chinese experience of international isolation after the Tiananmen crisis has left deep marks in the PRC’s future foreign policy alignment.

Still, despite its warm reception in contested African regimes like Sudan or Zimbabwe, the events of 1989 nevertheless prompted the Chinese leadership to nurse a long-term strategy that deliberately promotes China’s image as that of a harmonious and peaceful power. Since the beginning of the 1990s, this strategy has reinforced the country’s long-term national diplomatic priority of international respect and status through direct efforts in promoting China as a “responsible major power” (Medeiros 2009: 17). The intention of such efforts is to make the PRC seem suitable as a trustworthy world power that can be cooperated with internationally.

Essentially, Chinese policy-makers try to show their support for international rules, norms, and institutions and, even more importantly, are “playing a more active and constructive role in international organizations – such as the U.N. Security Council [and the] the World Trade Organization […] – to demonstrate that China is a force for stability and economic development”. (Medeiros 2009: 18)

China’s involvement in Sudan, especially during the Darfur crisis, will ultimately display how and in what scope China has put into action this attempt of achieving international recognition as a “major responsible power”.

**2.2.3. Combating US-American hegemony and unilateralism**

„A key dimension of Chinese foreign policy at the global level is an overriding concern with American hegemony.“ (Alden 2005: 152) With this statement, Chris Alden captures what has been the underlying notion of China’s external relations since the eruption of the Cold War. Until today, the fight against unilateralism in general and the US-American superpower in
particular has been one of, if not the most prevailing characteristic(s) of Chinese foreign policy. It is closely interconnected with other top security interests and national principles of the PRC, such as the country’s predominant concern for sovereignty and non-interference. This all becomes apparent when taking a look at the Chinese leadership’s statement in their position paper on China’s Peaceful Development in 2011: “It [China A/N] is opposed to the big bullying the small and the strong oppressing the weak, and to hegemonism and power politics”. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

Initially, the PRC’s emerging foreign policy was heavily influenced by the Soviet Union and therefore positioned in direct opposition to the western superpower: The support China received from the Soviet Union through the Sino-Soviet alliance contributed significantly to its foreign policy orientation.

Even when the alliance between China and the Soviet Union started to crumble eventually and the PRC stood up to position itself and its foreign policy independently from its former ideological ally, the quasi-natural obligation of combating US-American imperialism prevailed. In the post-1989 period, the PRC was anxious to apply a more active and independent foreign policy due to the expected rise of the “uncontested international hegemony of the US”. (Tull 2006: 461) The PRC’s fear was that this would possibly curtail its rise to a “global political power” and, as a consequence, reacted accordingly by promoting a multi-polar world system and simultaneously repositioning its status in the developing world:

With the demise of the Cold War altering the balance of power in the global system towards unilateralism, China took advantage of the situation to push for a multi-polar world order that resisted Western and, in particular, US hegemony. Realizing that this would find support in the developing world, China reasserted a foreign policy based on non-interference in state sovereignty and on non-alignment that eschewed hegemony.

(Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 751)

It therefore becomes apparent that Beijing’s unease with too much unilateral US-American influence on the globe served as motivation for Chinese foreign policy-makers to deepen their engagement with “strategic partners outside of Washington’s outreach.” (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 756) Primarily, these strategic partners were found within the developing world, and in particular on the African continent as the latter constituted a “possible third force independent of any major powers” (Taylor 2006: 4) for China.
This perspective explains for the most part why Beijing still ascribes such importance to bilateral cooperation with developing countries in Africa: Besides economic benefits and the access to natural resources that are vital for the upkeeping of China’s impressive growth rates, the PRC is additionally securing its role in international institutions through the impartial support of these countries. With this foreign policy orientation, China once again positions itself within the circle of developing nations and thus reaffirms its national identity as one of them.

A further aspect that is incorporated in China’s affirmation to combat “hegemony” and of further importance to my research interest is the PRC’s distinct aversion of the western concept of human rights. This can be ascribed to Beijing’s fear that a large-scale promotion of western-led human rights campaigns in the global South could be a way the West might seek to undermine the Chinese position within international relations and the global economy. As a result, Chinese policy makers have taken on to increasingly shrug off talks of democracy and human rights “as a tool of neo-imperialism” (Taylor 2006: 68).

As will become evident in the following chapters, China has to a considerable amount expanded both its political influence as well as the realization of its economic and geostrategic interests on the African continent. This is because the Chinese way of engaging on an equal footing with its partner countries made it an alternative to the western top-down approach, which is mostly characterized by a distinct donor-recipient relationship. China has therefore presented itself as a true alternative to both the “hegemonic” United States of America and Africa’s former European colonizers.

Almost naturally, the Chinese alternative has been welcomed with open arms by various contested African regimes, with Sudan and Zimbabwe leading the way. This is mostly due to the lack of conditions that would otherwise oblige these countries to adhere to standard human rights commitments. As China claims not to interfere with inner-state affairs of its partner countries on the one hand and doesn’t approve of the western concept of human rights for fear this could one day be turned against itself, on the other, it seems quite logical that South-South cooperation between China and contested regimes like Sudan have flourished in the past decades.

The following statement serves as predominant explanation in regard to this issue:
China is a partner that does not seek to interfere and in fact provides a discourse around human rights and state sovereignty that patrimonial leaders can embrace as a means to legitimize their own rule and ward off Western interference. (Taylor 2008: 71)

In the face of the success that China’s non-interference strategy has encountered on the African continent, it appears that the PRC’s future foreign policy will continue to include the fight against US-American hegemony and the western perception of human rights. The outcome of this scenario will inevitably depend on the support China receives from its partner countries in the developing world – with Africa at the very front.

2.2.4. Hu Jintao’s concept of a “harmonious world”

Officially proclaimed in 2005 at the summit for the UN’s 60th anniversary by then-Chinese president Hu Jintao, the concept of a harmonious world in international affairs clearly reflects the influence of morals and tradition in Chinese society and international relations. (Liu 2012: 165) Hu’s calls for establishing a harmonious world therefore represent also an external expression of his domestic endeavor to build a “harmonious society” and mirror his personal attempt at defining a distinct approach to foreign policy. (Medeiros 2009: 48-49)

According to Medeiros, for Hu, a harmonious world is “one in which states act in ways that respect each other’s national sovereignty, tolerate diversity […] and promote national development by equitably spreading economic benefits”. (Medeiros 2009: 49) In this sense, the concept of a harmonious world can be integrated in the PRC’s overarching approach of engagement with foreign countries as it contains the aspects of sovereignty and mutual benefit. In a way, as will become evident at a later point in this thesis, Hu’s approach of a harmonious world can therefore also be ascribed to China’s engagement with Sudan, given that the PRC’s initial reluctance to support UN peacekeeping forces on Sudanese territory can be explained with its firm stance on the inviolability of a state’s sovereignty – just like the harmonious world perception determines it.

In his conclusion at the UN summit, Hu once again stressed China’s role in promoting international peace and equality as well as its firm condemnation of unilateralism and hegemony:
We will continue to hold high the banner of peace, development and cooperation, unswervingly follow the road of peaceful development, firmly pursue the independent foreign policy of peace and dedicate ourselves to developing friendly relations and cooperation with all countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. […] China’s development, instead of hurting or threatening anyone, can only serve peace, stability and common prosperity in the world.

(Hu 2005)

It seems that after the inclusion of the harmonious world concept into the PRC’s foreign policy framework, China’s diplomatic sphere of influence has expanded significantly. This took place mostly towards the developing world in general and Africa in particular. (Masuda 2009: 58) Such developments stand in strong correlation with Masuda’s findings that inside China, most scholars interpret the harmonious world approach as a consequence of China’s new position within the international community or as a change of the PRC’s perspective facing the outside world. (Masuda 2009: 58)

2.3. Non-interference as China’s gate to the developing world

The PRC’s probably most controversial element of its foreign policy framework is embodied in the principle of non-interference. Together with other fundamental Chinese foreign policy elements such as state sovereignty and equality in international affairs, it was formally established in the 1950s. (Pang 2009: 239) Until today, non-interference represents the key pillar of China’s external relations.

Li Anshan, Associate Director of the Chinese Society for African History Studies, defines non-interference as follows:

This principle emphasizes sovereignty as the common denominator among all nations regardless of other factors, and fundamentally holds that all countries should be equal and no country has the right to dictate the sovereign affairs of others.

(Li 2007:75)

In reality, though, the non-interference principle has served to protect China’s own sovereign rights (Li 2007:75) as the analysis of both Li’s and Pang’s documents reveals: “Today, China continues to use the principle to resist the Western intervention into its own domestic politics.” (Pang 2009: 238)

By stating that China would never interfere in another country’s internal affairs, its leadership therefore simultaneously expects that the same standards be applied to China in order to
ensure that nobody infringes its national sovereignty. The overriding concern with sovereignty has thus incited Chinese authorities to put the non-interference principle on top of their external relations agenda. It has therefore steadily shaped China’s official foreign policy approach within its bilateral engagements with other countries as well as its diplomatic alignment in the scope of international relations.

Constanze Müller’s analysis of the PRC’s non-interference principle turns out quite critically. In her paper “China’s Engagement in Africa: Rhetoric and Reality” (published in German)⁴, she comes to the conclusion that especially in cases related to human rights issues, non-intervention is solely applied in a rhetorical way: On the one hand, Chinese diplomats use the principle in order to counter western criticism on its human rights records. On the other, by pushing forward non-interference as basis for negotiation, they reassure African countries that no intervention of western type would ever occur from the hands of the Chinese. (Müller 2006: 99)

It comes as no big surprise, then, that the persistence of China’s non-interference principle has engendered frictions between the PRC and the West. The latter in general embraces the opinion that external interference in state affairs may be necessitated under conditions of imminent humanitarian tragedies – a belief that has found official expression with the passage of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) doctrine by the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001. (Pang 2009: 240)

China, however, sees itself as a vigorous defender of national sovereignty and non-interference and therefore explicitly opposes international intervention as a matter of principle.

In this context, the issue of human rights stresses this contradiction between western and Chinese perceptions on external interference in a country’s inner-state affairs quite illustratively: Whereas the West believes that the concept of human rights has developed out of the need to protect citizens from state abuse, to China and most African nations, sovereignty should be on top of each country’s national agenda. In light of their shared experiences of foreign repression and a history of western colonial rule, this prioritization

may even seem plausible. Accordingly, the PRC considers western human rights-based concerns in (African) developing countries as “interference in its domestic affairs and a violation of its national sovereignty”. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 751)

Consequently, in the eyes of the PRC, by no means should human rights be used as a reason for one country to interfere in the internal affairs of another’s. The strategy behind this conviction is well-calculated and, in the long run, essential for the retention of power by the Communist regime: “By holding to this principle, China can both ensure its own sovereignty and gain the trust of African nations.” (Li 2007: 75)

The Chinese official position on human rights has come across profound reverberation on the African continent, where the establishment of a Sino-African strategic relationship has thriven tremendously during the past decades. This fact may also significantly be owing to similar perceptions on development and human rights of China and its partner countries in Africa. As Ian Taylor notes, “China and Africa to a large extent share the same attitude towards human rights. [...] They put economic rights over political rights and assign the highest priority to the right to development.” (Taylor 2008: 82)

It therefore seems that “sovereignty trumps other norms” (Taylor 2006: 69) – even those of human rights. He Wenping, Director of the African Studies Section at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, shares this opinion. Cited by Paul Mooney in his article “China’s African Safari”, He states that “China and Africa share the view that countries should not meddle in each other's affairs [...] We don't believe that human rights should stand above sovereignty” and, “[w]e have a different view on this, and African countries share our view”. (He cited in Mooney 2004)

In this sense, China appears to see its role as some sort of defender of Africa’s sovereignty. Consequently, the country’s initial threat of vetoing the presence of UN peacekeepers on Sudanese soil at the peak of the Darfur crisis has to be seen from this perspective.

As one can see, the Sino-African partnership is based on firm ground thanks to mutual perceptions in regard to the essential notion of human rights and state sovereignty. This for the most part explains why the PRC’s position in bilateral trade and aid agreements with Africa has gained such momentum. Considering the high levels of success China has
achieved with its unalterable strategy of non-interference on the African continent, evidently there has not yet been any reason for Chinese policy makers to deviate from this approach.

In confirmation of the above-mentioned findings, Pang Zhongying notes that there currently are three purposes serving China’s persistence in advocating the non-interference principle:

1. Non-interference holds the notion of defending China’s sovereignty from the “superpower threat” and other external interferences with the PRC’s state affairs.
2. The promotion of non-interference helps China to “create and maintain a deep political affinity with the wider developing world”.
3. Sticking to the non-interference principle allows China to “justify avoiding becoming involved in international crises” that are not of Chinese national interests.

(Pang 2009: 244-245)

As will be illustrated within the scope of this thesis, in the case of Sudan, especially the third purpose is of great significance: In the majority of cases, Beijing feels great reluctance to participate in international interventions initiated by western powers. In such instances – as was initially the case during the Darfur crisis – the PRC falls back on its principle of non-interference to “justify its inaction or opposition”. (Pang 2009: 245)

Consequently, China’s role in international conflict resolution is one of a kind:

Unlike other great powers from the West […], China plays a unique role in international cooperation and conflict because its adherence to the principle of ‘non-interference’ in the domestic affairs of other countries has conditioned and constrained its […] involvement with, or responses to, international crises, conflicts and their settlement.

(Pang 2009: 238)

However, the individual case of China’s involvement in the Darfur crisis will clearly show how its long-untouched doctrine of non-interference has come under increasing strain in recent years. With Darfur, the PRC has found itself involved in a conflict that could bear the potential to change its up to now persistent application on non-interference as its foreign policy’s key pillar. It is the conflict between strictly adhering to its principle of non-interference out of both ideological conviction and tradition on the one hand, and the supporting or approving of international interventions orchestrated by the United Nations as
an obligation that derives from the PRC’s recently claimed “responsible great power” status on the other that may challenge the principles of its foreign policy.

Jonathan Holslag’s statement confirms this perspective:

On the one side is the traditional emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, principles that proved to be lucrative in carving out economic deals in Sudan and elsewhere in Africa […]. On the other side we find constructive engagement […] necessary to maintain good relations with other world powers and to play a role in multilateral organizations.

(Holslag 2008: 72-73)

Holslag’s statement also confirms the “non-interference dilemma” China faces today, as has already been outlined by Pang. (cf. Pang 2009: 246) In regard to this dilemma, Wu’s analysis of China’s contemporary approach towards international relations seems appropriate to deepen that line of thought:

[China’s strong sovereignty concern has led it to hold onto a tight concept of sovereignty and noninterference into internal affairs. This not only limits China’s flexibility in the international arena but also makes Beijing unable to respond convincingly to criticism from Western nations of its internal policies on political reform and human rights. […] On the other hand, driven by the need to integrate itself into the international economic system and to maintain sound political and economic relations with Western nations, China has been gradually adjusting its position on sovereignty issues.]

(Wu 2001: 296)

As can be seen from this interpretation, and as has already been outlined in chapter 2.2. in reference to Medeiros, China ambitiously seeks acceptance as a “benevolent great power” (Medeiros 2009: 8) and puts great efforts into conveying the impression that it is willing to contribute its share in international peace-keeping and conflict resolution. This in fact has proven to be true – and additionally confirms Wu’s results stated above – when taking a look at the PRC’s increasing participation in UN peace-keeping operations in recent years:

China’s position on UN Peacekeeping Operations changed from principled opposition and non-participation in the 1970s, over support and non-participation in the 1980s, to support and participation in the 1990s.

(Holslag 2008: 73)

The imperative precondition for Chinese participation in UN peacekeeping operations, however, is that the UN Security Council holds a mandate for the respective intervention and
that it is performed under strict adherence to the Charter of the United Nations: “[E]ven though [the] Chinese government has to some extent accepted the RtoP concept, the prerequisite still remains to be authorized by the UN Security Council.” (Liu 2012: 163)

What should therefore be emphasized at this point is that the PRC’s enhanced participation in UN peacekeeping operations represents a “major indicator of China’s foreign policy shift”. (Pang 2009: 242) As it seems, concepts and principles within the Chinese external relations framework are not as firmly entrenched as assumed.

2.4. China’s peaceful development

China has declared to the rest of the world on many occasions that it takes a path of peaceful development and is committed to upholding world peace and promoting common development and prosperity for all countries.

(Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

The “development path” that the PRC has chosen for itself is peaceful. The concept of this development in fact represents a “strategic choice” that aims to realize modernization and has been pursued with the principal goal of creating a peaceful and stable international environment for the PRC’s national development. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

The central strategy within China’s pursuit of peaceful development is to “promote development and harmony domestically and pursue cooperation and peace internationally”. (ibid.) It thus stands in close correlation with Hu Jintao’s concept of a harmonious world5 and seeks to enhance China’s strategic weight in international relations by continuously asserting that it does not aspire after global hegemony.

Medeiros’ findings in regard to China’s defensive security outlook confirm this perspective. By citing official Chinese policymakers, Medeiros states that “China will never seek hegemony and never go in for expansion” and that “they [the Chinese A/N] do not seek to seize, invade, or conquer the territories of other countries”. (Medeiros 2009: 12) This in turn stresses once again the PRC’s promotion of its identity as a “benevolent great power” (cf.

5 See Chapter 2.2.4.
Medeiros 2009: 8) and thus leads us back to the initial foundations of China’s foreign policy.

In this sense, Jonathan Holslag’s statement perfectly encapsulates how the PRC combines its self-promotion as a responsible world power with the concept of peaceful development: “[S]afeguarding world peace to ensure domestic development, Beijing spends increasing efforts to brand itself as a responsible actor on the international scene.” (Holslag 2008: 72)

When taking into account China’s overriding concern with US hegemony, another important aspect of China’s peaceful development has to be mentioned: As Naidu and Mbazima have pointed out (see above in this chapter), Beijing is actively trying to counterbalance unilateralism and hegemony by the United States. Consequently, China uses its strategy of peaceful development also as a way to “secure its national interests through symbolic co-operation and supporting initiatives in multilateral agencies to counterbalance the US’s hegemony.” (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 756)

It becomes evident at this point that the implications resonating with the PRC’s peaceful development are numerous. When spinning the thread back to my research interest of China’s non-interference policy in Sudan, what needs to be kept in mind most of all is the following assertion by the Chinese government:

We will actively engage in handling multilateral issues and addressing global issues, undertake our due international obligations and play a constructive role in making the international political and economic order fairer and more equitable.

(Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

The Darfur crisis will provide a profound example to examine thoroughly how China does in fact apply its strategy of peaceful development in reality – and whether or not the PRC really fulfills its international commitments as a benevolent great power in Sudan.
3. China’s role as a donor in the international aid architecture

As it has become the PRC’s outspoken interest to portray itself as an international actor that operates with great sense of responsibility, the country strives for complete integration and acceptance of its role as a donor in the global aid architecture. Change has therefore taken place within China’s involvement as a donor in the developing world.

In this respect, Beijing’s most significant gesture has been expressed by the Chinese participation at the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held from November 29 to December 1, 2011, in Busan, Korea. Even more, with the signing of the concluding declaration “Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation”, the PRC went officially on board of the recognized sphere of international development actors. It thereby demonstrated its commitment to sustainable growth, the improving of human rights standards and poverty, as well as the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In specific, this means that China signed a document that outspokenly promotes human rights, democracy and good governance as an “integral part of our [the representations of developing and developed countries, multilateral and bilateral institutions as well as public and civil society A/N] development efforts.” (Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation 2011)

China’s participation at the Busan Forum, and even more so its signing of the final declaration, could not be of greater symbolic importance regarding its international commitment to development and poverty reduction. It also corresponds with China’s desired status of a global power that acts with responsibility: Since then, the PRC has officially been recognized as a donor within the international aid community, and in exchange has agreed to adhere to the standards of development cooperation as outlined in Busan.

At least, that is China’s current position on paper – the aim of this chapter is to illustrate what actually constitutes Chinese foreign aid programs in Africa in practice: How they are designed and implemented as well as whether or to what extent they deviate from the ideological and political stance the PRC has taken in Busan.
3.1. Chinese aid in Africa

In spite of China’s continued official self-identification as developing country, the PRC has successfully established and enshrined its role as a donor in the international aid architecture. On the African continent, this involvement takes place mostly within the concept of South-South cooperation\(^6\), whereby the PRC relies heavily on a rhetoric that stresses solidarity and equality among developing nations. Provocatively, one could also put it like this: “Although an emerging economic superpower, China continues to portray itself as a developing nation, at least to African audiences, to underline [their] quasi-natural convergence of interests […]”. (Tull 2006: 462)

In contrast, the PRC itself defines its role as donor in the international aid architecture as outlined in its White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid, published in 2011:

> China is the world’s largest development country, with a large population, a poor foundation and uneven economic development. As development remains an arduous and long-standing task, China’s foreign aid falls into the category of South-South cooperation and is mutual help between developing countries.

(Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a)

However, China’s “aid” flows are difficult to pin down to one clear definition due to the fact that the PRC to date has not officially clarified what exactly distinguishes Chinese aid as such. As a response to this problem, it may be helpful to contrast the characteristics of China’s aid programs to those of European or US-American nations or institutions. Considering that the international aid architecture is constituted of various differing kinds of flows, when speaking of aid as such, I will therefore refer to the standardized definition of official development assistance (ODA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC):

> Official development assistance is defined as those flows […] which are provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies, and each transaction of which is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective and […] is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25 percent […].

(OECD 2008)

\(^6\) Definition and further information see Chapter 6.5.1.
China’s first aid transfers started in 1950, one year after the inauguration of the People’s Republic, and initially went to North Korea, North Vietnam, as well as other neighboring socialist countries. Quickly, though, the PRC expanded its external assistance into South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. (Bräutigam 2008: 198) Especially in Africa, the PRC has steadily extended (and defended) its decisive identity as an alternative to the West when it comes to foreign aid programs: “By 1975, China had aid programs in more African countries than did the United States, and this pattern continues today.” (Bräutigam 2008: 198) As it turns out, China’s aid to Africa is therefore “clearly not a new phenomenon”. (Bräutigam 2008: 212)

As of today, China’s efforts to engage in South-South cooperation with other developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in most cases have been met with outspoken appreciation by their recipients in most cases – in effect, they have been welcomed with open arms, a fact that may to a great part derive from the prevailing spirit of partnership and the Chinese practice of providing aid on an equal footing: “[…] China’s aid to Africa is not one of a “superior” providing for an “inferior” but rather of one developing nation assisting another.” (He 2007: 33)

China is not a member of the DAC and has established its influence as a donor on the African continent without an overarching multilateral framework. According to the PRC’s White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid, the country offers foreign aid in eight forms: Complete projects, goods and materials, technical cooperation, human resource development cooperation, medical teams sent abroad, emergency humanitarian aid, overseas volunteer programs in foreign countries, and debt relief. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a)

The PRC’s aid is offered through three different instruments: Grants, zero-interest loans, and, since 1995, low-interest “concessional” loans with subsidized interest rates. (Bräutigam 2008: 200) According to Bräutigam, these forms also represent the Chinese equivalent of ODA. (Bräutigam 2011a: 204) In addition, “other official flows” from China, which are “moneys that come from governments but do not qualify as aid” are also tracked by the DAC. (Bräutigam 2008: 209) They include preferential export credits or commercial loans from Chinese banks and thus do not fall into the category of ODA. (Bräutigam 2011a: 205) The main institution in charge of China’s grants and zero-interest loans is the Ministry of
Commerce (MOFCOM). However, most Chinese financial transactions abroad are executed by China Eximbank and China Development Bank. (Bräutigam 2011a: 204)

As the following figures indicate, China has rapidly increased its presence as a donor on the African continent over the course of the past years: In March 2007, China Development Bank announced that it had financed 30 projects in Africa for about USD 1 billion. (Bräutigam 2011a: 206) As of September 2010, it reported to already having disbursed USD 10 billion to aid projects in Africa. (Bräutigam 2011a: 206)

Bräutigam characterizes China’s official aid program as “widely misunderstood”, a fact that results from the lack of transparency and public information by the Chinese government in regard to official aid flows. (Bräutigam 2011b) Although there have been partial improvements in the provision of public information about China’s aid programs, and transparency in general has also increased recently, Bräutigam criticizes that “official announcements on foreign aid are still few and far between.” (Bräutigam 2011a: 215) Contrary to OECD donors, “[t]he Chinese Government does not report its aid or other flows to the DAC”, leaving researchers only with the attempt to estimate the level of Chinese aid through media reports. However, this technique might lead to inaccurate results. (Bräutigam 2011a: 215)

Such is the case when “state-sponsored investment” is wrongly defined as “foreign aid” and as a consequence leads to the wrong assumption that “China’s foreign aid is driven primarily by the need for natural resources”. (Bräutigam 2011a: 216) Addressing this issue, Bräutigam states that although it is correct that Chinese investment is mainly driven by the access to natural resources, Chinese development aid on the other hand is provided to every African country the PRC has diplomatic relations with (Bräutigam 2011a: 216) – notwithstanding their potential reserves of valuable raw materials.

The same applies for using “foreign economic cooperation” as a proxy for the PRC’s aid flows: By definition, this term refers to “projects undertaken by Chinese contractors [,] including (1) overseas civil engineering construction projects financed by foreign investors; (2) overseas projects financed by the Chinese government through its foreign aid programs; (3) construction projects of Chinese diplomatic missions, trade offices and other institutions stationed abroad”. (NBS 2009 cited in Bräutigam 2011a: 217)
Chinese companies have begun to implement construction projects of this kind in Africa in the late 1970s during the country’s national economic opening strategy. (Bräutigam 2011a: 217) The importance that economic cooperation data should by no means be interpreted as foreign aid becomes even more obvious when recalling the fact that Chinese companies undertake such projects also in countries that the PRC does not have diplomatic relations with. As I demonstrated at the beginning of this chapter, Chinese external assistance always follows strategically outlined diplomatic paths. Economic cooperation, however, obviously does not meet that criterion – such data should consequently never be used to replace figures of Chinese foreign aid. (Bräutigam 2011a: 217)

3.2. “No strings attached” – the PRC aid regime

Contrary as to what may mistakenly be presumed, China’s aid programs are not as different to those of DAC member states; there even are significant parallels between Chinese concessional loans and the official ODA definition: Based on first-hand data of China Eximbank, Bräutigam (Bräutigam 2011b) demonstrates that in China it obviously is the government that designates the concessional loans, which subsequently are financed by China Eximbank and delivered to the government of the beneficiary country. This happens “with the nature of official assistance” (Bräutigam 2011b), just like any OECD country would deliver its aid: Similar to ODA standards, „[t]he objective of these loans is to ‚promote economic development and improve living standards in developing countries,‘ and to ‚boost economic cooperation between developing countries and China.’ Projects need to have ‚good social benefits‘”. (China Eximbank 2009 cited in Bräutigam 2011b)

Furthermore, concerning the lack of transparency within China’s foreign aid programs, things are not as bad as they may seem: There is reason to hope that Beijing slowly but steadily will be less reluctant to publish official figures of foreign aid: In this matter, Bräutigam dares to give a positive prediction: “The marked increase in information flows from Chinese embassies and announcements by Chinese leaders indicates that data on external assistance is no longer a state secret.” (Bräutigam 2011b)

So where is the difference then between aid delivered to Africa from DAC member states and the PRC? And how can one explain the steady rise and deepening of China’s involvement as a donor in Africa and growing western suspicion in response to that?
One of the main reasons for China’s increasing role as an alternative to the West in the African aid architecture is most probably located in its firm principle of “no conditions attached”. Contrary to practices of OECD donors acting within the international aid regime, the PRC has never tied its aid to conditions of any kind, be they of financial, economic, or political nature: “In sharp contract [sic!] [contrast A/N] to Western aid, Chinese aid is offered with ‘no political strings attached’.” (Pang 2009: 243)

This principle can be traced back as far as to the beginnings of intensified Sino-African relations in the 1950s, when Chinese aid was (as it is still today) constituted by cooperation without hierarchies, aid without conditionality, simply a union of equal partners. Leaving no further doubt in this matter, the PRC White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid expresses the aspect of “imposing no conditions” as follows:

China upholds the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, respects recipient countries' right to independently select their own path and model of development, and believes that every country should explore a development path suitable to its actual conditions.

(Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a)

More than fifty years later, the PRC still keeps the principles of “equality, mutual benefit and no strings attached” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a) at the heart of its foreign aid structures. Evidently, the fundamental pillars of Chinese foreign assistance characteristics did not change much.

In this context, the following statements perfectly illustrate how the PRC portrays its historical political and economic ties with the African continent: First, public Chinese discourse is largely dominated by a mindset à la “China has been selfless and sincere in providing generous assistance to Africa without any political agenda, pressure or interference in their internal affairs”. (People’s Daily Online 2006) Second, as a representative from the academic floor, He Wenping notes that the “Chinese development model values the political and international relations concepts of multilateralism, consensus decision-making, peaceful co-existence and respect for diverse cultures”. (He 2007: 30)

As a result, China’s core national identity values vehemently prohibit an interference of any kind with the internal affairs of the countries it economically cooperates with and/or to whom it provides aid. The always omnipotent principle of non-interference within Chinese foreign
policy is thus officially reaffirmed by the PRC in its White Paper on China’s Foreign Aid in 2011: “China never uses foreign aid as a means to interfere in recipient countries’ internal affairs or seek political privileges for itself.” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a) In this sense, Bräutigam’s statement gets to the heart of the matter:

It is well known that the Chinese do not impose any conditions on governance or human rights before financing projects in other countries, regarding this as interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

(Bräutigam 2010: 30)

However, despite the lack of official conditions on governance or human rights there are other aspects to be included when attempting to outline a complete picture of China’s foreign aid programs. One of these aspects is a reflection of Joseph Nye’s theory of soft power: According to Bräutigam, it appears to be the case that Chinese aid simply represents a “very modern expression of soft power: a tool of diplomacy and an instrument to meet political, strategic, and economic goals”. (Bräutigam 2008: 201)

The interpretation of China’s foreign aid program as a tool for diplomacy is particularly interesting: It seems that by providing external assistance to African development countries, Beijing pursues superior diplomatic interests⁷. At least that is the result Bräutigam came to after having analyzed declarations of Chinese aid commitments in 2008 by then-Premier Wen Jiabao and the Information Office of the State Council of the PRC in 2011. As evidenced by the data, the PRC did neither finance nor implement aid projects in any African country that had diplomatic ties with Taiwan because this would have implied a clear violation of the PRC’s “One China Principle”.

This principle dates back to 1971, when China, not Taiwan, was accepted as a member state of the United Nations with the help of 26 votes from African states (out of 76 affirmative votes). (Li 2007: 78) As of today, the matter between the PRC and Taiwan, the “Republic of China” is still unresolved: Beijing’s official position claims that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China” and the „[s]ettlement of the Taiwan issue and realization of the complete reunification of China embodies the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation“. (Taiwan Affairs Office and Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2013)

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⁷ Just like any other country.
Consequently, China is vigorously trying to restrain Taipei’s global influence: Particularly in the developing world, the PRC has continuously tied both bilateral cooperation (especially aid flows) as well as the establishment of diplomatic relations to the official recognition of the government in Beijing as the one and only “true” representation of China. In this sense, Chinese diplomacy, according to Medeiros, is “heavily oriented toward reducing support for Taiwan” (Medeiros 2009: 156):

As it turns out, China’s “no strings attached” mantra of foreign aid becomes a new meaning in the face of its ongoing conflict with Taiwan: Apparently, there are no conditions tied to Chinese aid except for the one that imposes the denial of Taiwan’s political recognition as sovereign state to its recipients.

Consequently, all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that maintain diplomatic relations with the PRC instead of Taiwan receive offers of grants and zero-interest loans by the Chinese government – even if these countries are per capita wealthier than the PRC itself, such as Mauritius, Botswana, or South Africa. (Bräutigam 2008: 200) In these cases, Chinese aid generally is symbolic, like in South Africa, where China built a pair of primary schools. (Bräutigam 2011b) The conclusion to be drawn in this respect is therefore that “[C]hinese aid agreements follow diplomatic ties”. (Bräutigam 2011a: 208)

The dogmas non-interference and “no conditions attached” of China’s external assistance programs have inevitably created tensions within the international aid community: As a matter of fact, Beijing’s insistence on sticking to these principle has caused western donors to fear for the effectiveness of the conditions their own aid programs are tied to. In essence, these represent a set of principles agreed by OECD member states and select African countries and mostly emphasize the importance of trade liberalization, financial reform, market reforms, and conditionality – in sum “aid made conditional on adherence to particular commitments on economic reform, human rights, and good governance”.

(Gu/Humphrey/Messner 2008: 285)

Understandably, the West feels its impact on the African continent threatened by Beijing’s “laissez-faire” attitude: “[S]ome DAC members fear that China and other non-members are undermining DAC efforts to use aid conditionality to improve governance and human rights in developing countries.” (Bräutigam 2011) In specific, the OECD member states’ concerns
rest especially on the worry that “Chinese finance may fuel corruption directly through the transfer of large funds to poorly governed regimes” on the one hand, and that China could “provide a financial lifeline to repressive, authoritarian governments that might otherwise be forced to bow to sanctions or governance conditionality”, on the other (Bräutigam 2010: 30) – as was the case with China’s involvement in Sudan.

In response, Gu, Humphrey, and Messner include the Chinese perspective into this discussion:

China’s policies have openly challenged these positions, making it clear that China views the motivations of the OECD countries with suspicion and aligns itself as a defender of Africa against them.

(Gu/Humphrey/Messner 2008: 285)

The authors further acknowledge that China’s rise as a donor in Africa could pose a serious challenge to the leading role of industrialized countries within the global aid architecture, as, in the long run, it weakens both the credibility of their recommendations as well as their very position on the African continent. (Humphrey/Messner cited in Bräutigam 2010: 20) In addition, specific fields are mentioned where a strengthened Chinese position in the international aid architecture might be felt in particular. These fields include “the power and governance structure of the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund); the dominant ideologies and prescriptions that currently shape recommended development policies and strategies; and the evolving standards in arenas such as human rights and the environment”. (Humphrey/Messner cited in Bräutigam 2010: 20)

The example of Angola demonstrates how the West’s fear for the loss of its sphere of influence on the African continent is well-founded: Demolished after years of civil war, Angola was in urgent need of external financing for national reconstruction at the beginning of the new millennium. Therefore, in 2004, negotiations with the IMF were opened in order to discuss a loan designed for exactly this reason. Owing to Angola’s prevailing corruption and poor governance, the IMF included obligatory conditions along with transparency measures into the loan agreement in order to “curb corruption and improve economic management”. (Taylor 2006: 90) However, before the accord was signed, Angola all of a sudden dropped out of the negotiations. The country had simply found a better suited bidder – China: The PRC’s counter-offer of a USD 2 billion loan from China Exim Bank was not tied to any condition whatsoever and included very low rates of interest. But most
importantly, “none of the IMF’s meddlesome conditionalities regarding corruption or graft [were] included”. (Taylor 2006: 90) As could be expected, Angola turned down the IMF’s offer and closed the deal with Beijing.

However, China had included the provision that through the extension of such a credit arrangement to Angola, it would obtain access to oil concessions in return. In addition to that, the PRC was successful in charming Luanda into promising that up to 70 percent of the financed projects would be assigned to Chinese companies. (Müller 2006: 97)

The Angolan case clearly exemplifies how the IMF not only lost a loan agreement but, in further consequence, also its sphere of influence, to the Chinese competition. It also lost the promotion of values like the fight against corruption and the strengthening of good governance to a competitor that does not at all consider such conditions to be essential for granting a preferential credit. In the face of the PRC’s preconditions to the Angolan loan that were fulfilled and secured both its long-lasting role in the country as well as its more than preferential access to Angola’s oil resources, China emerged as the winner also in the long run.

As will become evident at a later point of this thesis, China’s way of involvement with Angola does also exhibit certain parallels with its activities in Sudan: Even though in this case it was the West’s decision to leave the country and impose large-scale economic and political embargoes, it was only China’s arrival on the scene that made it possible for Sudan not to have to comply with the West’s demands. In the long run, it also made a return of western investment and aid flows irrelevant: China’s stepping in both as generous financier of the comprehensive construction of an exportable Sudanese oil sector as well as the country’s protector in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against multilateral sanctions and, initially, the deployment of UN and AU peacekeeping troops at the height of the Darfur crisis kept Sudan in its comfort zone at least for some time.

On a more general note, the outrage of western actors within the African aid architecture focuses mostly on China’s lack of transparency and conditionality: Under the flagship of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, western actors of the international aid architecture have constituted their position in clear opposition to the PRC. Their aims are the following:
To embrace greater transparency and do more to harmonize its donor activity in Africa with ongoing international assistance, especially with respect to debt. Chinese practices of tying loans to African commodity exports are contradictory to existing lending practices set forth in the […] OECD agreements. (Gill/Huang/Morrison 2007: 11)

The actors’ very own reasons for this seem plausible, as in late 2006 the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the IMF warned that “China’s emergence as a major creditor is creating a wave of new debt for African countries”. (Gill/Huang/Morrison 2007: 11)

This western fear of new African indebtedness appears to be the reason for DAC members to continuously denounce the Chinese practice of aid with no strings attached: “The fear is that Chinese lending practices may encourage the rapid recurrence of an unsustainable debt burden in Africa.” (Gill/Huang/Morrison 2007: 12) China, on the other side, sees economic and trade cooperation with Africa as a “major component of South-South cooperation” and speaks of “[p]romoting economic and social progress” as “the common task China and Africa are facing”. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2010)

3.3. Neo-imperialist venture? China’s controversial role in Africa
China’s role in Africa has always been the focus of western skepticism. Especially the USA continue to castigate China for its apparent willingness to sacrifice standards that are at the very heart of the former’s programs:

Some American voices argue that the Chinese engagement in Africa is predominantly a form of crude mercantilism and political interventionism that directly threatens U.S. interests and calls for confrontation, condemnation, and containment. (Gill/Huang/Morrison 2007: 12)

In light of a decades-long implementation of western aid programs that in fact did not really leave room for the expression of the actual needs of developing countries’ populations and instead presented them with ready-made solutions that in the end failed to improve the latter’s living conditions sustainably, such argumentation, however, represents a clear case of double standards on the part of the West. Firing back on such argumentation, Bräutigam pointedly responds to these “American voices”:
China’s mercantilist, state-sponsored engagement with Africa (including “aid”) reflects modes of engagement that the West (and Japan) have abandoned only very gradually, and unevenly, and at income levels far above those prevailing in China today.

(Bräutigam 2008: 213)

It therefore seems too simplifying for the West to point the finger on Chinese aid practices in Africa as it turns out that African leaders themselves actually do support Bräutigam’s line of argument. This becomes evident by the outcome of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) conference, held on May 22, 2012, in Addis Ababa: “In Africa, […], criticism of Chinese trade deals and lending as exploitative and self-interested is widely derided as hypocrisy on the part of the US and former European colonisers.” (ISS Conference Report 2012)

Obviously strengthened by their African partners’ support, Chinese voices effortlessly could reverse the West’s argumentation by looking at the presence of former colonial powers within those very countries that used to be their colonized peripheries in a different light: China’s point here could be that current involvements of European powers with African development countries continue to be of neo-colonial8 or neo-imperialist9 nature; that the West today continues its intrinsic influence in its former colonial empires and the pursuit of its interests by the revitalization of neo-colonial structures.

Such accusations land on sensitive ground: Have the western structural adjustment or conditional aid programs of the past decades not proven unable to find a cure for African underdevelopment? Have these politics in some cases not left African countries in even a worse state than before and continuously kept them within the tight grip of economic “underdevelopment” and global marginalization?

Actually, they have:

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8 Defined here as “the use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies”. (Oxford Dictionaries 2013b)

9 Understood as “a collection of thoughts and principles whose advocates critically examine the current social, political and economic implications that structurally result in uneven power relationships in international relations within distinct categories of winners versus losers in a capitalist world economy. […] [T]he capitalist international arena is divided between the powerful and the less powerful nations. The most powerful nations, although small in numbers, control the direction of the world to advance their imperialist ambitions.” (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011: 244)
Rupp’s statement below renders visible how the West’s approach to aid focused on the promotion of the opening of markets and liberalization of trade structures, financial deregulation and large-scale privatization in African developing countries for too long – without alleviating poverty substantially and, most importantly, sustainably:

Developmental assistance tied to “structural adjustment programs” was intended to replace the most pernicious of Africa’s governance structures with reformed, neoliberal institutions, but ultimately failed to improve economic conditions on the continent.

(Rupp 2008: 80)

In response, the Chinese perspective takes up the aspect of the West’s failed approach to African development cooperation and by this even sees its position strengthened:

In conjunction with the wholesale failure of economic reforms (SAPs), these setbacks, in Beijing’s view, have but confirmed its analysis that the patchy record of Western-driven reform efforts in Africa will inadvertently facilitate Chinese advances on the continent.

(Tull 2006: 467)

However, in what scope the PRC will be able (or willing) to promote a sustainable approach to development cooperation in Africa remains to be seen. Even though the signing of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation marks a clear alignment of China’s foreign aid policies with those of the West, this new Chinese commitment to adhere to basic standards of human rights and good governance seems mostly symbolic as of now, given that it had no substantial impact on China’s practice of providing untied aid to African governments yet. Maybe even because of this resilience against tied aid, China has never before been more popular among African countries as a partner both in development cooperation as well as in the course of pursuing shared interests in the international arena. Compared to the long-established donors of the West, it has been and still is welcomed with open arms by African governments as an alternative to the conditional grants of their former colonial rulers.

The results of Naidu’s and Mbazima’s research confirm this line of thought:

China has become an alternative development partner to African governments, especially in the way that it has intertwined its political and economic engagements with humanitarian assistance and enhanced aid packages. […] The low rates of interest of the concessional loans, which is in most cases tied to infrastructure contracts has made
Beijing an attractive partner to African leaders vis-à-vis the conditionalities of the financial packages offered by the IMF and the World Bank.  

(Naidu, Mbazima 2008: 758)

It needs to be emphasized at this point, however, that when condemning the PRC’s unconditional lending mechanisms, critics from the West should keep in mind that China is not the only emerging large-scale donor that does not report its aid to the DAC and that deviates from established norms within the international aid architecture: There are other nations – India and Brasil, for example – whose aid programs do not follow the OECD donor community’s guidelines, either. (cf. Müller 2006: 101)

Another aspect why China may be that welcome in Africa could be the fact that it has no history whatsoever in the continent’s colonial exploitation: The PRC never participated in global imperialist ventures on the African continent, as the European powers used to in the past. Au contraire, as has been outlined previously, China, too, was the victim of western oppression and has therefore persistently focused its national identity and energy on the pursuing of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-hegemonism of any superpower (read: the United States of America).

This hypothesis finds confirmation when taking into account Paul Mooney’s analysis of the Sino-African interlinkage as based on parallels in their past:

Beijing has pressed history to promote its economic agenda, attempting to win African sympathy by emphasizing the common history of exploitation China and African nations have suffered at the hands of Western colonialists.  

(Mooney 2004)

Denis M. Tull reinforces this attempt of locating the roots of China and Africa’s successful South-South cooperation in a shared past of exploitation and foreign domination: He describes Sino-African relations as a “historical opportunity for Africa’s states to escape the neo-colonial ties to the West”. (Tull 2006: 471)

In this sense, thanks to their shared heritage and the perceiving of China and Africa as “units struggling against common causes for common goals” (Yu 1988: 861), it appears that South-South cooperation as a tool for development has therefore found an enormous footing between China and Africa.
Still, continuing difficulties related to the Chinese reluctance to publish official information on its foreign aid program leaves one with the following problem: “Until Beijing decides to release a comprehensive account of aid (and especially until it can be formulated along the lines of the OECD-DAC), Chinese official flows will not be comparable with those from other donors.” (Bräutigam 2008: 213)

At this point, the attempt to form a prediction of the nature of future Chinese foreign aid programs in Africa results in the following dilemma: On the one hand, the PRC will most likely continue to become a more important source of development finance for Africa, a fact that will allow the Chinese to carry on with the construction of infrastructural projects under the banner of foreign aid – and consequently “creating much-needed electrical, transportation, and telecommunications capacity.” (Bräutigam 2008: 213) On the other hand, there is explicit concern expressed on the part of the West regarding the lack of social and environmental safeguarding standards that is beginning to “create resistance among African civil society groups”. (Bräutigam 2008: 213) We will only have to wait and see what the future might bring for China’s growing presence in Africa’s aid regime.
4. China in Africa

Introduction

"China and African countries have become all-weather friends, sincere partners in cooperation, and like-minded brothers."

*(People’s Daily Online 2006)*

China, “the largest developing country in the world”, and Africa, “home to the largest number of developing countries” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2010), have successfully formed a stable and enduring partnership: Connected through parallel strings of the past and shared experiences of hegemony and colonialism, as well as similar political attitudes on the international scene and priorities on their national agendas, the Chinese-African bloc represents a good, if not the best example of a partnership gone global.

As Beijing’s influence on the international level and the strong growth of its economy expanded, China’s role in Africa both as donor and large-scale investor has gained significant momentum – despite its current official status of a country that still finds itself in the process of development. China’s performance on the global scale has undergone significant changes; correspondingly, its presence as a political and economic “big player” on the African continent has experienced a noticeable transformation and deepened continuously during the past decades.

Now that both China and Africa have substantially accelerated processes of industrialization and urbanization, a new strategic partnership between the PRC and African developing countries has enabled both parties to enhance economic cooperation and bilateral trade agreements. It further permits Beijing to praise the Sino-African relationship as a win-win situation:

For China, Africa’s exports of crude oil, minerals, steel and agricultural products plays an active role in promoting China’s economic development and improving the Chinese people’s livelihood. For Africa, China’s products and technology meet the need of Africa’s development, while the Chinese market provides wide space for African products.

*(Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2010)*
According to Medeiros, a partnership to China is strategic when first, “[i]t is comprehensive, including all aspects of bilateral relations (e.g. economic, cultural, political, and security)” and second, “both countries agree to make a long-term commitment to bilateral relations, in which bilateral problems are evaluated in that context and [...] occasional tensions do not derail them”. (Medeiros 2009: 82) These strategic partnerships enable the PRC to intensify the level of interaction with its partner countries and also to determine the scope, content, and tempo of their relation. (Medeiros 2009: 82, 86)

In essence, China uses these partnerships as “mechanisms to expand economic opportunities (especially to gain preferential access to nations’ markets, investment, and natural resources), to stabilize and shape China’s regional security environment, to reduce external constraints on China, and to bolster its international reputation as a responsible major power”. (Medeiros 2009: 86)

The aim of this chapter is to get a closer look on the China-Africa relationship through a historic angle: Under what circumstances this partnership emerged, how it can be characterized during the past sixty years, how it looks like today – and whether or not it can really be called a “win-win situation” for both parties involved.


The first Asian-African Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia, from April 18 to 24, 1955, (Taylor 2006: 20) and represents the point of departure for China’s political interest in Africa: “Bandung marked the start of a definite interest by the PRC in Africa and in the developing world in general.” (Taylor 2006: 21)

According to George Yu, the conference embodies both China’s recognition of the Third World as an influential ally in pursuing its international goals and withstanding common opponents as well as the effective beginning of Chinese interest in and political orientation toward Africa. (Yu 1988: 850)

Of the 29 countries taking part, only six were African: Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast (today Ghana), Liberia, Libya, and Sudan. Out of these, it was only Egypt that was no longer under
colonial rule – as a consequence, it was also Egypt that China initially started having diplomatic relations with on the African continent. (Taylor 2006: 20) The first Sino-African bilateral trade agreement was signed between Egypt and the PRC in August 1955. (Taylor 2006: 21)

Sudan, not yet independent when the conference was held, should be the second African country to officially recognize Communist China on February 4, 1959, after finally having shaken off its colonial ties. (Taylor 2006: 21)

It can therefore be concluded that the Bandung Conference indicated the beginning of China’s interest in and political involvement on the African continent – its significance for the launching of a stable Chinese-African partnership seems evident. In the following period until 1959, the so called “Bandung era”, the PRC committed itself for the first time to the upcoming anti-colonial liberation struggle of various African countries (Taylor 2006: 21) – an ideological involvement that was to shape the following years of concentrated Chinese foreign policy efforts on the African continent.

4.2. Post-Bandung: China’s involvement in Africa until 1989

The period of Chinese political and economic involvement with African countries after the groundbreaking Asian-African conference in Bandung is best described as multifaceted and can be divided into various stages. I will depict these phases individually and give a detailed outline of the accompanying changes in Chinese involvement in Africa.

4.2.1. China and Africa: Ideological twins?

After the Bandung Conference, it was mainly out of ideological motivation that China’s outreach to Africa intensified rapidly: It was pure ideology that decided how, where, and in what scope China would engage on African soil.

Chapter 2 shows in detail how China’s own experiences with western occupation obviously shaped its political perception of the world. Still suffering from the national trauma that began with the British intervention in 1839, China both swore never to intervene in other countries’ internal affairs as well as to oppose western colonialism and imperialism.
throughout the world\textsuperscript{10}. That is exactly where Beijing’s outspoken dedication to supporting the global battle against colonialism and imperialism and, more importantly, the African wars for independence, stems from. During these struggles, the PRC’s usually omnipotent principle of non-interference was put aside for the first time in order to achieve higher ideological goals.

In this regard, Algeria serves as adequate example to illustrate how non-interference was not always as firmly entrenched in China’s foreign policy principles as was initially thought:

It was during the Algerian war against the French colonial power from 1957 until independence was reached in 1962 that the PRC openly supported a former African colony in its war for freedom. Chinese support came in form of issuing propaganda against France and supplying the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale – nationalistic movement and eventual political party in Algeria (Encyclopédie Larousse)) with weapons and training. (Taylor 2006: 21) Evidently, the case of Algeria demonstrates how ideological conviction trumped the PRC’s principle of non-interference in its foreign policy actions.

In addition, China intensified contact with Africa through cultural visits and participation at international conferences. The growing number of Chinese delegations visiting African heads of state alone indicates that Beijing’s interest in the African continent was expanding at speed. (Taylor 2006: 21-22) The most prominent example of Chinese state visits in Africa is probably then-Premier Zhou Enlai’s ten-nation tour through Africa between December 14, 1963, and February 4, 1964. (Yu 1988: 851) In sum, he paid three visits to Africa between 1965 and 1965. These visits provided China most of all with the opportunity to present itself to Africa on a personal level and to directly disclose its external relations toward its African partners (Yu 1988: 851): “[I]n essence, the PRC was publicizing the Chinese presence on the continent, and projecting Beijing’s image and prestige.” (Taylor 2006: 25)

According to George T. Yu, the intensified Chinese presence on the African continent during this period can be ascribed to three primary factors:

\textsuperscript{10} For further information see Medeiros 2009: 10-11.
First, China perceived the developing world as “an arena in which to achieve its political/ideological objectives”. (Yu 1988: 850)

Second, at the time, China sought to “secure international recognition and support as the sole legitimate government for China”. (Yu 1988: 851) The root of this matter was primarily the competition for a United Nations membership between the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the PRC. Both countries had discovered the power that lay within the vast number of African votes in the General Assembly. In the course of pursuing its “One China” policy, Beijing realized that Africa could play a decisive role in its international recognition. It further realized that African states had to be courted and won for the Chinese cause of replacing Taiwan within the UN. (Yu 1988: 851)

And third, the Sino-Soviet conflict: Following the break of the Sino-Soviet alliance at the beginning of the 1960s, Africa became a “battlefield” of the two blocs’ ideological conflict. China’s sole objective then was to counterbalance the Soviet Union in Africa. In this context, Naidu and Mbazima speak of “an ideological race between Beijing and Moscow” in which each side supported rival camps in order to build up “ideological solidarity” and to hold back the other. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 750) This fierce ideological battle was fought via political and financial support to rival movements of the African liberation struggle between the late 1950s and mid 1970s. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 750)

Back then, China’s role was not only to support African liberation movements, but to help its African partners with the construction of “landmark structures” such as stadiums, hospitals, or conference centers – projects that were “national symbols of independence and embodied the spirit of cultural decolonization”. (Li 2007: 71) According to Li, these Chinese-backed constructions were of great importance in the formation of African nationhood and state building. (Li 2007: 71)

It appears therefore that the Chinese held a significant role in the African endeavor for independence and national unity – China’s own history of western occupation and revolutionary struggle may even have served as an example.

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11 On October 25, 1971, Resolution 2758 was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, expelling Taiwan and replacing it with the PRC as “the only legitimate government of China” and as a permanent member of the Security Council in the United Nations. (American Institute in Taiwan 1971)
4.2.2. Turning inward: Cooled-off Sino-African relations in the 1960s

Notwithstanding the surge the PRC experienced within the scope of its involvement in African countries and the strengthening of their ideological ties, Sino-African relations experienced a deceleration during the second half of the 1960s because of China’s rigid ideological focus.

Li Anshan illustrates comprehensibly how this unexpected turn emerged on the surface of the Chinese-African relationship: “From the establishment of the P.R.C. to its economic opening (1949-1978), China’s Africa policy was heavily influenced by ideology. […] China placed itself on the front line of the struggle against colonialism, imperialism and revisionism in the Third World.” (Li 2007: 70) This “dogmatic approach”, heavily influenced by an “ultra-leftist mentality”, determined how relations with Africa were conducted throughout the 1960s: “The slogan “exporting revolution” became the primary objective toward Africa” (Li 2007: 71). It was not always met with approval by the affected African countries – also because this practice stood in drastic contrast with China’s propagated non-interference principle. (Li 2007: 71)

This policy had the unintended consequence of scaring off African countries: African governments simply felt threatened by Beijing’s expansive dogmatic behavior and chose to cool down their cooperation with China. Only “a handful” of African countries maintained official relations with the PRC. (Li 2007: 71)

However, reduced levels of Sino-African cooperation may also have resulted from the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, an event that refocused China’s foreign policy orientation towards domestic affairs and therefore cut back on Sino-African cooperation by “turning inward”. (Yu 1988: 853)

Still, the Cultural Revolution did not result in the complete collapse of Sino-African diplomatic relations, even if they experienced a severe decrease. As Yu points out, “China’s African policy was not dormant.” (Yu 1988: 853) China’s involvement in Africa, albeit significantly reduced in scale, was thus not completely abandoned during the 1960s.
4.2.3. China and Africa during the 1970s and 1980s

It was towards the end of the 1960s, when China decided to give up its policy of “exporting revolution” and started to provide more free and unconditional aid to Africa, that the Sino-African relationship bounced back to its initial promising point of departure. (Li 2007: 71) It was also the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 that represented an essential change in China’s Africa policy: During this time, the PRC slowly backed away from its fundamentally ideological motivation and instead sought to engage with African countries on a new, pragmatic basis of cooperation. Li illustrates this changed focus of China’s Africa policy as “from one based almost exclusively on ideological alliance to one with a far more pragmatic and diversified approach”. (Li 2007: 72)

In general, the spirit of “developing together” (Li 2007: 72) proved to be predominant in Chinese-African relations – a principle that until today has stayed characteristic for the PRC’s involvement on the African continent.

As becomes apparent, the PRC’s new approach in the 1970s looked for a significant expansion of its cooperation with Africa. This new Chinese focus was realized in form of enhanced economic and trade cooperation, cultural and educational exchange, medical and public health programs, military exchange and non-governmental communications. (Li 2007: 72) The main feature of this change can be found in the “spirit of co-development” (Li 2007: 73), a notion that initiated the decisive shift from the concept of providing free aid to a perception of aid whose intention was to benefit both sides: “China’s Africa policy has shifted from an unsustainable and ideologically-motivated approach, to political pragmatism and on to the present relationship based on economic pragmatism.” (Li 2007: 74)

Particular mention should be made of Li’s attempt at illustrating the changes China’s foreign policy strategy for Africa has undergone since its political and economic presence on the continent started to take roots in the 1950s. In this sense, one of the principal changes characterizing the PRC’s Africa policy in the 1970s can be symbolized by China’s “move from a posture of forming an alliance in international politics for the purpose of fighting against super powers to strengthening exchange and dialogue with Africa on the basis of seeking common ground while also reserving differences”. (Li 2008: 22)
Li’s findings clearly exemplify that at the time, it was neither the fight against the two superpowers and western imperialism nor the importance of sustaining an ideological alliance with African countries that shaped China’s policy toward the continent. It was the realization that mutual economic benefit and mutual economic development should be priorities of the Sino-African agenda that characterized the PRC’s new approach for the most part.

However, in the late 1970s, China’s involvement in Africa again experienced a short period of decline: According to the author, this deterioration was due to several factors, among which he locates the economic struggles the PRC had to face towards the end of the Cultural Revolution. This did not leave the Chinese leadership sufficient financial means to sustain its foreign aid programs to Africa. (Li 2008: 26)

Another factor of this decline was the adoption of a socialist modernization program by the PRC’s new Chairman, Deng Xiaoping. His focus was primarily directed at domestic affairs and reforming the Chinese economy. (Naidu, Mbazima 2008: 750) For the success of the program, immense amounts of foreign investment and technology were required – but in this regard, Africa couldn’t help: “Africa was unable to contribute to Beijing’s internal economic reforms, due to Africa’s failure to open up to the international economy and its marginal role in global affairs.” (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 750) Consequently, China’s partnership with African countries suffered somewhat in significance and scope: “Though China maintained friendly relations with Africa, it was not sufficient to give Africa the recognition it needed as a significant partner.” (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 750)

Nevertheless, Africa found its way back into China’s international agenda in the 1980s – even more so, it “once more assumed its leading role in China’s foreign policy”. (Yu 1988: 856)

4.3. China’s contemporary approach to Africa

As Naidu and Mbazima outlined in their paper on China-African relations, the “most obvious impulse in Africa today is that […] China has become Africa’s third largest trading partner after the US and France [signaling] a shift from the traditional balance of power towards Beijing”. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 757) As these findings indicate, ties between the PRC and
African developing countries have undergone significant changes – China’s position on the continent has never before been as powerful and influential.

Contrary to the early beginnings of the PRC’s presence in Africa during the 1950s, when Chinese-African relations based primarily on ideological grounds, China’s contemporary approach to Africa can without doubt be characterized by “strategic economic interests”. (Naidu/Mbazima 2008: 752) This assumption finds confirmation especially when looking at then-President Jiang Zemin’s tour through Africa in May 1996 where he presented a “Five Points Proposal” in order to establish the terms of a renewed relationship with Africa. (Alden 2005: 147) The proposal focused on reliable friendship, sovereign equality, non-intervention, mutually beneficial development, and international cooperation (Alden 2005: 147) and should from then on be at the center of the Sino-African partnership.

How this partnership can best be described today shall be the focus of the following section.

“Africa has served a number of vital functions and needs in China’s world role and foreign policy” (Yu 1988: 862) – it has been and still is of great value to the PRC not only because it provides its economy with resources essential for the maintenance of its impressive growth rate and a market place for its continually increasing bilateral trade relations, but also for reasons of global support-building and international lobbying for joint concerns. That includes, above all, the fight against US-American hegemony and unilateralism – a fight that clearly depends on African backing. In this sense, Chris Alden’s definition of four factors that particularly shape Beijing’s contemporary approach to Africa seems helpful to shed light on the various aspects of present Chinese-African ties:

1. Resource security
2. New markets and investment opportunities
3. Symbolic diplomacy and development cooperation
4. Forging strategic partnerships

(Alden 2005: 148)

When speaking of resource security, Alden assumes that China’s recent dynamic economic growth fuels an “ever-increasing need for energy and strategic minerals”. (Alden 2005: 148) More importantly, still, for my research interest is the landmark within China’s energy
strategy in 1993, when the PRC changed from being a net exporter to a net importer of petroleum: Now, “[a]s the world’s second-largest consumer of oil, and with only limited national resources, China is attracted to Africa’s relatively underexploited petroleum and other natural resources”. (Alden 2005: 148) In this regard, Masayuki Masuda adds: “In order to ease the shortage, China intensified diplomatic activities in Africa to secure new sources of energy”. (Masuda 2009: 73)

But it's not only oil and other key minerals that are vital for the maintenance of the PRC’s impressive industrial growth rate – in recent years, food security has also been a growing concern for the Chinese government: “With a projected increase in population, the loss of vital agricultural land to industry and increasing consumption amongst urbanising [sic!] people, Beijing perceives a need to obtain stable sources of key foodstuffs.” (Alden 2005: 149)

Hence the increasing demand for African grain and wheat crops – and governmental encouragement to invest in Africa’s agricultural sector, which falls under Alden’s second point, new markets and investment opportunities. (Alden 2005: 150)

As was already briefly mentioned in the historical outline of China’s involvement in Africa, the author is further convinced that symbolic diplomacy, i.e. “the promotion of national representation abroad” (Alden 2005: 150), to a significant degree shapes the current evolvement of Sino-African relations. As Li mentioned earlier, the construction of “large prestigious projects linked to institutional interests” (Alden 2005: 150) such as stadiums or even parliament houses in African partner countries, represent a considerable amount of China’s economic ties with Africa: “[F]ootball stadiums or new government buildings provide African regimes with tangible signs of power that can feed their need for legitimacy, if not translate into outright support from the population.” (Alden 2005: 151)

In the case of Sudan, it was the erection of the Friendship Hall in Khartoum that represents the notion of symbolic diplomacy that is obviously inherent in China’s involvement in Africa. (cf. Large/Patey 2011: 6)

In return for the funding and construction of such prestigious architecture, Denis M. Tull notes that China can reliably count on diplomatic support from African governments. Just like in the 1970s, when the Chinese courted African states into officially recognizing the PRC
instead of Taiwan, Beijing steadily keeps track on the realization of its international interests through African political backing in multilateral institutions: Here, the “one country – one vote” principle appears to pay off greatly for China. In this regard, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights serves as most prominent example, given that “African countries have frequently played a prominent role in frustrating Western efforts to bring about a formal condemnation of China’s human rights record”. (Tull 2006: 467)

In regard to his fourth characteristic of China’s contemporary approach to Africa, forging strategic partnerships, Alden points out that in the past, African votes have been crucial for the PRC’s foreign policy in multilateral institutions, including above all the blocking of resolutions at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that were aimed at the condemnation of Chinese human rights abuses. (Alden 2005: 153) Apparently, these votes will also be crucial in the future: “Beijing believes this strategic relationship with Africa […] will enable it to secure its interests in the WTO and other multilateral venues at relatively low cost over the long term.” (Alden 2005: 153)

In addition to his attempt of outlining the PRC’s motivations for its increased commitment to Africa, Chris Alden equally tries to portray the other side of the story by including an African perspective. He has thereby developed the thesis that China’s “phenomenal economic growth” may encourage African governments and businesses to “develop ties with a country that many perceive to be the next superpower.” (Alden 2005: 156) More specifically, he speaks of a “symbolic attraction of China” that he explains with the PRC’s own experiences as a victim of western imperialism, which is obviously met with approval by African elites “looking for a positive development model from the Third World.” (Alden 2005: 156)

Alden’s opinion finds resonance with Gill, Huang, and Morrison, who were trying to incorporate China’s very own perspective into the debate:

In Beijing’s view, China’s historical experience and development model resonate powerfully with African counterparts, and create a comparative advantage vis-à-vis the West. China emerged from colonial encroachment, internal chaos and economic destitution to achieve spectacular economic growth and infrastructure development.

(Gill/Huang/Morrison 2007: 7)
Obviously, this leaves African developing countries with the serious consideration of imitating the Chinese model. Simultaneously, though, the motivation for these countries to build relations with China to a significant part also stems from the appeal that China’s rapid rise to power implies for African leaders who themselves are “desperately looking for models of success that do not threaten established regime interests”. (Alden 2005: 156) Evidently, the PRC’s powerful principle of non-interference in internal state affairs ensures that said “established regime interests” are not jeopardized by Sino-African cooperation. This in turn explains how China is still highly welcome in pariah states like Zimbabwe or Sudan, both of which have experienced grave incriminations by the West.

This hypothesis finds further confirmation in Ian Taylor’s examination of Sino-African relations and the problem of human rights:

Problematically, it is because Beijing neither criticizes the lack of democracy in Africa nor strives to advance intrusive projects associated with human rights that China is a collaborator favoured by many African leaders and their neo-patrimonial regimes.

(Taylor 2008: 70-71)

In contrast, Tull’s line of argumentation follows another direction: With his attempt to explain the strategies of Chinese companies operating in African markets as well as China’s growing influence in Africa as a whole, he developed three main factors:

First, Chinese firms appear to be “significantly less risk-averse” than their western competition, particularly in “war-torn” countries like Angola, DR Congo, and Sierra Leone. (Tull 2006: 468). This apparently stems from the Chinese habit of considering the challenges that come with such a political and economic environment as “economic opportunity”. (Tull 2006: 468)

Second, Tull sees in China’s focus on specific sectors – above all infrastructure – another reason for the success of Chinese businesses in Africa. (Tull 2006: 468)

And finally, China’s strategy of specifically targeting African countries that have become subject to sanctions imposed by the West may be the third reason for the impressive accomplishment of Chinese state-sponsored and private companies operating on African soil: “Since Western states are still by far the most important trading partners of African states,
Western sanctions *de facto* turn these countries into niche markets.” (Tull 2006: 468) As China does not adhere to sanctions imposed by the West, it can successfully “position itself as an alternative partner of ‘pariah states’”. (Tull 2006: 468) This will be of special interest to my case, since China has implemented this “free-riding strategy” (ibid.) in Sudan under Omar al-Bashir, who incited China repeatedly to threaten the UNSC with making use of its right to veto western sanctions or interventions.

As can be seen from Tull’s argumentation, Beijing has been able to firmly cement its position in African countries – above all, within their natural resources and infrastructure sectors. Similarly, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) assumes that China has reached such strength in Africa mostly because of its “close association between the state and business [...] [enabling] it to offer roads, bridges, railways, dams, power plants, ports, pipelines and telephone lines in exchange for securing energy and raw materials supplies.” (IISS 2007) This once more underlines the aspect of mutual benefit, a characteristic that has so often been emphasized as identity-establishing element of the PRC’s ties with African countries.

Li Anshan, too, realizes the symbolic weight that the principle of mutual benefit embodies for Sino-African relations, or, more specifically, the role China plays in “helping African economies to achieve long-term growth through the principle of mutual benefit”. (Li 2007: 79) Li puts it like this: “[W]hen China benefits economically from Africa’s emerging markets, it reduces and relieves African countries’ debts.” (Li 2007: 79) These practices all seem like profound mechanisms of South-South cooperation and at first sight may indicate China’s much-praised “win-win situation”.

So where is the catch – or is there even one?

According to Denis M. Tull, there is. Despite the soaring success of cooperation between China and Africa, the author urgently stresses to bear in mind the following:

> [I]t is not evident that Chinese-African trade differs significantly from Western-African trade patterns; nor is it clear that China’s engagement will substantially improve Africa’s prospects for development. [...] Judging from its most important import partners, Beijing’s economic interests in Africa do not vary from those of Western states.

(Tull 2006: 471)
Concerning trade and economic cooperation, his analysis clouds the previously primarily positive and promising portrayal of the Sino-African strategic partnership: By stating that most African companies simply do not dispose of the capacities necessary to compete with their Chinese counterparts – even in African markets – Tull highlights Africa’s inability to undersell Chinese production costs and prices. As a consequence, African economies find themselves at a disadvantaged position, owing to the fact that their exports to China mostly consist of capital-intensive commodities. (Tull 2006: 472)

Consequently, the author stresses that “African countries have to recognise that China will not per se have a positive impact on their economies. China’s foreign trade policies are not driven by altruistic motives”. (Tull 2006: 472) As a result, this perspective obviously contradicts Beijing’s eager proclamations that intensified Sino-African cooperation will inevitably lead to a “win-win-situation”. (Tull 2006: 472)

With that said, Tull has touched sensitive ground, given that China’s increasing influence on the African continent is not always met with approval. The IISS aptly described the problem of contemporary Chinese presence in Africa that sometimes is conceived as controversial and bears the potential of stirring up conflict, as was the case in South Africa and Zimbabwe over Chinese clothing imports. (IISS 2007) On various occasions, concern has been voiced by senior African politicians that China may plunder Africa’s resources while forcing out local industries, such as the textile sector. (IISS 2007) Equally, just like Tull predicted, there are worries that “long-term deals for exports to China may prove disadvantageous, and may lock the continent into supplying unprocessed raw materials in exchange for manufactured products and engineering services.” (IISS 2007)

Consequently, in the long run, African policy-makers fear that their cooperation with China might prevent their own economies from diversifying. (ibid.) Alden and Alves addressed this issue:

> With the economic content of these new relations echoing the classic commodity-manufacturer dynamic of old, the rhetoric of ‘South-South’ solidarity and co-operation seemingly takes on dimensions that seem to hardly differ from generations of North-South ties.

(Alden, Alves 2008: 46)
One will only have to wait and see whether or not African development countries will dispose of enough strength and willpower so as not to let this fear become reality.

4.4. FOCAC – Opening the door for increased Sino-African cooperation

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was founded in October 2000 at a specially convened Ministerial Conference in Beijing under the joint initiative of China and Africa. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China 2013) It was the first multilateral consultative instrument to be formally established between China and Africa. (He 2007: 36) FOCAC’s main purposes as quoted on its official website are “further strengthening friendly cooperation between China and African states under the new circumstances, jointly meeting the challenges of economic globalization and seeking common development”. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China 2013)

At the first ministerial conference of FOCAC, held in Beijing from October 10 to 12, 2000, approximately 80 ministers from China, representatives of 44 African states, and 17 regional and international organizations were participating. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China 2013) The outspoken significance that this first convention represented for Africa is found in the Chinese commitment to either cancel or reduce African countries’ debts, as well as a simultaneous encouragement directed at Chinese companies to invest in Africa. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2010)

Provocatively, the PRC’s debt relief strategy could be described as an “excellent public relations tool for Beijing, because it not only garners popular support but also allows for two positive press events: the first to provide the loan, the second to relieve the debt”. (Woods 2008: 5)

However, there is an important aspect to consider in regard of China’s debt relief announcement for African developing countries, as is addressed by Chris Alden: “By cancelling debt, China places itself in step with the leading foreign powers operating in Africa, and […] implicitly suggests that China is on a similar footing as the West.” (Alden 2005: 151)
According to Taylor, this first convention of FOCAC in 2000 in essence had three main objectives:

For one thing, the meeting was embedded in Beijing’s general strategy to “at least rhetorically declare its aim of overhauling the global order” and promote China’s “traditional hostility” to US-American “hegemony”. (Taylor 2006: 67)

Second, the Forum provided Beijing with the possibility to show off its Socialist Modernization program – thus, in Taylor’s words, “demonstrating the superiority of China’s economic policies” – but also trying to encourage African countries to reform their economies “the Chinese way” in order to facilitate the implementation of Chinese foreign aid. (Taylor 2006: 69)

And third, the meeting was – at least for Taylor – “certainly” part of Chinese continuous efforts to detain Taiwan from gaining political legitimacy or the status of an independent republic. (Taylor 2006: 69)

In general, the Forum reflects the high priority China bestows upon its African partners at the beginning of the 21st century. (Taylor 2006: 69) In return, it provides Africa with a platform to “take action and strengthen its position through integrated and strategic policy formulation” as well as increased efficiency in diplomatic interaction. (He 2007: 36)

Altogether, there were five ministerial conferences between China and Africa within the framework of FOCAC. At its most recent gathering in 2012, the importance of the new Sino-African “strategic partnership” was once again stressed by Chinese officials. This was also formally registered in the Beijing declaration released on the occasion:

We [China, A/N] believe that the development of the new type of strategic partnership between China, the largest developing country, and Africa, the largest group of developing countries, is of great significance for the peace, stability and development of the world and serves the fundamental and strategic interests of both sides. As an important platform for collective dialogue and an effective mechanism of practical cooperation between China and Africa, FOCAC has played an irreplaceable role in promoting China-Africa relations.

(Beijing Declaration of the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation 2012)
Especially the introduction of this official statement, with the PRC once again stressing its identity as a developing country, allows one to spin the golden thread back to the beginnings of this chapter: The significance that Africa implies for the PRC’s political, economic, as well as geostrategic interests could not be more obvious at this point.

**Conclusion**

I chose George T. Yu’s words to conclude, for the value and meaning that they contribute to the literature analysis undertaken within the scope of this chapter:

> China’s African policy has been a manifestation of China’s basic foreign policy attitudes, an expression of China’s perceptions of the world, and a statement of China’s values governing foreign relations.  
> (Yu 1988: 861)

The intention of this chapter was to give a detailed portrayal of how China steadily broadened and deepened its involvement in Africa – at first primarily on ideological, in between on economic, and in the end on strategic and economic grounds. The construction of a common identity with a shared past and mutual experiences of western imperialism has certainly been beneficial to the current strength of Sino-African cooperation. It has also contributed to the position China holds in Africa today: A country of the developing world, an equal partner, “one of us”. This role has gotten even stronger through the PRC’s growing presence as a donor on the African aid scene.

What began as the concentrated effort of supporting African countries in their fight for liberation and independence turned into the proclamation of a new strategic partnership. What commenced as hesitant Sino-African alliance against imperialism and western hegemony developed into stable channels of South-South cooperation. And what started as Chinese aid provided out of ideological motivations evolved into bilateral trade structures distinguished by their unique feature of defining mutual benefit as their common goal.

I hope to have comprehensibly illustrated how China has evolved as a political and economic actor on the African continent, and how it completed its transformation from supporting liberation movements out of purely ideological motivations to encouraging its national enterprises to strengthen their partnership with Africa by investing there without any political prerequisites. In essence, Africa’s strategic value for the PRC was portrayed in depth – there
should not be any further doubts regarding Chinese motivations for fostering this relationship.

Some characteristics of Chinese involvement in Africa of course do come across as controversial and entail seemingly never-ending criticism – justified or not – from the West. Notably, what has become evident towards the end of this chapter is that the Sino-African partnership does not constitute a true win-win situation. However, it definitely represents an alternative to long-established trading patterns between Africa and overly powerful western partners. Thanks to the notions this alternative embraces, first and foremost the spirit of co-development and mutual benefit, the PRC is welcomed by African countries and thereby contributes profoundly to the success of South-South cooperation. One should therefore be able to carefully predict that an end of China’s successful involvement in Africa is most probably not on the horizon.
5. China in Sudan

“Sudan is [...] a defining case in China’s changing relations with Africa, and a key illustration of transition and convergence in China’s international politics.”

(Bradbury 2012: 363)

I chose the statement above to introduce the present chapter as it illustrates perfectly the importance Sudan exemplifies both for China’s encompassing involvement in Africa as well as the reflection of its general status in the international community. The nature of the PRC’s involvement in Sudan, particularly during the Darfur crisis, is also important for the research interest of this thesis as it may well herald the start of a change within the Chinese non-interference policy. That is the reason why Sino-Sudanese ties shall be explored in depth within the scope of the following chapter.

My aim for this section is therefore to illustrate Sudan as a postcolonial state and how it developed ties with China. I will then explore the PRC’s role as Sudan’s most important trading partner, consumer of oil, and strategic ally, as well as the deepening this partnership has undergone within the years. Particular focus shall be put on shared experiences of western isolation that both China and Sudan endured during the 1990s and that contributed significantly to the deepening of their strategic partnership. I will conclude this chapter with a depiction of the Sudanese second civil war and the PRC’s role in it.

5.1. Historic outline of postcolonial Sudan

Sudan obtained independence from British and Egyptian colonial rule in 1956. At the time, however, it was only a privileged Arab elite in the northern part of the country and former colonial authorities that negotiated the process of state building. Accordingly, only that elite was to take control of power and establish the postcolonial central state. And quite naturally, it focused primarily on the realization of its own interests. As a consequence, the needs of Sudanese populations living in peripheral regions outside Khartoum – notably the South and the province of Darfur in the West – were excluded and their political and economic marginalization, which dates back to Anglo-Egyptian colonial structures, was further entrenched.
Since independence, it was therefore the northern region of the country that “almost entirely” (Bradbury 2012: 368) maintained political and economic power and thereby contributed to the circumstance that “ethnic and cultural discrimination” outlived colonialism: Wealth-generating mechanisms (such as the refining and exporting of oil) were exclusively concentrated in the hands of the Arab elite in the North, “governance [reached] out only a few hundred miles from the capital”, and “the influence of central state control” visibly declined outside Khartoum. (Bradbury 2012: 368)

Anglo-Egyptian colonial structures have therefore left behind a “political legacy in the form of an authoritarian central state, whose authority has been contested by its outlying, peripheral regions”. (Large/Patey 2011: 3) As becomes apparent, the legacy of colonial rule in Sudan has consequently manifested itself in a “historically rooted political and economic marginalization of Southern Sudan”. (Large 2011: 89)

For the Sudanese people, a clear cut from its colonial past was therefore never realized: Even though independence was reached, postcolonial structures of inequality and marginalization persisted and shaped the country’s redistribution of wealth and power as well as its contemporary political system. Resulting from this was the eruption of two civil wars:

> A former Anglo-Egyptian colony, Sudan gained independence in 1956 and immediately fell into internal conflict. The civil war was largely one of secession, a result of continual economic and political neglect of the South by the northern government, a tendency that was an extension of the country’s colonial legacy. Following an 11-year span of relative peace resulting from the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, regional marginalisation still held meaning when the second civil war broke out. (Patey 2007: 1000)

In the long run, Khartoum’s absolute governance structures have effectively sustained the colonial exclusion of the country’s periphery. Practical examples of the Sudanese center’s elitist policies, which excluded peripheral regions from national revenues and state services, include the following: “Development funding intended for the South was often funneled to Khartoum […] and the state provided minimal services to the peripheries such as Darfur and the Southern regions […].” (Bradbury 2012: 369) Obviously, this did not contribute to the much-needed amelioration of the Sudanese inner-state divide – to the contrary, it fuelled violent upheavals by armed rebel groups in the South to fight for independence, as their
struggles for more equality and participation in economic and political life has always been disregarded and suppressed by the North.

Khartoum’s deliberate neglect of the Sudanese peripheries manifested itself in the South’s characterization as constant source of unrest, as well as the almost chronic inability of the central state to unite the entirety of its national territory:

While the central state in Khartoum has concentrated political power and wealth it has also suffered from an underlying weakness of central state rule, meaning that it cannot maintain control over its full territory.

(Large 2009: 620)

In this sense, the North-South divide and the central state’s failure to exercise power over Sudan’s complete territory, as well as grave inequalities and fundamental religious tensions, explain why the country has experienced numerous armed conflicts that gravely affected its economic development even decades after the country had shaken off its colonial past: As Rose Bradbury puts it, “[r]acial and religious divides – at times quite arbitrary – in concert with peripheral marginalization catalysed a succession of civil wars between the North and South.” (Bradbury 2012: 369)

The longest conflicts fought in unified Sudan were the two civil wars between the northern government in Khartoum, characterized by a traditional Islamic culture, and the southern Sudan region, whose population is primarily Christian, from 1955 until 1972 and from 1983 until 2005. (U.S. Energy Information Administration 2013; Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126)

During Sudan’s second civil war, it was mostly the economic and political marginalization of the country’s peripheries that contributed to “a series of interlocking conflicts” (Large 2009: 614) which prompted several rebel groups to fight the government: “A collection of rebel groups in the South, ever-distrustful of Khartoum, fought the government under the eventual banner of the SPLM/A." (Patey 2007: 1000)

According to its official website, the formation of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army is a “continuation of the past struggles of the Sudanese people, before, during and after colonialism. The rise of the SPLM/A in 1983 was a translation and a

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12 Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army
continuation of the longstanding political discontent into an armed conflict”. (SPLMToday.com 2012)

Resistance manifested itself in varying forms: In cities and urban centers, rebels from the South used popular uprisings in 1964 and 1985 to bid defiance to the regime in Khartoum. In the marginalized regions of Southern Sudan, Southern Kordofan, and Southern Blue Nile\(^{13}\), resistance took place in form of a “popular and patriotic armed struggle” during the periods of 1955 to 1973 and 1983 to 2005. As becomes apparent, “[t]he birth and formation of the SPLM/A in 1983 was […] not an isolated incident, but rather a culmination and continuation of these struggles of the Sudanese people”. (SPLMToday.com 2012)

The consequences of Sudan’s second civil war were literally fatal: In the end, “[t]his conflict would result in over two million deaths, the internal displacement of more than four million people and around half a million refugees”. (Large 2009: 614)

Sudan as we know it today dates back to 1989, when the National Islamic Front (NIF), which later was reconstituted as the National Congress Party (NCP) and whose leader to date is Omar al-Bashir, took power through a military coup. Its main objectives, according to Askouri, were the defeat of the southern rebels, to Islamize and Arabize the South, to unite the South with the rest of the country – if necessary, by force – as well as to establish an Islamic state. (Askouri 2007: 72)

Henry Lee and Dan Shalmon depict the events of 1989 in the following way:

In 1989, Colonel Omar Hassan al-Bashir, backed by the National Islamist Front, overthrew the elected government and escalated military actions against the Sudan’s People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) [sic!] in the South. By the time the civil war had ended, more than 2 million people had died and 4 million were displaced.

(Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126)

For the future safeguarding of the military coup’s objectives, the NCP “cemented Khartoum’s dominance through authoritarian rule, coupled with a discourse of militant Islam and Arab racial supremacy”. (Bradbury 2012: 369) As Bradbury states, “[s]ince its inception, the NCP has repeatedly answered civilian discontent with state sanctioned violence, leading to

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\(^{13}\) See Annex Figure 2
protracted armed conflicts”. (Bradbury 2012: 369)

This did, however, not prevent China to intensify its ties with the Sudanese central government.

5.2. China and Sudan – shared experiences of western isolation

Since the formal establishment of diplomatic ties between the PRC and Sudan in 1959, the relationship between the two countries has undergone significant changes. While their past is mostly connected through shared colonial experiences and the “post-colonial affinity of South-South relations”, their present marks “tremendous economic achievements” by China in Sudan, which “pull[ed] the country away from misery by investing in its oil industry”. (Large/Patey 2011: 2)

What remains constant, though, is that the strategic partnership between China and Sudan has always entailed particular fuel for discussion and skepticism within the western world. As the PRC, itself a country that does not enjoy a flawless human rights records, to put it mildly, nurtures its ties with the condemned “pariah state” under President Omar al-Bashir, South-South cooperation between China and Sudan remains contested and has continuously been the focus of western criticism.

In contrast, as Large and Patey point out below, from a Chinese perspective, the PRC’s involvement in Sudan appears to be a case where South-South cooperation almost seems predisposed to thrive:

Whereas Western media typically portray Sudan as a failed state on the verge of complete collapse under civil war and poverty, China more often regards Sudan as a land of opportunity. Sudan is a beacon of China’s successful engagement in Africa […].

(Large/Patey 2011: 2)

Essentially, these different perceptions on China’s engagement in Sudan show how much a detailed outline of their strategic partnership is required in order to comprehensively outline what constitutes the former’s involvement in the latter – and not to run the risk of repeating simplifying accusations that in reality might not do justice to the nature of their relationship. In this sense, the contemporary alliance between China and Sudan needs to be evaluated in regard to the PRC’s economic and political ties with the central state in Khartoum. Above all,
this requires an analyzing perspective including the knowledge of a “prior-existing [Sudanese A/N] political economy of unbalanced development”. (Large/Patey 2011: 3)

This realization establishes a connection to the historical foundations of Sino-Sudanese ties, which base on shared experiences of a colonial past and a “history of Chinese aid, trade and cultural links with Sudan” (Large 2009: 613) since diplomatic relations were established in 1959.

When tracing the PRC’s relations with Sudan back to their beginnings, what leaps to the eye is the element of a joint fight against western imperialism and foreign domination, which has characterized these ties since the very beginning and contributed significantly to the intensification of China’s strategic partnership with Sudan:

Sudan’s historical relations with China have been defined by the shared experience of hardship and resistance against outside interference in internal affairs, beginning with nineteenth-century British imperialism.

(Large/Patey 2011: 5)

In the case of Sudan, “nineteenth-century British imperialism” was felt in the colonial administration of its country and the exploitation of its national resources. For China, it was the forced opening of its economy by the British in 1839 that distinguished Chinese national identity with a distinct aversion against foreign intervention from then on. Over this shared contempt, China and Sudan initially bonded.

However, despite their good diplomatic relations, economic cooperation between China and Sudan was insignificant during the second half of the 20th century, as trade relations merely concentrated on small-scale exports on both sides: “From independence to the early 1990s, Sudan exported cotton, sesame, and metal scraps to China. In exchange, Sudan received small arms, fabrics and other textiles.” (Askouri 2007: 71) As Large puts it pointedly, “[p]rior to oil investment, China’s relations with Sudan were […] more symbolic than politically consequential”. (Large 2009: 613)

This notion is further confirmed in light of the circumstance that the PRC did not interfere in Sudan’s first civil war even though it actively supported other African wars of independence. (Srinivasan 2008: 58)
Trade relations between China and Sudan improved, however, following President Jafaar Nimeiri’s visit to the PRC in 1970. Nimeiri, who had seized power through a coup in 1969 and thereby put an end to civilian rule “marred by corruption and economic problems”, had spent “16 stormy years as Sudanese leader until he was himself overthrown in 1985”. (Wheeler, MacSwan 2009) It was Nimeiri who imposed Islamic Sharia law in 1983, an act generally perceived as “the major catalyst” for the country’s second civil war that put the mainly Muslim Sudanese North against the Christian South. (Wheeler/MacSwan 2009)

Back in 1970, with Sudanese growth rates deteriorating and its economy in desperate need of petroleum and other commodities (Wheeler/MacSwan 2009), Nimeiri turned to China for help. Nevertheless, he “reportedly [was] advised to turn to the US for assistance with oil prospecting as China did not have the right technology”. (Moro 2012: 23) What concerned arms deliveries, development aid, and technical assistance, however, China was in the position to support the country. (Srinivasan 2008: 58) In addition, the PRC provided loans “on easy terms”, with no strings attached, and thereby facilitated the construction of prominent government buildings\textsuperscript{14}. (Moro 2012: 24)

The reason for China’s initial reluctance to immerse itself more deeply in a partnership with Sudan was that at the time, it simply did not have the capacities to be a significant partner in economic or political terms. This started to change, however, when the NIF forcefully ended civilian rule and current President Omar al-Bashir seized power in 1989.

Resulting from al-Bashir’s violent accession to power, and the realization that the country’s human rights situation deteriorated even more, western investors and donors began to withdraw from the country and gradually set up financial and trade boycotts against Sudan. In addition, the IMF released a “declaration of non-cooperation against Sudan due to the government’s unpaid IMF debt and debt services” in 1990. (Rone 2003: 508) As a consequence, Sudan faced bankruptcy and was feverishly looking for foreign investors. It had turned to China before – it would turn to China again, since things were different now: Contrary to 1970, when the PRC had to dismiss Sudanese appeals to help boost the country’s stagnating economy, after all, it was China’s turn to step in and emerge as Sudan’s “single most important economic partner” (Large 2009: 614):

\textsuperscript{14} Among which was the Friendship Hall (see also Chapter 4.3.).
Following the 1989 NIF military coup [...] with Sudan becoming increasingly isolated and Chinese national oil companies looking for international opportunities, the historical bond between the two countries found new meaning. (Large/Patey 2011: 6)

Obviously, the circumstances had changed: The rewards of the PRC’s economic modernization program had finally started to kick in and allowed the country to be more generous with undertaking investments abroad. Given that Sudan’s despondent situation suited the PRC’s plans just fine, the country just seemed to be the right place to expand bilateral trade and cooperation with.

And that’s exactly how it was, as China found itself “[e]levated in importance by Sudan’s particular circumstances of political isolation and an international sanctions regime imposed over the 1990s” and therefore represented a “practical economic and developmental alternative for Khartoum”. (Large 2011: 89)

However, in light of the events in June 1989, which represent an “important juncture in history in both countries” (Srinivasan 2008: 59), it has to be admitted that there is more to the initial motivations behind reinforced Sino-Sudanese ties than simple economic calculation:

On 4 June, the world’s attention was focused on the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in Beijing. On 30 June, a military coup orchestrated and backed by the National Islamic Front (NIF) quietly brought a new regime to power in Khartoum. (Srinivasan 2008: 59)

As evidenced by the findings above, the “marriage of convenience” (Srinivasan 2008: 55) between China and Sudan therefore has its origins in shared (and simultaneous) experiences of western isolation.

For China, it was the events at Tiananmen Square that put an end to its “honeymoon with the developed world” (Alden/Alves 2008: 53) and left Beijing rather alone on the international floor. New friends were desperately needed – Sudan’s inquiry for help just came at the right time.

For Sudan, Omar al-Bashir’s support for Saddam Hussein preceding the 1991 Gulf War and the constant turmoil that dominated the country’s political life cost it the US-American aid benefits, which had kept Nimeiri’s head over water during the 1970s and 1980s. (Srinivasan
Consequently, with the absence of US aid, western support in Sudan in the beginning 1990s was scarce and left Khartoum facing increasing international isolation.

With this in mind, the following statement highlights how Sino-Sudanese cooperation emerged from a distinct feeling of having lost vital partners and the shared urgency to form new alliances: “By the time Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir visited Beijing in November 1990 entreatng aid from China, both countries were subject of heavy Western scrutiny.” (Srinivasan 2008: 59)

As becomes apparent, it was because of the international outcry and accompanying embargoes directed at the PRC in the wake of its brutal suppression of civilian demonstrations at Tiananmen Square, on the one hand, and the economic embargoes targeting Khartoum, whose impact Sudan had already been painfully experiencing for a while, on the other, that Beijing and Khartoum felt connected through the West’s economic and political alienation.

Reinforced Sino-Sudanese cooperation therefore emanated from a mutual need to circumvent the vacuum that had been created by the West’s withdrawal. In addition to shared experiences of western imperialist ambitions in the past, its tactic of isolation and international exclusion in the early 1990s brought the countries even closer.

Nevertheless, Chinese aid at the time was restricted to the signing of agreements on economic and technical cooperation and cultural exchange, as the PRC at the time “was reluctant to give more than symbolic aid”. (Srinivasan 2008: 59)

This should change, however, when China started implementing large-scale infrastructure investments notably in Sudan’s oil sector: As will be shown in the following section, the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership started to reach its full potential once China’s technical assistance catapulted the country’s petroleum sector to international export level.

5.3. The role of oil in China’s contribution to Sudanese growth

By 1997, with national debt up to 250 percent of GDP, the civil war against the South draining further resources from its treasury, and destroyed rural areas crippling Sudan’s
agricultural economy, the country was in “desperate financial straits”. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125) The only way out of insolvency was to increase national revenues – oil exports, therefore, seemed to be the solution. However, in the face of underdeveloped petroleum resources and most of its oil territory unexplored, the central government first had to find someone that helped put into shape its oil sector.

The reason for the neglected status of the country’s petroleum facilities obviously lies within Sudan’s chronic status of civil war. Initially, it was the oil giant Chevron USA that first started to explore for oil on Sudanese grounds in 1974. When civil war broke out for the second time, however, the company found itself entangled in the nation’s conflict as its headquarters in western Upper Nile, in the South of Sudan, also became a target of separatist rebel attacks in 1984. (Rone 2003: 504) Following the killings of three expatriate workers (Rone 2003: 504), Chevron decided to exit Sudan in 1992 “under US pressure and [further A/N] SPLA threats” (Moro 2012) and pulled out private investments of more than 1 billion USD. This was done by selling its shares to the small Canadian firm Arakis, which subsequently formed today’s Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), the by far biggest and most influential association operating in Sudan’s oil sector. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125; Large/Patey 2011: 10; Rone 2003: 504)

As European and North-American companies had left the country because Sudan was “off limits to western business due to legal restrictions and war-related investor risks” (Large 2011: 89), China presented itself as the ideal partner to fill the void. This can be ascribed to the following three reasons:

First, the PRC had succeeded in making substantial progress with the development of technologies vital to oil production and was now sure that it could provide substantial help to construct and strengthen the Sudanese petroleum infrastructure. (cf. Moro 2012)

Second, in order to maintain the impressive growth rates back home, China obviously was in need to find sources that could still its domestic hunger for resources and provide its industries with steady flows of oil: “It [China A/N] needed oil from abroad to sustain economic growth.” (Moro 2012)
Finally and most importantly, the Chinese non-interference policy was obviously perceived to come in handy in Khartoum as the PRC vowed to neither intervene, nor let its business activities be diverted or disturbed by a country’s internal affairs – and that included also civil war. As Large puts it, “[p]roceeding as it does within political relations constructed on the basis of political equality and, crucially, non-interference, […] it is hardly surprising that the Chinese government’s approach is valued by the Sudan government.” (Large 2011: 90)

As a consequence, in 1995, just like President Nimeiri did before him, al-Bashir paid China a visit to ask for help with the development of its national oil reserves. And “[t]his time around China accepted as it had the technology and interest”. (Moro 2012)

In spite of the fact that oil already was discovered and partially explored in the early 1970s, Sudan’s petroleum resources were “undeveloped” and the major part of its territory “unexplored”. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125) Considering also the crucial twist of fate that left the PRC practically without competition from western multinational oil corporations on Sudanese grounds, for China, consequently, Sudan had “enormous upside potential” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125).

The PRC’s two national oil and gas enterprises, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), therefore had de facto no obstacles to clear to cement their position in Sudan and get entrust with the task of restructuring and boosting the country’s oil sector by producing, importing, trading, and processing oil. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 113)

As the US had “banned engagement by American companies with the oil sector” due to allegations that the government of al-Bashir abused human rights and supported terrorists (including Osama bin Laden)15 (Moro 2012: 24), China was the only country “prepared to fill [the] vacuum” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125) created by the departure of western companies and was therefore the decisive actor that helped Sudan avoid national bankruptcy.

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15 “Under US President Clinton, the US government adopted a policy of isolating the Sudanese government, placing it on the State Department’s list of states supporting terrorism in 1993. In 1997, a US executive order barred any US person (including corporations) from doing business with the government of Sudan or its entities […]” (Rone 2003: 509)
President al-Bashir made sure to show his gratitude to his helper in time of need by selling oil concessions to the PRC “on generous terms” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125), which in specific means that “[…] there are no restrictions on profit reparations, and the Sudanese government exempts CNPC from all domestic taxes on exported oil (although CNPC does pay royalties)” (Large, Shalmon 2008: 126). Simply put, “from a purely commercial basis, investments in […] Sudan were almost too good to refuse”. (Large, Shalmon 2008: 126)

In 1997, China’s CNPC obtained a 40 percent share – the largest single share – of the GNOPC, and as of now operates the company in cooperation with Sudan’s national oil company Nilepet as well as Malaysia’s Petronas and India’s Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC). (Goodman 2004)

Even though “oil was first discovered in the early 1970s”, it was only in 1999 that Sudan finally was in the position to export the first barrel (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125) – and this was above all thanks to the large-scale Chinese investments in its oil sector, whose “official […] point of departure has been to facilitate and practically help deliver the infrastructural foundations deemed to be prerequisites of economic growth.” (Large 2011: 90) This included the financing of the construction of roads, bridges, hydroelectric power stations, pipelines, dams, a new airport in Khartoum, textile mills, and agricultural projects. (Askouri 2007: 75; Lee/Shalmon 2008: 125)

Simply put, the overall objective of “China’s oil development strategy aimed to turn Sudan into a functioning oil exporter”. (Large 2007: 4)

Gradually, economic relations between China and Northern Sudan gained significant depth, as the PRC’s standing developed from a “comparatively minor position” to Khartoum’s “most important external economic partner” (Large 2009: 625): In 2009, the PRC accounted for 76 percent of Sudan’s exports and 22 percent of imports. (Large/Patey 2011: 14) What has been the constant of Sino-Sudanese ties throughout the years, however, is that oil “remains at the heart” of their strategic relationship and “dominates Sudan’s trade with China”. (Large 2009: 615) By 2007, Sudan had become “a centre of established Chinese interests”, ranking sixth among the PRC’s oil suppliers (Large 2009: 615) and remained its

Malaysia holds 30 percent and India 25 percent. (Srinivasan 2008: 60)
third largest overall trading partner in Africa”, behind Angola and South Africa. (Large/Patey 2011:14)

These findings shed light on the positive side effects that resulted for the PRC following the creation of an exportable Sudanese oil export sector – such as the increase in business opportunities for Chinese products, ranging from textiles to cars, electronic goods as well as construction materials. (Large/Patey 2011: 16) In addition, the authors permit to draw the conclusion that “[t]he broad China-Sudan trade pattern is consistent with China’s wider Africa trade profile.” (Large/Patey 2011: 16)

Above all, however, Sudan “first and foremost is a key investment destination for […] [China’s A/N] national oil company CNPC”. (ibid.)

This is because with CNPC as the “major Chinese oil company” (Srinivasan 2008: 61) operating in Sudan, the PRC holds extensive shares in the country’s two most important oil corporations: In addition to the already mentioned 40 percent stake in Sudan’s GNPOC, which China has been holding since 1997 to develop oil concessions in Blocks 1, 2, and 4 in the area of Heglig and Unity, it holds 41 percent in the Petrodar Operating Company (PDO)\(^{17}\), which was established in October 2001 in order to expand Blocks 3 and 7. (Srinivasan 2008: 61) With 95 percent, CNPC almost exclusively holds Block 6, which has launched production in 2004, and in addition owns 35 percent of the Red Sea Petroleum Operating Company (RSPOC), which is in charge of the partly off-shore Block 15. (Large 2007: 2)

All of the above mentioned CNPC’s producing sectors (except Block 6, which spreads into Darfur) are located along Sudan’s contested North-South border\(^{18}\) (Large 2009: 615; Srinivasan 2008: 61) – a fact that would turn out problematic in light of the country’s raging civil war as the location of “key oilfields”, such as Heglig, was the focus of heavy disputes between the NCP and the SPLM/A during the Central Peace Agreement (CPA)’s interim period. (Large/Patey 2011: 17)

\(^{17}\) China’s second oil company in Sudan, Sinopec, holds 6 percent of PDOC; Malaysia’s Petronas holds 40 percent. (Srinivasan 2008: 61)

\(^{18}\) See Annex Figure 1
In addition, since CNPC contributed to its construction in 1997, China’s leading oil company has a 50 percent stake in the Khartoum oil refinery. Furthermore, together with its construction branch China Petroleum Engineering and Construction Corporation (CPECC), CNPC participated in the construction of the 1,600 kilometres pipeline from the Heglig oil fields to the Red Sea export plant (Srinivasan 2008: 61; Holslag 2008: 73), thereby “effectively connecting domestic production to the international market”. (Large 2007: 4)

On the occasion of the 15-year anniversary of its cooperation with Sudan, the CNPC issued a report on its activities in Sudan from 1995 until 2009. It emphasizes the principle of mutually beneficial development as inherent to CNPC’s overall approach in Sudan, and generally accentuates how the PRC sees its role as instrumental for the achievement of the local economic growth:

Over the past 15 years, CNPC has, together with its partners, helped to build an integrated and modern oil industry in Sudan. The company has witnessed the huge changes that growth in Sudan’s oil industry has brought to the life of the Sudanese people. Guided by the principle of mutually beneficial development, CNPC will continue to play a positive role in deepening cooperation and strengthening friendship with Sudan.

(CNPC 2009)

China’s involvement in Sudan, however, “goes beyond oil”. (Askouri 2007: 78) The most prominent examples of infrastructure projects unwound by the Chinese are the El Gaili Power Station as well as the Merowe Dam project in Northern Sudan.

The former is a power plant driven by oil and gas, which is “cited as exemplifying China’s positive contribution to developing Sudan’s energy sector” by both the PRC and Sudan. (Large 2011: 90). The latter serves as example of how a Chinese initiative prompted other investors from the Middle East, France, Germany, and Switzerland to join in on a large-scale infrastructure project. The dam’s first construction phase started in November 2003 and was led by Chinese contract workers; its first finished stage was inaugurated by President al-Bashir in March 2009. (Large 2011: 91)

Nevertheless, the Merowe Dam also stands for a foreign Chinese infrastructure project that is internationally disputed for its fatal economic and social impacts: The dam’s advocates (obviously including China) promote the “positive benefits” (Large 2011: 91) that the project created for Sudan’s economic development by doubling the country’s electricity generation...
capacity (Bosshard 2011). Its opponents condemn the enforced displacement of more than 50,000 people from the fertile Nile Valley to “arid desert locations”: “Thousands of people who refused to leave their homes were flushed out by the reservoir, and protests were violently suppressed.” (Bosshard 2011)

As becomes apparent, the case of the Merowe Dam not only illustrates the sometimes controversial nature of China’s infrastructure projects in Sudan, but also the authoritarian character the Sudanese regime displays when confronting its opponents. In light of the excessive use of force and brutality that were applied to make Sudanese civilians comply with the central state’s intentions, this project has obviously tarnished China’s image in Sudan, as it is now seen as a blind supporter of Khartoum. Consequently, this complicity in “massive population displacement” (Askouri 2007: 77) sheds a critical light on the “opportunistic nature of China’s foreign investment” (Askouri 2007: 82) in Sudanese infrastructure projects.

Sadly enough, it seems that massive displacements and brutal repression are techniques inherent to al-Bashir’s way of ruling the divided country, which therefore concerned above all its oil sector. Here, the central state’s contested methods included “forced displacement in oil-field regions, the recruitment and arming of ethnic militias in these areas, and the use of oil revenues by Khartoum to prosecute the war more ruthlessly”. (Srinivasan 2008: 62)

As the PRC maintains its economic cooperation exclusively with the central state in Khartoum on a strict non-interference basis, it turned out to be an extremely difficult – and in the end, impossible – task to put distance between these contested activities and its own role as an accomplice of the government. And this is exactly why China has attracted so much criticism from the West. However, it needs to be noted at this point that China was not the only economic actor by far that was involved in activities fueling Sudan’s growth: In 1999, the European Union (EU) opted for a policy of “constructive engagement” with Khartoum, and UN sanctions were lifted in 2001, which consequently leads the reader to Srinivasan’s pointed observation that “one would be mistaken to think that China was a lone rebel against all others”. (Srinivasan 2008: 63)

Reverting back to the subject of oil as central focus of the Sino-Sudanese partnership, in 2008, after Libya, Nigeria, Algeria, and Angola, Sudan was among the five countries in
Africa that “together produce 80 percent of the continent’s oil and hold 90 percent of its reserves”. (Srinivasan 2008: 61). Recalling the fact that the first Sudanese barrel of oil was only exported nine years ago in 1999, this achievement becomes even more impressive and obviously clarifies that “oil is considered a pillar industry” (Large/Patey 2011: 20) for Sudan’s economic growth.

China’s role in this is substantially important, as its enormous financial investments and technical assistance have undoubtedly played a decisive role in the large-scale professionalization of the country’s oil sector. Through its strategic partnership based on non-interference and mutually beneficial development, the PRC has therefore contributed greatly to Sudan’s development in general.

On a final note, however, what needs to be kept in mind is that above all, China’s large-scale investments in Sudan’s oil sector have pursued the overarching goal of securing supply for the maintenance of its domestic growth. As “[a] disruption of this source of energy supply will have serious impact on China’s national economy” (Iroanya 2010: 187), China takes a great interest that Sino-Sudanese oil ties will remain unimpaired in the future.
6. Theoretical perspectives on China in Sudan

“Facts come to mean something only as ascertained and organised in the frame of a theory.”

(Myrdal 1963: 160)

Introduction

The theoretical framework of the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership is comprehensive and entails various analytical dimensions. In the attempt of applying theory to reality, I have chosen the analytical angle of modernization theory to put China’s role in Sudan into perspective. In this section, I will form an encompassing approach that provides profound theoretical explanations to shed light on the nature of China’s involvement there. The specific interest of this chapter is therefore to establish a conceptual and theoretical basis of the Sino-Sudanese partnership as based in the approach of economic modernization theory.

As I assume that modernization theory embodies one of the predominant characteristic features of Sino-Sudanese ties, I am striving to confirm that the case of China’s presence in Sudan contains elements that are inherent to the modernization theory.

In doing so, I will first outline the most characterizing elements that constitute modernization theory, followed by their application to the case of China in Sudan as well as a critique that takes up a postcolonial perspective. Furthermore, I will propose the concept of development relations and South-South cooperation as alternative development models within Sino-African ties and Sino-Sudanese ties.

6.1. Modernization theory

Modernization theory – „the belief that industrialization and economic development lead directly to positive social and political change“ (Berman 2009) – has been a focus of academic attention in western development studies since the 1950s. In the context of global de-colonization and the leap for development of recently independent states, modernization

19 Postcolonial theory in essence can be defined as a „term for a collection of theoretical and critical strategies used to examine the culture (literature, politics, history and so forth) of former colonies of the European empires, and their relation to the rest of the world. While [they] embrace […] no single method or school, […] post-colonial theories share many assumptions: they question the salutary effects of empire (visible in phrases such as ‘the gift of civilization’ […] and raise such issues as racism and exploitation. Central to all […] is the position of the colonial or post-colonial subject. (Makaryk 1993: 155)
theory quickly became to dominate social sciences in the West (Joshi 2005) and should henceforth represent the most dominant feature of the latter’s official development assistance.

I have chosen Shmuel N. Eisenstadt’s definition of modernization, who describes the concept as follows:

Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic, and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian and African continents.

(Eisenstadt cited in Bernstein 1971: 147)

Evidently, the theoretical concept of modernity is closely tied to the notion of development. Within the scope of this thesis, I will use the term development as defined by Christopher M. Dent:

From a functional or technical perspective, we can define development as process of various inter-related human activities and endeavours that, in ideal terms, realise certain indivisible goals [...] [such as] poverty reduction, rising and equitable distribution of welfare levels, and the improving competitiveness, efficiency and environmental sustainability of a nation’s or society’s economic-related activities.

(Dent 2011: 166)

Especially during the initial emergence of modernization theory in the beginning second half of the twentieth century, the notion of development as “aspiration, ideology, and field of study” (Bernstein 1971: 142) was on top of the international agenda. At the time, the world, but especially the West, was involved in the extensive academic search for an applicable solution to get de-colonialized nations out of their persistent state of “underdevelopment”.

The solution, as it was thought at the time, was found in the universal formula for success of the already “modernized”, industrialized countries: By implementing the very industrializing processes that have catapulted “modern” nations to their advanced state of development, it was generally assumed that “backwards” or “traditional” societies, to echo the linguistic usage of the time, would achieve economic, political, as well as social progress. In this new, de-colonialized world order, the predominantly western discourse on development and actual ODA flows were both not exempt from the power of the modernization paradigm’s spell. To the contrary, the modernization narrative essentially shaped the West’s approach to
development and therefore had significant influence on the design and implementation of its development cooperation programs.

Only with the gradual rise of sensitivity and awareness within development studies, and the latter’s steady orientation towards postcolonial theories, as well as the demand of self-determination and increasing empowerment for developing countries has the predominant focus on economic modernization lost its initial appeal within the West’s international aid architecture.

At the time, however, the West’s “gift of development” (Dent 2011: 166) was essentially influenced by an academic mindset that prioritized economic, political, and social modernization over actual long-term needs of local populations and for decades successfully silenced every other scientific approach to alternative development:

[…] In the past the West’s ‘gift’ of development to Africa through its overseas aid programmes was very much conceived as part of a wider modernisation process, in other words, a techno-industrial expansion of materialistic activities and a ‘taming of wilderness’ […]. In the post-Cold War era, market capitalism and liberal democratic governance have been peddled as the conventional wisdom on aspired […] paradigms of economic, social and political development. (Dent 2011: 166)

In essence, the West’s rationale of development and modernization consequently was about “paving the way for the achievement of those conditions that characterize rich societies”. (Escobar 1992: 25) Generally it can thus be stated that the most pertaining characteristics of modernization consist of dynamics that require the introduction of a market economy, monetization, urbanization, industrialization, as well as the spread of mass communications and literacy. (Bernstein 1971: 151)

Modernization theory therefore assumes that North American and European growth standards produce “the model of modern society”. (Bernstein 1971: 147) The fundamental argument of the modernization narrative is consequently located in the universal belief that there is only one single type of development – which is western-style industrial-capitalist rise. Basically, the implementation of development efforts that were aligned with modernization theory was supposed to achieve higher living standards and reduced levels of poverty by imitating the specific success story of the industrialized West (i.e. Northern America and Europe). If
uniformly applied, this strategy was believed to modernize “underdeveloped” societies: “[T]he so-called natural progress closely followed the trajectory of western Europe and North America: [H]ow they had transformed and ‘developed’ became the blueprint for the rest of the world.” (Joshi 2005)

Consequently, the most pertinent elements of the modernization narrative are thus the dichotomization of tradition and modernity (Bernstein 1971: 150) as well as a single development trajectory from the West serving as universal model for all “underdeveloped” regions across the globe.

However, as modernization theory is constituted of imposing the western model of economic rise – including both its moral values and its belief systems – on developing countries’ social and political landscapes, it contains also the notion of “social change”. (Bernstein 1971: 144) This implies that development as such not only incites economic and political transformation, but also requires the transformation of society.

The notion of social change seems “unmistakably” based on North American or European attributions. To name just a few, these would include a society’s willingness to be open to change, a personal orientation that is directed more towards the future than the past, as well as punctuality or organization. (cf. Inkeles 1966: 54-60) Quite obviously, these characteristics resonate intensely with beliefs that are inherent in Eurocentric argumentation, which considers the West’s political, juridical, and societal convictions, as well as its economic system and moral values as superior to those of the “underdeveloped” regions in the world.

Therefore, modernization theory assumes that these individual traits should ultimately promote and support a society’s transformation process from a status of underdevelopment to modernity. In the end, modernization theorists also predict that these traits will pass a society from its initial stage of traditionalism through the preconditions for “take-off” and the drive to maturity until, eventually, it will reach the “age of high mass-consumption”. (cf. Rostow 1960: 4-16) At least, that is the scientific conviction of Walt Whitman Rostow, who, with his work on the five stages of economic growth\(^\text{20}\), has significantly shaped the discourse on

\(^{20}\) Rostow, Walt Whitman (1960): The Stages of Economic Growth
modernization theory. Within the scope of this thesis, however, Rostow’s work shall not further be elaborated on.

6.2. Modernization theory revisited: The case of China in Sudan

The reason why I am suggesting that China’s engagement Sudan can be characterized as founded in modernization theory is initially based on the value that the PRC has continuously dedicated to domestic modernization after Deng Xiaoping launched the country’s economic reformation era in 1978: Since then, Chinese modernizing elements such as the opening-up to foreign economies and technologies, as well as the large-scale socialist modernization program, have decidedly shaped the PRC’s domestic prioritization.

The modernization narrative therefore represents a substantial part within Chinese national identity formation processes. In addition, it has significantly influenced the PRC’s activities abroad, as is evidenced by the following statement:

Modernisation as a national goal or programme to achieve a ‘strong nation’ status has played an influential part in China’s state-building since the country came into substantive contact with the outside world, from the invasion of Western imperialism in the mid-nineteenth century to the current effort to develop the country’s economy. To a greater or lesser extent during the past century or so, modernisation has affected many facets of China’s domestic life as well as its international relations.

(Chan 1999: 64)

As has been outlined earlier, the Chinese presence in Sudan has mostly been felt in the country’s state-directed oil sector. There, the PRC’s approach can be labeled as being of purely economic nature, as the primary goal of its activities was to enhance growth mainly through a strategy characterized by the following assertion:

The official rationalization of China’s economic role [in Sudan A/N] partly involves the reinvention of state-directed grand developmental ambition seen at different points in Sudan’s colonial and post-colonial history. This has involved ambitious but ultimately flawed central state-directed initiatives to drive economic productivity by generating export revenue mainly through agriculture or infrastructural projects intended to improve agricultural export schemes.

(Large 2011: 90)

Both this statement and further findings that “[c]aptivating notions of economic modernization seen in different periods in Sudan are in practice being reprised with Chinese
characteristics […]” (Large 2011: 90) demonstrate that modernization theory appears to represent the theoretical foundation of China’s engagement in Sudan.

Furthermore, when attempting to characterize the Chinese involvement in Sudanese oil affairs, it appears that the activities of PRC oil corporations have contributed significantly to the deepening of regional disparities as well as the inner-state separation of “developed” versus “underdeveloped” regions within Sudan. As has already been evidenced earlier, the fundamental divide between “developed” and “underdeveloped”, “rich” and “poor”, “modern” center and “backwards” periphery, as well as the urgent need to “develop” these marginalized areas with the uniform model of western-industrialist rise, are some of the most distinctive elements of modernization theory. Apparently, the nature of China’s role in Sudan seems to meet these criteria, as is evidenced by the abstract below:

[T]he teleology of the modernisation narrative that China has contributed to most recently has been counter-balanced by a practical reinforcement of a pattern of central state rule that has often entailed violent means of engaging its peripheries on a North-South and East-West basis.

(Large 2011: 90)

More importantly, in light of accusations that criticize how the PRC’s modernizing objectives were realized at the cost of the civil population in Sudan’s peripheral regions, the description of China’s “official approach […] [as] founded on an underlying rationale of modernisation that prioritises outcomes, even at the expense of social impacts” (Large 2011: 90) seems plausible when taking into account the following aspects:

On the one hand, China’s extensive investments in the Sudanese oil infrastructure steadily blocked out the downside effects that its activities had on the marginalized parts of the Sudanese people (i.e. continued exclusion from oil benefits, lack of political and economic participation, as well as mass displacements to make room for large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Merowe dam and the Red Sea pipeline) – and thereby consciously put up with the “social impacts” this approach generated. On the other hand, by solely engaging with al-Bashir’s regime in Khartoum, the PRC effectively denied any cooperation with actors but the central state in the North and through that further contributed to the South’s economic and political marginalization.
The impression that is being created in light of this argumentation is that China’s modernizing approach in Sudan intensified regional disparities and strengthened the country’s internal dichotomization between the “modern” central state apparatus in Khartoum and peripheral, “backwards” areas in Southern Sudan and the province of Darfur.

As a matter of fact, the revenues generated by the fruits of enhanced oil exports – which Sudan has only been able to benefit from thanks to Chinese investments and technology – only served the authoritarian regime in the North and did nothing to alleviate the situation for the marginalized populations in the South. This explains why the PRC’s entanglement in Sudanese oil affairs has repeatedly been blamed for having contributed to the aggravation of the economic and political marginalization of South Sudan and Darfur. Given that the center-periphery dichotomization is inherent to the modernization narrative, and China did nothing to alleviate this divide, it seems that modernization theory is suited to shed light on the nature of China’s role in Sudan.

It is important to emphasize at this point, however, that one should refrain from pointing the finger on China alone when analyzing the social consequences that derived from the modernization rationale it applied to Sudan. True, the large-scale infrastructure and oil extraction projects of Sinopec and CNPC on Sudanese grounds fed into the distinct wealth concentration of the central state apparatus in Khartoum and thereby contributed further to the exclusion of the peripheral regions in Southern Sudan and Darfur.

Nevertheless, the PRC is not solely to be blamed for contributing to the deepening of Sudan’s structural deficiencies. What needs to be kept in mind is that first, China is not the only big player in Sudan’s oil sector: Malaysia’s Petronas and India’s ONGC are high-level economic partners within Sudan’s overarching “Look East”21 policy and therefore shape the Sudanese oil business just like China does.

And second, it is primarily the Sudanese regime under President Omar al-Bashir that has to bear responsibility for the eminently uneven distribution mechanisms that outlived Anglo-Saxon colonial rule and has continued to dominate the country since he came to power in

1989. It is therefore the country’s prevailing postcolonial structures that constantly remind the Sudanese people of their past, and a regime that has not put much effort into countering them effectively. In this sense, the prevailing Sudanese inner-state inequalities between the government in the North and provinces in the South can first and foremost be traced back to the country’s period of colonial rule.

These facts seem to escape collective memory too often in the heat of discussions surrounding the case of China’s presence in Sudan. For this reason, priority needs to be given to the evidence that in the end, China’s decisive role for Sudan’s economic growth, “only partially capture[s] what is a more multidimensional process with a highly uneven impact that has compounded Sudan’s historic centre-periphery economic grievances”. (Large 2011: 94)

Consequently, China’s role in Sudan absolutely needs to be contextualized within the postcolonial heritage that Anglo-Egyptian rule has left behind; it has to be analyzed as inserted into and later on affected by a “prior-existing political economy produced […] by a history of unbalanced development that has contributed much towards independent Sudan’s series of interlocking conflicts”. (Large 2011: 89)

Here, Stephanie Rupp’s findings should be mentioned: Even though her characterization of contemporary South-South relations between China and Africa rests at a general level, her final conclusion can well be applied to the case of China in Sudan:

While China’s activities in Africa are neither colonial nor neocolonial, China exploits features of postcolonial Africa that provide benefits to the state, often at the expense of ordinary Africans’ well-being. […] The irony is that the structures of political and economic domination that are most amenable to China’s exploitation of Africa’s natural resources are the very same structures that African governments inherited from European colonial powers and subsequently nurtured and deepened in their quest to maintain power during the decades after independence.

(Rupp 2008: 81)

In this sense and from a postcolonial perspective, China’s involvement in the Sudanese oil sector functioned quasi as side-effect to deepen the country’s national divide between center and peripheries. It therefore seems that Bernstein’s notion of “dual society” (Bernstein 1971: 154) applies perfectly to characterize the political and economic split of the Sudanese society:
“[T]he notion of the ‘dual society’ is convenient for modernization theory as it neatly divides underdeveloped countries into backward (traditional) and advanced (modern) sectors without considering the symbiotic relationship between the two which can be analysed in terms of the creation of underdevelopment.”

(Bernstein 1971: 154)

In the case of China in Sudan, the facts speak for themselves, as the Sudanese “history of unbalanced development” shaped the country’s contemporary economic and political environment considerably and further intensified the gap between Khartoum’s “central ruling state apparatus” versus “centrifugal development, political marginalisation and exploitation” in Darfur and southern parts of Sudan. (Large 2011: 97)

Especially in light of Sudan’s booming oil industry that “sharpened the contrast between the prosperity of parts of Khartoum and the underdevelopment prevailing in Darfur” (Large 2011: 97), it seems accurate to characterize the Sudanese society as “dual”. In consequence, as the element of a dual society represents a characteristic feature of the modernization narrative, there seems to be no further doubt that the PRC’s main approach in Sudan can be ascribed to modernization theory.

6.3. Circular causation in a cumulative process: Explaining Darfur’s chronic underdevelopment

Gunnar Myrdal’s economic theory approach provides us with an encompassing overview of the prevailing status of underdevelopment within regions of the global South. Even though his findings date back to the early 1960s, his scientific achievements still entail important insights for contemporary development studies. They also matter greatly for the research interest of this thesis since there certainly are parallels between Myrdal’s theoretical assumptions and the concrete example of my case study of China in Sudan. Through his work on regional inequalities, I hope to provide a clear picture of the circumstances that surround Darfur’s seemingly chronic status of marginalization and underdevelopment – a status which, as the analysis mentioned above just demonstrated, de facto served as a constant predisposition for conflict.

With his general theory of underdevelopment and development, Myrdal aims to explain the mechanisms that lead to and sustain both national and international economic inequality. His main hypothesis assumes that “normally a social process is cumulative because of circular
causation”. (Myrdal 1963: 50) The purpose of his “principle of circular and cumulative causation” is to shed light on how prevailing problems of inequalities and different rates of progress – both inner-state and globally – are constantly reproducing themselves and keep under-developed regions in the tight grip of a vicious circle, preventing them from effectively achieving better living standards. For this reason, Myrdal has defined so-called “backwash effects” and “spread effects” that spur or hamper cumulative causation. The purpose of these effects is to explain how developed regions appear to further develop even faster, while underdeveloped regions seem to remain confined to their economically, politically, and socially disadvantaged status.

Essentially, what Myrdal is trying to say is that “the higher the level of economic development […] a country has already attained, the stronger the spread effects will be”. In contrast, “the curse of a low average level of development” in an underdeveloped country derives from the fact that the spread effects are generally weak. (Myrdal 1963: 34) As a result, in Myrdal’s words, “poverty becomes its own cause”: The market forces in poor countries will rather lead to the creation of regional inequalities and to expanding those that already exist, than they will engender higher development rates. (Myrdal 1963: 34) Consequently, a low level of national economic development is accompanied “as a rule” by great economic inequalities – and therefore simultaneously represents a “major impediment to progress”. (ibid.)

In the case of developing countries, circular causation in a cumulative process thus proves to be a vicious circle that keeps them locked in their current status of underdevelopment and economic marginalization – just like everlasting peripheries, so to speak.

Why these findings are of such importance for my research interest becomes evident when linking them to the case of Sudan and, more particularly, Darfur: As I already demonstrated, the Sudanese province represents the paramount example of the country’s “centrifugal development, political marginalization and exploitation” that effectively inflamed conflict there and in other parts of Sudan. (cf. Large 2011: 97) The profound inequalities that immanently characterize the relationship between the prosperity of Khartoum and the underdevelopment prevailing in Darfur and Southern Sudan, keeping these areas locked in a permanent status of inner-state peripheries, therefore seem to apply to Myrdal’s hypothesis of regional inequalities and underdevelopment.
Consequently, according to the concept of circular causation in a cumulative process, Darfur has been kept in the tight grip of a vicious circle that reproduced its underdevelopment over and over again. It can therefore be concluded that ultimately, the persisting marginalization of Darfur confirms Myrdal’s thesis of circular causation.

The notions of colonialism and foreign economic domination are also of significant importance to my case as they represent valid theoretical examples that seem applicable to the nature of China’s contemporary involvement in Sudan. This assumption is based on Myrdal’s examination of colonial rule, where he specifically refers to the construction of roads, ports, railways and the like. Even though these accomplishments were primarily motivated by the colonial governments’ own interests, in the author’s eyes they nevertheless contributed significantly towards the creation of conditions that in general enabled a certain degree of economic development.22 (cf. Myrdal 1963: 56) Here one can draw a connection between Myrdal’s general assumptions on colonial achievements and Chinese involvement in Sudan: This connection bases on the fact that it was with the help of large-scale investments and modernization incentives in the Sudanese national oil infrastructure on behalf of the PRC that Sudan was able to expand its oil exports to a crucial level and reach a significantly improved level of development.

This strategy allowed China to kill two birds with one stone: By essentially assisting Sudan with the nation-wide setup and refinement of its oil infrastructure, the PRC simultaneously ensured its own preferential access to the one natural resource of vital necessity for its own development needs.

Notwithstanding western tendencies that accuse China’s general Africa strategy of neo-colonial characteristics, it goes without saying that China is not a “metropolitan country” (i.e. the colonial power) that has put Sudan under colonial rule and exploitation. Within the scope of this thesis it has been demonstrated time and again that China and Sudan consider themselves equal partners in the pursuit of mutual benefits within the framework of South-South cooperation. Nevertheless, the case of Sudan renders visible that there do exist certain

22 I consider it important to emphasize at this point that there is no justification whatsoever to legitimize the system of colonialism – a system that exploited and captivated free and independent countries and did not leave room for political or economic systems, ideologies and social structures that were different to those of their colonizers’. For my case, Myrdal’s work is to be understood strictly through an economic perspective – a perspective that allows me to draw parallels between my own theoretical assumptions and the practical example of China in Sudan.
parallels between the interests and actions of former metropolitan powers engaged in colonial peripheries, and those of China that finds itself involved in a strategic partnership with Sudan.

The large-scale entanglement of Chinese national oil corporations in the Sudanese oil sector has permitted the PRC’s strategic partner country Sudan to rise to the status of an influential “big player” in the oil business. Simultaneously, it has allowed China to firmly inscribe the protection of its national interests – i.e. the safeguarding of Sudanese oil flows towards the PRC – in the Sino-Sudanese relationship. Nevertheless, these two countries do not find themselves opposed in a relationship marked by rigid hierarchies and exploitation – such as colonized and colonizers did – but consider their ties as characterized by notions of mutual benefit. If one follows the PRC’s proclaimed strategy of economic “win-win situation” that it pursues in Africa, there is no other option than to conclude that this does in fact apply to its involvement with Sudan.

A last case in point shall demonstrate that Myrdal’s approach can in parts be linked to the nature of Sino-Sudanese ties: It is the one that assumes that “[a] main interest of a metropolitan country was order and social stability”. (Myrdal 1963: 59) As Myrdal describes it, it was the metropolitan powers’ most common strategy to align themselves with “the privileged classes in the dependent country” (Myrdal 1963: 59) in order to guarantee the safeguarding of their national interests. These privileged classes were “primarily interested in preserving the social and economic status quo under which they were privileged”; in most cases, they would neither “press […] for a national integration policy aimed at greater equality within the country”, nor for a “progressive economic development in the main subsistence sector of the economy”. (Myrdal 1963: 59)

In Sudan, it practically springs to one’s mind who this “favored group” would be: All things considered, the above-stated description is quite accurate in characterizing the Sudanese regime under president Omar al-Bashir. Its deliberate neglect of the Darfur region and Southern Sudan as well as its structural lack of willingness to implement policies aimed at reducing persisting national inequalities and inner-state marginalization allows this comparison to be made.
China, in this case, embodies the role of metropolitan power that seeks social stability by forming an alliance with the dependent country’s ruling elites. It’s unconditional support of and economic cooperation with al-Bashir, including arms deals during the peak of civil war, leave no further doubt thereof. Because in the long run, it appeared highly necessary for China to make sure that Sudanese oil never stopped flowing East: Naturally, just like any other (western) country, the PRC is generally interested that the political and economic stability in the country where it has heavily invested be maintained. In the case of Sudan, it therefore was profoundly interested in keeping every turmoil that might put Sudan’s petroleum production at risk – i.e. rebel uprisings and civil war – at a safe distance.

In the scope of worsening conditions during the Darfur crisis, however, where civil uprisings and rebel movements endangered the PRC’s long-term interests in Sudan’s oil sector on the one hand, and western human rights defenders and the UNSC on the other, Chinese policymakers may have realized that a change of strategy might be overdue. Given that social order, stability, and peace in general are fundamentally important for the safeguarding of Chinese national interests abroad, the PRC’s ensuing role as mediator and its involvement in Sudanese conflict resolution during the Darfur crisis in this respect may thus represent a careful deviation from its initial “blind-eye support” (Large 2008: 97) of the Sudanese elite.

China’s careful rapprochement with the newly independent state of South Sudan23 may just be the most prominent indicator for this change of position.

6.4. Critique

“One cannot look at the bright side of modernity, however, without looking at its dark side of domination.”

(Escobar 1992: 23)

Within the field of development studies, modernization theory has increasingly experienced academic alienation over the years: Understandably enough, critical voices could not stay silent in the face of a development theory that openly advocates the “universalization of European history” (Escobar 1992: 23). A development theory that in essence lumps together developing countries’ economic, political, and social landscapes with those of industrialized

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23 After its formal secession in 2011, A/N.
ones simply could not remain uncontested, as “it is distorting to classify today’s underdeveloped countries with the pre-industrial societies of the West […]”. (Bernstein 1971: 152) This alone should be reason enough to closely scrutinize the main theoretical assumptions of the modernization approach – and to challenge them.

This is because a theory that aims to implement exactly the same course of action in developing countries that proved to be successful in the West entirely ignores their different historical contexts. It also turns a blind eye on developing nations’ contemporary economic and political grievances – and thereby does not acknowledge that the “industrialized world” never had to face problems of this kind. More importantly still, the steep curve of industrial-capitalist rise in the “developed world” was largely based on the systematic exploitation of those “colonial empires” that today represent the very “underdeveloped” regions modernization theory seems keen to get out of their “backwardness”.

With the implications of the colonial past in mind, a detailed assessment of the relationships between industrialized nations and those that are still in the process of development is indispensable if the latters’ living standards really are to be improved. A postcolonial perspective consequently seems most qualified to embrace all the notions that are neglected within the scope of modernization theory.

The outline of the modernization narrative and its application for China in Sudan have therefore demonstrated the awareness that only a detailed examination of two countries’ interlinkages in the past and their implications for the present will ensure that any planned development policies have a realistic chance to turn out successful for all stakeholders involved. Without a profound analysis of a country’s postcolonial structures and the power asymmetries that continue to shape these ties, there simply cannot be a legitimate claim for authentic and earnest development planning – neither from the West, nor from China. Acknowledging the need to face up to developing countries’ colonial past, and the postcolonial structures that may still continue to prevail in the present, embodies thus an indispensable condition for effective development cooperation.

In this sense, modernization theory is confronted with the inquiry of the historical context “in which the impact of ‘modernizing forces’ on indigenous ‘traditional’ societies is first located” – and this historical context, according to Bernstein, is for the most part located
within the era of colonialism. (Bernstein 1971: 153) Modernization theory, however, fails to include this crucial element in its theoretical foundations. The most prominent example in this regard is the continuous existence of a divided society in Sudan, whose population is profoundly split by inner-state inequalities which date back to British-Egyptian colonial rule.

As has become apparent, the case of China in Sudan demonstrates illustratively how the PRC’s cooperation with the central government in Khartoum and the immense investments of Chinese oil corporations in the Sudanese oil sector did in fact not face up to the remnants of colonial structures of power that continued to rule the country after more than fifty years of independence. By immersing itself in these inherently asymmetrical structures, and, worse, without showing any efforts at all to combat them, China’s modernization approach in Sudan was obviously stretched to its limits as it did not reach out to all parts of Sudan and therefore contributed to the conservation of the country’s postcolonial divide.

The reproduction of the global cleavage between “advanced” and “backwards” societies and regions leads us to the findings of Arturo Escobar, who represents one of the most prominent critics on modernization theory: His post-development approach actively promotes the influence of grassroots movements and local knowledge as alternatives to the concept of development – a concept that in his eyes has kept “developing countries” in the rigid grip of marginalization and underdevelopment for the past six decades. In this sense, Escobar’s advance on breaking free from conventional perceptions of development can be understood as the most fundamental pillar within the critique on modernization theory.

This is largely because his perspective on modernization puts the concept of development into a critical perspective, and therefore perfectly encapsulates notions that other characterizations (including those cited at the very beginning of this chapter) have failed to incorporate:

[D]evelopment can be described as an apparatus (dispositif) that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies. In other words, development is what constructs the contemporary Third World […]. By means of this discourse, individuals, governments and communities are seen as “underdeveloped” (or placed under conditions in which they tend to see themselves as such), and are treated accordingly.”

(Escobar 1992: 23)
Following Escobar’s argumentation, the “developing world” as such can be interpreted as a construct that was created, shaped, nurtured, preserved – and dominated – by the “industrialized world”. Consequently, “underdeveloped” societies or regions as such would not exist had not the “developed world” constructed a whole academic discourse accordingly. In this sense, “development” has produced “underdevelopment”.

In light of the fact that the “success story” of industrialized countries in the “North” was largely built on the systematic exploitation of their colonial empires in the “South”, the industrial-capital “model” for modernization as such is already ultimately flawed. As the case of China’s modernizing approach in Sudan has demonstrated, the implementation of the modernization narrative in “underdeveloped regions” is doomed to fail if a country’s economic and political landscape, historical background, and social structures are not acknowledged and included into the creation of developing policies.

Obviously, this was not the case with China’s strategy in Sudan: The incidents in 2008, when rebel uprisings in Sudan not only targeted the central ruling apparatus in Khartoum anymore, but also the latter’s most affiliated ally, demonstrate how the PRC’s presence in the marginalized areas of Darfur and South Sudan was mostly perceived as further state repression that contributed to the regions’ economic marginalization. The kidnapping and killing of Chinese CNPC workers at a Chinese-operated oil manufacturing site in Southern Kordofan 24 consequently demonstrated how the modernization approach of China’s presence in Sudan was rejected by those parts of the Sudanese population that experienced only the negative aspects of this strategy.

Essentially, this demonstrates how an approach that is solely characterized by elements of economic growth and devoid of any substantial and sustainable development objectives, an approach that reaches out not to the whole country but only its privileged elites in the end cannot succeed if major parts of the official recipients feel they are only further excluded from the process of development. China’s strategy in Sudan therefore remains contested.

Furthermore, academic positions advocating the imperative for “backwards societies” to shed “traditionalist” behavior only to replace it with western norms of production and social values

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24 For further information see Chapter 8.3.
should be excluded from any present or future academic discourse, as they essentially represent Eurocentric convictions and patronizing beliefs. As the past decades of failed approaches to development and of ODA substantially characterized by the modernization narrative have taught us, it is high time that western actors of the international aid architecture cease to presume that they always have the answers for the problems of developing countries – without even letting them speak first.

For this reason, it seems that Arturo Escobar’s approach is leading us in the right direction. As his argumentation has illustrated quite evidently, “underdevelopment” can only be truly overcome if we shed patterns of convictions and behaviors that continue to create the gap between rich and poor, “developed” and “underdeveloped”, “modern” and “traditional”. “Underdevelopment” can therefore only cease to exist if we completely invert the concept of “development”.

So how does this affect my analysis of China’s role in Sudan? Considering the notions of mutual benefit and equality that China has always inscribed in its involvement with Sudan, there is high probability that the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership represents the very alternative to development Escobar is looking for. In this sense, the concept of development relations within the framework of South-South cooperation may entail essential notions to China’s presence in Sudan.

The ensuing section shall expand on this line of thought and present this approach as the alternative to development that Escobar has vividly advocated for.

6.5. China and Africa: Conceptualizing South-South development relations

There is a growing realisation that traditional relations and partnerships with the West have not helped Africa overcome the structural obstacles to eradicating poverty and reversing its economic marginalisation. Rather than develop, Africa is haemorrhaging while the rest of the world accumulates wealth at its expense through the unbalanced exploitation of its natural resources and the enforcement of a distorted international economic system.

(Rocha 2007: 17)

In the face of failed development cooperation with the West over the course of the past decades, above-stated extract renders visible how it seemed only a logical consequence for
African states to start looking for alternative development partners within their own ranks. Critical voices – both in the global North and the South – grew stronger and increasingly began to demand alternative approaches to development that countered the dictate of the modernization narrative. The emerging framework of South-South cooperation has therefore presented itself as the alternative Africa was looking for, enabling its nations to form stable development cooperation with other developing countries, among which today primarily China, Brazil, India, and other African countries lead the way following their emergence as “new poles of growth” in the past decade. (Zoellick cited in Modi 2011: 4)

In this sense, when assembling the relations that Africa maintains with western nations, on the one hand, and those between Africa and China, on the other, one will note that there is a distinct difference between North-South and South-South development cooperation: Where western states perceive their relations with African developing nations mostly under the aegis of clear-cut donor-recipient classification, China in contrast comprehends its engagement with Africa more in terms of a mutual “development partnership”. (Dent 2011: 165)

The question that arises in this context is thus whether the Sino-African relationship within the framework of South-South cooperation is qualified to represent a “new paradigm of ‘development relations’” (Dent 2011: 3) within the international (aid) system. The focus of this subchapter is therefore to explore the modes of involvement between the PRC and Sudan within the concepts of “development relations” and South-South cooperation.

6.5.1. South-South cooperation as alternative to western “aid”

Per definition, the concept of South-South cooperation is best subsumed with the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South cooperation:

[...] South-South cooperation is a common endeavour of peoples and countries of the South, born out of shared experiences and sympathies, based on their common objectives and solidarity, and guided by, inter alia, the principles of respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from any conditionalities. South-South cooperation should not be seen as official development assistance. It is a partnership among equals based on solidarity. [...] South-South cooperation embraces a multi-stakeholder approach, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector, civil society, academia and other actors that contribute to meeting development challenges and objectives in line with national development strategies and plans.

(United Nations, A/RES/64/222 2010)
Considering the research interest of the thesis at hand, it seems important to put special emphasis on the notions of partnership, equality, and solidarity that this definition embraces as in essence, they reflect the pillars that China bases the concept of its strategic partnerships with African developing countries on. Also, I consider it crucial to accentuate the UN’s approach that South-South cooperation cannot be equated with the concept of ODA as defined by the OECD’s DAC and therefore embodies a completely different approach to development – just like China’s unconditional and mutually beneficial approach to aid does. In this sense, I aimed to find out to what extent Sino-Sudanese ties represent an alternative mode of engagement as promoted by the concept of South-South cooperation.

The origins of South-South cooperation as a concept date back to the period after World War II, which was characterized by large-scale decolonialization processes and a global system whose terms left these recently independent developing countries at a distinct disadvantage:

> The colonial powers established exploitative patterns of trade and commerce, secured easy access to the continent’s abundant natural resources to fuel their manufacturing industries, and obtained protected markets for their manufactured goods. Termed as the ‘Third World’ or ‘developing’ states or the ‘South’ in the language of international politics, these countries shared common historical experiences and faced similar politico-economic challenges.  

(Modh 2011: 1)

Set in this historical context, South-South cooperation back then was generally recognized as a “philosophy for development” for developing countries that were confronted with persistent rates of poverty and underdevelopment during the 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, the characterization that fits best perceives the framework of South-South cooperation as “collective self-reliance as an engine of growth”. (Modh 2011: 2)

On a large scale, South-South cooperation emerged following Africa’s “lost decade” in the 1980s, when the continent was put under the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the Bretton Woods Institutions, which primarily consisted of “economic conditionalities imposed by the World Bank and the IMF, a top-down approach by primary lenders that attempted to reorient the African economies to the free market model” and “[…] wreaked havoc on their social and economic fabric”. (Modh 2011: 2)
Given that African nations initially had no other option than turn to the West for external financial assistance and implement the required liberalization and privatization policies, a certain frustration was felt throughout the continent as it became evident that the West’s foreign-induced approach proved to be a failure. As a consequence, African developing countries increasingly turned their back on US-American and European donors and instead opted for the strengthening of development partnerships with other countries of the global South. For that reason, the concept of South-South cooperation gained particular influence in the 1990s. This can also be interpreted as African developing countries’ response to the challenge of “economic recovery” that the failed approach of SAPs initially had left them with. (Modi 2011: 3)

As soon became apparent, South-South cooperation turned out to be a huge success for African developing countries. For the most part, this is due to the circumstance that this framework provided them with a serious alternative to western lending mechanisms and aid contingencies as well as gave them more leverage within international negotiations – and therefore more independence and self-determination.

For China, the concept of South-South cooperation has officially been promoted as preferred type of interaction with other developing countries, as can be seen from the PRC’s White Paper on Chinese foreign aid:

> Under the framework of South-South cooperation, China will work with all parties concerned to conduct complementary and fruitful trilateral and regional cooperation on the basis of respecting the needs of recipient countries and jointly promote the process of global poverty alleviation.

> (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a)

South-South cooperation in this sense has therefore substantially served to reinforce the strategic partnership between China and Africa. Given that China still enshrines its international standing as part of the developing world, especially in Sudan, the framework of South-South cooperation represents an ideal platform to enhance their bilateral trade and development cooperation. This is because the Chinese government inscribes the most prominent elements of its foreign policy – equality, mutual benefit, as well as no conditions attached – also to the ties it maintains with Sudan. South-South cooperation therefore appears to characterize this individual strategic partnership.
6.5.2. “Development Relations” – A new paradigm to development?

The reason why I have chosen the concept of development relations to be outlined as part of this thesis’ theory section is because I assume that this concept contains structures which might be able to characterize the nature of the Sino-Sudanese relationship. Mostly, this hypothesis was triggered by Large’s comment that “‘[d]evelopment relations’ […] have been integral to modern Sudan-China relations” (Large 2011: 88) – which is why this approach entails profound implications to provide substantial insights into the nature of Sino-Sudanese relations.

The concept of development relations was developed by Christopher M. Dent and is “partly based on the actual evidence from the Africa-China relationship and how it may ideally and potentially evolve in the future”. (Dent 2011: 165)

In essence, development relations between two developing countries have proven fundamental for the promotion of bilateral economic cooperation within the setting of South-South cooperation. Ideally, this framework allows developing partner countries to communicate and negotiate on an equal basis, work together in a way that is mutually beneficial, and pursue the common goal of enhanced development capacity on both sides. (Dent 2011: 165)

According to this characterization, the key motives behind sustained and enhanced development relations are located within the notion that by engaging with each other, two developing nations both draw a profit from their economic and/or political cooperation, and both see their development capacities strengthened.

As has become apparent earlier, the past decades of the West’s modernization approach to development have obviously not contributed effectively to achieve sustainable levels of development for marginalized countries or regions; neither the West’s “gift” nor its supposed

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25 Various functions of the nation or economy affected which are linked to development, such as technocratic, institutional, industrial, infrastructural, human capital, or sustainable development capacity. (cf. Dent 2011: 167-168) The improvement of these capacities within the framework of development relations may be accomplished through diverse channels of foreign economic policy practice, such as trade, foreign investment as well as technical and financial aid. (Dent 2011: 168)
“wisdoms” (Dent 2011: 166) have proven effective to get Africa out of its underdevelopment trap.

What African developing countries obviously need is a completely new and encompassing approach to development – an approach that is free of supposedly well-meant but often paternalistic recipes for success. This need is even more stressed in light of a “neoliberal utopia” (Bourdieu 1998) of economic liberalization, financial deregulation, free trade, privatization, and open markets that for decades was promoted as the common cure to underdevelopment. Ultimately, though, it failed to sustainably contribute to the eradication of poverty and improved living standards in the developing world.

In this sense, the concept of development relations embodies a set of collective hopes and aspirations for developing countries to sustainably alleviate and, eventually, end their economic and political marginalization. It further appears to be fundamentally important for contemporary South-South relations and the global system in general, since it represents an “attempt to break free of traditional designations for international economic relationships between states and other actors”. (Dent 2011: 166)

As already outlined, South-South cooperation embraces and promotes this redesigned and fresh approach to development and therefore embeds the concept of development relations within its overall framework. Finally, it seemed like there was a serious alternative to the West’s approach to development: In a way, South-South cooperation allowed developing countries to break free from rigid structures within the global trade system and liberate them from the influence that their former European colonial rulers held even after independence was reached. This was also the case of the initial rapprochement between China and Sudan; here, it was also South-South cooperation that allowed the strengthening of their position vis-à-vis the perceived superiority of the West.

Former powerful presumptions of this kind, presumptions that teemed with a confidence that increasing trade relations between the North and the South would lead to improved living standards in developing countries, have already been proven wrong by Tull26. With his critical note, Myrdal’s argumentation falls in line, as he was a firm believer that “[o]n the

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26 See Chapter 4.3. or Tull 2006: 472.
international as on the national level trade does not by itself necessarily work for equality” – on the contrary, it may have “strong backwash effects” on underdeveloped economies. (Myrdal 1963: 51) This is because the West’s recommendations and aid practices were primarily aimed at the augmentation of primary goods exports of developing countries and thereby kept them from diversifying their economies and in further consequence from overcoming economic marginalization.

As history taught, such policies did not induce higher incomes or increased economic development – to the contrary, “[…] trade by itself does not lead to such a development; it rather tends […] to strengthen the forces maintaining stagnation or regression.” (Myrdal 1963: 52-53)

Trade by itself will therefore not cause higher development rates; merely enhancing trade levels cannot be the solution to developing countries’ persistent problems of poverty and low living standards, as the formula “natural resources for manufactured goods and services” simply does not pay off evenly. This lack of balance can only be combated if the existence of terms of trade detrimental to developing countries’ economic diversification and competitiveness is taken into account and, ultimately, abolished.

Trade relations alone, within established trade patterns between countries of the “South” and the “North”, seem neither suited nor capable to contribute essentially to the improvement of economic competitiveness and the reduction of poverty in developing countries. The concept of development relations therefore provides developing nations with a good possibility to distance themselves from overly powerful trading partners and patterns.

By definition, it is the ultimate goal of development relations to pursue mutual benefits and achieve common goals of development for both countries affected. In contrast to the bilateral ties that African countries maintain with western states, it is therefore more likely that there will be “empathy” between partner countries engaged in development relations in what concerns the strengthening of both of their development capacity needs. (Dent 2011: 168)

Consequently, when attempting to distinguish the main features of development relations as opposed to common trade relations, reinforcing those mutual development needs is the key characteristic element:
A key principle of ‘development relations’ is that it alternatively designates primacy to strengthening of development capacities above all else as the core objective and purpose of economic interactions with developing country regions such as Africa.

(Dent 2011: 167)

By way of example, the Sino-African partnership has often been chosen when illustrating this key principle of development relations as well as the distinct reciprocity of South-South cooperation.

Given that China’s own economic development paradigm has significantly shaped the way of interaction with its African partner countries and has often been used as a model for other developing countries, the China-Africa relationship seems to represent the *exemple par excellence* for the concept of development relations. As the following abstract from China’s White Paper on China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation illustrates, it is in fact the notion of mutual benefit that dominates the official discourse on the development relations that China maintains with its African partner countries:

[...] China and Africa give full play to the complementary advantages in each other's resources and economic structures, abiding by the principles of equality, effectiveness, mutual benefit and reciprocity, and mutual development, and keep enhancing economic and trade cooperation to achieve mutual benefit and progress.

(Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2010)

As this extract demonstrates, Chinese policy-makers take the PRC’s commitment to engage in development relations with Africa seriously, and furthermore see strong future potential in the expansion of this strategic partnership. China has consequently taken up the cause to promote the principles of equality and mutual benefit as fundamental mode of interaction with other developing countries – and that includes its involvement with Sudan.

In this sense, China’s large-scale investments in the Sudanese oil infrastructure serve as perfect case to exemplify the “strengthening of development capacities” as core objective of development relations. This is because the extensive role that China plays within Sudan’s oil industry has on the one hand enabled Sudan to construct stable and substantially strengthened exports and thereby to improve its national revenues significantly. On the other, it has appeased the PRC’s hunger for petroleum on a long-term basis.
Nevertheless, China does keep its own interests in mind when immersing in development partnerships on the African continent. Despite solemn assertions to “[u]nremittingly helping recipient countries build up their self-development capacity” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011a), the PRC has in fact taken up assimilated forms of western economic process – especially by becoming a “major global centre of capitalist development”. (Dent 2011: 166)

The considerable amount of oil concessions that China’s national oil companies CNPC and Sinopec hold in the Sudanese oil sector and incidentally reinforced Sudan’s inner-state inequalities, as well as its contested arms sales to the government in Khartoum even though civil war was raging could not be more exemplary to illustrate this line of thought.

Consequently, things do not look as rosy as they may seem: China’s role in development relations with Africa, especially with Sudan, is not that of a charitable benefactor. Quite the contrary, the PRC knows how to keep its own national interests on top of the agenda:

Considering the fact that as a member of the WTO and a country that despite its official positioning within the developing world is more and more perceived as a global economic power with substantial influence, China’s development capacities are significantly stronger than most of its African partner countries; the PRC’s position within the Sino-African development partnership has thus substantially more weight. Considering further that China’s quest for natural resources has remarkably increased in recent years in order keep up with its own “industry capacity development trajectories” (Dent 2011: 168), it seems quasi natural for the PRC to bargain primarily for natural resources in exchange for the funding of large-scale infrastructure projects and low-priced consumer goods – which leaves its African partners with terms of trade that actually prove to be detrimental to the diversification of their economies and therefore keeps them stuck in their vicious circle of underdevelopment.

The consequence to this development is a distinct “capacity asymmetry” between China and its partner countries in Africa, which means that “the former has more to offer the latter in terms of development capacity enhancement”. (Dent 2011: 168-169)

In specific, this implies that Africa serves mostly as a supplier of raw materials to still the PRC’s hunger for natural resources which China considers vital for the continuity of its
economic growth rate and the increased living standards of its population. China, on the other hand, provides its African partners with the construction of roads and infrastructure, technical aid, as well as manufactured goods and services. Obviously, this indeed creates a clear gap between the individual development capacities. And also obviously, this pattern of engagement also applies to China’s presence in Sudan, given that it is primarily the basic commodity oil in exchange for infrastructure and manufactured goods (if one were to be cynical, this would include technology-intensive products like arms) that constitutes the Sino-Sudanese partnership.

Daniel Large confirms this hypothesis by asserting that even though Chinese investments in the Sudanese oil sector have “underpinned the subsequent expansion of a more diverse array of Chinese business and a fuller spectrum of business activities [...] economic relations are, however, asymmetrical: in narrow economic terms, China’s importance to Sudan far exceeds Sudan’s importance to China”. (Large 2009: 616)

But not only does China have more to offer in regard to bilateral capacity building, it also replicates western patterns of economic interaction. This finding came into view within the scope of Uwe Wissenbach’s examination of the Sino-African development partnership, where he came to the conclusion that contemporary trade mechanisms were dominated by “familiar patterns of resource exports against manufacture imports”. (Wissenbach 2011: 25)

Does this sound familiar? As already outlined, these patterns have structured trade relations between developing countries on the African continent and industrialized countries in the global “North” for the past decades. They have thus to a significant extent shaped North-South cooperation and, in the end, exceedingly turned out to be to the latter’s disadvantage.

As becomes apparent, the framework of South-South cooperation between China and Africa does therefore not per se provide African development countries with more favorable terms. China’s trade relations with Africa in some cases exhibit clear parallels with trade patterns that the West has maintained with the continent for decades.

The consequences that such economic disequilibrium within Sino-African development relations entails are fatal, since “[t]his gives rise to the old theory of dependency which
explains Africa’s predicament by external factors and terms of trade [...]” (Wissenbach 2011: 25)

In the end, the conceptual characterization of Sino-African as well as Sino-Sudanese development relations turns out quite pessimistic: Even though China inscribes a policy of mutual benefit in the strategic partnership it maintains with African developing countries, it has become evident that the benefits that both Chinese state companies as well as private enterprises accumulate are not equal with the benefits African elites and ordinary people accumulate. (Rupp 2011: 83) Consequently, this partnership reflects in large part the very same North-South pattern that over the past decades has exceedingly disadvantaged the competitiveness of developing countries’ economies.

This conclusion obviously puts considerable strain on the effectiveness of development relations between China and Africa. It also represents quite a challenge to the concept of South-South cooperation. However, there’s more to the Sino-African relationship than pure calculation: Ties between China and Africa cannot just be painted in black and white, as the relevance of China as a new partner in development cooperation – even though the nature of its involvement is not flawless – cannot be neglected. In this regard, Stephanie Rupp’s findings are essential:

Despite the reality that the mutual benefits are not equal, Chinese investment in Africa is coupled with the kind of development in financial, commercial, infrastructural, and socioeconomic sectors that is urgently needed for Africa’s longer-term growth and eventual self-sufficiency – development efforts that were neglected during the post-colonial decades of the twentieth century.

(Rupp 2011: 83)

Consequently, the concept of development relations entails profound implications for Sino-African ties in general, and Sino-Sudanese ties in specific.

**Conclusion**

As has become apparent within the scope of this chapter, South-South cooperation represents a significant alternative to old-established western development paradigms. Despite its characterization that emphasizes equality and mutual benefit, this framework nevertheless contains certain imbalances and capacity asymmetries within Sino-African and Sino-Sudanese ties. Notwithstanding perpetual assertions on the part of the Chinese that its South-South relationship with Africa and Sudan pursues mutual benefit as number one goal, its
modes of engagement exhibit a certain replication of North-South development cooperation patterns. As a consequence, development relations between China and Africa are apparently not (yet) in the position to represent the true alternative to development Escobar was looking for.
7. China and the Sudanese civil war

7.1. Militarized oil development

Even though Sudan’s second civil war was initially triggered by a government campaign to convert its southern population to Islam, oil played a “significant, if not dominant role” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126).

This is largely owing to the fact that most of Sudan’s national oil reserves are situated in the southern and central region of the country, in the Unity and Abyei provinces27, which are mostly populated by the largely non-Muslim Dinka and Nuer people. (cf. Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126; Askouri 2007: 77; Taylor/Wu 2013: 465) As these areas are close to the border with northern Sudan, and as it is exclusively the latter that collects the revenues of the country’s oil reserves – despite their location in the South and in the (at the time) contested borderland – it becomes apparent that “[o]il has […] been an integral part of the long-standing internal dispute between Khartoum and the South”. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 465)

Originally, the autonomous government in the Sudanese South collected the entirety of oil revenues, but this was only when the country’s oil reserves were still estimated to be at a low level. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126)

As it became evident that South Sudan might dispose of vast, unexplored oil resources, the regime in the North “reasserted control” of the country’s oil sector by creating a new province, Bentiu28, which primarily incorporated the existing oilfields. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126) The question of how to secure continuous oil supply and wealth generation for the North was easily solved as the Sudanese regime established the country’s one and only refinery in the outskirts of Khartoum.

This refinery, however, was located more than 1,000 kilometers away from actual oil wells and therefore required the construction of the already mentioned Red Sea pipeline to connect the oilfields to the refinery. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126) Ultimately, though, this expenditure paid off, as it put Sudan’s North in control of the South’s oil reserves and thereby also of

27 See Annex Figure 2
28 See Annex Figure 1 and/or Figure 2
national oil revenues – a great part of which were used to finance the Sudanese army as well as militia groups. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126)

This act, however, put the cherry on top of the structural neglect of Sudan’s peripheries in the South and Darfur: In the face of their decades-long political marginalization and economic exploitation, the discontent and despair of the socioeconomically deprived regions manifested themselves in eruptive violence, which was only fuelled further by Khartoum’s “oil prosperity”. (cf. Large 2011: 97)

As the Government of Sudan (GoS) was perceived to be most vulnerable at its oil production sites, the SPLM/A’s actions were mainly directed at the oil fields under central state control. Violence inflamed even more with the North’s correspondingly fierce response: “Given that oil revenues were essential to the North’s ability to fight the war, rebel forces from the South targeted the oil facilities. In turn, the government spent considerable resources defending the infrastructure.” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126.127)

But what was China’s role in all of this?

Generally, the PRC’s assignment in the disputed oil fields along the North-South border was to supply technical expertise and help with the financial investments to ensure the effective development of these reserves. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126) Furthermore, Beijing allocated Chinese workers to “expand, construct, and operate the oilfields, pipeline, and refinery” and therefore, as Lee and Shalmon put it, “agreed to serve as total turnkey contractor”. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 126)

One of the often-repeated charges against China’s role in Sudanese oil affairs was that “GNPOC did not hire local southern Sudanese laborers, even for the most menial work”. (Human Rights Watch 2003) Instead, as the construction of the Red Sea pipeline showed, CNPC subcontractors “brought in thousands of Chinese and some northern Sudanese laborers to build the pipeline” – and therefore effectively denied local communities even the “small spin-off” they would usually receive from foreign oil investment: jobs in infrastructure construction. (Human Rights Watch 2003)
Chinese investments and the PRC’s significant political backing of the NCP has “contributed substantially” to the GoS’ power and has therefore “politicized China’s position amongst armed opponents of the Sudan government”, drawing “Chinese oil operations further into the politics of conflict in Sudan”. (Large 2009: 618)

In addition, al-Bashir’s order to implement a “scorched-earth policy” indirectly added to the PRC’s perceived role as complicit to state-sponsored violence: Khartoum carried out military offensives in the Unity province from February 1992 until December 1993, “allegedly to prepare for resumption of oil-production by clearing the area of villagers” and with the ultimate purpose to “create ‘a swath of scorched earth’ around the oil fields”. (Switzer 2002) State aggressions continued until 1999 and were executed by the Sudanese army and state-sponsored militias, whose ambitions were to secure sustained oil development and deprive the rebels of a base of support “in their bid to attack the industry and undermine the government’s oil revenues”. (Goodman 2004)

The consequences of northern Sudan’s scorched-earth policy were fatal, as it induced “massive depopulation and displacement” and thereby further contributed to the militarization of oil development. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 466) Worse still, “Khartoum encouraged ethnic tensions by granting Arab herdsmen an unwritten licence to pillage and destroy the communities of the Dinka and Nuer […]”. (Patey 2007: 1001)

Naturally, the Government of Sudan rejected accusations implying that oil revenues were used to finance and nourish the war. According to the interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, Gerhart Baum, on the situation of human rights in Sudan, which was held at the 56th session of the UN General Assembly, Khartoum instead claimed that the profits accumulated through oil were used for the development of the Sudanese South. As of 2001, however, the Special Rapporteur noted that “[…] the Government has not provided sufficient evidence supporting this claim.” (United Nations, A/56/36 2001)

More to the contrary, evidence clearly points to the fact that “oil development during the 1990s was inextricably connected with armed conflict”. (Large 2008: 97) And this is exactly where China’s alleged complicity in human rights violations linked to Sudanese oil development comes in, as there are valid indications confirming the CNPC’s (and other
major foreign oil companies\(^{29}\) involvement in al-Bashir’s “scorched-earth policy”: In addition to the indirect funding of the militias carrying out the attacks through CNPC’s securing of continuous oil development, China also provided technical assistance or the workforce, or in some cases even both, to the construction of roads or infrastructure that facilitated Khartoum’s large-scale turnouts.

These findings are evidenced by Stephen Brown and Chandra Lekha Sriram, whose research revealed that “[t]he Chinese government helped to build a road meant to facilitate access to oilfields, which also permitted attacks on civilians”. (Brown/Sriram 2008: 258)

Furthermore, as the resentment of Chinese oil companies and their perceived complicity with the NCP’s counter-insurgency increasingly gained center stage within SPLM/A forces, China more and more became dependent on protection from Khartoum to keep the thousands of Chinese citizens working at the oil sites safe – and the oil flowing. In this sense, arms exports from China to Sudan proved to be beneficial for both sides, as on the one hand, “Chinese laborers are protected: They work under the vigilant gaze of Sudanese government troops armed largely with Chinese-made weapons” (Goodman 2004), and on the other, Khartoum was reassured that with this protection, oil development could continue without interruption.

The gravity of this mutually beneficial solution evolved, however, as allegations of serious human rights abuses committed by the Sudanese forces surfaced. (Brown/Sriram 2008: 258)

In this context, the following statement illustrates perfectly how “[o]il development was militarised, influenced conflict patterns on the ground and exacerbated civilian suffering” (Large 2008: 97) – and to what extent China was involved in all of this:

The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) combined aerial bombing raids and use of proxy forces (northern Baggara Arab militias and Nuer groups from Southern Sudan) in attacks aimed at depopulating Nuer and Dinka settlements and cattle camps located in oil-rich areas to enable oil-expansion. […] The successful development and running of Sudan’s oil industry amidst the civil wars by CNPC and other foreign companies\(^{30}\) demonstrated a willingness to side with Khartoum entailing complicity in state-sponsored violence […]

(Large 2008: 97)

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\(^{29}\) Canada’s Talisman Energy Inc., for example, was accused of “letting government forces use the company’s airstrip to launch raids in surrounding villages, in order to secure oil-bearing lands and company assets”. (Switzer 2002)

\(^{30}\) Such as Malaysia’s Petronas, India’s ONCG, or the Canadian oil giant Talisman Energy Inc., A/N.
As China got more and more entangled in Sudan’s civil war through its uninterrupted involvement in the country’s oil sector and obvious support of the government’s strategy to drive out local populations when they were seen as obstacles to economic growth, Beijing was more and more portrayed as complicit in worsening of the human rights situation. When things deteriorated, and "Sudanese government forces, armed with Chinese weapons, used CNPC facilities as a base from which to attack and dislodge southerners in the vicinity of the new oil fields” (Taylor 2008: 79), obviously both the SPLM/A and later Darfurian rebel groups considered China as the decisive actor and most vital ally that kept Khartoum’s blood-spattered oil prosperity up and running. This is why CNPC facilities were increasingly seen as strategic target to hurt Khartoum. (cf. Large 2009: 618)

And so it happened that when rebel groups from the South started to attack the oil sites where Chinese workers (and huge investments) were located, the PRC found itself caught in a delicate situation: “[W]ith thousands of its citizens at risk, it was under pressure to protect its workers and the facilities that they had built.” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 127)

Consequently, according to Henry Lee and Dan Shalmon, the PRC was left with three choices: It could either leave Sudan and abandon its investments, send security staff to protect the Chinese workers, or provide the Sudanese army with technical assistance and equipment in order to guard its citizens against rebel attacks. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 127) In the end, Chinese policy-makers opted for a combination of the second and third option:

Although there is no hard evidence that Chinese troops were ever present in the Sudan, from the perspective of the rebel forces in the South, the Chinese had clearly sided with the North and the military government in Khartoum.

(Lee/Shalmon 2008: 127)

Eventually, it also became apparent that, through its leading role in the Sudanese oil sector, China not only contributed to the NCP’s retention of power and helped Khartoum finance the acquisition of weapons on the international arms market. In addition, it actively pursued major arms deals with the GoS and assisted with the task of developing Sudanese domestic arms via technology transfer and technical assistance. (Large 2007: 4)

It thus appears that the PRC’s activities in Sudan were not solely confined to the country’s oil sector – arms exports also played a significant role within China’s strategic partnership with Sudan.
7.2. China’s arms transfers to Sudan

The link between Chinese arms exports to Sudan and the country’s worsening human rights situation during civil war initially relates to the connection between Khartoum’s increased oil revenues and concomitantly increased arms purchases: As Jemera Rone puts it, “[o]il revenues rose from zero in 1998 to almost 42% of total government revenue in 2001, making the all-important difference in projected military spending.” (Rone 2003: 508) Consequently, according to Large, “oil revenue became a key source of hard currency for GoS arms purchases”. (Large 2007: 4)

In specific, the author bases his hypothesis on the following findings:

Prior to the increase in oil revenues in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) had consistently complained about its lack of financial and material means to wage war effectively against the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). But between 1999 and 2001, government oil revenues increased by some 875.7 per cent from 15.7 billion Sudanese dinars (USD 61 million) to an estimated 153.2 billion dinars (USD 596 million). Perhaps as much as 80 per cent of this windfall went into procuring and producing weapons. (Large 2007: 4)

In this sense, Srinivisan falls in line with Rone’s and Large’s argumentations and goes even one step further by establishing the link between Khartoum’s drastic increase of oil revenues, generated thanks to PRC investments and technical assistance, and the large-scale purchase of weapons made in China: “[A]s Sudanese oil revenues buoyed government coffers from 2000 onwards, arms sales from China increased significantly.” (Srinivasan 2008: 60) More to the point, Taylor and Wu state the following: “Certainly, Khartoum has used hard currency generated by Chinese investment in Sudanese oil fields to finance its conflict in the southern part of the country […].” (Taylor/Wu 2013: 465)

These findings attribute a new meaning to the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership, as Khartoum’s heavy embroilment in civil war obviously did not deter Beijing from pulling off bilateral arms deals with the GoS. The notion of their strategic partnership was further extended in light of the Sudanese government’s fondness for China as a “preferred supplier” of arms because “it attaches no conditions to its arms sales other than monetary ones and oil concessions, and its weapons are relatively cheap”. (Askouri 2007: 75)
In general, the transfer of weapons from China to Africa has been inherent to Sino-African relations since “the beginning” (i.e. the 1950s), when Chinese arms were officially designated to support African liberation movements. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 463) At the time, the overarching intention of Chinese arms deliveries was to “cement ties” with African countries that were just in the process of reaching independence. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 463)

According to Taylor and Wu, Sudan has received Chinese weapons since “at least 1985, with transfers between 1985 and 1989 totaling US$50 million” that cumulated in the 2000s, when the PRC was “the key player in Sudan’s arms trade”. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 465). It appears therefore that “[d]iplomacy via weaponry” (Taylor/Wu 2013: 465) represents a common tool within the strategic partnership between China and Sudan.

Within the international community, however, the PRC’s unrestricted weapons exports has “come under particular scrutiny in the context of the Sudanese civil war and the crisis in Darfur”. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 465) In specific, Beijing has been accused of worsening the Sudanese civil war by supplying the central government in Khartoum with weapons that subsequently were used against civilians: These allegations base on discoveries of significant amounts of weaponry in actual war zones in Southern Sudan in 1997 and 1998 (Srinivasan 2008: 60), which included “large numbers of relatively new Chinese arms and ammunition”, such as artillery, anti-personnel mines, rifles, machine guns, anti-aircraft guns, and ammunition. (Large 2007: 5)

In addition, Taylor and Wu’s findings put further strain on the contested Sino-Sudanese relationship, as they shed light on how Chinese-run oil sites served both as safe haven and home base for government forces:

There is some evidence that airstrips built and maintained by Chinese workers in the oil areas were used during 2002 and 2003 as military bases from which the Sudanese government forces launched missions. Many of the helicopter gunships in Khartoum’s arsenal were obtained from China, often using projected receipts from oil extractions in the regions where fighting took place.

(Taylor/Wu 2013: 466)

Unfortunately, there are no verified numbers on the “exact nature and extent” of China’s technical assistance for Sudanese domestic arms production, but there are signs indicating
that the PRC supervised arms assembly processes and participated in the construction of various weaponry factories in the outskirts of Khartoum. (Large 2007: 6)

All of these findings perfectly document how the Chinese principle of non-interference has enabled the PRC to carry its relationship with the Sudanese government to extremes by pulling through arms deals at the peak of civil war. This implication is further reflected in Srinivasan’s findings:

> It is clear that in its dealings with countries such as Sudan, China has benefited from combining principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty with a commercial opportunism that meets its expanding economic interests.

(Srinivasan 2008: 56)

Notwithstanding western criticism of China’s military involvement in the Sudanese civil war, which castigates the human costs of China’s opportunist approach in Sudan, it is important to put the PRC’s war-related actions in perspective: Of course it might be argued that in the case of Sudan, “[a] sovereign regime […] under pressure invited Chinese arms companies to supply [it] with arms […] and equipment and on occasion this has been used to protect Chinese assets”. (Taylor/Wu 2013: 468) And of course it might be further asserted that China is not the only country pushing through arms deals with an internationally contested regime, as Taylor and Wu emphasize:

> […] China is not the only nation that puts its own interests ahead of moral concerns. Nor is it the only one to turn a blind eye to abuses and/or to craft relationships with questionable regimes in exchange for access to resources.

(Taylor/Wu 2013: 469)

What needs to be kept in mind is that China is only one of several states – including France, Iran, and Saudia Arabia – that has supplied the Sudanese regime with small arms, light weapons, and ammunition, even though the country has been scarred by armed conflict since the early 1980s. (Amnesty International 2007: 13)

However, the issue here is that China actually claims to be different (Taylor/Wu 2013: 460), as Hu Jintao’s promotion of the harmonious world concept, the country’s peaceful development doctrine, as well as concerted efforts to portray the PRC as major benevolent power illustrate quite clearly. In accordance with their nation’s overall attempt to spruce up its international reputation, official statements from PRC spokespersons repeatedly claim that
“[t]he Chinese government consistently adopts a prudent and responsible attitude toward arms sale[s]”, with “strict laws and regulations”, and the request that its trade partners commit themselves “not to transfer China’s weapons to a third party”. (Jiang Yu, spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, cited in Taylor/Wu 2013: 470)

China’s official set of rules governing the country’s involvement in international weapons transfer is outlined in the Regulations of the People’s Republic of China on Administration of Arms Export. In this context, article 4 is most important, as it specifically declares that it is the state that exercises control over Chinese arms exports. Furthermore, according to article 5, China engages in arms trade on the basis of “conduciveness to the capability for just self-defence of the recipient country”, “no injury to the peace, security and stability of the region concerned and the world as a whole” as well as, ultimately, non-interference in the internal affairs of the recipient country. (Gov.cn 2012)

Reality, however, looks different in light of the fact that “China is the only major arms-exporting power that has not entered into any multilateral agreement setting out principles, such as respect for human rights, to guide arms-export licensing decisions”. (Taylor 2008: 79)

Furthermore, when compared with the majority of international agreements on arms control, the PRC’s principles on the regulation of arms exports obviously stand out because of their vague character and predisposition for “loose interpretation” (Amnesty International 2006: 26)

With the ratification of multilateral agreements that set up a framework of international norms to regulate international arms transfers, the UN and arms-exporting countries were striving to “ensure global stability by regulating export procedures in such a way that weapons are prevented from falling into the hands of regimes and individuals who commit human rights violations”. (Kopecki 2008: 218)

Their standards of regulation are commonly defined in the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA), the Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Control for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies (Wassenaar Arrangement), as well as the
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)’s Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons (OSCE Document) or the EU Code of Conduct on Conventional Arms Exports. (Kotecki 2008: 218; Amnesty International 2006: 26)

China, however, is not a signatory of the Wassenaar Arangement and the OSCE Document, and although it “explicitly declared its support for the UNPoA”, the PRC’s export controls do not conform with the established international norms as proclaimed in these agreements. (Kopecki 2008: 223-226)

Consequently, Amnesty International criticizes that the PRC’s regulations “do not include a direct provision which would prohibit the transfer of arms to countries where they are likely to be used for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law”. (Amnesty International 2006: 26) The organization further voices concern over the PRC’s interpretation of its principle of non-interference “in a manner that is not consistent with states’ existing obligations under international law”, as this would free Chinese authorities from their responsibility to bear in mind the respective human rights record of potential recipient states. (Amnesty International 2006: 26)

These concerns seem justified in the face of Chinese foreign deputy minister Zhou Wenzhong’s response to criticisms regarding PRC arms deals with Sudan in 2004. Dismissing the country’s poor human rights record, Zhou declared, “[B]usiness is business. […] We try to separate politics from business […] [T]he internal situation in Sudan is an internal affair, and we are not in a position to impose upon them”. (French 2004)

The events surrounding the Darfur crisis, however, will demonstrate how the PRC’s “politics of blind eye support” (Large 2008: 97) in Sudan would eventually run into considerable constraints.
8. The Darfur crisis

“What had been a comparatively uncomplicated bilateral relationship exemplifying mutual benefit for both governments evolved into the defining case of China’s African involvement [...].”

(Large/Patey 2008: 30)

8.1. Conflict takes its course: International outcry versus Chinese abstention

Li Anshan defines Darfur as a “very complicated case”, as “historical origins, national integration, religious conflict, refugee migration, and poverty” all collude in one of Sudan’s most marginalized provinces. (Anshan 2008: 38)

Conflict erupted there after years of violent upheavals as a “full-scale armed rebellion against the government” (Srinivasan 2008: 66) in early 2003 while simultaneously, peace negotiations between Khartoum and the SPLM/A had finally gotten under way:

[W]ith the North-South civil war approaching a formal end, Sudan was denied even a moment’s peace as longstanding sentiments of neglect and exploitive intervention from the Khartoum government fostered growing rebellion in the western region of Darfur, leading to a full fledged civil war.

(Patey 2007: 1000)

The Sudanese government’s response came fast and was no less fierce than the rebel uprisings. Until 2004, a “particularly intense and devastating government-sponsored counter-insurgency campaign […] following an attack by the rebel Sudan Liberation Army on a government airbase in el-Fasher, Darfur, in April 2003” was executed. (Large 2009: 614)

The majority of Sudan’s foreign partners, however, “looked the other way” as they were scared to jeopardize the fragile peace negotiations between the GoS and Southern Sudan. (Srinivasan 2008: 66)

A shift within the at first hesitant international response to Darfur occurred only one year later, as the extent of the humanitarian crisis and the severity of the war’s impact on civilians could not be ignored any longer. (cf. Srinivasan 2008: 66) Finally, when the GoS and the
SPLM/A signed the first key protocols of the peace agreement in May 2004, “international pressure on Khartoum over the situation in Darfur rapidly increased”. (ibid.)

Reverting from peace negotiations of the Sudanese civil war to those of the crisis in Darfur, previously, on 8 April 2004, the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement had been signed in N’djamena, Chad, by the Sudanese government and two main rebel movements from Darfur, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). (African Union 2004) Mediated by Chad, the N’Djamena accords were the first attempt to bring a halt to the ongoing clashes between the Sudanese government and insurgents in Darfur. They further established a Ceasefire Monitoring Committee that reported to a Joint Commission, consisting of two members each of the signatory parties, the Chadian mediation, the AU, the US, as well as the EU. (African Union 2004)

In consequence, the agreement served as inducement for the African Union to approve the deployment of a monitoring mission (African Union Mission in Sudan – AMIS) to Darfur (Holslag 2008: 75), whose main objectives were the following:

1. Assist in the amelioration of the general security situation in Sudan
2. Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief and repatriate refugees
3. Help protect civilians in Darfur
4. Monitor the conflict parties’ adherence to the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement

(EUROPEAID 2012)

However, financial shortages, the limited nature of the mandate, as well as deficient military capacities weakened AMIS’ effectiveness and correspondingly made it a “lame duck without any ability to tackle continuous crimes against humanity”. (Holslag 2008: 76)

In the beginning of September 2004, then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell proclaimed in a testimony before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the Government of Sudan and the Jingaweit 31 bear responsibility“. (Powell 2004) He further advised the increase of African Union monitors “as

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31 Variant spelling from the most commonly used term „Janjaweed“, describing Arab militias that were “organized as a counterinsurgency force” by the Sudanese government (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2014) in order to crush the armed uprisings in Darfur. Khartoum “heavily funded” (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 128) and supported the Janjaweed by providing them with military equipment (including arms).
the most practical contribution we [the United States A/N] can make to the security of Darfur”, which required, however, the cooperation of the Sudanese government. (Powell 2004) Furthermore, the United States requested the Sudanese government to “take action and bring Jingaweit leaders to justice”, warning Khartoum that the UNSC would impose sanctions against the country “if Sudan fail[ed] to comply”. (Powell 2004)

Considering the PRC’s deeply entrenched presence in the country’s oil sector as well as its role as important military ally to the GoS, “Khartoum’s destructive military efforts in Darfur created a serious foreign policy conundrum for Beijing” (Large/Patey 2011: 30): As China had amplified its role in Sudan from reliable oil developer to trusted supplier of weapons over the years, all of a sudden, it was caught in the middle of multilateral ambitions to end human rights violations in Darfur. With all eyes focusing on the United States and their declaration that genocide was committed by Sudanese armed forces and government-sponsored Arab militias, Beijing’s “business is business” (French 2004) approach in Sudan was consistently put under strain by western countries.

This was largely because China’s heavy investments in the Sudanese oil infrastructure as well as its continuing arms sales to the GoS had politicized its local role in a way that was increasingly perceived as “foot-dragging and obstructing” the Darfur question. (Srinivasan 2008: 67)

As for China, Sudan represented above all a reliable source of oil that the country’s domestic growth could not do without. Curbing or even withdrawing its oil activities in Sudan would have entailed a commercial and financial disaster for China: On the one hand, this would have significantly jeopardized Beijing’s long-term resource security, and torn a deep hole into its national balance sheets, on the other. Ultimately, this explains why the PRC was highly motivated to shield Khartoum from the imposition of international sanctions that could adversely affect the Sudanese oil development – and therefore its own national interests in the country.

As a consequence, Beijing abstained from voting on UNSC Resolution 1564, which established an international commission of inquiry into human rights violations in Darfur and in light of Khartoum’s persistent lack of cooperation considered “taking additional measures as contemplated in Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, such as actions to affect
Sudan’s petroleum sector”. (United Nations, S/RES/1564 2004) However, before the resolution could even pass, the United States had to revise its text twice in order to “water down the provision on sanctions” (Srinivasan 2008: 67) as the PRC otherwise threatened to veto the sanction altogether.

Here, the PRC’s strategy was plain and simple: “Wielding its veto card, Beijing had succeeded in ensuring that the threat of oil trading sanctions against Khartoum was significantly weakened.” (Srinivasan 2008: 67) Or, more to the point, “despite its reference to state sovereignty and the concomitant appraisal of Darfur as a ‘domestic issue’, Beijing’s intransigence in the Security Council was essentially linked to its oil interests”. (Tull 2006: 470)

Srinivasan’s and Tull’s findings obviously echo Large’s analysis below, as the latter illustrates comprehensibly why China chose a method of abstention to meet the new challenges and threats to its standing in Sudan:

> Although China has threatened to use its veto to block the UN Security Council from imposing sanctions against Khartoum over the Darfur conflict, it has never done so. Its strategy has been instead to dilute the language of resolutions and to frequently abstain from voting.

(Large 2007: 7)

Obviously, this was not approved by those UNSC members that were struggling to put an end to ongoing violence in Darfur. In addition, as Beijing’s support of the NCP facilitated the purchase of arms that the Sudanese government subsequently used to defeat the rebels in the South and support the Janjaweed militias in Darfur, the international community more and more put China’s strategic partnership with Sudan under close scrutiny.

### 8.2. Sudan, weapons made in China, and the UN arms embargo: Darfur’s political dynamite

Tendencies to suspiciously eye the nature of the PRC’s bilateral cooperation with Sudan, especially in arms trade, even gained strength in light of evidence that promulgated how “[t]he Darfur region ha[d] been deeply affected by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons”. (Amnesty International 2006: 13) Acting as if nothing had happened, Chinese policy-makers nevertheless “reaffirmed […] support for Sudan in a renewal of military ties” in November 2005. (Budabin 2011: 141)
In this regard, the PRC’s approach to conflict-resolution in Darfur consequently can be characterized as double-sided: “While not blocking action at the international level, China was still protecting NCP-governed Sudan to some degree […] [appearing] to be showing one face to the international community, while showing another to its long-time ally, Sudan.” (Budabin 2011: 141)

Especially international human rights organization turned the spotlight on the contested nature of China’s strategic partnership with the Sudanese government: Above all, they castigated Beijing for turning a blind eye on the obvious involvement of the GoS in the gross human rights violations32 that were happening in front of the world and further bemoaned the heavy toll that Chinese arms shipments to Khartoum had taken on civilians in Darfur.

In specific, Amnesty International’s 2006 report on China’s continuing arms flow to Sudan criticizes severely how „China has continued to allow military equipment to be sent to Sudan despite well-documented and widespread killings, rapes and abductions by government armed forces and allied military groups in Darfur“. (Amnesty International 2006: 1)

In response to the worsening human rights conditions, the UNSC passed Resolution 1556 (China abstained), imposing an open-ended arms embargo on all non-governmental bodies and individuals in Darfur in July 2004 (Security Council Committee 2013; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2012) and thereby further curtailing the Sudanese government’s access to weapons from major arms suppliers other than China. (Iroanya 2010: 188) Ironically enough, the PRC’s reputation as Khartoum’s preferred arms supplier consequently even gained in strength, as Sudan now faced “heavy reliance on China for arms transfer” and had only “limited access to alternative sources of supply”. (Iroanya 2010: 188)

Nevertheless, the context of Sino-Sudanese arms deals necessitates to underline the following crucial aspect: Even though Chinese arms transfers to Khartoum “clearly facilitated gross abuses by the Sudanese government”, these sales actually did not violate international law: “While the United States imposed sanctions and the European Union […] imposed an arms embargo, China was bound by neither.” (Brown/Sriram 2008: 257)

32 Including aerial bombings and attacks on villages, forced displacements, summary executions, disappearances, looting, as well as destruction of property. (Amnesty International 2007: 3)
Only if it were to be proven that the PRC intentionally closed arms sales with the GoS knowing for certain that these weapons would be passed along to ruthless militias and used for human rights abuses by the Sudanese army could Beijing legitimately be accused of complicity. (Brown/Sriram 2008: 257) Still, considering the poor human rights record that had been ruling the country for decades, as well as the acute intricacy of civil war and the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, it seems hard to believe that China was not aware of the atrocities committed with its weapons.

Amnesty International confirms this suspicion by claiming that the governments of Khartoum’s main arms supplier countries (notably the PRC and Russia) “have been, or should have been, aware […] that several types of military equipment including aircraft have been deployed by the Sudanese armed forces and militia for direct attacks on civilians and indiscriminate attacks in Darfur”. (Amnesty International 2007: 7)

Notwithstanding this, the point here is that Chinese arms sales to the Sudanese government were morally debatable, but legally irreproachable – at least provided that these transfers were transacted prior to the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1591 (China abstained, again) in March 2005, which expanded the arms embargo to all parties of the N’Djamena Ceasefire Agreement, including therefore now also Sudanese government forces. As a consequence, any weapons delivered to the GoS after the expansion of the UN embargo were in clear violation of international law. (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2012; Brown/Sriram 2008: 257-256)

The decision to amplify the UN arms embargo was the result of ongoing discussions after UNSC Resolution 1556 was adopted, questioning why the GoS had been excluded from the ban given that “Sudan’s armed forces were known to be arming and actively supporting the Janjawid militias“. (Amnesty International 2007: 7) As this had to be amended, Resolution 1591 was passed; now, the arms embargo finally targeted all conflict parties in Darfur. In addition, the UNSC established a Panel of Experts\(^{34}\) to observe the enforcement of the embargo and further imposed supplementary measures containing a travel ban and an assets

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\(^{33}\) Amnesty International here refers to the published and unpublished reports of the UN Panel of Experts to the UN Sanctions Committee on Sudan as well as its own, very detailed report published in November 2004.

\(^{34}\) Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan, (United Nations, S/2006/795 2005)
freeze on individuals defined by the Sanctions Committee. (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2012)

In the meantime, the Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague in 2005, as violence did not subside and President al-Bashir’s role in “serious violations of international human rights law” had been confirmed by a UN inquiry. (Branigan 2011) In further consequence, the ICC issued arrest warrants against al-Bashir “on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, making him the first sitting head of state to be indicted by the court”. (UN News Centre 2011)

China, however, is not bound to enforce the ICC warrants because it is not a signatory of the body and consequently does not recognize the court’s judicial authority. (Branigan 2011) It has therefore continued to cooperate and negotiate with the Sudanese president in political, economic, as well as military terms (and even welcomed him as guest of state to Beijing in 2011).

Notwithstanding the Security Council’s concentrated efforts to bring a halt to foreign arms flows to Darfur, the UN embargo was “largely ignored by the Government of Sudan and the armed opposition groups as well as by several of the key states from where the most significant arms transfers have been sent to Sudan“. (Amnesty International 2007: 6)

These findings were compiled by the UN Panel of Experts and officially presented to the UNSC in October 2006:

[T]he Panel maintains that blatant violations of the arms embargo by all parties operating in Darfur continue unabated. Weapons, notably small arms, ammunition and military equipment, continue to enter the Darfur states from a number of countries and from the region of the Sudan.


According to Amnesty International, “the bulk” of these weapons was transferred from China and Russia – both of them permanent members of the Security Council, both of them undoubtedly au courant with the atrocities that were committed with these weapons in Darfur. (cf. Amnesty International 2007: 7) In 2009, another report of the UN Panel of
Experts confirmed “the prominence of Chinese manufactured arms and ammunition” in Darfur. (United Nations S 2009/562 2009)

As becomes apparent in consequence, China’s arms sales to Sudan did not always conform to international law, as the transfers to Khartoum processed after March 2005 represented a clear violation of the UN embargo.

In addition, with the GoS continuing to deploy imported military equipment, firearms, and ammunition to launch attacks in Darfur which resulted in civilian casualties, and furthermore not stopping to arm and support the Janjaweed militias (Amnesty International 2007: 3), the international community increasingly cornered the PRC for its persisting military cooperation with the Sudanese government.

In response, the PRC retorted that the majority of the equipment and arms mentioned in the UN Panel of Expert’s report stemmed from deals that were concluded during the Sudanese civil war (and therefore in accordance with international law) – “[h]ow they ended up in the hands of the Darfur militia groups [supposedly A/N] was outside China’s control”. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 129)

Referring to the principle of non-interference, the PRC emphasized over and over again that it would neither get involved in Sudan’s domestic politics nor judge the activities of its government, as its involvement with Khartoum was “always purely commercial”. (Lee/Shalmon 2008: 129) This explains also China’s initially hesitant engagement in the Sudanese conflict resolution, which “did not evolve beyond having quiet words with Khartoum and in effect shielded Sudan from a growing international consensus for tougher action”. (Srinivasan 2008: 68) In the meantime, the conflict in Darfur became more complex, as rebel groups disintegrated and conflict spilled over Sudan’s borders into Chad and the Central African Republic. (Srinivasan 2008: 68)

8.3. The PRC gradually takes action: China’s new role as negotiating power

According to Srinivasan, “[t]he critical period in analysing Beijing’s Darfur policy and its implications for Chinese engagement in Africa began after the failure of the Darfur Peace
Agreement (DPA)”, which was signed between the Sudanese government and only one of the then three Darfur rebel movements in Abuja, Nigeria, on May 5, 2006. (Srinivasan 2008:69)

In the face of another failed peace agreement\(^{35}\) and the subsequent resurgence of violence in Darfur, China realized that the longer this conflict carried on, the more destructive its impact would be on the PRC’s national interests in the country. Considering its deep entrenchment in Sudan’s oil sector, Beijing obviously had a lot to lose. More than anybody else, China was therefore concerned to protect its long-term interests in Sudan – and to end the Darfur crisis swiftly.

Consequently, as killings, rape, and displacements continued despite the presence of AMIS peacekeepers (BBC News 2006), in mid-May 2006, China came aboard of the unanimous UNSC Resolution 1679. Its passage paved the way for the replacement of the “beleaguered, poorly mandated and inadequately resourced” AMIS peacekeeping units with UN troops by early 2007. (Srinivasan 2008: 69) The resolution also aimed at the extension of the already-deployed UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), whose presence in the country had been stipulated as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the GoS and the SPLM/A, which was finally signed on January 9, 2005.

In general, the PRC supported replacing AMIS with a UN operation. It was, however, a “conditional support” (Holslag 2008: 76), as China’s one and only condition requested the GoS’ consent prior to a deployment of UN forces to the Darfur region. This being one of the most essential notions of the Chinese non-interference principle and its stance on state sovereignty, it explains further why the PRC had “refused to let resolution 1706\(^{36}\) pass without inserting the requirement of Khartoum’s consent” (Holslag 2008:76).

Resolution 1706 was adopted on August 31, 2006 with the PRC’s (as well as Russia’s and Qatar’s) abstention. It was “promptly rejected” (Srinivasan 2008: 70) by Khartoum on the grounds that a deployment of UN troops in Darfur would “violate its sovereignty” as these forces had “colonial ambitions”. (BBC News 2006) Al-Bashir even went so far and threatened “peacekeepers with violence should they set foot” in Darfur. (Goldberg N.D.)

\(^{35}\) As was to be expected, the remaining non-signatory rebel groups did not accept the DPA. (Srinivasan 2008: 69)

\(^{36}\) S/RES/1706 (2006): Succeeding Resolution 1679 and authorizing the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in Darfur, requiring, however, the GoS’ prior consent.
What needs to be stressed at this point is that China’s approach to conflict resolution in Darfur never ran counter to the deployment of UN troops to the region \textit{per se}. It did oppose, however, an international intervention that was carried out by western powers, devoid of Sudan’s consent, and aimed at enforcing peace from outside.

The PRC’s extreme sensitivity to western-led international intervention mostly ascribes to the suspicion of attempted regime change that China considers an inevitable side effect of external interference. As this was the case during its “century of humiliation”, Beijing today is “extremely sensitive about Western-initiated humanitarian initiatives behind which it suspects a regime change lurks […]”. (Hoeymissen 2011: 107)

In virtue of its former “victim mentality”, interventions initiated by the West – especially in developing countries of the global South – are therefore irreconcilable with China’s non-interference principle. Consequently, as it opposes foreign interventions into the internal state affairs of a sovereign country as a matter of principle, official Chinese support for western approaches to international conflict resolution is often difficult to obtain: “China’s non-interference policy and its preoccupation with state sovereignty […] make many of the solutions that outside powers advocate, such as sanctions or military interventions, in principle unacceptable”. (Hoeymissen 2011: 98) Instead, China opts for conflict resolution through talks and negotiation.

When linking these findings to the PRC’s presence in Sudan, it becomes evident that “China never opposed the deployment of UN troops to Darfur, but it tenaciously refused a peace enforcement operation […] without […] obtaining the consent of the national government”. (Holslag 2008: 74) To the contrary, as time passed and the conflict increased in size and complexity, the PRC took a great interest to “send in blue helmets” […] as awareness grew that escalating violence would put its economic stakes in Sudan at risk”. (Holslag 2008: 74)

What incited China’s motivation to play an active part in the Sudanese conflict resolution even more was that in the face of Khartoum’s stubborn posture and defiance of the international consent that UN peacekeeping forces would substantially alleviate the situation in Darfur, the international community increasingly started to lose patience with those countries that had abstained from their vote on Resolution 1706 – above all China. (Srinivasan 2008: 70)
Furthermore, it finally seemed to dawn on the PRC that clinging to its non-interference principle might not be the most effective way to deal with new challenges like those it was confronted with in Darfur. Concerning this, Large pointedly notes, “[t]reats and attacks against their own interests provided a self-interested reason for Beijing to promote conflict resolution in Sudan and was one driver of a more active Chinese political engagement”. (Large 2009: 619)

As China’s interests were ‘explicitly targeted in the context of the Darfur conflict’, Large’s comment addresses the crucial aspect of how the PRC’s “deepening political involvement” in Sudan made it vulnerable to “anti-government violence”: This is because rebel groups in Darfur increasingly regarded China’s role in Sudan as “politically inseparable from the central state under the NCP” and therefore also complicit in Khartoum’s “brutal counter-insurgency campaign in Darfur”. (Large 2009: 618)

Two serious incidents illustrate this line of thought: In October 2007, JEM rebels attacked Chinese oil sites in Defra, Kordofan, and gave Beijing an ultimatum to withdraw from Sudan within one week. The second episode of insurgent violence aimed at the PRC occurred one year later, in October 2008 in Southern Kordofan, and was “far more serious”: Nine Chinese CNPC workers were abducted, five of them killed, on the grounds that “China supported the Khartoum government militarily and helped it marginalize our [the rebels’ A/N] region”. (Large 2009: 618) It is difficult to say to what extent these events scarred or even traumatized the PRC – for certain, however, they made Chinese policymakers realize how a smooth outcome to the Darfur crisis was also in their own best interest.

And finally, the China-Africa summit in Beijing within the framework of the third ministerial conference of FOCAC in November 2006 coincided with a “new level of international scrutiny of China’s Africa relations”. (Srinivasan 2008: 71) Deputy Asia Director at Human Rights Watch Sophie Richardson used this opportunity to denounce the PRC’s omnipotent principle of non-interference and directed international attention at China’s alleged inactivity in ending violence in Darfur:
China insists that it will not ‘interfere’ in other countries’ domestic affairs, but it also claims to be a great friend of the African people and a responsible major power. But that doesn’t square with staying silent while mass killings go on in Darfur.

(Richardson cited in Human Rights Watch 2006)

Ultimately, though, China did not stay silent. For the first time in the history of Sino-African relations, the PRC made use of its power and status on the continent by taking on the task of acting as a mediator. From 2006 on, China put considerable efforts into persuading the Sudanese government to accept the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in Darfur. (Holslag 2007: 5) In this sense, as Alexandra Budabin puts it, “[s]trangely, China’s policy towards the Darfur situation underwent a major shift during the course of 2006.” (Budiban 2008: 142)

As violence and instability in the region increased, the UNSC further discussed a possible military intervention and therefore left China more and more concerned about its own position in Sudan – and its status in the international community, too. In addition, then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s personal efforts to find a political solution to Darfur and achieve the deployment of UN peacekeepers “threatened to make Beijing look even more unhelpful, unless it showed its commitment to being part of a solution”. (Srinivasan 2008: 70)

Consequently, Chinese policy-makers tried to find a way that met the reputational challenges emanating from China’s perceived inactivity to resolving the Darfur issue and simultaneously appeased the West’s demand for more Chinese commitment in conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

However, the PRC maintained its firm opposition towards international intervention without the consent of the country involved. Instead, Chinese policy-makers rather opted for “dialogue and negotiation“. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

According to Holslag, this endeavor was characterized by “a subtle interplay between a permanent effort to solidify its privileged partnership on the one hand and loudening appeals for allowing the peacekeeping mission on the other“. (Holslag 2007: 5) Also, “[f]rom a tactical perspective the insistence on political consent enabled Beijing to buy time and to
make the UN mission more acceptable to the Sudanese regime”. (Holslag 2008: 75) Ultimately, though, China’s “quiet diplomacy” should turn the tables in Darfur.

8.4. “Quiet Diplomacy” – China’s game-changing approach to conflict resolution

As the PRC persistently opposed both the implementation of sanctions in order to pressure Khartoum into accepting a joint intervention by UN and AU peacekeeping forces as well as the deployment of peacekeeping troops in Darfur against al-Bashir’s will, the international community, notably the West, blamed Chinese policy-makers for “completely ignoring – even exacerbating – the deteriorating human rights situation in the region”. (He 2007: 34) Essentially, the accusations’ general tone was that China hid behind its principle of non-interference in order to safeguard its own interests in the country’s oil industry.

Considering, however, Chinese diplomats’ “significant efforts behind the scenes” to alleviate the situation in Darfur, including “maintaining the channels of communication between all concerned parties, arranging mutual visits by relevant heads of states, dispatching special envoys and facilitating coordination with the United Nations” (He 2007: 34-35), all signs point to the fact that the Darfur conflict prompted China to perform a careful transformation of its formerly rigid stance on non-interference.

In specific, China’s “quiet diplomacy” approach in Sudan refers to Ambassador Wang Guangya’s attempts at persuading Khartoum to support the hybrid peacekeeping force by the UN and AU. China was therefore actively lobbying for Kofi Annan’s plan in order to push forward a political solution in the region. (He 2007: 35)

The “Annan Peace Plan” was presented in person by the Secretary General in November 2006, and consisted of three phases that aimed at the deployment of combined African Union and United Nations peacekeeping forces in the Darfur region. It focused on the gradual increase of the logistic, technical, and human power support for the AU peacekeeping troops in Darfur, which consisted of only 7,800 men at the time, until the envisaged hybrid mission of UN and AU forces would be completed. (China.org N.D.) Ultimately, Annan’s main objective was to deploy a hybrid UN-AU mission of 17,000 troops and 3,000 police officers in Darfur “to monitor an area roughly the size of France”. (UN News Centre 2013)
Xuefeng Sun and Feng Jin describe the PRC’s attempt to achieve a political solution in Darfur by relying on a strategy of dialogue and negotiations behind the curtain as follows:

The Chinese government strenuously sought to persuade the Sudanese government to accept Annan’s approach, and at the same time actively lobbied at the UN and other international organizations to revise and improve on the existing approach, in order to prevent possible sanctions against Sudan.

(Sun/Jin 2009: 30)

Even then-President Hu Jintao reinforced the quiet diplomacy approach by holding talks with al-Bashir during the Beijing Summit of FOCAC in November 2006, as well as during his visit to Sudan in February 2007. While staying there, Hu proposed four key principles to solve the conflict in Darfur (He 2007: 35):

1. Continuing respect of Sudan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity
2. Keeping up dialogue and consultation on an equal basis as well as efforts to solve the Darfur issue peacefully
3. Further insisting on the importance of the role both the United Nations and the African Union played in the Sudanese conflict resolution mechanisms, and improving their efficiency
4. Improving the living situation of the local people in Darfur

(Xinhua 2007)

According to Large, Hu’s state visit further demonstrated China’s commitment to resolving the Darfur issue. After his meeting with al-Bashir, the Chinese government publicly called for “a comprehensive ceasefire” as well as “the acceleration of the political negotiation process”. (Large 2007: 7) Hu’s principal messages were repeated by Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun, who visited Sudan in April 2007. While staying there, Jun called for “Sudanese flexibility while opposing sanctions – simultaneously appeasing international criticism and providing continued support to the Sudanese government”. (Large 2007: 9)

Financial efforts, too, were made to boost China’s “quiet diplomacy” approach in Sudan: Until 2007, the Chinese leadership provided humanitarian goods worth USD 11 million to the Darfur region (He 2007: 35) and donated USD 3.5 million to AMIS. (Large 2007: 7)
As consequently becomes apparent, “[r]ather than sit on the sidelines, China entered the diplomatic fray over negotiating peacekeeping forces in Sudan” (Budabin 2011: 142) – and therefore steered out of the initially rigid grip of its non-interference principle. Srinivasan perfectly encapsulates the PRC’s new diplomatic self-confidence and unprecedented active participation in international conflict resolution:

China was increasingly seen to be in a key position to impose upon Khartoum, and by 2007, it would appear to have acknowledged that it was acting with such an understanding of its power in mind.

(Srinivasan 2008: 67)

The PRC’s promise to send 275 military engineers to the Darfur region as part of the second phase of the Annan plan and repeated affirmation of “the need for pursuing a peaceful resolution to the crisis through a negotiated political process and cooperation with the international community” (Large 2007: 9) is visual proof of this assumption.

In the end, the PRC turned out to be the deciding factor in urging President al-Bashir to accept the Annan Peace Plan – which he finally did on August 1, 2007. On November 16, 2007, the AU, the UN, and the GoS formally agreed on its implementation. (China.org N.D.)

Obviously, China’s “quiet diplomacy” approach as well as its serious contribution to resolve the Darfur conflict politically had great impact on Khartoum’s initial dismissal of the Annan plan. Originally, this strategy was de facto applied as appeasement policy. In the end, though, “quiet diplomacy” emerged as the PRC’s game-changing approach to bring together the African Union, the United Nations, and the Sudanese government to agree to a consolidated solution. Considering the balancing act that China had to master in the face of tradition, ideology, and international expectations, opting for this particular strategic choice seems logical:

China’s quiet diplomacy in Darfur reveals its attempt to strike a balance between the traditional principle of “noninterference in other’s internal affairs’ with the requests and needs of international society.

(He 2007: 35)

In this sense, the PRC mastered to bridge the gap between fulfilling the demands of the international community and making Khartoum comply without sacrificing its own privileged position in Sudan. As the context of Darfur demonstrated quite clearly, “China’s
diplomacy shifted gradually from passing the message to active persuasion” (Holslag 2008: 79), and all evidence points to the assumption that the PRC is gradually reviewing its non-interference principle.

Summarizing, Holslag puts these findings into perspective:

Sudan was the first instance where China actively lobbied an African government to permit a UN mission on its soil. Via active brokering and indirect pressure, China succeeded in neutralizing the incompatibility between its economic interests and the principle of noninterference on the one hand, and western appeals for intervening in Darfur and the need for long-term stability on the other.

(Holslag 2009: 30)

8.5. “Genocide Olympics”

Despite the PRC’s balancing act of its own “behind-the-scenes pressure politics” (Large 2009: 619), many – above all western human rights and civil society organizations – believed that its actions “did not represent the full extent of pressure […] [China] could wield in Sudan”. Ironically, “[b]y increasing its diplomatic efforts, China [had A/N] left itself vulnerable to criticism for its foreign policy choices.” (Budabin 2011: 142) This should manifest itself in a campaign of public defamation, spearheaded by the US-American “Dream for Darfur” campaign.

It was already in summer 2004 that several groups and individuals in the United States worried about the ongoing large-scale human rights violations in Darfur. In consequence, they initiated the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) to “highlight humanitarian concerns and advocate conflict resolution” (Budabin 2011: 139):

Expanding the scope of its advocacy campaigns, the SDC sought additional targets beyond the US national arena in order to generate leverage over the government of Sudan. From 2004 to 2008, the SDC highlighted and targeted crucial linkages in the international arena, while staying rooted domestically in the US.

(Budabin 2011: 139)

The international spotlight was increasingly turned on China due to its hosting of the Summer Olympics of 2008 in Beijing, an event that had already incited international media to increasingly focus on the country’s human rights policies. (Budabin 2011: 139) As international efforts so far had failed to bring a halt to the violence in Darfur, SDC proponents started to target China with a campaign that included the “lethal re-branding of the Beijing Games as the ‘Genocide Olympics’” and created a “public relations storm that
threatened the positive image that China had wanted to project”. (Budabin 2011: 139) Its mission was primarily to “use the 2008 Beijing Games as a way to press China to use its influence with the Sudanese regime to bring security to the Darfur region”. (Budabin 2011: 152)

The PRC had long pursued the goal of hosting the Olympics in order to show the world a particularly favorable image of itself. Anticipating an exceptional high level of media attention, Beijing strived to “give a positive narrative of its ascendancy as an emerging global power”. (Budabin 2011: 141)

At the same time, the interest of the international community (i.e. notably the United States) to resolve the Darfur crisis put China in a delicate situation, as the general tone in both the political and the public sphere inquired how China could “balance its strategic interests in Sudan and its foreign policy principles of non-interference against its rising prominence in the international community and humanitarian affairs”. (Budabin 2011: 141)

In spite of Beijing’s continuous diplomatic aspirations to exert influence on Khartoum through talks and negotiation, the SDC was not convinced that China was “exercising its full muscle” (ibid.) to pressure Khartoum into cooperating with the international community and accept the UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping force. “Dream for Darfur” therefore seized the moment and made use of the strategically ideal overlap between the alleged genocide in Darfur and “China’s shining moment on the world stage as the host of the 2008 Olympics […] Spurred by the search for levers on Khartoum, advocates rested their sights on China as a vulnerable venue for exerting mass pressure”. (Budabin 2011: 145)

The campaign’s most prominent representatives included US actress and UNICEF goodwill ambassador Mia Farrow as well as Hollywood artist George Clooney. The renowned Sudan-activist Eric Reeves even convinced the Washington Post to publish an editorial that incorporated the provocative phrasing of “Genocide Olympics”, and director Steven Spielberg resigned as artistic advisor to the Olympics’ opening and closing ceremonies in protest over China’s alleged lack of contribution to resolve the Darfur crisis. (Budabin 2011: 146-147) In addition, since 2004, the SDC and its constituent organizations enjoyed official support from many US-Congressmen and Congresswomen, which allowed the campaign to indirectly target China through the US government. (Budabin 2011: 148) The culmination of
events was when in May 2007, 108 members of the House of Representatives and the Senate signed a letter addressed to Chinese President Hu Jintao that contained “veiled threats against China’s image during Beijing’s 2008 Olympics” (Budabin 2011: 149), cautioning him that a “public relations disaster” might await China “if it did not use its influence over Khartoum to help curtail the violence”. (Srinivasan 2008: 73)

Evidently, the impact of “Dream for Darfur” deeply hurt Chinese ambitions to internationally display a positive picture of the PRC. Beijing obviously had to learn the hard way that its strategic partnership with Sudan posed a serious threat to its ambitions of portraying the PRC as a major benevolent power:

Beijing’s role in Sudan has tarnished the Chinese wish to promote China as a responsible international actor, committed to China’s “peaceful development” and active within multilateral fora as a sensible and globally minded power.

(Taylor 2008: 80)

8.6. Beijing shifts its Darfur policy

Ultimately, Darfur revealed how China’s “attempt to separate economics from politics” (Taylor/Wu 2013: 470) was no longer tenable. The “Genocide Olympics” offensive confronted Beijing with an “unprecedented international scrutiny” (Srinivasan 2008: 78) and therefore was the last straw for China to realize that an uncompromising stance on non-interference would only prove disadvantageous in the long run.

Furthermore, the events surrounding the Darfur crisis as well as the SDC’s “Dream for Darfur” campaign vividly demonstrated how China’s actions (or rather lack thereof) in one country inevitably influenced its overall Africa strategy – and its status within the international arena. Daniel Large and Luke Patey put this realization into perspective:

Sudan’s relations with China have been internationalised in more visible ways since 2004 when, more than anything, Darfur brought China’s engagement in Sudan to a wider, more global audience, influencing coverage and perceptions of China’s expanding role in Africa in the process.

(Large/Patey 2011: 2)

Apparently, China, became aware of that, too, as its reaction to the “Genocide Olympics” accusation was to “address the situation in Darfur more energetically”. (Budabin 2011: 154)

In consequence, Beijing surprised the international community by appointing Liu Guijin,
former Ambassador to South Africa and Zimbabwe, as first Chinese Special Envoy for African Affairs (Budabin 2011: 154) – “despite its general distaste for envoys of this nature”. (Thomas-Jensen/Spiegel 2007: 852)

Liu’s main focus was directed at resolving the Darfur issue, and his appointment generally perceived as “almost certainly a result of global activist pressure”. (Thomas-Jensen/Spiegel 2007: 852) Motivated by global activist pressure or not, envoy Liu’s appointment and his focus on the conflict in Darfur nevertheless “heralded a clear diplomatic offensive by China”. (Srinivasan 2008: 75) In response to “Genocide Olympics”, Liu stated that the SDC activists’ attempt to establish a connection between Darfur and the 2008 Beijing Olympics was “either ignorant of reality or steeped in obsolete Cold War ideology”, as it “tend[s] to distort China’s stance and refuse[s] to recognize the constructive role China has played” in carrying forward a political solution to the Darfur conflict. (People’s Daily Online 2007)

Reaffirming the PRC’s identity-establishing principles of non-interference and state sovereignty, Liu further asserted that in order to find a “fair solution” in Darfur, the Sudanese government’s consent was crucial for any peacekeeping operation to succeed. He therefore called to mind that “[t]he international community should not forget that it [Sudan A/N] is a legitimate government that deserves respect”. (People’s Daily Online 2007)

In addition, Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun’s state visit to Sudan in spring 2007 further appeased international demands for China to show more commitment to peace negotiations in Darfur. His stay also included a “well-publicized” visit to three refugee camps in Darfur (Budabin 2011: 154), which obviously was above all meant to appease China’s critics. To make things even clearer and leave no further doubt of the PRC’s commitment to ending the Darfur crisis swiftly, Jun asserted at a press conference subsequent to his visit that “China is willing to continue to play a constructive role on the issue of Darfur”. (Embassy of the PRC in the Federal Republic of Germany 2007)

Only days later, the PRC convinced al-Bashir to accept the Annan Peace Plan and therefore agree to the deployment of UN forces to strengthen the already-present AU troops. (Budabin 2011: 154) Finally, the debate on China’s “Genocide Olympics” receded more or less with Beijing signaling its support for Resolution 1769, which approved the projected deployment
of a joint AU-UN peacekeeping force. (cf. Budabin 2011: 154) The PRC even promised it would make significant troop contributions (and it actually did).

Apparently, China’s policy in Darfur had undergone significant changes: Whereas Beijing tried to avoid getting drawn in the conflict as well as having to make “tough choices between external expectations and its proper standards and interests” (Holslag 2008: 83) in the initial stages of the conflict, by mid-2006, “China had begun to take a clear position and actively lobbied the Sudanese government to allow a foreign intervention in Darfur”. In 2007, the PRC even “went a step further as it sought to negotiate the terms of the deployment and assisted the conception of a concrete and workable road map to achieve tangible process”. (Holslag 2008: 83)

Furthermore, “[s]tatements like ‘business is business’ became unthinkable”. (Holslag 2008: 83) and China finally realized the importance of communicating with the media: “The initial reluctance to comment on Darfur made way for frequent press conferences and various articles in state-controlled newspapers.” (Holslag 2008: 83)

With the unanimous passage of UNSC Resolution 1769 on July 31, 2007, “high-ranking African, American and European officials praised China for its constructive policy”. (Holslag 2008: 84) This also included the use of “very direct language” (Srinivasan 2008: 78) by Assistant Foreign Minister Zhai Jun, who warned Sudan in an interview that “the world is running out of patience over what’s going [on A/N] in Darfur”. (Sudan Tribune 2008) While reaffirming Beijing’s support to its partner country, Jun nevertheless appealed to Sudan “not to do things that will cause the international community to impose sanctions on […] it”. (Sudan Tribune 2008)

Furthermore, China’s commitment to supporting the UNAMID peacekeeping force in Darfur with its own troops further demonstrates a “major indicator of China’s foreign policy shift”. (Pang 2009: 242) In this regard, Sharath Srinivasan’s remark about the sudden change in China’s position towards international relations hits the nail on the head: “[T]he China of the

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37 Deciding the deployment of a „hybrid international force of up to 26,000 UN and African Union [...] soldiers and police officers, UNAMID, to Darfur in a bid to put an end to the humanitarian casualties in the region“. (Lee/Chan/Chan: 429) The hybrid force was also authorized to prevent armed attacks, which could also include “GoS-backed forces”. (Large 2007: 9)
new century now seemed willing to speak on behalf of the world. And, with the world, Beijing was confronting Khartoum with more than non-interference.” (Srinivasan 2008: 80)

And finally, Holslag’s statement below serves as a perfect example to illustrate the shifts in Beijing’s Darfur policy:

Instead of bringing on isolation, China succeeded in exploiting its role to gain moral credibility among African countries and strengthened its position in multilateral forums like the United Nations, the Arab League and the African Union. [...] From the perspective of the Sudanese government, China’s diplomacy allowed it to save face and to secure its central position in the peace process. (Holslag 2008: 84)

However, before one hastily jumps to conclusions, it is vital to put these developments in perspective. Dampening the West’s initial euphoria about China’s new commitment to international conflict resolution in Darfur, according to Large, “China’s official policy continues to be the protection of Sudanese sovereignty”. (Large 2007: 9) He grounds his assessment on the particular episode when Beijing (beside Russia) objected a UN Human Rights Commission report on Darfur (Large 2007: 9) and therefore apparently relapsed in old behavior patterns.

In addition, UN troops arrived only slowly in the Darfur region, which prevented a rapid resolution of the humanitarian crisis. However, this was primarily because of President al-Bashir’s obstruction, who insisted that “non-African troops could not enter the country until after African troops had been fully deployed”. (Lee/Chan/Chan 2012: 429) Consequently, by January 2008, “only 9,000 of the envisioned 26,000 UNAMID peacekeeping force[s] were stationed in Darfur.” (Lee/Chan/Chan 2012: 429)

For its future involvement in Sudan, this obviously left China with a heavy burden. Even though the pre-requisites for a military slow-down in Darfur were achieved and the PRC gave its formal blessing for the deployment of the UNAMID mission, for the Sudanese people, it was still a long way to go until peace could fully be established. In this sense, “for many in the West”, Beijing’s strategic partnership with Khartoum continues to be “widely perceived as a formidable barrier to a successful humanitarian intervention in Darfur”, and they continue to “lash out” at the PRC for its “unwillingness to impose sanctions against the Sudanese authorities due to its concerns for oil”. (Lee/Chan/Chan 2012: 430)
Acknowledging the inconvenient truth that through its intermediary role, Beijing in a way also “nourished the economic survivability of the [Sudanese A/N] regime”, the West’s deception, or at least its persisting scrutiny and a certain wariness towards China’s involvement in Sudan consequently seem plausible.

In addition, Darfur has also demonstrated a certain clash between western and Chinese perceptions on conflict resolution given that the PRC justified its continuing economic cooperation with the GoS and large-scale economic investments in the country’s oil sector by referring to their “contribution to development as a vehicle for realizing peace”. (Large 2011: 96) In this concern, Jun used said press conference following his journey to Sudan to “rearticulate, reinvent, and promote” economic development as “the solution to Sudan’s protracted conflicts” – with the subtle undertone that this understanding of development implied, or better, “actively necessitated”, future Chinese economic engagement in the region. (Large 2011: 96)

In specific, Jun declared: “The Darfur issue in essence is an issue of development”:

The basic way of resolving the Darfur issue is economic reconstruction and development. Without economic growth, it will be impossible to improve the living conditions, people will continue to fight for basic living materials and the root cause for local conflict will not be eradicated.

(Embassy of the PRC in the Federal Republic of Germany 2007)

Obviously, this type of argumentation resonates profoundly with the “notion that more economic development can overcome armed conflict” (Large 2011: 96), which is further evidenced by Large’s statement:

Official Chinese perspectives concerning China’s position and role in the Darfur crisis, besides pointing to its positive, successful diplomacy or peacekeeping contribution, reiterate the fact that flourishing commerce between China and Sudan can help to resolve the root of the Darfur crisis.

(Large 2011: 96)

This also further reflects China’s developmental approach to Sudan as inherently characterized by the modernization narrative. It consequently does not seem surprising at all that China’s aid in Sudan “remains limited in the context of overall economic relations”. (Large/Patey 2011: 27) This includes most of all development projects in water and road construction in Darfur and eastern Sudan, which are carried out by Chinese companies and
presented as “a tangible contribution towards economic development, regarded as having the greatest efficacy in overcoming the causes of conflict.” (Large/Patey 2011: 27)

However, even though its notions on conflict resolution might diverge from those of the West, China nevertheless realized that it had no other choice than to cooperate with the international community and contribute its share – if not for the people in Sudan, then at least for the sake of its own interests. This learning process may have been arduous, as Pang’s comment below illustrates, but the impact on the PRC’s evolving perspective on its international relations was significant:

[T]he Chinese government has been forced to recognize that protecting growing Chinese overseas interests requires a more outward looking and engaging foreign policy that supports global and regional institutions that help resolve international […] disputes […].

(Pang 2009: 238)

This realization may well have been reinforced due to the fact that the Darfur conflict threatened to considerably tarnish the PRC’s national interests, both locally and globally.

Either way, ultimately, there is reason to hope that Darfur has incited Chinese policy-makers to reconsider the absolute nature of its non-interference principle – a doctrine that is responsible for having created a substantial gap between the West’s and the PRC’s Africa policies and approaches to international conflict resolution. However, as the events surrounding the Darfur crisis demonstrated, all signs point to the fact that China’s “talk of a ‘quiet revolution’ in Chinese attitudes towards non-intervention is increasing”. (Large 2007: 9)

The following statement captures this perfectly:

The Darfur case may prove to be an important chapter in China’s arrival as a status quo global power. Faced with unprecedented scrutiny of its Sino-African relations, Darfur evidences an evolution in Chinese foreign policy from a value proposition of ‘no political conditions’ to a pragmatic acceptance of the need to use its growing influence […] China’s self-perception and approach to its foreign relations in Africa are noticeably shifting.

(Srinivasan 2008: 81)
9. “Interference Light”? Implications for China-Africa relations

Beyond doubt, the individual case of the Darfur crisis represents an extraordinary juncture in China’s foreign policy approach in Africa. Gradually, as the PRC’s diplomacy evolved from “passive, blind support for Khartoum to more active involvement in pressure politics aimed at ending conflict” (Large 2009: 612), its standing in international relations, too, experienced significant changes. In a way, Darfur therefore “internationalized” Sino-Sudanese ties “to an unprecedented degree” (Large 2007: 7): As China’s position on Darfur moved away from a “hands-off role” to “more active engagement” (Large 2007: 7), its perception within the international system progressively shifted from deliberate blocker to committed mediator at the same time.

Whereas at the outbreak of conflict in 2003 and well into 2006, Beijing strained to keep a low profile in multilateral negotiations and to shield Khartoum from economic sanctions that could put its own interests in the country at stake, it took on a more active role as intermediary between the Sudanese government and the UNSC starting in mid-2006. By not only trying to facilitate communication with and between the conflict parties, but eventually even exerting pressure on the GoS to keep the objective of peace in sight, China executed a slight deviation from its until then absolute non-interference policy for the first time in its history. In this sense, “[t]he Darfur case may prove to be an important chapter in China’s arrival as a status quo global power […]. China’s self-perception and approach to its foreign relations in Africa are noticeably shifting”. (Srinivasan 2008: 81)

The Darfur case consequently “indicates areas of possible reshaping and reformulation in China’s foreign policy and suggests some new parameters for engagement […]” (Srinivasan 2008: 66) which shall be outlined in the scope of this chapter.

9.1. China enters the global stage: Influence without interference

Ultimately, Darfur revealed how the Chinese dogma of non-interference was stretched to its limits as the PRC’s initial response to the crisis, repeatedly sticking to its credo, threatened to jeopardize its reputation, long-term interests as well as the protection of its citizens. At one point, consequently, the PRC had no other choice than realize its rigid “business is business” approach in Sudan was no longer tenable without losing face before the international
community. As violence reached another high and endangered not only the PRC’s assets in the country’s oil industry, but also the lives of its citizens, Darfur made Chinese policymakers finally comprehend that “non-interference does not prevent it from getting drawn into existing domestic conflicts in African countries”. (Hoeymissen 2011: 98)

In this sense, even though in theory China’s “primary foreign policy propaganda mantra” of peaceful development dictates strict adherence to the non-interference principle, the PRC’s government is also aware that it is “expected to protect the interests and safety of Chinese interests abroad”. (Mills 2012) The recent abductions and killings of CNPC workers in Darfur accentuated this cleavage between ideological convictions and practical demands even more.

As, on a global level, non-interference “marginalizes China in the international community and forces Beijing to adopt a passive stance in key multilateral discussions” (Mills 2012), Beijing consequently was “forced to recognize that protecting growing Chinese overseas interests requires a more outward looking and engaging foreign policy […]”. (Pang 2009: 238) According to Iain Mills, this obviously “raises the question of how long the non-interference policy can be sustained, and whether Chinese interests would be better served by abandoning it for a less rigid position”. (Mills 2012)

As a consequence, China’s deliberate strategy to engage more actively in its involvements on the African continent can be seen as the result of a gradual alienation from its non-interference policy as well as the realization that this would be the “best strategy to defend and assert its national interests”. (Tull 2006: 462)

In Darfur, the PRC’s subsequent decision to adjust its posture from “no intervention at all” (Liu 2012: 161) to getting on board with the UNSC Resolution, authorizing the deployment of a peacekeeping force on another sovereign state’s grounds (granted, with that state’s permission), therefore represents a milestone both in China’s foreign policy’s practice as well as its national identity formation.

As consequently becomes apparent, above all, the conflict in Darfur confronted Beijing with the imminent need to adapt its non-interference dogma in conformity with a changed international environment of global interlinkages and responsibilities. In this sense, the difficult task China is currently facing is to modify its ideological standing on non-
interference in a way that safeguards its national interests but does not challenge its peaceful development doctrine and concept of a harmonious world.

China is therefore standing at a crossroads. What the country is looking for is an ideological compromise that can be advocated both internationally and domestically without downgrading its position in the international system.

As a result, the evolving concept of “influence without interference” appears to provide the PRC with the perfect solution to respond to both international and national expectations. It also allows China to meet the new challenges arising from its deepening profile in Africa and multilateral institutions.

“Influence without interference” further enables the PRC’s leadership to reconcile both western and Sudanese (and its own) interests without diminishing its position in international affairs or putting at risk its own power base at home. It also permits China to establish its new role as active partner in multilateral conflict resolution mechanisms, as could be observed in Sudan: There, Chinese diplomats succeeded in significantly accelerating peace negotiations as they became “more involved in Sudanese politics” by applying the approach of “influence without interference” to appeal to the NCP leadership. (Large/Patey 2011: 31)

In this sense it can be stated that “[i]n moving from a ‘business is business’ rhetorical stance to one of embracing and publicizing ‘influence without interference’ Beijing charted new waters”. (Srinivasan 2008: 78) This is further evidenced by the following citation:

Sudan was the first instance where China actively lobbied an African government to permit a UN mission on its soil. Via active brokering and indirect pressure, China succeeded in neutralizing the incompatibility between its economic interests and the principle of non-interference on the one hand, and western appeals for intervening in Darfur and the need for long-term stability on the other.

(Holslag 2009: 30)

Characterizing the PRC’s evolving approach to conflict resolution in Darfur as “balancing act” therefore captures best how Beijing struggled to live up to the expectations of the West, demanding China to finally act according to its self-cultivated image of a major benevolent power. At the same time, it tried hard not to antagonize the Sudanese government with its gentle “pressure politics” (Large 2009: 619):
Chinese diplomacy pursued the challenging balancing act of trying to appease different, conflicting constituencies: attempting to be seen as a progressive force by supporting moves to establish UNAMID and the political process aimed at a negotiated solution in Darfur, while continuing to support the NCP.

(Large/Patey 2008: 31)

Apparently, “influence without interference” allowed Beijing to master this diplomatic tightrope walk: Its positive contribution to resolving the Darfur crisis demonstrated to the West that China was committed to take on the responsibilities that come with its desired status of a “major benevolent power”. The PRC’s recent contributions to international peacekeeping operations give further utterance to its rising commitment of playing an active part in African conflict resolution.

In this regard, the PRC’s willingness to exert leverage on Khartoum over the humanitarian crisis in Darfur consequently demonstrated a certain “willingness to adapt itself to the western agenda”. (Alden/Alves 2008: 56) In return, it was rewarded with the “clear realisation among western governments that China now matters greatly to African affairs, and needs to be actively engaged as a partner”. (Srinivasan 2008: 79) Darfur therefore “has allowed for a new level of dialogue, interaction and collaboration” on Africa between the UN, London, Brussels, Washington and Beijing”. (Srinivasan 2008: 79)

However, Beijing also succeeded in keeping Sudan as a strategic partner, oil supplier, and venue for investments. Consequently, the case of Darfur also exemplifies how a foreign policy approach of “influence without interference” will not stand in the way of China’s future ambitions on the African continent.

As becomes apparent, China’s shift from “non-interference” to “influence without interference” revolutionized both its foreign policy approach to a strategic partnership with an African country, as well as its perception on the international floor. In the face of the success this concept achieved in the Darfur crisis, it therefore holds promise to characterize the PRC’s blueprint on future Sino-African relations.
9.2. From non-interference to conditional interference: China’s new approach to African affairs

As the events surrounding the Darfur crisis have illustrated, China eventually did not have a choice other than supporting a multilateral solution in order to end ongoing violence – and “enhance its image and protect its economic interests”, as Sara van Hoeymissen pointedly adds. (Hoeymissen 2011: 105)

Even though the PRC would not deviate from its opposition to international sanctions or even a military intervention, it nevertheless gradually amended its posture on its universal doctrine of absolute state sovereignty by joining UN Security Council efforts to deploy the UNAMID peace force in Darfur. This obviously corresponds with China’s general increased involvement in UN peacekeeping operations and represents a crucial shift in its foreign policy. 39

Sudan felt the effects of this change quite strongly, as its most important political and economic ally at the time suddenly took an unexpected turn and lobbied Khartoum to accept the deployment of an AU-UN hybrid peacekeeping mission. Consequently, it could be observed that “[w]hile it still maintains the principle of non-interference or non-intervention, China no longer simply challenges/opposes international intervention sponsored or organized by the West”. (Pang 2009: 240)

At the outbreak of conflict in Sudan, China’s “steadfast support for a hard conception of Sudan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity” corresponded with its traditional attitude of the absoluteness of state sovereignty and “gave practical meaning to […] the sovereignty-based political framework of its Africa policy”. (Large 2009: 620) However, as the events in Darfur took their course, Chinese policymakers slowly but steadily abandoned the perceived totality of this concept.

As Liu Tiewa notes, “[w]ith the development of globalization and the growing interdependence among states as well as China’s increasing national power, China gradually altered its attitude towards its traditional belief about absolute sovereignty”. (Liu 2012: 160)

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39 See Chapter 2.3.
In consequence, as was evidenced by the Darfur crisis, the PRC has progressively accepted the “limitations on its sovereignty in the international society”. (Liu 2012: 160) Furthermore, its relatively recent membership to the IMF and WTO exemplify this shift in its foreign policy principles as far as economic cooperation is concerned. (Liu 2012: 160)

Also regarding the delicate matter of multilateral, western-led intervention, it also seems as if Beijing significantly altered its once absolute perception on state sovereignty – and consequently gave new meaning to the Chinese doctrine of non-intervention. The following statement demonstrates this clearly:

[... ] China has gradually changed its general attitude towards humanitarian intervention from absolute non-intervention by the international society to conditional international intervention.

(Liu 2012: 161)

As can be observed by China’s eventual approval of and commitment to a peacekeeping operation on Sudanese territory the concept of “conditional interference” as serious alternative to past norms of Chinese engagement in Africa, predominantly marked by the non-interference principle, therefore seems promising.

In light of the PRC’s careful policy shift during the Darfur crisis, which signaled a hesitant deviation from its firm adherence to non-interference and state sovereignty until then, the approach of conditional interference consequently also bears serious potential for China’s future role in international conflict resolution. At least, this strategy would secure the country’s status as “benevolent great power”, as evidenced by Holslag’s statement:

Although in the 1980s and early 1990s, Beijing opposed attempts by the international community to intervene in African security issues, nowadays it tends to join them. Beijing is increasingly recognizing the United Nations’ role in resolving the numerous conflicts and safeguarding the sovereignty of developing nations.

(Holslag 2009: 30)

In addition, a more integrated role in African affairs and in multilateral conflict resolution has allowed the PRC to bring those issues to the international agenda that it considers affairs of the heart: Its insistence on obtaining Khartoum’s consent before the UNAMID peacekeeping force could be deployed to Darfur serves as good example to emphasize this aspect.
In Darfur, Beijing without doubt experienced the obvious advantages that come with active participation in and more commitment to causes that are perceived to concern everyone, as its status as key stakeholder in negotiations leading up to UNSC Resolution 1769 obviously demonstrated. Furthermore, its relationship with western nations improved significantly as China finally could thrive in its role as global power acting with great responsibility (which, one could add, was about time, considering that both the Sino-Sudanese arms transfers at the peak of the civil war and the “Genocide Olympics” campaign heavily damaged Beijing’s reputation).

The “conditional interference” approach therefore opened up new possibilities and optimistic prospects for future Chinese engagement in its strategic partnerships with African countries. Especially intensified cooperation with multilateral bodies like the United Nations or the African Union will help pursue its objectives on the African continent.

9.3. African solutions to African problems as South-South conflict resolution

As “proclaimed all-weather partner of Africa”, China obviously does not want to oppose the interests of its strategic partner countries on the continent. (Hoeymissen 2011: 109) In light of Beijing’s reluctance to support sanctions targeting Sudan’s NCP regime and its objection to break off its political, economic, and military ties with Khartoum both during the civil war and the Darfur crisis, this aspect should not necessitate further explanation.

However, what seems important at this point is the fact that China recently has been paying more and more attention to the role that regional bodies play in African conflict resolution: As an emerging power in Africa, the PRC has “increasingly acknowledged and supported the work of regional organizations on security issues that affect its interests in Africa. It occasionally supports regional solutions in conflict situations to enhance its image and protect its economic interests […].” (Hoeymissen 2011: 109)

In this sense, the African Union represents a vital partner to ensure peace and stability on the continent – and therefore protect China’s interests in its partner countries. In specific, Beijing
promotes the AU’s concept of “African solutions for African problems” to protect African
countries’ sovereignty and fend off western interventions on the continent.

Specifically, the PRC’s strategy calls for the alignment of its foreign policy principles in
correspondence with those of the AU, which neither requires sacrifices concerning its non-
interference policy nor threatens the realization of its national interests on the African
continent:

By closely aligning its policies with those of key African regional players, China is
attempting to respond to international expectations and advance its views on appropriate
conflict resolution models while safe-guarding its interests in Africa.

(Hoeymissen 2011: 99)

In a way, this strategy reflects China’s attempt to meet the reputational challenges that
resulted from its rising profile in Africa, but also from its contested ties with “pariah states”
like Sudan.

Even though Chinese authorities keep emphasizing the supremacy of state sovereignty, the
principle of “African solutions for African problems” nevertheless enables them to support a
multilateral approach to conflict resolution that does not directly confront its stance on non-
interference. This approach, however, is only acceptable for Chinese policymakers because to
them, the African Union truly represents a regional organization devoid of any exertion of
influence by external actors. The AU’s leverage on the African continent is unquestioned by
the PRC.

Because of increasing global economic and political interdependencies, China acknowledged
already in the 1990s that states could voluntarily delegate parts of their sovereignty in order
to achieve “long-term goals or political ideals”. (Hoeymissen 2011: 95) These findings
 correspond with Chan’s analysis, who refers to the PRC’s realization that “[i]n the pursuit of
some long-term interests or political ideals, a state may have to make a compromise to give
up temporarily the exercise of its sovereignty”. (Chan 1999: 77)

40 Without a UNSC mandate or the consent of the country afflicted A/N.
Consequently, if parts of a state’s sovereignty have voluntarily been ceded to a regional umbrella organization, Chinese policy-makers will neither oppose this organizations’ methods in conflict mediation and resolution nor, at worst, interventions into its member countries – provided the organization has a corresponding mandate. (Hoeymissen 2011: 95)

As was demonstrated in the scope of this thesis, China opposes military intervention on principle: Its official position is that “countries should seek peace, safeguard security, settle disputes and promote harmony through cooperation, and oppose the use or threat of use of military force against one another”. (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC 2011b)

Notwithstanding this, the African Union’s principle of “African solutions for African problems” strikes a welcome balance for China between its principle of non-interference and western nations expecting it to act in accordance with its self-proclaimed status as a major responsible power. As Hoeymissen puts it, “[…] China’s commitment to working with the AU and other regional bodies can also be understood as part of an effort to promote conflict resolution models that respect sovereignty”. (Hoeymissen 2011: 109)

Even though it is the African Union’s explicit goal to “defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States” (The African Union Commission 2013), the theoretical foundation of “conditional interference” provides the organization with the legal basis to perform collective interventions in “grave circumstances”, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. (Hoeymissen 2011: 102) As a consequence, the principle of “conditional intervention in member states’ internal affairs” (He 2007: 34) theoretically would enable the PRC to give its formal blessing for the deployment of African peacekeeping troops in one of their own member states if the local situation required it.

Consequently, Beijing’s decision to back up the African Union’s mission in Sudan and talk al-Bashir into accepting the UN’s hybrid peacekeeping force ultimately demonstrates that China is turning to regional bodies in Africa for the vital role that they play in local conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

The PRC’s dominant method that has emerged in recent years within conflict resolution mechanisms is thus as follows: China vigorously promotes the African Unions’ approach of
“African solutions for African problems” in order to strengthen inner-regional problem solving, but also to avoid intervention by non-African actors on the continent. In a way, the Chinese support for the AU’s regional conflict resolution therefore also proves to be an essential tool of South-South cooperation.

It appears that this strategy is expected to prove successful also in the years to come, as ambassador Xie Xiaoyan stated in May 2012 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) conference of Sino-African Union cooperation in peace and security in Africa:

China regards the African Union as key cooperation partner. China is determined to continue supporting the practice of African solutions to African problems, safeguarding African legitimate rights and interests, and supporting AU-led peacekeeping through capacity-building programmes.

(Institute for Security Studies 2012)

In this sense, “African solutions for African problems” bears significant future potential as South-South conflict resolution mechanism and will most probably further stimulate the Sino-African strategic partnership.
10. “Enemies into Friends”\textsuperscript{41} – China’s bilateral ties with South Sudan

Beijing’s relations with Sudan before the South’s secession basically reflected the PRC’s strong belief in the principles of non-interference and state sovereignty: It only engaged with the central state in the North and neglected every other actor in the country, including Sudan’s South under the SPLM/A. China consciously neglected potential cooperation partners other than the central state under NCP rule, which is why its investments and political cooperation were only transacted with the regime in Khartoum. This should change, however, when peace was achieved and South Sudan emerged as a sovereign actor.

In essence, Beijing’s initial resistance towards sanctions or even an intervention in Darfur stemmed from its “strong belief in the proper, legitimate role of the central state in maintaining order”. (Large 2009: 620) Still, even though the GoS concentrated both political power and oil prosperity in Khartoum, it was not able to exert control over the entirety of Sudan’s territory as it “suffered from an underlying weakness of central rule” (Large 2009: 620), which was further exacerbated by the SPLM/A’s continuous uprisings.

As a result, Beijing was confronted with the following situation:

\textit{China [was forced] to respond to the fact that the central state in Khartoum […] [was] unable to exert effective control over its full territorial jurisdiction. Beijing has thus had to negotiate and adapt to the politics manifest beyond and below formal state sovereignty, which in practice means engagement with Sudan’s periphery and most notably Southern Sudan.}

(Large 2009: 621)

Officially, the civil war ended on January 9, 2005, when the NCP and the SPLM/A signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and thereby finally ended violence after 22 years of heavy fighting. The CPA established two separate governments in Northern and Southern Sudan for an interim period of six years. In the North, the Khartoum-based NCP continued its rule; in the South, the semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS)\textsuperscript{42} was established by the SPLM. Furthermore, a Government of National Unity (GoNU) was set up in Khartoum to operate “on a power-sharing basis between the NCP and SPLM” during the interim period. (Large 2009: 621)

\textsuperscript{41} Large 2008: 102

\textsuperscript{42} After South Sudan’s formal secession on July 9, 2011, this abbreviation stands for „Government of the Republic of South Sudan“.
The CPA also covered a wealth-sharing arrangement, enabling South Sudan to receive oil profits and further stipulated that a referendum would be held in 2011 so as to grant its people the right to self-determination and decide whether or not the South would secede and become a sovereign state. (cf. Large 2009: 621)

Consequently, “[t]he ‘one Sudan, two systems’ framework created by the CPA in principle allowed other powers to recognise and engage both the central GoNU and the GoS“ (Large/Patey 2008: 27) The CPA’s provision uniting two “self-governing democratic” entities within the framework of the GoNU consequently allowed to address the “historic problem of Southern Sudan’s [economically and politically marginalized A/N] position within Sudan” and further “rendered it politically and legally possible” for Beijing to approach the SPLM directly (Large 2009: 622):

> By conferring political legitimacy upon the SPLM as members of the central state and as the former-rebels turned ruling party of the Government of Southern Sudan, the CPA therefore enabled but also required Beijing to embark on a process of incremental political outreach with Juba. (Large 2009: 622)

And this China did.

As Beijing had been maintaining bilateral ties exclusively with Khartoum since 1959, its first careful approach towards Juba therefore represented “a political departure of note in the history of its relations with Sudan”. (Large 2009: 621) In addition, this particular development also highlighted the “constraints of adhering to a strict policy of respecting formal state sovereignty” (Large 2009: 621), which until then confined China’s cooperation with Sudan to the NCP in the northern part of the country.

However, the PRC quickly realized the vital role that a bilateral cooperation with South Sudan would represent to the fulfillment of its national interests in the region given that after secession, up to three quarters of the country’s oil reserves would be located on southern territory. (cf. Branigan 2011) It is therefore not coincidental that China put considerable efforts into establishing formal ties with Juba once the SPLM was officially constituted as political actor. As undoubtedly expected, this was not to Khartoum’s delight.

And as might have been expected, too, China’s attempt to create a “political outreach” to Juba presented itself as a real challenge. Logically, the reason for this lies in the PRC’s past
of political, economic, and military cooperation with Khartoum and its alleged complicity in oil-related violence: “[China’s] support for the NIF/NCP meant that it was widely seen as the principal backer of the […] [SPLM/A]’s former enemy.” (Large 2009: 622)

More importantly, what Beijing tried to present as non-interference in Sudan’s internal affairs, the SPLM interpreted quite differently as “interference through support for its enemy”. (Large 2009: 622) In light of large-scale Chinese arms transfers literally to the battlefields of the civil war, Juba’s new leaders hardly can be blamed for that stance.

Despite these reservations, China and South Sudan eventually started to officially engage in bilateral cooperation as “the conjunction of time-honoured pragmatism, mutual need and the prospect of mutual benefit meant that both the Chinese government and the Government of Southern Sudan were open to business after 2005”. (Large 2009: 622)

The civil war had left its mark in the newborn state. After more than two decades of destructive conflict, Juba was in considerable need of investments and foreign aid. China’s extended hand therefore represented the ideal solution to overcome infrastructural deficiencies in South Sudan. This proved to be reciprocal, as the PRC actively tried to promote its position in the country through direct budget support and various construction projects: “It has acted in part to address its acknowledged unpopularity and gain a more strategic political foothold in Southern Sudan.” (Large 2009: 624)

Consequently, China’s relations with the GoSS significantly deepened through aid and investment. Unfortunately, though, they did not remain unclouded as the conflict between Juba and Khartoum repeatedly re-erupted over continuing disputes related to oil – and the PRC got caught in the crossfire.

Renewed clashes between the GoS and the GoSS were mostly owing to the fact that “overwhelmingly”, oil is “the main source of income”\(^43\) for both entities and the CPA did not adequately clarify how resources would be divided. (Anderson 2012) Now, conflict between the north and south of Sudan centered on the border regions, where much of the contested oil fields were located. Furthermore, there was no easing of tensions in sight as the pipelines to the only export site at the Red Sea coast all run through the territory of Sudan. (Anderson

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\(^{43}\) In 2012, South Sudan depended on oil revenues, which accounted for 98 percent of its annual budget. (Walker 2012)
In addition, the majority of refineries is also located within the North’s territory. (SouthSudaninfo.com 2014)

Hostilities escalated in January 2012 when Khartoum “demanded an exorbitant “transfer fee” of thirty-six dollars for each barrel the South wished to pump through its territory”. (Anderson 2012) As Juba’s counter-offer of one dollar, which was closer to the international reference, was rejected, al-Bashir “retaliated by seizing nearly a billion dollars’ worth of oil”. (Anderson 2012) When in response, South Sudan cut off oil production as a whole, Sudan’s Armed Forces bombed oil fields on Juba’s border. (cf. Anderson 2012)

China was stuck in the middle, as it now maintained bilateral ties with both countries and CNPC as well as all the other oil companies with Chinese shares operated on both northern and southern territory. Suddenly, the PRC involuntarily rediscovered its role as mediator. This time, however, it was not between the UNSC and Khartoum, but between Sudan and China’s former adversary South Sudan. Again, the stakes were high for the PRC, as it had established its position as leading investor in Juba’s oil industry and accounted for the bulk of the South’s oil flows abroad:

To keep the oil flowing, China, as South Sudan’s biggest oil investor and consumer (accounting for 82% of its oil exports), has been drawn uncomfortably into the high-stakes conflict between north and south.

(Walker 2012)

To ensure continuing oil production, China was “pushed to mediate” between Khartoum and Juba (Tiezzi 2013), as oil “concerns not only major economic interests of Sudan and South Sudan but also their overall relations” (AllAfrica 2013) – and therefore China’s involvement in the countries’ oil sectors, too. In response to South Sudan’s decision to halt oil production, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Liu Weimin consequently appealed to both sides to “remain calm and restrained”:

We urge the two sides to remain calm and restrained, avoid taking any extreme action and continue working together with mediation by the African Union and other parties to resolve their dispute through negotiation at an early date and to benefit the two countries and their peoples [...].

(Xinhua 2012)

Liu’s statement serves as best example to conclude this chapter as it both underlines China’s increasing tendency to turn to regional organizations such as the African Union for conflict
resolution and also reveals once more the challenges its principle of non-interference is continuing to face on the African continent today. Shannon Tiezzi’s sharp observation also gets to the heart of Beijing’s still unsolved “non-interference dilemma” (cf. Pang 2009: 246):

As China becomes more globalized, Beijing may be forced to take a more active role to safeguard the lives of its citizens and Chinese business interests. In the coming years, Beijing might have to rethink its foreign policy calculus, especially how it interprets “non-interference.

(Tiezzi 2013)

In this sense, Sudan represented a captivating case to illustrate how China’s non-interference policy in Africa is increasingly “getting pushed out of its comfort zone”. (Bräutigam cited in Kelly 2012)
11. Conclusion

This thesis’ aim was to analyze China’s presence in Sudan and how the Darfur crisis affected both the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership as well as the principle of non-interference as fundamental element of the PRC’s foreign policy approach towards Africa.

Beijing’s deep economic involvement in and close political cooperation with Sudan entails implications that reflect its overarching approach towards the African continent as well as its geostrategic position in international affairs. I therefore concentrated my research on a detailed observation of the Sino-Sudanese ties and the transformation this relationship has experienced during the conflict in Darfur. These findings were further connected to China’s general Africa policy and allowed for a comprehensive description of the constraints its underlying principle is increasingly exposed to.

As was demonstrated, China’s overall involvement on the African continent has undergone a significant evolution in the course of the past sixty years. What originated in an ideological alliance against western imperialism and colonial domination eventually evolved into a pragmatic economic cooperation that praises the notions of equality and mutual benefit as characteristic features. The “Five Principles of Mutual Coexistence”, with non-interference leading the way, always primarily constitutionalized Beijing’s stance regarding its external relations and consequently allowed it to promote the equality of all nations as well as emphasize its peaceful and harmonious outreach to Africa.

This explains why Beijing vehemently opposed an international intervention in the Darfur region without Khartoum’s consent, as this would have undermined Sudan’s sovereignty – and put an end to the PRC’s lucrative projects in the country’s oil industry.

Non-interference also serves as distinguishing feature between western and Chinese development cooperation and has substantially enabled Beijing to popularize and demarcate its activities as a donor on the African continent from those of the OECD’s aid regime: Besides emphasizing its mantra of “no conditions attached”, the notions of mutual benefit and equality demonstrate how, in theory, China claims to meet the recipients of its aid flows at eye level and considers these ties as pure economic cooperation with a reciprocal strengthening of development capacities. South-South cooperation between China and Africa
therefore experienced a significant surge. Particularly those nations with contested human rights records and a liability to non-democratic, elitist governance structures welcome this unconditional and perceived egalitarian approach to development. As was demonstrated, this also perfectly applies to the case of Sudan.

Nevertheless, the analysis on Sino-African development relations provided sufficient room for a careful, but optimistic outlook: With its commitment to the Busan Partnership, Beijing vows to adhere to standards of human rights and good governance – standards that until then were commonly perceived to be sole characteristics of western ODA. This development therefore represents a clear change of paradigm in Chinese aid standards.

However, the question if China’s South-South approach to development cooperation is necessarily better than the West’s leaves room for future discussion, as a repetition of disadvantageous North-South trade patterns and the existence of development capacity asymmetries were also detected within the PRC’s alternative. As became apparent, South-South cooperation between China and Africa in general, and between China and Sudan in specific, does not per se provide African development countries with more favorable conditions. Contrary to official Chinese reaffirmations, Sino-Sudanese ties are therefore not a true “win-win situation”.

On the international floor, the PRC’s “dual identity” as caught between its status as an aspiring world power and its simultaneous self-identification of a developing country puts the country in an extremely difficult position. Furthermore, Beijing is increasingly required to resolve its non-interference dilemma and act according to its desired portrayal as “major benevolent power”.

Better than any other international hot spot, the Darfur crisis accentuated this predicament. It also indicated that China tends to lean towards a less rigid interpretation of non-interference in order to tackle the new challenges that resulted from its deepened profile in Africa: At a certain point, the events surrounding the conflict in Darfur clearly demonstrated that the PRC was no longer able to hide behind its non-interference mantra without losing its hard-earned status as global power that acts with responsibility on the international floor.
In Sudan, emphasizing its fundamental foreign policy principle of non-interference and the absoluteness of state sovereignty allowed China to deepen its alliance with and gain substantial economic benefits from a country that the West had disgraced as “pariah state”. That alone, as well its own contested human rights records, tarnished the PRC’s desire to be officially recognized as a serious and trustworthy actor on the international stage. However, besides shared experiences of a colonial past, their individual political and economic isolation by the West turned out to be the initial connecting point between Beijing and Khartoum in the early 1990s.

Filling the vacuum that had been created by western alienation even allowed this “marriage of convenience” (cf. Srinivasan 2008: 55) to flourish and for China to gain a foothold in the Sudanese oil industry. Characterized by a Chinese approach that can predominantly be ascribed to the modernization narrative, oil always remained at the heart of the Sino-Sudanese partnership. It was only the large-scale Chinese investments and technical assistance that allowed Khartoum to transform this sector into a profitable source of revenues. And it was only with these revenues that President al-Bashir was able to launch its brutal counter-insurgency campaign against the SPLM/A in Southern Sudan and later against Darfurian rebels, which to a certain extent implied an at least passive Chinese complicity in the civil war.

International scrutiny, however, rose to an unprecedented level, as China’s role was connected with ruthless practices of oil infrastructure development (i.e. al-Bashir’s scorched-earth policy) and Chinese arms transfers to Sudan reached a peak – Khartoum’s primary responsibility in the civil war and the brutal repression of the rebel uprisings in Darfur notwithstanding. For China, this was business as usual: Its bilateral ties with Sudan were branded as simple economic cooperation and any interference into the country’s domestic turmoil impossible due to the ideological convictions prevailing in Beijing.

Human rights organizations and a UN Panel of Experts confirmed the use of weapons made in China in actual combat zones: Both Sudanese armed forces and non-state militias were equipped with these arms. Not only was Beijing therefore castigated as accomplice to al-Bashir’s crimes against humanity (which only the US actually labeled as “genocide”) but also violated international law, as arms exports to Sudan continued even after the proclamation of the UN arms embargo in 2005.
The Darfur conflict and China’s position in it has exemplified how easily the securing of natural resources vital for the upkeeping of the PRC’s growing living standards can be threatened by internal processes in its partner countries. China obviously had to learn the hard way how in the long run, instability in the destination countries of its investment is not best combated by burying its head in the sand, nor by sabotaging multilateral efforts designed to put an end to violence. Only when its interests in Sudan were not just in jeopardy, but actually targeted by conflict parties did Beijing realize that its non-interference policy had not protected it from getting drawn into local collisions, and a more active stance was needed in order to ward off this imminent danger.

The PRC’s sudden change of mind therefore aimed for a peaceful and political solution and incited high-level diplomats (including then-President Hu Jintao) to take on the task of mediation in order to settle the Darfur crisis. This strategy allowed China to save face before the international community without damaging its relations to Khartoum. However, clashing perceptions between the West and China on conflict resolution in Darfur inevitably displayed how non-interference provided the PRC only with a very limited scope of action, and that was negotiations and dialogue.

Ultimately, though, China’s “quiet diplomacy” approach did in fact contribute significantly to the alleviation of the Darfur crisis. In the end, it also heralded the start for China to play a more active role in international conflict resolution, as the country’s gradual adoption of the principle of conditional interference illustrated. Furthermore, the transformation process China’s non-interference principle was exposed to during the Darfur crisis opened up new ways of possible engagement with Africa: As demonstrated within the individual case of China in Darfur, “influence without interference” seems a promising start to enter uncharted waters.

The intention of this thesis was to provide a detailed picture of what characterizes China’s presence in Sudan and how the events of the Darfur crisis have impacted on the PRC’s until then undisputed principle of non-interference. It was my personal aim to embrace a comprehensive perspective that as much as possible includes every angle necessary for an objective and encompassing observation.
At first sight, it may seem that the Chinese principle of non-interference, as well as its commitment to establishing a peaceful and harmonious world order, rest on high moral ground. Initially, this gentle and genuinely placid perception of international relations may be quite appealing. Disillusion ensues quickly, though. Because ultimately, as the case of Sudan displayed, the top priority of Beijing’s non-interference policy was not to safeguard the sovereignty of other nations, or stop so-called western “imperialism” from spreading, but simply to protect its own interests abroad. With growing food- and energy security concerns back home, China obviously has a lot to worry about. But so do others.

In this sense, it may be noted how non-interference presents itself as supposedly convenient solution to secure a nation’s vital interests: It enables cooperating parties to engage with each other on a purely economic basis and does not confront them with inconvenient truths about their partner which subsequently would have to be addressed. However, matters of the heart such as universal human rights should not fall prey to an opportunist approach to foreign relations – sovereignty should not “trump other norms”. (cf. Taylor 2006: 69)

Unfortunately though, this is exactly what happened when China intensified its strategic partnership with Sudan. Not only did the PRC deliberately avert its eyes from gross human rights abuses that were committed at the hand of the Sudanese government, but worse, it put considerable efforts to shield Khartoum from sanctions that could have ended violence faster. It even supplied the Sudanese government with weapons so as to preserve its own privileged position in the country. However, despite repeated affirmations of staying out of Sudan’s domestic affairs, at the moment when Beijing held out the prospect of weaving its veto card to protect Sudan and at the same time itself, its non-interference dogma became empty rhetoric. Clearly, China had chosen to take sides in a conflict that was getting out of control.

Consequently, non-interference appears to have served as hideout for Beijing for not having to assume the kind of responsibility expected from a major benevolent power. It was due to the threats that the Darfur crisis increasingly represented to its profitable investments – and its citizens – that China gradually came to its senses and decided to play a more active part in resolving the issue. It was also due to large-scale criticism on behalf of the West, and notably the United States, that it was pressured into taking a more active stance in Darfur.
Of course, Beijing’s efforts to avoid a military intervention in the country do have to be valued to a certain extent. Violence should always be avoided, and as the term already implies, “enforcing” peace from the outside is always complicated and in most cases messy. However, as the western doctrine of “Responsibility to Protect” demonstrates, sometimes a country simply has to take up position to allow for the strong to protect the weak.

In the end, by lobbying Sudan into acquiescing in the Annan Peace Plan, China seems to have protected all: Khartoum, by sparing it from economic sanctions and a western intervention. The UNSC, because it was finally able to deploy the hybrid peacekeeping force in Darfur and exert leverage on al-Bashir. Most of all, however, it seems that China protected itself: Its strategic partnership with Sudan remained more or less unaffected, its image as a major benevolent power was internationally restored, and the dialogue with the West even improved once the PRC had assumed its key role as negotiating power.

This all was made possible by facing reality and leaving the rigid stance of non-interference behind. Instead, China embraced the concept of “influence without interference” to resolve the conflict in Darfur. All signs point to the fact that it will incorporate this new approach into its overarching foreign policy approach in Africa. In addition, it seems that Beijing’s increasing alignment with key regional actors on the African continent gradually allows the PRC to warm up to the AU’s approach of “conditional interference”.

I take these developments as positive indicators that with the passing of time, Beijing will move away from the idea that only a strict policy of non-interference may serve as true protection to a state’s sovereignty. In the end, however, one has to ask the question who in fact actually needs to be protected. Ultimately, these are a country’s civilians. However, if their own state fails to protect their fundamental rights and/or lives, it is up to the international community to do so. And with the responsibility that comes with the status of a major benevolent power, this includes China, too.
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Figure 1
Map of Sudan Oil and Gas Concession Holders in Sudan

Source: US AID
**Figure 2**

Map of Sudan

Source: United Nations
Abstract

This thesis focuses on the principle of non-interference as one of the most fundamental elements shaping the Chinese foreign policy and developmental approach. Its practical application is analyzed by reference to the presence of China in Sudan and accompanied by a comprehensive examination of the Sino-Sudanese strategic partnership, which is ultimately assumed to shed light on Beijing’s overall Africa policy.

China’s principle of non-interference and its nonconformist unconditional approach to development cooperation polarized all actors on the continent: While (autocratic) African regimes extended an especially warm welcome to Chinese aid flows and economic cooperation characterized by “no conditions attached”, the West predominantly eyed this concept of development cooperation suspiciously. Especially the PRC’s close cooperation with the “pariah state” Sudan illustrates the rapid surge of its presence in Africa, which is above all owing to the country’s non-interference doctrine and a continuing self-identification as primarily belonging to the developing world.

However, its significantly deepened profile on the African continent as well as its increasingly influential role on the international floor confronts the PRC, torn between its “victim mentality” and its status as rising global power, with new challenges and risks: As demonstrated by the case of Sudan and particularly the crisis in Darfur, China’s principle of non-interference and the propagated absoluteness of state sovereignty were increasingly stretched to their limits. On the one hand, China put considerable effort into safeguarding its long-term national interests (as well as its citizens) in the Sudanese oil sector. On the other, it strived to portray its international role as that of a major benevolent power. This image, however, was considerably damaged by Beijing’s entanglement in contested, human rights-violating Sudanese oil infrastructure development as well as its continuing arms transfers to Khartoum during the civil war in Darfur.

Efforts by the international community to put a halt to ongoing violence in Darfur were initially met with Chinese obstruction, justified with its non-interference dogma as well as the protection of Sudan’s sovereignty. In light of the country’s persistent cooperation with and shielding of Khartoum as well as its continuing military cooperation with the government, China’s reputation, however, became increasingly impaired. Ultimately, though, as an
unprecedented level of international criticism culminated in the US-American “Genocide Olympics” campaign, and Chinese oil sites and workers were increasingly targeted by Sudanese rebel attacks, Beijing realized that non-interference did not protect it from getting drawn into the local conflicts of its cooperation countries.

In this sense, this thesis’ research questions “What characterizes China’s presence in Sudan and which transformation processes was this relationship confronted with in the scope of the Darfur conflict?” and “Which consequences did the Darfur conflict entail for China’s principle of non-interference in Africa?” can be answered as follows:

The PRC’s engagement in Sudan, inherently basing on a modernization theoretical approach and purely economic cooperation, left its passive non-interference policy behind in order to energetically take on the role of a mediator. In the end, it was thanks to the Chinese “quiet diplomacy” that Khartoum’s consent for the deployment of the African Union’s and United Nation’s hybrid peacekeeping mission in Darfur was achieved and the crisis there could be alleviated. The implications of this sudden change of strategy for China’s overall Africa policy are to be found in a gradual but steady move towards a more active role in regional conflict resolution mechanisms as well as a careful distancing from the country’s until then absolute non-interference principle.

These tendencies are confirmed by Beijing’s adoption of an “influence without interference” strategy as well as its increasing identification with the African Union’s “conditional interference” approach.
Zusammenfassung (Abstract in German)


Das vertiefte Profil Chinas in Afrika und seine rasant ansteigend einflussreiche Rolle auf dem internationalen Parkett stellen das zwischen Opfermentalität und dem stärker an Gewicht gewinnenden Status als Supermacht gespaltene Land jedoch vor neue Herausforderungen: Der Fall Sudan und insbesondere dessen Krise in Darfur verdeutlichen die Grenzen, an die das chinesische Paradigma der Nichteinmischung und die propagierte Unberührbarkeit staatlicher Souveränität stießen: Einerseits galt es, die eigenen Interessen (und Staatsbürger) im sudanesischen Ölsektor zu sichern, andererseits vor der internationalen Staatenchaft das Gesicht zu wahren, um auch in Zukunft die Selbstinszenierung einer verantwortungs- und friedvoll agierenden Macht aufrechterhalten zu können. Letzteres wurde vor allem durch Chinas tiefe Verstrickung in menschenrechtlich bedenkliche Infrastrukturerrichtungen des Ölsektors sowie Waffenlieferungen an Khartum während des Bürgerkriegs in Darfur erschwert.

„Genocide Olympics“-Kampagne und sich mehrenden Überfällen sudanesischer Rebellenkampagnen auf von chinesischen Firmen betriebene Ölstandorte realisierte die Volksrepublik letztendlich, dass auch Nichteinmischung nicht davor schützt, in lokale Konflikte ihrer Kooperationsländer hineingezogen zu werden.

Die Beantwortung der Forschungsfragen „Wodurch lässt sich Chinas Präsenz im Sudan charakterisieren und welche Transformation durchlief diese im Rahmen des Darfur-Konflikts?“ beziehungsweise „Welche Auswirkungen hatte der Darfur-Konflikt auf Chinas außenpolitisches Konzept der „non-interference“ in Afrika?“ erfolgt demnach folgendermaßen:


Das kommt insbesondere durch Pekings Zuwendung zu einer „influence without interference“-Strategie sowie der zunehmenden Identifizierung mit dem Ansatz einer „konditionellen Einmischung“ der Afrikanischen Union zum Ausdruck.
Curriculum Vitae

Katharina Schreiber

Date of birth: December 15, 1988 in Vienna
Nationality: Austrian, single

Educational Background

September 1999 until June 2007 High School, Bundesgymnasium/Bundesrealgymnasium Stockerau

December 2005 until June 2006 Exchange semester at Elkins High School, Missouri City, Texas, USA

Higher Education

October 2008 until present International Development Studies, University of Vienna specializing in International Relations, International Law, Human Rights, African Colonial History

September 2011 until June 2012 Academic exchange year within the framework of the ERASMUS mobility program in France, Institut d'Etudes Politiques (IEP) de Lyon

March 2008 until June 2008 Study of Romance Philology/French, University of Vienna

October 2007 until February 2008 Study of Law, University of Vienna

Internships

March 2013 until April 2013 “Capacity Building & Development Cooperation Event Management” TRIALOG – Development NGOs in the enlarged EU, Vienna


August 2010 until September 2010 GEZA – Gemeinnützige Entwicklungszusammenarbeit GmbH, Vienna

July 2010 Volunteer XVIII International Aids Conference, Vienna
**Academic Stays Abroad**

November/December 2010  
Study trip to the International Criminal Court in The Hague;  
European Parliament, European Commission, Permanent  
Representation of Austria at the European Union, Brussels;  
UNESCO, Paris

August 2010  
ICEUR (The International Center for Advanced  
and Comparative EU-Russia/NIS Research) International Summer  
School at the Faculty of Politology at Lomonosov Moscow State  
University (MGU), focusing on advanced studies of Russian foreign  
and domestic politics

March/April 2010  
Cultural exchange with the Universidad de la Habana, Facultad de  
Filosofía e Historia, and lectures at the local United Nations  
Development Program (UNDP) office in Havana, Cuba

March/April 2009  
Study trip to United Nations Headquarters in New York City, World  
Bank and IMF in Washington D.C., USA

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**Language skills**

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