

# **China's Impact on Capacity Building in the African Union**

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## 1. Introduction

China's increased involvement on the African continent since the beginning of the new millennium is not solely limited to the bilateral sphere but also affects the regional integration process. The founding of the African Union (AU) as successor of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as well as the founding of NEPAD and the reinforcement of the sub-regional organisations reflect a rising awareness among African nations that regional integration and the articulation of common goals might be an effective instrument for development. China's involvement in some of these dynamic processes of regionalization and region-building in Africa appears to introduce another level of complexity in an already intricate environment. China has created a unique form of interregional cooperation in Africa that challenges the European perception of Interregionalism as a paradigm for promoting "regionalized multilateral" global governance.

The aim of this paper is to determine how China influences the structure, substance and dynamics of regional integration and capacity-building in sub-Saharan Africa with special regard to the AU. The relationship between China and the regional- and sub-regional organizations in Africa is categorized as a hybrid form of "asymmetrical Interregionalism" in which a regional organization, such as the African Union, interacts bilaterally with a single power. Building on Heiner Hänggis' categorization of Interregionalism, this paper investigates the extent to which new paradigms of Interregionalism as promoted by China might impact regional integration and capacity-building in the AU.

## 2. Regional Organizations and the Role of External Actors

With the foundation of the AU, the African states attempted to strengthen economic cooperation and stabilize the African security landscape but it was also an initiative to cope with new external challenges in an era of globalization. Regional integration can be viewed as a conscious strategy for managing external developments but also a defensive one reacting with a top-down approach to new challenges.<sup>1</sup> The level of institutionalization that can range from informal interstate cooperation to "regime-building" and the emergence of

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<sup>1</sup> Gilson 2002a, 6

intergovernmental and supranational organizations are among other factors influenced by the external relations of a region.<sup>2</sup> The member states of the AU are constantly reacting to internal and external stimuli that define their interest in regional cooperation. According to Schwarz, states can act as “external Federators” to a region without being part of the region.<sup>3</sup> External actors can thus intentionally or unintentionally influence regional cooperation and encourage or hamper the integration process.<sup>4</sup>

Actors can influence the course of integration in another region either directly through actions targeting certain processes and key-sectors or through the omission of action which can, depending on the external environment, lead to a change in the determinants of the regional integration process. External actors can be local, national, regional, inter- or transnational and pursue political, social, economic or cultural goals. Actors can be defined as external when they interact with internal actors from a decision making center located outside the internal system.<sup>5</sup> Zimmerling (1991) distinguishes between positive and negative compelling reasons for actors to engage in another regional sphere. Negative reasons can be summarized under keywords like challenge, threat and danger and are highly dependent on the perception of the particular actor. A positive reason for engagement in another region is the creation of a mutually beneficial setting.<sup>6</sup> External actors can influence many key-sectors that contribute to the emergence and facilitation of regional cooperation.<sup>7</sup> They can connect incentives like trade and cooperation with the condition of regional integration and support groups and organizations that promote regional cooperation. Other variables regionally impacted by external actors include collective identity building (influenced by the shift of relations from the national to the multilateral level), intra- and interregional institution building, diversification and regional (infrastructure) development.

The role of external actors and their different motives and strategies to influence regional organizations are demonstrated by Grugel (2004) in the case of the USA and EU in Latin-America or by Weiland (2006) in the relation between the EU and the Southern African

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<sup>2</sup> Hänggi 2006, 4

<sup>3</sup> Schwarz 1971,385

<sup>4</sup> Harders 2008

<sup>5</sup> Zimmerling 1991, S. 58

<sup>6</sup> Zimmerling 1991, S. 140 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Harders 2008, S. 53 ff.

Development Community (SADC). Among others, Szymanski and Smith (2005) also discuss external actor involvement.

Apart from nation-states, other regional organizations or regional sub-systems can have an external influence on the integration process in another region.<sup>8</sup> Even if the impact of external influence is somewhat neglected in the Eurocentric integration theory, it is an important variable for the emergence of regional cooperation in the global south.<sup>9</sup> According to Joseph Nye, external influence is not just a catalyst for regional cooperation but a necessary condition for regional integration in the global south.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. The Actorness of Regions

Because of the dependencies and restrictions resulting from a continuous asymmetrical setting of the international system, it seems that the scope of action for regional and sub-regional organizations in sub-Saharan Africa is shrinking.<sup>11</sup> At the same time there is a rising awareness among regional organizations in Africa that they are independent actors in the international system and can develop relations with external regions and states. Regional forms of cooperation are not just a catalyst for the interests of individual nation states but for the development of their own foreign-policy agendas which are influenced by the input from their member states and have their own dynamics. Hänggi, Roloff and Rüländ (2006) provided some empirical evidence that in the last two decades regional organizations have become more active in the international system and have themselves been established as distinguishable actors. This phenomenon with focus on the external relations of the European Union has received more and more attention in recent years, although with a certain ambiguity in the concept of Trans- or Interregionalism and the actors participating in the process of cooperation.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of a clear definition, the notions of Transregionalism and Interregionalism are often used interchangeably.

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<sup>8</sup> Zimmerling 1991,139

<sup>9</sup> Zimmerling 1991,55-56

<sup>10</sup> ebd., S. 135

<sup>11</sup> Zeuner 2005, 22-23

<sup>12</sup> Alternative concepts for these kinds of organizational structures would be "mega-regionalism" (Yamamoto 1996), "Transregionalism" (Aggarwal 1998, Rüländ 1999), "Transcontinentalism" (Roloff 2001), "Intercontinentalism" (Hilpold 1996) and "Pan-regionalism" (Gilson 2002).

According to Hettne, Transregionalism is the process of *"institutions and organizations mediating between regions"* (Hettne 2004), whereas interregionalism describes the situation after these processes are institutionalized. Söderbaum (2010) sees Interregionalism as an extension of the narrow concept of region-to-region relations in a formalized mostly intergovernmental framework between regions or states with limited actor capabilities.<sup>13</sup> Transregional settings can be quite heterogenic and have a somewhat diffuse membership where, besides regions and states, other groups and institutions can also participate in interregional cooperation.<sup>14</sup> Aggarwal and Fogarty define interregionalism as *"the pursuit of formalized intergovernmental relations with respect to commercial relationships across distinct regions"* (Aggarwal and Fogarty 2004, 1). Whereas this definition mainly focuses on economic aspects, Roloff provides a good starting point for grasping the complexity of Interregionalism and its different aspects: *"Interregionalismus beschreibt die politisch gewollte und daher aktiv betriebene Verdichtung der interregionalen Aktivitäten"* (Roloff 1999, 99). Interregionalism is not just viewed as an economy based process but as a multidimensional phenomenon in a post-hegemonic international system. Hanggi also offers multiple definitions when he refers, among other things, to biregionalism, transregionalism and hybrid regionalism, such as relations between a region and a state.<sup>15</sup>

Hybrid Interregionalism is defined as arrangements between a regional grouping or organization with a single nation state located in another World region. These relationships approach, as in the case of a dominant position of a single state in its own region (USA in North America, China in East Asia), the same characteristics as classic forms of Interregionalism.

Unlike regionalism during the Cold-War era that was shaped by a liberal US hegemony and the "Open Regionalism" Doctrine, Interregionalism today is an innovative paradigm of international relations which mirrors an increasing vertical differentiation of international institutions that stretches from the local to the global level.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Söderbaum 2010, 6

<sup>14</sup> Tsaranidis in Dosch 2010, 219-220

<sup>15</sup> Hänggi 2000, 7

<sup>16</sup> Rüländ in Dosch 2010, 157

From a theoretical perspective, this research project assumes that interregional actors and their respective interregional policies are influenced by both internal and external factors. The analysis of interregional relations includes not just the interregional interaction but also the role of different actors in the consolidation of regional integration within the partner region.

#### **4. The Development of Chinese-African Relations**

The current dynamics of Sino-African relations can be traced back to the early 90s in the last century when several events triggered a new wave of cooperation between China and several African countries. After the end of the Cold War, the interest of the former global superpowers to maintain their strong political influence in Africa diminished and opened up opportunities for other external actors to establish themselves on the continent. Meanwhile, the Beijing Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 led to a situation where several Western partners shunned China for the harsh measures the Chinese military employed against demonstrators and thus China was in need of new allies. As the developing world was elevated in Chinese thinking to become a 'cornerstone' of Beijing's foreign policy Africa was subsequently no longer marginalized but regarded with a new emphasis.<sup>17</sup> Apart from the search for new political allies, Africa was also an attractive source for natural resources to fuel the economic rise in China.

In the vacuum created at the end of the Soviet-Union and the partial withdrawal of the USA and its Western allies from the political stage in Africa, Beijing found a supportive constituency in many African countries who viewed China as an alternative to the Western development model. The economic success story of China combined with a lack of interest in democracy or good governance made it an attractive option for many African leaders who were dissatisfied with traditional allies or were trying to diversify international cooperation. In this setting, the relations between China and Africa developed rapidly and China is now one of the biggest investors and trading partners for many African countries. In the last decade, China's economic and political connections with most African states have gained massive momentum and the FDI Volume has more than tripled. Following the USA and Europe, China is the third largest trading partner with Africa and the biggest state-investor

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<sup>17</sup> Kopinski 2012, 1

in infrastructure projects.<sup>18</sup> Most interactions between China and Africa have a bilateral setting where China negotiates investments and trading deals individually with each government although Beijing has expressed a principal willingness to give more consideration to regional approaches and strengthen its cooperation with regional organizations in Africa.

## 5. The Regional Level of Sino-African Cooperation

China's approach to cooperation with regional and multilateral organizations in Africa is quite different from other donor-countries and conceptually guided by the pursuit of amicable, peaceful and prosperous neighbors. The Chinese government as an external actor follows a pragmatic approach, which favors bilateral relations pursued in the multilateral framework of FOAC.<sup>19</sup> Due to a focus on resources, political influence and the disclosure of new markets guided by the principle of non-interference, China maintained, until a few years ago, a neutral position towards cooperation with regional organizations in Africa.<sup>20</sup> In recent years however, the Chinese emphasis on supporting regional cooperation in Africa has increased. The main factors of this policy change have included the growing Chinese interest in a stable environment to protect Chinese investments and economic development in Africa and the successive approximation to international donor standards. The decisive factor however seems to be the willingness of China to achieve consensus when interacting with the AU or other sub-regional organizations on critical topics. The inclusion of regional organizations in the Sino-African dialogue strengthens the position of the African side compared to a bilateral setting. The traditional structural shaped bilateral negotiations between China and its African counterparts connote a certain disadvantage for single African states compared to a strategic south-south partnership where China supports regional cooperation and regional development in Africa. A collective approach strengthens the bargaining position on the African side and makes it easier to address critical topics with particular relevance to development such as the employment of local workers or technology transfer.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor 2009, 1-4

<sup>19</sup> Davies 2008, 2-3

<sup>20</sup> Brautigam 2008, 21

<sup>21</sup> Alden 2005

China formulated a clear strategy in its “China’s African Policy” in 2006 which has shaped the course of Chinese cooperation in Africa ever since. But apart from the guidelines the policy offers, there is a coordinated strategic approach of Chinese investment in Africa. The areas of investment and the fields of cooperation are following domestic economic interests of China and the current global development and can be adjusted quickly. So far, Africa lacks a coordinated response mechanism and most political actors interact with China on an individual basis pursuing different national interests. To stabilize this volatile relationship, it is up to African states and institutions to determine a regulative framework that contributes to a sustainable relationship. Key prerequisites for such a framework include a strong bargaining position of the African states which need a unified approach rather than the pursuit of singular interests. China could profit from an acceleration of its interactions with Africa due to the reduction of negotiators and projects and the preceding dialogue mechanisms within the AU.<sup>22</sup> *“China may lose some negotiating advantage if African countries can start to collaborate and cut better deals, but there could be benefits as well; Beijing might find it easier to deal with Africa “in bulk” (Amosu 2007).*

Beijing has realized that a regional approach in Africa might be beneficial for economic development and is the logical continuation of its long term strategy on the continent. Many of the development hindrances and security threats that endanger Chinese investments are caused by transnational factors that can only be challenged on a multilateral basis. China is increasingly looking for multilateral linkages in Africa that succeed or at least amend the bilateral arena and give them regional or continental access to Africa. The focus is especially on regional and sub-regional organizations but also on the private sector and to some extent even on transregional civil organizations. So despite a perceived loss of bargaining power in a regional setting, China has increased its cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa in various areas tackling political, economic and security issues on a supranational level. The bilateral approach that China favored for many years restricted its dealings to single nation states and is now slowly being replaced by a double track strategy where regional organizations are gaining importance as a political counterpart in Africa. Additionally, interregional arrangements are one tool in Beijing’s foreign-policy kit for allaying the fears of other actors about its proactive international behavior. China’s

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<sup>22</sup> Krugman 1993

increasing willingness to become enmeshed with regional schemes in Africa follows the Chinese mantra of foreign policy: “make friends in every quarter, trade goods, learn from each other and enjoy respectful interactions” (guang jiao pengyou, hutong youwu, bici xuexi, li shang wanglai 广角 朋友, 互通有无, 彼此 学习, 礼尚往来).<sup>23</sup> Despite economic development, peace and security are the other main driving forces behind China's increasing cooperation with regional organizations. In recent years, Beijing rhetorically has detached itself more and more from some pariah states in Africa like Sudan and Zimbabwe though in some cases Chinese investments in these states are still rising. This policy change from uncritical support of highly controversial regimes to open critique is another diplomatic move to safeguard, or in some cases restore, the Chinese reputation as a responsible stakeholder in Africa with the international community as well as among African actors. Additionally, China sees its African endeavor more and more as a long term investment with business potential beyond pure resource extraction. Conflicts and unstable regimes are endangering the success of Chinese investments in Africa and force China into a more active role in order to protect its interests. The AU as a major actor in conflict resolution and peace building is seen as an instrument for creating a better setting for Chinese investments. This new found interest in African inner affairs is contradicted by the fact that the easiest entry markets for Chinese companies are in states that are sanctioned by Western countries. These markets often offer high investment risk due to unstable political and judicial conditions and high conflict potential. Even if some countries like Angola and Sudan have been profitable investment destinations, Chinese companies are now targeting more and more resource-rich countries with a high presence of Western stakeholders. China competes in these countries in a “scramble for resources” with international enterprises which have a well-established market presence and advanced technical and management capabilities. To balance these structural deficits, China focuses on its competitive advantages and the Chinese government accompanies tenders with massive diplomatic support and infrastructure commitments. *“This explains the strategic bundling of three vectors of interaction (aid, trade, investment) which China needs to access new resources while established industrialized clients can more easily rely on established connections.”*(Jing Men 2011, 253). Closer cooperation with the AU is another option for

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<sup>23</sup> Barne 2009, 81

Chinese strategies to increase legitimacy and improve the investment conditions for Chinese companies.<sup>24</sup>

Due to structural deficits, a lack of coordination between the different levels and insufficient institutional capacities at the AU level as well as the preference of African states for national solutions instead of a joint African approach, China has not fully embraced the AU as a cooperation partner in many areas. There are still concerns on the Chinese side whether the Union can live up to its claim of regional leadership against the national interests of its member countries and curb the effort of coordinating the implementation of regional projects (Interview Li Zhibiao 09/13). On the side of the African Union China's increased recognition as a negotiating partner gives the AU leverage to extend its influence in the region and establish itself as an envoy for Africa's external relations. Therefore, the AU has prioritized the expansion of their cooperation with China in several areas.<sup>25</sup>

### **5.1. China and the AU**

The founding of the African Union was an attempt by Africa's political elite to cope with the challenges of globalization and redefine their identities and interests in a changing international system.<sup>26</sup> Due to this external alignment, the Constitutive Act of the AU includes the objective to "encourage international cooperation" with a focus on peace, security and stability in Africa. Like its predecessor the OAU, the AU has a long standing tradition of international cooperation and is generally open to external impulses from other actors. In contrast, China favored for many years a bilateral approach when dealing with Africa. As China's African policy is shaped by an economic rationale and does not consider the promotion of African regional integration as a foreign policy objective in itself, the utilization of bilateral channels seemed sufficient for economic interaction.

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<sup>24</sup> Jing Men 2011, 253)

<sup>25</sup> Other important partners of the AU include the EU, USA, India, Latin America, the Arab-League and Turkey.

<sup>26</sup> Makinda 2008 S. 42

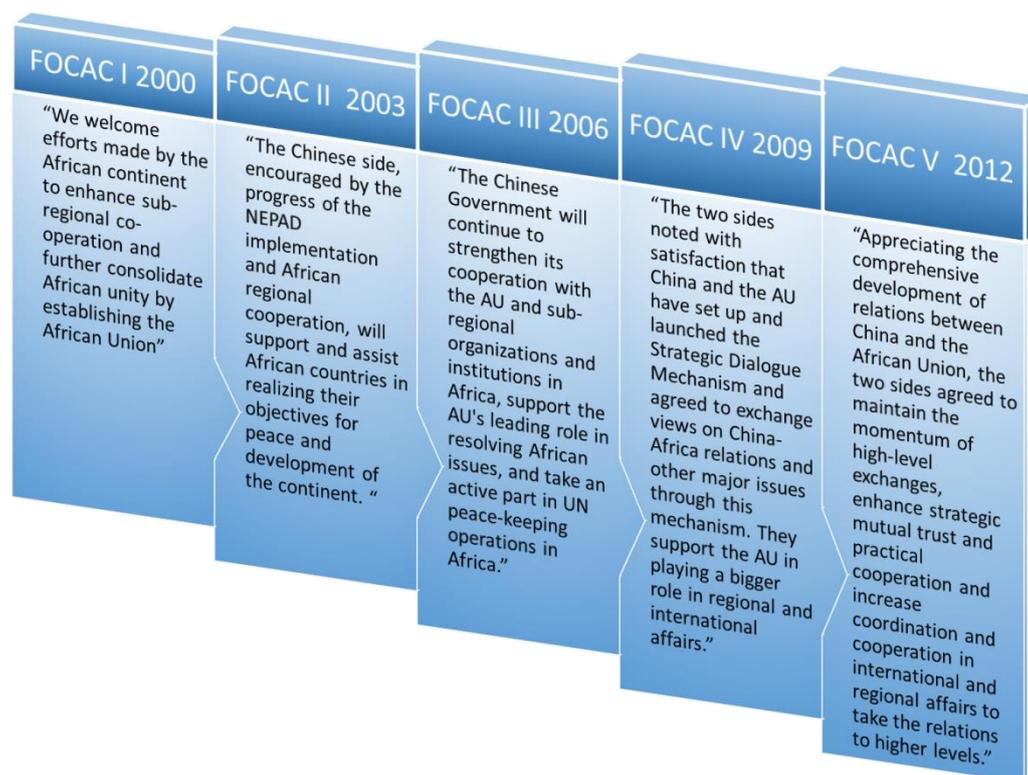


Fig.1 FOCAC and the African Union (FOCAC Declarations 2000-2012)

China depends, like other external actors, on a stable and comparatively secure environment to conduct a coherent and profit oriented investment strategy. To protect their increasing amount of long term investments Chinese actors in Africa have to avoid actions or policies likely to facilitate instability or conflict or associates them with human rights abuses and repressive regimes in Africa and elsewhere. *"After an initial phase of snapping up resource extraction concessions, it is almost conceivable that China will be compelled by instability and conflict in Africa to realize that its long term economic interests are best served by promoting peace in Africa and that this is most likely to come about by encouraging representative government in Africa rather than supporting dictators."* (Obiroah 2008, 9) Beijing's policy makers started to consider other options for managing their relationships on the continent and were increasingly considering regional organizations as cooperation partners. After the founding of the AU and NEPAD and the slow emergence of a viable regional and sub-regional framework in Africa, China postulated

in its "African Policy" in 2006 its motivation to increasingly use regional and multilateral channels to deal with Africa and expand its relations with regional organizations.<sup>27</sup>

The AU and NEPAD have gained more and more recognition and several new dialogue mechanisms and mutual initiatives have been established. As a result of the FOCAC III meeting in Beijing, a formal strategic dialogue mechanism between China and the AU was implemented in 2007. The first meeting was held at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa.<sup>28</sup> Zhai Jun, then vice-secretary of foreign affairs, and Jean Ping, head of the AUC, discussed general topics of Sino-AU cooperation but also concrete problems in Dafur, Zimbabwe, DR Congo and Somalia.<sup>29</sup> The second strategic dialogue took place in September 2009 in Beijing with Yang Jiechi, the minister of foreign affairs at the time, in attendance. The talks focused on the Chinese support of the AU's peacekeeping missions and future projects for capacity-building at the AU level.<sup>30</sup> The Dialogue Mechanism is headed on the Chinese side by the deputy foreign minister and on the African side by a representative of the AUC who attend the meetings which alternate between Beijing and Addis Ababa. The annual meetings are supplemented by meetings on an ad-hoc basis to discuss recent international developments with a special focus on security related issues. In the FOCAC Action Plan (2012-2015), the establishment of several sub-committees on various topics of Sino-African relations is envisioned. In this smaller framework, different strategies adjusted to the respective region could be discussed and complemented by periodical continental FOCAC summits. Even if this mechanism is not a novelty in China's foreign policy (comparable dialogues exist with South Africa, USA or India among others), it highlights the Chinese perception of the AU as a relevant actor in Africa and the willingness to integrate the AUC further in its hitherto nation focused African strategy. Apart from the establishment of new dialogue platforms, the number of high-level exchanges between the AU and the PRC has increased in the last years. Jia Qinglin, the chairman of the Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), visited in 2012 the opening of the 18<sup>th</sup>. General Assembly of the African Union and many members of the AUC have visited China in recent years. In 2011, China gave about 4 Million US\$ in direct assistance to the AU and organized training workshops for AU Officials in the areas of public

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<sup>27</sup> Chinas Africa Policy 2006 Prt. 2-5

<sup>28</sup> Xinhua 27. 11.2008

<sup>29</sup> Taylor 2011, 78

<sup>30</sup> [/http://www.ocnus.net/artman2/publish/Africa\\_8/China-is-Filling-the-Gap-Left-by-Nepad-s-Failure.shtml](http://www.ocnus.net/artman2/publish/Africa_8/China-is-Filling-the-Gap-Left-by-Nepad-s-Failure.shtml)

governance, diplomacy, fight against terrorism and poverty reduction.<sup>31</sup> The workshops usually focused on the Chinese approach to these various topics and can be summed up under “what can Africa learn from China.” In the field of peace and security, China has provided the AU with RMB30 million yuan of military grants first in 2010 and then in 2011, and provided a total of US\$ 1.2 million in cash aid for the AU mission in Somalia in 2010 and 2011.<sup>32</sup> In the upcoming years, China is planning to further intensify its relations with the AUC and strengthen its cooperation in African regional and international affairs.<sup>33</sup>

Due to structural deficits, a lack of coordination between the different levels, insufficient institutional capacities at the AU level and the preference of African states for national solutions instead of a joint African approach, China is hesitant to prioritize regional relations in many key areas. Bilateral cooperation is for China still the most efficient and pragmatic approach for dealing with Africa. But even with this limited confidence in the current capabilities of the AU, China has intensified its dialogue with the AU and considerably increased its financial support. This support is on the one hand based on the speculation that the African Union will develop the potential to become a crucial actor on the continent and on the other hand on initiatives of the AU who claiming a stronger position for itself in the Sino-African dialogue. China gains a potential ally and, in the case that the AU becomes a success story, China has proven itself as a reliable partner at, compared to other bilateral investments, small costs. Additionally China has, besides a possible future rationalizing of its relationship with the African continent, already profited from its close interaction with the AU in terms of legitimizing its African policy.

The African Union has much more to gain from an intensified relationship with China and tries to position itself as a strategic important partner for China. China, which credits the AU with the potential to become a strong actor in the region, is regularly following AU initiatives to institutionalize the setting of their relationship and create new dialogue frameworks. Moreover, other Chinese investments in AU infrastructure and capacity are part of the expectations from Beijing that the AU is a cornerstone for rationalizing Sino-African relations.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.focac.org/eng/dwjbzjjhys/t952532.htm>

<sup>32</sup> *Ib.*

<sup>33</sup> Peoples Daily January 30, 2011

The cooperation between China and the AU at a regional level is further hampered by the various regional organizations existing in Africa with partially overlapping memberships at various stages of capacity and competence. For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) would be regarded as one of the pillars of a sub-regional AU-China-REC Dialogue in the region. South Africa which is the most powerful economy in the region has however joined the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) together with Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. As Swaziland has diplomatic relations with Taiwan, there is officially no diplomatic contact between Beijing and Mbabane. Similar problems of dual membership exist within the SADC and EAC with regard to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). The multitude of regional organizations in Africa is however not a specific problem of China's regional engagement but has been a longstanding challenge in Africa's regional integration process. However "*China and other major powers, including the developed countries, adds a crucial dimension and incentive for the AU to begin, in earnest, the difficult and complicated but necessary rationalization of the multiplicity of RECs into the AU's five regions*"(Edinger 2008, 10). To solve the issue of multiple memberships, various custom unions and tariff barriers that exist in Africa's regional landscape, the AU in conjunction with the RECs need to sort out their own interim inter-African diplomacy of a regionalized engagement with China within the FOCAC framework, pending a more institutionally rationalized REC framework.<sup>34</sup>

## 5.2. The Role of the African Union in FOCAC

The Forum of Chinese African Cooperation (*Zhōng Fēi hézuò lùntán*; 中非合作论坛) established in 2000 is a novelty in China's foreign policy which is usually focused on a dual strategy of bilateral relations on the one hand and a strengthening of global multipolarity on the other hand. Hence the first initiative for establishing the forum came not from China but from a group of African countries (among others Ethiopia, Mauritius, Madagascar) who called for a unified approach towards China. Beijing was at first opposing the idea of institutionalizing this asymmetric relationship between a country and a continent and many voices opted for continuing a strict bilateral strategy. But at the beginning of the new millennium it came to a profound change in the Chinese foreign policy and the proponents

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<sup>34</sup> Edinger 2008, 11

of a broad “going global” strategy got the upper hand. In this context, the claim of African countries for a multilateral platform found positive reception and the inaugural Ministerial Conference of FOCAC was held in October 2000 in Beijing.

After the first FOCAC meeting, China began institutionalizing the process. The Follow-Up Committee of FOCAC founded in 2001 comprises 27 ministerial units and financial institutions nominally co-chaired by the ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, with their section leaders as co-chairs.<sup>35</sup> It is mainly responsible for coordinating different Chinese departments' relations while implementing various follow-up actions. The Secretariat of the Follow-Up Committee, which is in charge of daily affairs, is located within the African Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>36</sup> The Chinese FUC was first headed by Vice-Minister Ji Peiding but also some other key political heavyweights have participated in the Committee and thus helped intentionally or unintentionally to deepen the Chinese influence on the design and agenda of FOCAC. The official positions at the FUC were:

- Former Foreign Minister (1998-2003) and State Councillor: Tang Jiaxuan.
- MOFTEC Head: Shi Guangsheng.
- MOFTEC Deputy Head: Sun Guangxiang.

However, other very influential politicians gave political content to the FUC including the Secretary-General (Foreign Ministry Director of West Asia and Africa), senior Chinese ambassadors to Africa, such as Liu Guijin (former Commerce vice-Minister and now Ambassador to the Russian Federation), Liu Guchang and senior MOFTEC/MOFCOM officials such as Vice-Minister Sun Guangxiang, Wei Jianguo (the former Deputy-Director and Director-General of West Asian and African Affairs), He Xiaowei (the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation of China). Heading the administrative side of FUC is the Secretary-General Ms. Xu Jinghu, Director-General of the African Department in the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Taylor 2011, 49, Zhang 2011, 502

<sup>36</sup> Zhang 2011, 502

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Data/Africa\\_file/Manualreport/cia\\_13.html](http://www.ide.go.jp/English/Data/Africa_file/Manualreport/cia_13.html)

A number of additional forums and thematic sub-committees have been established under the broader FOCAC framework. The *FOCAC Women's Forum* was founded in Cairo in October 2009 with the aim of helping enhance the role of women in promoting economic and social development and enriching Sino-African friendship. *The China-Africa Industrial Cooperation and Development Forum* was founded in Beijing in November 2009 with the theme of "Equality, Trust, Cooperation and Win-win." It is aimed at promoting and deepening Sino-African strategic partnerships, strengthening investment in the respective industrial fields, striving to resolve the impact of a global financial crisis on Sino-African industries, establishing long term Sino-African industrial and trade relations, and building an information and communication platform for Sino-African industrial projects and industrial enterprises. *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation – Legal Forum* was founded in Beijing in October 2010, aimed at exchanging views on legal affairs and exploring approaches for enhancing legal cooperation. It is expected to develop into a platform that will serve the development of Sino-African relations over an extended period. *The China-Africa Think Tanks Forum (CATTF)* was founded in Zhejiang in October 2011. Its aim is to establish links among Chinese and African think tanks, as well as scholars from other parts of the world with an interest in Sino-African relations, with a view to conducting dialogues, exchanges and studies on Africa's political and economic situation, Sino-African relations and related issues. The Zhejiang Normal University and its Institute of African Studies and the China-Africa Business School will be the Standing Secretariat.<sup>38</sup>

The FOCAC process was designed as a multilateral mechanism in which multiple stakeholders participate in an open dialogue but is in fact structurally controlled by China. China is the main agenda setter and determines the outcome of the meetings and the content of joint-declarations. Taylor (2011) understands this predominant position of China as a result of the fragmentation of African governments and the lack of a coherent entity that represents African interests rather than a coordinated strategy of China to pursue its own interests. China emphasized at the FOCAC IV conference that the process should become more "African-centric" but did not further specify the point. A joint advocacy of African states regarding China could indeed strengthen the bargaining position and lead to better investment and trade conditions. The Economist writes on this matter: "*African*

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<sup>38</sup> [www.focac.org](http://www.focac.org)

*leaders could play their hands rather better. They should talk to each other as well as their hosts in Beijing. If they negotiated as a block, they could drive a harder bargain. Just as China insists that foreigners enter into joint ventures with its companies, so Africans should make sure they get China's know-how, not just its money" (The Economist 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006).*

The paramount importance of China in the FOCAC process in combination with the mantra of a win-win situation and the reiteration of Africa's positive economic outlook has led to high expectations among African leaders for a positive impact of China on African economies. In case the future development of Africa cannot compete with these expectations, the status of China as an alternative to Western partners might be damaged. Through a transfer of responsibilities from the Sino-African dialogue to its African partners and a diversification of the FOCAC Agenda, China could reduce dependency on a positive economic development in Africa.

Under the FOCAC framework, several policy documents like the '*Program for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development*' (October 2000), the *Beijing Declaration*, the *Addis Abbebe Action Plan* (both in 2003) and a multitude of trade agreements were adopted. Also in the area of development-cooperation and infrastructure investment, the FOCAC process is the most important institution for coordinating different projects and programs China conducts in Africa. "*FOCAC is a significant feature of China-Africa relations and is viewed as the centrepiece of China's current aid practice to Africa*" (CSS 2008 S.10). The establishment of the Chinese Follow-Up Committee has since been mirrored by several African Countries such as South Africa, Ethiopia, Zambia and Sudan who set up their own mechanisms.<sup>39</sup> These structures try to support the complex interactions between the Chinese FUC and African countries where the Chinese side lacks a reliable counterpart. Usually the African diplomatic corps in Beijing is the first level of contact for Chinese officials concerning all FOCAC matters. These channels though have proven quite unreliable as there is a communication gap between Beijing based African diplomats and their home governments and in most cases the embassies have no decision making power. But even when some African countries have now started to institutionalize their FOCAC engagement,

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<sup>39</sup> Zhang 2011, 502

the Chinese Committee is by far the best organized institution with the largest staff and financial resources.

The establishment of the Chinese Follow-Up Committee of FOCAC and Secretariat, and the follow-up committees set up by certain African countries provide a degree of permanency to the FOCAC process. But all these institutions were set up separately by either China or by African countries and do not form a joint standing body. In other words, the FOCAC has not established joint institutions such as a Council of Ministers, a Committee of Ambassadors, a Consultative Assembly or a joint secretariat. FOCAC regularly holds Ministerial Conferences and Senior Officials' Meetings, but the "conference" mechanism emphasizes occasional consultation and discussion in contrast to the nature of a sustainable and permanent organization.

The African Union Commission has since its foundation attended the FOCAC conferences as an observer and in recent years has become more involved in the coordination of the African participants of FOCAC. The upgrading of the AUC from a mere observer of FOCAC to a full member in 2011 confirmed the revaluation of the AU as a potential facilitator in the Sino-African dialogue. The AUC tried with varying success to coordinate the African members of the FOCAC and to arbitrate between the States, RECs and other actors involved. Under the new status as a full member, this coordinating function of the AUC becomes more and more enhanced and institutionalized. A senior official of the AU Commission has now been appointed as FOCAC Coordinator who initializes, prior to the FOCAC meetings, conferences at a ministerial level to discuss and agree on common topics in order to find a coherent position on the FOCAC Agenda proposed by China.<sup>40</sup> The AUC also tries to mediate between the African Ambassadors in China and increase its involvement in the follow-up activities on the African side.<sup>41</sup> One consideration of the AU is to split up the FOCAC conference into several meetings as AU-REC-FOCAC sub-regional meetings which would help to focus the dialogue on the topics most pressing for the respective region. The sub-meetings would include the five established RECs and just periodically complemented by continental FOCAC meetings.

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<sup>40</sup> Anshan 2012 , 31

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.chinafrica.cn/english/china\\_report/txt/2012-01/30/content\\_422295.htm](http://www.chinafrica.cn/english/china_report/txt/2012-01/30/content_422295.htm)

Beijing is in favor of proactive involvement from the African member states in the FOCAC process and is not insisting on its dominant role as agenda-setter. Both sides hold expectations that the AUC is becoming a catalyst for African interests and is the main reference for China in Africa. In the fifth FOCAC Action Plan (2013-2015), a whole passage is dedicated to the expansion of China-AU relations with a focus on security, development and regional integration. *“The two sides recognized the important role of the African Union in safeguarding Africa's peace and stability, promoting Africa's development and advancing the African integration process, and support a bigger role and greater influence of the African Union in international and regional affairs” (focac.org)*. Part of the Action Plan is also the establishment of an AU delegation office in Beijing which would be the first diplomatic mission of the AU for a state rather than international organizations.

## **6. China and NEPAD**

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was launched in 2001 and combined two programs for economic development of Africa: a) the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP), an initiative by the former president of South Africa Thabo Mbeki in conjunction with heads of State from Algeria and Nigeria, and b) the OMEGA Plan for Africa developed by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal.<sup>42</sup> NEPAD's four primary objectives are: to eradicate poverty, promote sustainable growth and development, integrate Africa in the world economy, and accelerate the empowerment of women. It is based on the underlying principles of good governance, democracy, human rights and conflict resolution. NEPAD seeks to attract increased investment, capital flows and funding, providing an African-owned framework for development as the foundation for partnership at regional and international levels. Many areas of the NEPAD program in the agricultural sector, infrastructure development and human resources are similar to the Chinese priorities for Africa's development and can be integrated into China's Africa policy. The basic idea of NEPAD “African solutions for African problems” is also similar on an ideological level with Chinese foreign policy. African ownership of the development program and the transfer of decision-making power to the recipient countries are strengthening the position of African national and regional interests towards the traditional donor countries. From a

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<sup>42</sup> Taylor 2011, 54

Chinese perspective, this promotes the national autonomy of African states and the emergence of multipolar decision-making structures. In contrast to other international development programs on the continent which are shaped by Western states or institutions, the NEPAD process is viewed as a genuine African initiative. Taylor (2011, 61) views NEPAD as a development strategy fundamentally shaped by neoliberalism and aimed at the opening and liberalization of African markets and economies. Unsurprisingly, China, who followed more or less the same course over the last three decades, is supportive of this strategy and has continually increased its financial support for the NEPAD process.

In The Addis Abbebe Action Plan, the main outcome of the FOCAC II meeting, China states that *"The Chinese Side encouraged by the progress of the NEPAD implementation and African regional cooperation, will support and assist African countries in realizing their objectives for peace and development of the continent"* (www.focac.org). Whereas some observers have seen this as mere lip service when considering the weak performance of NEPAD, China has since then maintained continuing support for the program. China sees NEPAD at least on a rhetoric level as an important instrument for Africa's regional development that is highly complementary with Chinese engagement in Africa. China places its support in the context of south-south cooperation based on a win-win partnership and the principle of help for self-help. *"China will always support the implementation of NEPAD to help Africa release its tremendous potential and enable the African people to really benefit from the global economic and social development (...) NEPAD has in recent years gained more substance, improved its mechanisms and made plans for priority areas like agriculture and infrastructure, playing a positive role in promoting the development and revitalization of Africa"* (Wang Min 2011, vice-ambassador to the UN [http://www.nepad.org/system/files/GA%20mtg\\_China.pdf](http://www.nepad.org/system/files/GA%20mtg_China.pdf)).

On July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the Secretariat of the Chinese Follow-Up Committee signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Strengthening Consultation and Cooperation with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).<sup>43</sup> In the same year, China supported NEPAD's Pan-African Infrastructural Development Fund (PAIDF) with US\$ 625 million and provided NEPAD with US\$ 1.5 million in cash aid for training nurses and midwives. The ongoing support for the NEPAD program despite meager results are confirmed by the

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<sup>43</sup> Zhang 2011, 501

FOCAC declaration of the fifth FOCAC meeting in Beijing in 2012: *“The two sides highlighted the important role of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in promoting African development and integration and applauded the cooperation between FOCAC and NEPAD. The Chinese side will increase exchanges and expand cooperation with the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency in a joint effort to promote economic and social development and regional economic integration in Africa”* (FOCAC Declaration 2012).

China approves of the general outline of the NEPAD program but actual support and cooperation implementing infrastructure projects and capacity building initiatives have been restricted to small scale projects. China is concerned about the limited guarantee for Chinese investments in the context of multilateral infrastructure projects under the NEPAD framework. Whereas states have their own budgets and can raise credits from other sources, NEPAD has no means for reacting to deviations during the implementation process and higher project costs. To avoid investment losses, China tries to split up regional projects outlined by NEPAD into national sub-projects and thus have clear responsibilities on the side of the participating national governments. An example for this strategy is the Chinese contribution to the Mombassa-Bujumbura highway that was planned by NEPAD. The section between Kigali and Bujumbura was split up into two independent projects with their own budgets and independent contracts between China and Rwanda and China and Burundi.

## **7. Conclusion**

The relations and interactions between China and the AU have intensified in recent years and to a certain degree have become institutionalized. New structures have been established not just with the full membership of the AU in FOCAC but also with the implementation of the AU-China strategic dialogue mechanism. These frameworks are mostly aimed at trade promotion and have a consultative character with no or just very limited decision-making power. The prioritization of certain topics and the utilization of existing structures for the creation of new institutions is based on ad-hoc decisions that mostly follow Beijing's current agenda. Besides the AU-China Strategic Dialogue Mechanism, several other structures dealing with China related issues have emerged within the body of the AU. The emergence of these new institutions is not a reception of Chinese structures

but a reaction to the interaction with an external partner that requires an adaptation of the internal system. The different consultative mechanisms are characterized by mostly open cooperative structures that are oriented towards a regular conference schedule but otherwise have an amorphous character. These institutions cause very little governance costs and can be reproduced in various political fields. In many cases, these institutions use already established resources from the AU member states or the AU Commission. These structures albeit with a loose character offer numerous starting points for the AU to become a focal point of the Sino-African dialogue and coordinate the various African interests and strengthen regional options. Whereas many traditional donors have long established contacts with some states or regions without involving the AU, China is open to more active involvement with the AU: *“China appreciates the significant role of the AU in safeguarding peace and stability in the region and promoting African solidarity and development. China values its friendly cooperation with the AU in all fields, supports its positive role in regional and international affairs and stands ready to provide the AU assistance to the best of its capacity” (focac.org).*

Through the development of an African Agenda towards China and the identification of areas where China could support regional development in Africa, the AU could strengthen its role in the FOCAC process and take over a big share of the distribution of Chinese (ODA) investments on the continent. While policies at the AU level will be important in setting the overall guiding normative framework for engagement, the future role of the AU strongly depends on the policies of the AU member states. China will for the time being insist on continuing FOCAC instead of establishing a full China-AU partnership. Bilateral cooperation is still the most important area of Chinese engagement in Africa and will need to be further governed by national policies toward development priorities and investment. With these limitations for independent action it is questionable if the AU can develop a joint African Agenda that can set the future guidelines for an overall African approach.

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