

Delegitimization and 'Re-socialization': China and the Diffusion of Alternative Norms in Africa

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Abstract

Socialization of Africa into the liberal international order was largely a preserve of the West. However, as China expands its economic and political influence across Africa, the liberal international order is being put to the test. Representing alternative global governance norms and values, China is seeking the legitimation of its emerging global leadership by delegitimizing its rival, the United States. How the delegitimization and expected 're-socialization' of Africa are unfolding is this article's subject of enquiry. Based on expert interviews conducted in Africa and China, the article examines the interlink between legitimation and 're-socialization' within the context of China's rising influence in Africa. It advances the argument that China is concerned with having a global order, operating based on norms and values favourable to its national and geopolitical interests. In making this argument, the article refocuses the attention onto the subtle making of a global order preferred by China, at least in Africa.

Keywords

China, socialization, legitimation, liberal international order, norms

Introduction

This article is concerned with how China, a non-Western global power, is seeking legitimation of its imminent global leadership through delegitimization of the United States and re-socialization of other actors. The window of opportunity for

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China is that the liberal international order is under strain on multiple fronts. First, the order's foundational principles are being tested by the rise of populism (ultra-nationalism, anti-globalization and protectionism) in Europe and in the United States. Second, non-Western global powers such as China are challenging the liberal international order seeking the material revision of its operational structure and establishing alternative multilateral institutions premised on a different set of norms and principles. What is emerging is a 'triangular convergence' of rising powers demanding more say and authority in global governance, shifts in global power distribution from West to East and the United States' rethink of its role in global governance. These frontal challenges to the liberal international order are gradually opening more space and opportunity for non-Western rising powers to question the legitimacy of the liberal international order and its main proponent, the United States. Accordingly, this has led to assertions that the 'old order dominated by the United States and Europe is giving way to one increasingly shared with non-Western rising states' (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 63). However, more than the 'old order' giving way to one 'shared with non-Western rising states', it appears that non-Western rising states are actively seeking means to expedite the material revision or replacement of the 'old order'.

At the fore of non-Western rising states seeking more global influence is a pragmatic China. It acknowledges the insufficiency of its military and economic capabilities to directly challenge the United States' global dominance. Also, pragmatic in that while some emerging powers historically expanded their influence abroad 'through invasion, colonization, expansion or even large-scale wars of aggression' (Zheng, 2005, p. 20), China is using its economic capabilities—making natural resource and trade deals 'in America's backyard, in Africa, in the Gulf and on its southern and western peripheries' (Stein, 2010, p. 12). Underlying its pragmatic strategies of global influence expansion is an agenda to delegitimize the liberal international order and attempt to reverse Western socialization in some parts of the Global South, with Africa being a case in point. The commonality between China and Africa, and most parts of the postcolonial Global South, is that both do not entirely subscribe to the Western-centric order or Western norms of intervention, responsibility to protect (R2P), human rights, good governance and democracy. These norms, which came to define the liberal international order were for most countries in the Global South, and to some extent China unchallengeable due to their position in the international system. China and countries in the Global South constituted 'lesser states in an international system [that] follow the leadership of more powerful states' (Gilpin, 1983, p. 30). However, as the relative economic power of China increases and its global influence expands, it is steadily challenging the legitimacy of the liberal international order that it did not create but was socialized into.

Premised on this background, and with reference to qualitative expert interviews conducted with government officials and diplomats in Addis Ababa, Harare, Pretoria and Beijing in 2017, this article examines the interlink between legitimation and 're-socialization' within the context of China's rising global influence. Socialization is understood as the 'process of inducting actors into

the norms and rules of a given community... [of which the outcome must be] sustained compliance based on the internalization of those norms' (Checkel, 2005, p. 804). Re-socialization is therefore a process of redoing the socialization with the objective of creating membership in a different or alternative society where intersubjective understandings of the society become taken for granted and based on a different set of norms and principles (Johnston, 2008, p. 21). For the process of socialization to be successful, the socialization agent should be regarded as legitimate. The term 'legitimation' is understood in this article as both a process of denoting 'explicit or implicit justifications for the authority of an order, on the one hand, and the development of a concomitant sense of obligation on the part of the subjects' (Friedrichs, 1980, p. 541), on the other. Delegitimation is a deliberative and pragmatic effort to discredit an actor and rendering them not legitimate. In seeking to understand processes of legitimation and delegitimation employed by China, the article advances an argument that emergent global powers like China are concerned with having a global order operating based on norms and values favourable to their national and geopolitical interests. To do that they seek to delegitimize dominant liberal international order norms and influence 're-socialization' of regions such as Africa where their influence is expanding. The article then concludes by exploring how this interlink between legitimation and re-socialization is contributing to the diffusion of China-preferred norms in Africa.

Legitimation and Socialization

From its establishment at the end of World War II, the liberal international order is sustained by a general 'acceptance of the framework of the international order by all major powers, at least to the extent that no state is so dissatisfied that... it expresses its dissatisfaction in a revolutionary foreign policy' (Kissinger, 1957, p. 1). The general acceptance referred to by Henry Kissinger constitutes the basis of the United States' legitimacy as a leader of the liberal international order. That 'right to rule' as put by Robert Gilpin (1983, p. 34) is further based on four factors: (a) the United States and allied forces' World War II victory, (b) the US 'ability to enforce its will on other states', (c) the provision of public goods such as international security and (d) the global dominance of Western norms and principles. Even with the United States meeting all four conditions, other parts of the Global South, such as China and some countries in Africa, had to be forcibly incorporated into the liberal international order as the United States and Western Europe made considerable effort to integrate the non-Western world. Regarding China, David Shambaugh (2016) notes that 'America's (and Europe's) strategy was to embed China in this global institutional order (this was known as the 'integration strategy') and thereby socialize it into the underlying liberal norms of the Western-created post-war order.' Because at times the integration process of non-Western countries included imposition of sanctions, wars of aggression and military intervention, the legitimacy of the liberal international order 'does not necessarily

mean justice *per se* but rather an international consensus, especially among the great powers, about the nature of workable arrangements and the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy' (Schweller, 2015, p. 8).

The extraordinary rise of China as a global power with a growing influence in the Global South has however upset that 'international consensus', upon which the legitimacy of the liberal international order is anchored. The White House concluded in 2017 that the four-decade US policy of supporting China's rise hoping that 'its integration into the post-war international order would liberalize China' was dashed because 'China expanded its power at the expense of the sovereignty of others' (The White House, 2017, p. 25). Other US officials such as former Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick also foresaw the challenges of a rising China that did not fully subscribe to the rules and norms of the liberal order. In 2005, he argued that China must be socialized into being a responsible stakeholder in the international system so that it can work together with the United States to sustain the system (Zoellick, 2005)—a remark interpreted by Beijing as the United States seeking to contain China. However, with the 'triangular convergence' to its advantage, an increasingly assertive China—more self-aware of its global significance—is determined to have more voice and authority in the running of the international order. The implication is that the order cannot continue to be 'a hierarchical order with liberal characteristics... organised around multilateral institutions, alliances, special alliances, and client states' (Ikenberry, 2011, p. 61). It should be more accommodating of China's global interests and vision. Still, Obama argued in 2015 that Beijing should not be allowed to write the rules. Instead, he emphasized that it is the United States, which should play 'a leading role in setting the highest standards for the rest of the world to follow' arguing that 'unless we act now to set our own high standards, the fast-growing Asia-Pacific will be forced to play by lower-standard rules that we didn't set' (Obama, 2016).

The implication of Obama and Zoellick's statements is that the United States considers itself to have the legitimate right to rule, thus legitimating the liberal international order. In this scheme of things, non-Western powers, regardless of their increasing global power, are seen as having inferior standards and thus should be prevented from socializing other states into an alternative community premised on their 'substandard rules and norms'. Plainly, Obama and Zoellick do not consider China legitimate enough to determine the rules of the order or socialize other states into its preferred rules and norms, and so does President Donald Trump. Accordingly, China, like other countries in the Global South, is 'treated as an *object* ... a nation to be moulded and shaped normatively... into the prevailing rules and norms of the system (Shambaugh, 2013, pp. 103, 104). The substance of this notion is that by having the right to rule, and the 'legitimacy' of the liberal international order, the United States is justified to socialize other states into its preferred norms and principles—effectively linking the right to rule and legitimacy of the global order to socialization of other states. What this means is that claims of legitimacy by a global power controlling the global order justify its socialization of other states. However, as China's global power grows, and it becomes increasingly dissatisfied with being an object of Western socialization, it

is difficult for Beijing to continue being a passive ‘socialization object’ of the United States, because such socialization is ‘aimed at mediating its intentions’ (Goh, 2009, p. 119) and constraining its global influence.

Delegitimization of the United States

To gain legitimacy, a rising global power seeking structural reform of the international system should first challenge the ‘right to rule’ of the dominant global power that oversees the system. However, China still lacks the economic and military capabilities to challenge the United States, directly. The World Bank statistics suggest that China’s gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 was US\$12 trillion and that of the United States was US\$19 trillion. More so, the US per capita GDP of US\$59,531 is sevenfold that of China’s US\$8,827 (The World Bank, 2018). In terms of military spending, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that in 2017 China’s US\$228 billion constituted a third of the United States’ US\$610 billion military budget.

Notwithstanding, as Beijing extends its influence into Africa and other regions through mostly trade and investment, it is finding more opportunities to challenge America’s ‘right to rule’. For instance, China has since 2010 been Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)’s top export and import market. In 2015, SSA’s exports to China constituted 13.99 per cent share of SSA’s global exports, compared to the United States’ share of 5.38 per cent. Imports from China amounted to 16.54 per cent of SSA’s total imports (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2016). In 2016, China–Africa trade reached US\$149 billion, while Chinese companies continue to dominate SSA’s mining and construction sectors. In peace and security, as of 30 June 2018, China had the highest number of troops in the UN peacekeeping missions among the five United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent members. It deployed 2,418 troops compared to the UK (666), France (662), the United States (0) and Russia (0). And, in 2016, an Afrobarometer survey suggested that 63 per cent of Africans in 36 countries consider China to have the most positive influence on their countries (Lekorwe, Chingwete, Okuru, & Samson, 2016). For China, the strategy is to concentrate on trade, investment and peacekeeping missions—areas that the United States is either not interested in or find difficult to compete against China.

A part of Beijing’s strategy has also been to use international developments to project the United States as an unreliable global power influenced by self-interest. For example, Beijing seized Donald Trump’s ‘America First’ policy, anti-globalization rhetoric and withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Iran nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) to prove the United States’ unreliability as a global leader. In respect of the United States’ withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and subsequent imposition of sanctions on Iran, Wang Yi, China’s Foreign Minister suggested that such actions undermined ‘the authority of the United Nations (UN), the effectiveness of multi-lateral deals and the credibility of the international rules’ (Xinhua, 2018). Previously, at the 2017 G20 Summit in Davos, President Xi chastised the United States for

advancing protectionism and positioned China as the guarantor of globalization. Addressing the United States' backtracking on its responsibilities to maintain multilateralism and the Paris Agreement, President Xi said:

We should adhere to multilateralism to uphold the authority and efficacy of multilateral institutions. We should honour promises and abide by rules. One should not select or bend rules as he sees fit. The Paris Agreement is a hard-won achievement, which is in keeping with the underlying trend of global development. All signatories should stick to it instead of walking away from it as this is a responsibility we must assume for future generations. (Xi, 2017)

Also, speaking against the United States' unreliability with Beijing's reliability and steadfastness in keeping its global commitments, Premier Li Keqiang stated in the NPC Work Report 2017 that China, as a major power 'will not shift in its commitment to promoting global economic cooperation'. Premier Li added that Beijing:

will uphold the multilateral trading regime as the main channel of international trade, and will play an active part in multilateral trade negotiations... China is a responsible country. We have always striven to honour the commitments we have made, and we will firmly defend our due rights and interests. (2017, pp. 30, 31)

Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang's statements have the effect of besmirching the United States' 'right to rule' by portraying it as an unreliable and irresponsible global power. By furthering that impression, China is feeding into growing global sentiments that the United States' practices in global governance do not reflect shared values of multilateralism and the obligation to honour promises and commitments. To China, because the United States no longer exercise its power based on the norms and rules of the system it created, the United States has a legitimacy deficit—diminishing its authority as a legitimate global leader.

Beyond China, the United States' failure to meet its global commitments and provision of public goods seem to push African countries towards Beijing. Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, argued during an official visit to Beijing in March 2017 that in contrast to the West, China adhered to the values of 'equal treatment and mutual respect, no demarcation in ideology while developing relations with Africa' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2017). Similarly, for economic and geopolitical reasons, some of the United States' historical allies such as South Africa are gravitating towards Beijing arguing as President Zuma did that 'China is a reliable friend of the African people' (China Network Television, 2015).

Second, Trump's rethinking of the United States' role in global governance and provision of public goods, such as development assistance, also gives Beijing crucial arsenal to prove the inadequacies of the United States as a global leader. For instance, Trump's transitional team sent a list of questions to the state department querying: 'With so much corruption in Africa, how much of our funding is stolen? Why should we spend these funds on Africa when we are suffering here in the US?' This questioning of the US aid's effectiveness in Africa was followed up with substantial budget cuts on foreign assistance and was reflected in the absence of a

concise African policy in the Trump administration—further alienating countries reliant on the US support. China seized the opportunity. Although its development assistance and aid to Africa lag far behind that of the United States, Britain, France and Japan, China still portrays itself as a major player in providing economic public goods to Africa and other developing countries. Speaking of the One Belt, One Road initiative, Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, said it was an idea that ‘came from China but it belongs to the world with its benefits flowing to all countries’. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to discredit the United States, he continued, ‘while the trends of protectionism and unilateralism are rising, the Belt and Road Initiative has become the common cause of the world which will help rebalance the economic globalisation by making it more universally-beneficial and inclusive’ (Zhang, 2017). Li Keqiang also stated, ‘we opened China wider to the rest of the world. As we pushed ahead with the Belt and Road Initiative, we worked to increase complementarity between the development strategies of, and practical cooperation between, China and other countries along the routes’ (Li, 2017, p. 6). An official at the African Union in Addis Ababa concurred:

China is more reliable in its development and cooperation policy towards Africa than the United States... therefore it makes sense to align with China than be burdened with tough conditions from Europe and the United States, that even if you follow will not guarantee access to financing or development assistance.¹

Third, contrary to Western demands for political and economic reforms in exchange for development assistance, China is regarded as offering development assistance with ‘no political conditions’ (except for the ‘One China’ policy). This is particularly welcomed by regimes in Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Angola and Ethiopia that are weary of Western intervention in their political and economic affairs. Contrary to assertions that China is popular among incumbent regimes in Africa, a senior official in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the biggest opposition political party in Zimbabwe largely aligned to the West, confirmed in an interview that MDC preferred China’s no-conditions-attached and non-interventionist approach to development assistance and cooperation.² While Chinese development assistance and investments come with procurement conditions favouring Chinese businesses, those conditions are still considered less onerous than demands for economic and political reforms that usually accompany Western aid and development assistance. Furthermore, the move by the Trump administration to reassess the US foreign assistance with a view to penalize countries that vote against the US policies at the UN is seen as condescending and paternalistic by countries in the Global South. Besides, as put by a Pan-African parliamentary committee on trade customs and immigration official, ‘China is bankrolling multi-billion-dollar projects whereas the West is engaged in multi-million-dollar humanitarian projects. Africa needs infrastructure, trade and investment not charity.’³ That sentiment is gaining credence as Chinese-funded infrastructure and investment projects such as the standard-gauge railway in Kenya, the trans-boundary Ethiopia–Djibouti railway and special economic zones in Ethiopia propel economic growth. Furthermore, China is

now one of the major providers of the international development finance—a major public good that makes it indispensable to Africa and other poor countries in the Global South.

In addition, instead of imposing its own development model, Beijing argues that all countries, great or small, have a right to choose their own development path and that cooperation with external powers should be mutually beneficial. For African countries, unable to access sufficient development assistance from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) due to lack of political and economic reforms, this is a relief. The implication of China's insistence on states choosing their own development model is that it subtly delegitimizes the neoliberal and market-oriented economic policies within the liberal international order that African countries were compelled to implement with disastrous outcomes. According to Ruben Gonzalez-Vicente (2015), China's insistence that there should be no interference in another state's development trajectory has the effect of rescaling the global economic governance by empowering national elites and reintroducing the state as the gatekeeper and facilitator of the development of capitalist enterprises. Its authoritarian economic development has somewhat discredited neoliberal and market-capitalism policies prescribed to Africa by Bretton Wood institutions. Accordingly, countries such as Zimbabwe, Angola, Nigeria and Ethiopia have shown increased preference for a Chinese development model, characterized by a strong state supported by a strong party setting and implementing the national development agenda.

Finally, Beijing is also challenging the legitimacy of international norms such as the R2P—portraying them as susceptible to manipulation by Western powers to achieve their political objectives. Although Beijing initially supported R2P, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s military intervention and ouster of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya occasioned a reversal of that support. Describing it as a tool for regime change, Beijing has promoted resolving global security challenges based on its foreign policy principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. In 2012, Wang Yi, then China's permanent representative to the UN, described R2P as counterproductive and having serious shortcomings 'such as ill-defined responsibilities, unclear authorizations and lack of *ex post facto* accountability' (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 2012a). Drawing lessons from NATO's military intervention in Libya, Wang Yi contrasted Beijing's position with that of the United States, Britain and France. He stated:

China has no selfish interest, but a persistent, responsible attitude. Our fundamental point of departure is to safeguard the purposes and principles of the UN Charter as well as the basic norms governing international relations, including the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in others' internal affairs... and to safeguard the interests of all countries, small and medium-sized. (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN, 2012b)

By portraying Beijing as the vanguard of weaker countries against abuse of international norms by stronger Western countries, China is building a critical mass of countries that are opposed to international principles such as R2P and

international justice. For instance, in South Sudan and Libya, Beijing insisted on the ‘African solutions to African problems’ approach emphasizing that only Africans know how to resolve their problems without external interference. The approach has made China distinct from Western powers such as the United States and France, often accused of instigating regime change agendas and military intervention in Africa. In that respect, China is setting the stage for the reconstruction of the R2P principle and others that do not fit into its global governance preferences of political solutions to conflicts, respect of state sovereignty and non-intervention.

Furthermore, China is increasingly using platforms such as the UNSC to strong-arm Western powers to deal with global governance issues according to its preferred norms and principles. For instance, by vetoing resolutions that seek to authorize intervention through military and non-military means, Beijing has hamstrung the capacity of the United States to resolve some international problems such as the civil war in Syria and South Sudan. Susan Rice, the United States’ former ambassador to the UN argued that China and:

Several members have sought for weeks to weaken and strip bare any text that would have defended the lives of innocent civilians from Assad’s brutality. Today, two members have vetoed a vastly watered-down text that doesn’t even mention sanctions...In failing to adopt the draft resolution before us, this Council has squandered an opportunity to shoulder its responsibilities to the Syrian people. We deeply regret that some members of the Council have prevented us from taking a principled stand against the Syrian regime’s brutal oppression of its people. (International Coalition for Responsibility to Protect, 2011)

As put by John Ikenberry, China is using ‘the rules and institutions of liberal internationalism as platforms to project its influence and acquire legitimacy at home and abroad... [and] acquire great-power authority and exercise global leadership’ (2011, p. 63). For instance, in 2008, China vetoed a UNSC resolution imposing international sanctions on the Zimbabwean government. In 2017, China also refused to support a UN arms embargo on South Sudan and targeted sanctions on three key government and opposition figures arguing that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development was not in favour. By aligning its voting decisions with perceived African interests, China is gradually influencing the reconstruction and implementation of liberal international norms and principles so that they conform to its global order preferences and foreign policy objectives. Simultaneously, it is gaining recognition by countries in Africa and other regions as a protector of their interests at the UN and other liberal institutions.

The four issues discussed above constitute an attempt by Beijing to delegitimize the United States and the liberal international order. In emphasizing and capitalizing on the United States’s unwillingness to respect the limits to its power and abide by norms and principles that underlie the liberal international order, Beijing is challenging the logic of the United States insisting on the socialization of other states into a liberal global order that is imploding. Beijing’s reasoning seem to be that the right of the United States to rule and determine the rules of the system is no longer justified and that due to its unreliability as a global leader the

order should be reformed to reflect the new distribution of global power. As put by Henry Kissinger, 'today this "rules-based" system faces challenges... Outside the Western world, regions that have played a minimal role in these rules' original formulation question their validity in their present form and have made clear that they would work to modify them' (Kissinger, 2015, p. 2). Kissinger's observation and China's behaviour is consistent with Randall Schweller's (2015) argument that although China is a latecomer 'it is actively seeking more influence over other states, the world economy, and the set of rules and rights that govern interactions among states (e.g., international norms and regimes, the nature of diplomacy, and property rights on a global scale).' Part of seeking that influence is delegitimizing the United States as a global leader and the liberal international order while it projects influence and acquires global authority and leadership to legitimize its preferred global order.

Re-socialization and Diffusion of China-preferred Norms in Africa

The ultimate objective of the delegitimization of the liberal international order and the United States' global leadership is to re-socialize countries in the Global South into China's preferred global order. Important to note is that 'the socialization of nonconformist states proceeds at a pace that is set by the extent of their involvement in the system' (Waltz, 1979, p. 128). In the liberal international order, the extent of Africa and China's involvement in global economics and politics was determined by their adoption of Western principles, norms and values. However, their acceptance of and involvement in the system was not 'the result of Kantian process of progressive enmeshment but rather of coercive socialization and, in places, straightforward hegemonic imposition' (Hurrell, 2006, p. 204). Their adoption of Western principles and norms was therefore superficial, motivated by the need to ensure their survival, and reap as much benefit from the liberal international system as possible for as little internalization of the principles as was possible. In addition, their 'pseudo-socialization' was aimed at avoiding punishment for nonconformity because countries that opposed the Western socialization had sanctions imposed, and at worst their regimes changed through military intervention and isolation—an example being the imposition of sanctions and an arms embargo on China by the European Union (EU) following the Tiananmen Square massacre. The EU arms embargo on China is still in effect. In Africa, the United States Office of Foreign Assets Control has nine active sanctions programmes. African countries under comprehensive and selective sanctions for broadly threatening the US foreign policy and national security goals are Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe (US Department of the Treasury, 2017). As of 4 August 2017, China and 17 African countries have restrictive measures (sanctions) imposed on them by the EU, mostly for failing to respect human rights and democracy tenets.⁴ Accordingly, for both China and Africa socialization was not internalized in a manner that made it irreversible. It was a matter of 'public conformity without private

acceptance' (Booster, 1995, p. 96). Thus, most pretended to have been socialized because there was no viable alternative with similar benefits.

The implication is that postcolonial African states remain in the liberal international order through a combination of 'carrots and sticks'. The Global South, in particular Africa's socialization into the liberal international order can thus be described as an instrumental adaptation because it is enabled by sanctions and incentives. While African countries and China do not find the benefits problematic, they view the imposition of sanctions by the West, in cases where they do not conform, as a continuation of the Western colonial dominance over their territories. As put by Robert Mugabe in 2015, the notion among most political leaders in Africa is that Europeans 'think Africa is their God-given territory because once upon a time they oppressed us... Not so with the Chinese' (Thornycroft, 2014). Former President of Botswana, Festus Mogae, also said, 'I find that the Chinese treat us as equals. The West treats us as former subjects' (Hilsum, 2006). China's emphasis on state sovereignty and non-intervention makes it a viable alternative for African states seeking to build relations based on equality. Moreover, populism in Western Europe and the United States is leading to the external and internal questioning of the efficacy of democracy in times of crises, thereby further delegitimizing the Western-sponsored democratization project. With corruption and the abuse of power coupled with increases in political instability in countries regarded as models of democracy and good governance in Africa such as South Africa, African leaders are gravitating towards authoritarianism with political stability rather than liberal democracy. The failures of Western democracy promotion projects in Libya are often juxtaposed with authoritarian but economically growing countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda. Accordingly, China's model of development, which is premised on internal stability and strong-state-driven economic development, is gaining momentum as the preferred development model for Africa.

From failed neoliberal economic policies such as the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s to the imposition of political reforms and military interventions, the West suffers from a 'legitimacy crises' in Africa. The various interventions stemmed from a liberal hegemony committing 'the United States to spreading democracy in unfamiliar places, which sometimes requires military occupation and always involves interfering with local political arrangements' (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016, p. 74). In addition, increased concerns over exclusion of the African continent from international institutions such as the UNSC and calls for mass withdrawal from the International Criminal Court (ICC) reflect the deep-seated misgivings of African states with the current liberal international order. This discontent culminates in continent-wide initiatives such as the African Renaissance aimed at pushing back Western intervention in African affairs. The rise of non-Western powers, principally China, offering an alternative global-governance framework based on equality, respect for state sovereignty and mutual benefit has added to the West's crises of legitimacy. In a veiled attack on the United States, which is withdrawing support from 'non-strategic' countries mostly in Africa, Wang Yi said, 'What distinguishes China-Africa cooperation is that China always keeps its words' (Xinhua, 2017a). Yan Xuetong also argued that:

the policy now is to allow smaller countries to benefit economically from their relationship with China. For China, we need good relationships more urgently than we need economic development. We let them benefit economically, and in turn, we get good political relationships. We should “purchase” the relationships. (Yan, 2015)

The extraordinary rise of China and its growing global economic and political influence has contributed to China adopting a foreign policy that challenges the legitimacy of the liberal international order.

Beijing’s strategic focus on Africa as it sought ‘good political relationships’ provides a viable alternative to the liberal global order for non-conformist states such as Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Angola and Sudan. As these countries focus on China, they have embarked on initiatives aimed at reversing their socialization to the liberal international order. For instance, Zimbabwe adopted the ‘Look East’ policy in the early 2000s ‘to redirect the public imagination towards a different identity at the domestic and international levels’ (Youde, 2007, p. 3). As the United States questions the basis of its relationship with Africa, impose travel bans on citizens of Sudan, Somalia and Libya, contemplate cutting aid and focus on protecting US companies from external competition, Africa is ‘looking elsewhere for an exemplar... President Xi has fully immersed China as the nation to fill that void in the global political economy landscape’ (Nleya, 2017). Paul Kagame argues that contrary to Western development aid to Africa based on unfair trade practices that favoured Europe, Africa demanded ‘a trade relationship built on this new approach would be more helpful in reaching what should be our common goal: sustainable development, mutual prosperity and respect’ (Kagame, 2009). The ‘new approach’ is the Beijing approach to trade and development cooperation in Africa. The implication of this reversal in socialized relations of trade and engagement between Africa and external powers compelled Germany and the United States under Obama to change the narrative of their relations with Africa from aid and assistance to trade and investment cooperation.

The rise of China coincides with a general ideological awakening in Africa. Over the past 15 years, Africa has developed principles such as ‘African Solutions to African Problems’ and the African Renaissance agenda which aim at forestalling Western interference in African economic, political and security affairs. Although the implementation of these agendas has been lax, they epitomize Africa’s refusal to grant legitimacy to Western intervention in its internal affairs—or at least, set the terms for a legitimate Western intervention in African affairs. Through its official narrative of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, win-win cooperation, mutual benefit and equal partnership, Beijing offers alternative norms and principles in global governance that resonate with Africa and other developing countries. Yan Xuetong argues:

the emphasis of these principles in Africa was a result of an adjusted Africa policy adopted by Xi to increase China’s influence in Africa because President Xi envisioned that the competition between China and the U.S. is not over so-called strategic spots... it is going to be about how to use regulations to manage the world. You cannot make the rules by yourself. To make market rules, you need most countries to support you. That is why we need friendships more than business. (Yan, 2015)

This strategy is arguably working because countries in Africa are aligning their positions in the UN and other global forums with China's thus giving legitimacy to Chinese leadership in global governance.

Africa's most common challenge besides poverty and lack of development is the prevalence of armed conflicts. How to resolve these armed conflicts has often been a point of contention between the West and Africa. Former colonial powers, especially France often militarily intervene in Africa's intrastate-armed conflicts much to the chagrin of African leaders. While the United States, France and NATO exhibit their military power in conflicts such as those in Central African Republic, Libya and Mali, China camouflages its military power in non-threatening ways, such as sending its troops under the UN peacekeeping operations, as it has done in South Sudan and Mali. Similarly, while African countries, including South Africa and Nigeria, refused to have the US Africa Command relocated in Africa, there has been no visible opposition to China establishing its first military base in Djibouti. This is partly because Beijing wraps its military activities in Africa in 'new ideas and thoughts put forward by Xi, including forging partnerships that replace confrontation with dialogue, and alliance with partnership, building a new type of international relationships featuring win-win cooperation, and jointly building a community of shared future for all of mankind' (Xinhua, 2017b). These ideas, according to Wang Yi 'reject the old concepts of alliance and confrontation, rise above the old approach of zero-sum games, and have distinct Chinese characteristics and major implications for the world' (Xinhua, 2017b). The effect is that African countries are increasingly adopting and insisting on China's global security norms and principles (non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, respect for other states' sovereignty and territorial integrity) being adopted as the preferred means to resolving conflicts on the African continent, significantly limiting the influence of the West in Africa's security governance.

China is also advocating a BRICS+ model to expand the BRICS and include other countries in the Global South. Oliver Stuenkel argues that this is China's strategy of expanding its sphere of influence and diffuse its norms and values across the developing world. Similarly, the US director of national intelligence stated, 'emerging trends suggest that geopolitical competition among the major powers is increasing in ways that challenge international norms and institutions.' The implication is that as China expands its influence abroad, showing itself to be a non-threatening global power willing to share its economic development with other developing countries. In a veiled attack on the United States, which is withdrawing support from 'non-strategic' countries mostly in Africa, Wang Yi said, 'What distinguishes China-Africa cooperation is that China always keeps its words' (Xinhua, 2017a). Countries in Africa are accepting it as a legitimate global leader, responsible and able to dispense public goods, thus enabling it to 'legitimately exercise control over certain policy areas of subordinate states' (Zaum, 2013, p. 6). China's policies and strategies in the BRICS, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the One Belt, One Road are therefore being legitimated because they are perceived to be broadly benefiting other countries, especially in Africa.

Conclusion

As China's global influence expands, its foreign policy is increasingly focused on advancing ideas, norms and values that are often at odds with the liberal international order. For instance, China's model of governance and development is often advanced as an alternative to the Washington consensus giving Africa an alternative source of norms. Increasingly, African countries are looking to China for leadership and inspiration in poverty reduction and for a model to achieve rapid economic growth. The implication is an increased questioning of the human rights based approach to development dominance in the liberal order. China's strong state backed by a single dominant stable ruling party driving the national economic development agenda is gradually seen as prerequisites for Africa's extraordinary economic growth. Ethiopia and Rwanda, two countries with the highest economic growth in Africa, emphasize the Chinese model that favours stability over competitive electoral democracy and individual civil and political rights. Combined with China's major investments in infrastructural development, such as the standard-gauge railway in East Africa, Beijing is carving out a significant zone of influence and shaping foreign policy orientations of African countries.

China has undoubtedly benefitted from the current liberal international order more than Africa or any other country in the Global South. However, what it has in common with these other countries is a frustration over lack of reform to accommodate its growing influence. Africa, the biggest voting bloc in the UN General Assembly, shares this frustration. The result has been increased expressions of dissatisfaction and efforts to delegitimize the United States. Incessant demands by the African Union for two permanent seats in the UNSC have gone unheeded. Even though China has not lent significant support to Africa's demands for expansion of the UNSC, its diplomatic support to the African Union, the self-portrayal as Africa's 'all-weather friend' and a shared perception of victimhood from past imperial ambitions of the West are welcomed by most African leaders. Furthermore, China's emphasis on state sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states has to greater extent emboldened leaders, such as Robert Mugabe, Uhuru Kenyatta, Omar al-Bashir and Jacob Zuma to question the current global justice system. The result has been the deliberate disregard of the ICC warrants of arrest by South Africa and appeals for the withdrawal by African countries in protest to an alleged targeting of African leaders by the ICC.

Despite these major advancements, China is still a long way in re-socializing African countries and establishing an order based on its preferred norms. There are two main reasons. First, China is not a hegemony, yet. And, as put by Chinese government officials and a leading China foreign policy expert at Renmin University of China in Beijing, 'China does not want to be a hegemony and will not directly or indirectly seek to be one.'⁵ Beijing's reluctance to pursue and achieve a hegemonic status is problematic. State elites 'internalize the norms and value orientations espoused by the hegemony, and, as a consequence, become socialized into the community formed by the hegemony and other nations accepting its leadership position' this hegemonic order 'comes to possess a 'quality of oughtness' (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990, pp. 289–290). Without the hegemony status, China's

sphere of influence will remain fluid and lacking an authoritative dictation of the norms and values that other states have to internalize. This is made even more precarious by Beijing's insistence on the Chinese exceptionalism, which makes it difficult for Beijing to enforce integration of its preferred norms and values in Africa. By insisting for instance that the Chinese model of development is not replicable, there is an incipient frustration and confusion even in Ethiopia, which claims to follow China, model on what the essentials of the model are. China's reasons for officially refusing to acknowledge a replicable model are concerns of being accused of behaving like an imperial power in the same mould as the West. In addition, it seems that Beijing is not interested in the responsibility that comes with exporting a model of development, particularly in Africa where previous Western models have failed to yield results. The effect is that China's legitimation and 're-socialization' goals entirely dependent on African countries' voluntarism, which means that China has no control over the period and result. The implication of China's reluctance to articulate its model and preferred norms is that countries in African are often unclear of which norms to internalize.

Second, China's influence in Africa depends on economic benefits and public goods it can dispense. In 2016, China–Africa trade fell to US\$150 billion from US\$200 billion in the previous year. In addition, droves of Chinese small-scale entrepreneurs are leaving Africa citing difficult economic conditions as commodity prices fall and political instability increases. The effect, for example in Angola, is that African countries falling into economic problems are reverting to the World Bank and IMF for financial assistance. Even countries such as Zimbabwe with a strong anti-West rhetoric are focusing on renewing relations with Western financial institutions and powers. The effect is that as China's trade and investments in Africa slow down, African countries are shifting their attention back to the West suggesting the 'embeddedness' of the continent in the liberal international order but acceptance of China's version of global order norms mainly for the material benefits that it brings.

Although China has made inroads in delegitimizing the liberal international order and the United States, there is doubt whether it can effectively 're-socialize' Africa, replacing Western values and principles with its own. Apart from the reasons cited above, each order has imbedded within itself self-renewal characteristics that come with centuries of operation. The liberal international order is entrenched within the economic and political system of most African countries such that internal opposition will inhibit a transition to the Chinese model. For instance, small states like Botswana have pushed back on China's demands not to invite the Dalai Lama. Ian Khama, President of Botswana argued that Botswana is not a colony of China; therefore, it will not have its foreign policy dictated to. In that respect, China is still not yet a viable alternative to the liberal international order. It is still complementary and inspirational but not strong enough to cause re-socialization of the Global South, particularly in Africa.

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Notes

1. Interview, African Union official. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (18 August 2016).
2. Interview, Movement of Democratic Change official. Harare, Zimbabwe (2 July 2017).
3. Interview, Pan-African parliamentary committee on trade customs and immigration official, Harare, Zimbabwe (2 July 2017).
4. The following African countries are on the EU restrictive measures: Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, the Republic of Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/restrictive_measures-2017-08-04.pdf
5. Interview, China foreign policy expert and government official. Beijing, China (11 October 2017).

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