

# **FRIENDSHIP OF THE OUTSIDERS: IDENTITY IN CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH ETHIOPIA AND SOUTH AFRICA**

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To Jole, my other Self

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ANC – African National Congress  
APRM – African Peer Review Mechanism  
AU – African Union  
BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa  
CCP – Chinese Communist Party  
Comintern – Third Communist International  
COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions  
EPLF – Eritrean People’s Liberation Front  
EPRDF – Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front  
EU – European Union  
FDRE – Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
FOCAC – Forum on China-Africa Cooperation  
GMD – Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party)  
MLLT – Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray  
NAM – Non-aligned Movement  
NEPAD – New Partnership for Africa’s Development  
NP – National Party (South Africa)  
OAU – Organization of African Unity  
PAC – Pan Africanist Congress  
PRC – People's Republic of China  
ROC – Republic of China  
RSA – Republic of South Africa  
SACP – South African Communist Party  
UK – United Kingdom  
UN – United Nations  
USA – United States of America  
USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



## NOTES ON CHINESE AND ETHIOPIAN NAMES AND TERMS

The *hanyu pinyin* Romanization system is applied to Chinese names of persons, places, and terms. The transliteration is also used for the titles of Chinese publications, with an English translation in brackets. All titles and quotes were translated by the author. Names of individuals are written in the Chinese way: surname first, followed by the given name. Some popular names have traditional Wade-Giles spellings appearing in parentheses after the first use of the *hanyu pinyin*, such as Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek).

The BGN/PCGN 1967 Romanization system is applied to Amharic names of persons, places, and terms. Names of individuals are written in the Ethiopian way: given name first, followed by the father's name (and the grandfather's, if used). In citations, the given name is substituted for the surname.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This dissertation proposes a new model of friendship between states, argues that this helps us to better understand Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations, and that this potentially has wide-ranging implications for the future of the current international order. It thus has come a long way from my initial research design, which was rooted in rather traditional notions of Chinese soft power, and asked whether an increasingly powerful China was exerting influence on the worldviews of African governments. Yet as soon as I had left the comfort of the library and begun to talk with decision makers in Ethiopia and South Africa, I realized that this impact-response pattern was too simple, despite the fact that the governments in Pretoria and especially Addis Ababa indeed *are* being influenced by Chinese practices regarding development, party-building, or propaganda work. Importantly, my African interview partners not only were able to explain these learning processes with reference to seemingly universal notions of rationality, but also in light of their countries' specific historical developments and present conditions, and the ideologies the ruling parties had developed during their years of revolutionary struggle.

The close relations between China and the two African states hence were presented as something organic and natural, rooted in "who" these states are. This contrasted with how my interview partners spoke about their countries' relations with the Western states, which were described as good and important, but nevertheless seemed to lack the kind of intimacy that was present in relations with China. I therefore felt that I needed to cast a wider net that would allow me to capture the special qualities of Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations, and I found this net in constructivist theories on the role played by identity in international relations, especially the idea of international friendship as an intimate relationship between states.

Given the resulting breadth of my thesis, I often had to leave the more familiar confines of my own discipline of international relations, and venture into the vast

realms of psychology, sociology and anthropology, of social and political theory, and of comparative history and area studies. These intellectual travels were undertaken without much guidance, and I hope that those who are more versed in these fields will forgive the inevitable shortcomings of my accounts. However, I also hope that the comprehensiveness of the presented argument to some extent compensates for my lack of expert knowledge on the intricacies of theories developed in other disciplines, as well as the complex path that has resulted in contemporary Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations.

While I thus take on the full responsibility for any mistakes, omissions or questionable decisions contained in this dissertation, I also need to thank many colleagues, friends and interview partners, without whom I could not have written this study. Above all, I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisors, Heike Holbig and Reinhard Wolf, who despite numerous setbacks during the research and writing process continued to support me and my project. This dissertation was written within the interdisciplinary research program Africa's Asian Options (AFRASO) at Goethe-University Frankfurt, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and I want to thank my colleagues who provided a stimulating research environment – especially Uta Ruppert, Stefan Schmid and Falk Hartig. In addition, I would like to thank the friends I met at the Institute of Political Science, especially Sebastian Biba, Chen Mei, Simone Claar, Philipp Erbenraut, Sandra Evans, Jonas Gobert, Claudia Hülsken, Alma Kolleck, Christina Maags, Christiane Münscher, Martina Neunecker, Tilman Peters, Christian Rosen and Bertram Schwarz.

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## INTRODUCTION: HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS

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We are sincere friends, reliable partners and good brothers, sharing both happiness and adversity, rejoicing in successes that the other has achieved. In a nutshell, China-Ethiopian relations have become a real and excellent model for South-South Cooperation.

Wang Yi and Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, *China-Ethiopia relations – An excellent model for South-South cooperation* (2014)

Seen in the context of China's friendship with all other countries, 17 years may not seem long. But thanks to the personal commitment of our top leaders and the tremendous efforts of our two sides, China-South Africa relations, after 17 years of growth, have become a model of solidarity and cooperation between China and Africa and between China and other major developing countries.

Xi Jinping, *A rainbow of friendship* (2015)

### CAN STATES BE FRIENDS?

The language of friendship is part of the standard repertoire of Chinese diplomats and leaders – not only in the context of Sino-African relations, but also in China's relations with its regional neighbours, other parts of the developing world, and to a lesser degree also the developed countries of the West. At the same time, there appears to be a general consensus amongst foreign observer that China, “the loneliest superpower” (Pei, 2012), in fact has “few acquaintances and fewer friends” (Wyne, 2014), and that this is a central reason why the country, despite all its capabilities, remains a “partial power” (Shambaugh, 2013, p. 7). As such, Chinese friendship rhetoric mostly is taken to be just that – rhetoric.

If we continue to understand friendship as euphemism for alliance, as many observers do, it indeed appears as if the People's Republic of China (PRC) is intent on going it alone as a great power. In a post-Cold War era that is characterized by globalization and multipolarization, however, we need more fine-tuned concepts than formal alignment to detect closeness between states – and the notion of

Chinese loneliness arguably owes as much to our conceptualization of international relations as to reality. Using a constructivist approach, this dissertation thus proposes that we should include a refined understanding of international friendship into the academic study of international relations (IR), that Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations indeed exhibit special qualities that can only inadequately be captured with alternative concepts such as alliance or partnership, and that this could have important implications for the future of international order.

These are bold claims, and not only on empirical grounds, but also because there are good theoretical reasons to assume that states as collective, self-interested and rational actors operating in an anarchical context are not capable of something that can rightfully be labeled friendship. Most researchers accordingly prefer the rationalist language of alliance and partnership, and relegate friendship into the textbooks of diplomats, not scholars. However, while such fundamental objections against the use of friendship in IR need to be addressed in detail in the following chapter, it also needs to be emphasized here that the proposed concept of international friendship is clearly distinct from the term's usage in diplomatic exchanges, including official Chinese friendship rhetoric.

For example, although the presented argument at first glance appears to share the diplomatic language of personified states ("China" is friends with "Ethiopia" and "South Africa"), this is not a simplistic metaphor I use to avoid dealing with the amorphous conglomerate of individual institutions or human beings that constitute the abstract entity that is the state. On the contrary, this study takes the social construction of the state as a collective actor with a specific identity as its object of investigation, and regards international friendship as part of often elite-led and goal-driven attempts to demarcate what it means to be "us" and "them." Friendship between states accordingly consists of processes of mutual recognition and identification, brought about by a plethora of actors on various levels, and its defining characteristic is not so much whether two states "like" each

other, or even whether they treat each other in a certain way, but whether they have developed an intimate relationship between “significant Others.”<sup>1</sup>

Since the relational construction of collective identities primarily is accomplished via discursive and symbolic means, international friendship often has a theatrical character to it – which is why observers tend to dismiss it as empty rhetoric. It would nevertheless be wrong to assume that international friendship has no real-world consequences: Because it helps them in creating international and domestic order, states are motivated to behave in ways that reaffirm and heighten the worth of their socially constructed Self, and it is in friendships where such “Self-referent rewards” are most readily available. Behaving friend-like towards the significant Other accordingly becomes inherently rewarding, and rational behavior amongst friends follows a different logic than rational behavior amongst partners, rivals, or enemies. Therefore, while the discursive or symbolic dimension of friendship indeed is central, meaningful friendships are more than this.

International friendship in this study designates an intimate Self-Other relation between states that is characterized by mutual recognition and identification, and which is also expected to affect behavior. It does not imply, however, that states behave irrationally (even though friendships sometimes may lead to emotional responses), that states suddenly become altruistic (even though the inclusion of Self-referent rewards means that some material costs are worthwhile), or that power has no role to play in friendship (although the inclusion of a normative dimension makes power less central). In general, therefore, we need to avoid treating international friendship as an unrealistic ideal that is supposed to solve every problem of international relations, and instead as a real-world practice that

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<sup>1</sup> Just as “China,” “Ethiopia” and “South Africa,” terms such as the “West,” the “South” or the “Third World” are used in this study not in an essentialist way, but to denote socially constructed categories people use to define meaning and make sense of the world. These social constructs matter for international relations, and disaggregating them into their individual components therefore often means to miss the wood for the trees. For an introduction to constructivist approaches to international relations, see Adler, 2013.



takes place in the rather un-friendly environment of international politics, and thus has a noticeable yet limited impact on how states interact with another.

If we analyze Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations through this theoretical lens, it becomes clear why “the Ethiopian government is (perceived as) a friend of Beijing in a special way” (Seifudein, 2012, p. 147), or why experts’ descriptions of Sino-South African relations range from “unique partnership” (Alden & Wu, 2014, p. 5) to “inexplicable love affair” (Olander & Van Staden, 2015). Indeed, if we simply treated them as partnerships, we would stand to miss many important dynamics; at the same time, however, the analysis will also show that the friendships exhibit important shortcomings and problems that are unlikely to be solved in the foreseeable future.

#### FRIENDSHIP OF THE OUTSIDERS

This is a qualitative study that seeks to understand the dynamics of international friendship by focusing on a small number of cases, which also means that we must be careful with generalizations. The presented argument nevertheless has implications for our understanding of China-Africa relations more broadly, which continue to be trapped between the contending and highly politicized narratives of solidary Sino-African friendship on the one hand and exploitative Chinese neocolonialism on the other. Given the ubiquity of these narratives, many scholars have made it their goal to look behind the smokes and mirrors of official rhetoric and biased media coverage, and the currency that is most valued in the study of China-Africa relations consequently are hard facts, established and verified through extended field research. Over time, these facts are expected to allow us to capture the true nature of an evolving relationship that is too complex to be framed in black-and-white terms. This is the “myth-busting” approach to the study of China-Africa relations (Hirono & Suzuki, 2014), and although we are still missing many pieces, the picture that has started to emerge indeed proposes that China-Africa relations are not as exceptional as its most vocal supporters and as well as its most ardent critics would have us believe.

Unfortunately, however, the dominance of the myth-busting approach with its empiricist bend also has resulted in a neglect of conceptualizations of international

relations that take the role of ideas seriously, and treating Chinese friendship rhetoric merely as a propaganda trick not only means to underestimate the African side's agency, but also the role language plays in politics – especially in Chinese politics (Schoenhals, 1992). I therefore agree with Chris Alden and Daniel Large (2011, p. 25), who argue that the study of China in Africa needs to “go beyond any simple, misleading and binary material/discursive opposition (‘reality’/‘rhetoric’, ‘practice/discourse’).” This dissertation will show that at least in some bilateral relationships Chinese friendship rhetoric indeed matters, but not because it deceives its African audience, but because it is part of social processes of identity construction on both the Chinese and the African side, and because it helps in the establishment of a legitimate order that increases stability and efficiency. As such, while Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations have been selected here exactly because they stand out, and not because they are deemed to be representative of an encompassing Sino-African friendship, they nevertheless urge us to take the ideas expressed in official discourse more seriously.

The context for this study is even larger than China-Africa relations, however. As Ayşe Zarakol (2011) has shown, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the relationship between the essentially European society of states on the one hand and the non-European states on the other came to resemble the Established-Outsider figuration described by sociologist Norbert Elias, and the outsiders henceforth had to deal with the stigma of being inferior – of not being civilized or secular or developed or strong or modern enough to belong to the core of international society. For many states that pre-dated the arrival of European modernity and imperialism, including China and Ethiopia, the result was a prolonged identity crisis, and the search for ways to restore the dignity and status that had been lost. The situation was different for colonial states such as South Africa, but after independence they still had to overcome their marginalization and stigmatization. It was on the basis of shared experiences and challenges such as these that notions of Third World solidarity were grounded, and although the international system has gone through important changes since the era of decolonization, the basic division between what today commonly is referred to as the developed North and the developing South still continues to inform the identities of those who entered the

international society of states as stigmatized outsiders. The North-South divide therefore matters for bilateral friendship construction, and not only because it provides unifying notions of a shared fate and a common Other, but also because friendships provide a means to deal with challenged identities.

The developing world is a heterogeneous group of states, however, and the links that constitute the South often are too weak to overcome the many rifts and conflicts that drive them apart. More important for understanding the special qualities of Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations than the mutual recognition as members of the South, therefore, are the shared worldviews of three ruling parties that during their formative revolutionary years had turned to the East, not the West, to find solutions for their respective country's identity crisis. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the East later resulted in an existential crisis for those who sought to define their state's identity in light of socialist visions of modernity, but the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the African National Congress (ANC) nevertheless still hold on to their goal of following an alternative development path that is deemed to be more in line with their countries' needs than Western notions of liberal democracy and market capitalism. Cooperation between China and Ethiopia as well as China and South Africa therefore is informed by shared notions of alternative modernization and global transformation, which in turn have been central for achieving the kind of "rational morality" that is typical of international friendship. Seemingly outdated ideological ties therefore continue to matter for international friendship, and this study not only is about Sino-African relations and the North-South divide, but also about the ongoing if subdued competition between different visions of the future.

Despite their common identities as developing countries with shared worldviews, there is no denying that Sino-Ethiopian and to a lesser degree also Sino-South African relations are characterized by a fundamental asymmetry in power, and that they thus have taken on certain qualities of a hierarchical relationship. At the same time, however, this hierarchy goes hand in hand with the "qualified equality" that marks international friendship, namely a carefully maintained equality in

terms of Self and Other, a recognition of the respective Other according to his own self-images, and differentiated rights and responsibilities that are said to be in line with the respective state's needs and capabilities. As such, this study also is about the creation of international order through the establishment of dependable relationships between stable Selves and Others, an order that includes elements of hierarchy but is nevertheless recognized as legitimate by the involved actors because it is based on mutually recognized identities. The finding that some developing countries in search for an alternative to the Western powers and their vision of modernity have established friendships with a rising China therefore has important implications for the future of global order, and one reason why the actors that are involved in them describe Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations as special is that they are regarded as part of a shifting balance of forces that will allow the rising powers of the South to finally overcome the Established-Outsider figuration.

## STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 introduces the literatures on friendship and identity in international relations, and proposes a new model of international friendship that explains the special qualities of these inter-state relationships with the inclusion of Self-referent rewards and the role friendship plays in the creation of legitimate order. It also discusses the meaning of friendship as process, how friendship is expected to affect behavior, and how power continues to matter in friendship. In Chapter 2, the theoretical model will be translated into research questions and a set of indicators that can be used to assess the quality of international friendship. In addition, the logic of case selection and the generation of empirical observations necessary for answering the research questions will be addressed.

In Chapter 3, the empirical part of the study will begin with an analysis of how China's state identity has historically been developed in relation to Others the Chinese Self was dissociated from, as well as Others the Chinese Self was associated with, and how the CCP sought to solve the identity crisis that resulted from imperial China's contact with the aggressive and "modern" European Other by following a socialist vision of modernity. This "biographical narrative" of the

state is important here because it gives meaning to the very existence of “China,” and today provides the representational resources for Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African friendship construction. In addition, it will be discussed how the management of China’s Self-Other relations continues to form an integral part in the CCP’s claim to power, and how notions of friendship are an important element in the party’s conceptual ordering of the world. And lastly, it will be argued that the CCP’s attempts to establish the PRC as a new type of peacefully developing and responsible great power, which seeks to further the national interest but at the same time practices solidarity with its friends in the developing world and promotes a new type of mutually beneficial international relations, make it imperative to find friends from the South.

Chapter 4 discusses the role Africa plays in China’s Self-Other relations. The symbolic relevance of pre-colonial contacts, the shared fate of Western colonialism, and the common struggle for national liberation and development will be highlighted – even if these notions often lack historical accuracy. In addition, it will be shown how the more recent emphasis on shared interests and strategic partnerships adds a decidedly future-oriented element to the narrative of Sino-African friendship that promises to combine historically grown ties of solidarity with pragmatic initiatives that will lead to tangible outcomes. Taken together, these narratives and discourses help to establish a specific identity of China as a benevolent and respectful equal that will always remain Africa’s good friend and partner, and set friendly China-Africa relations apart from the continent’s relationship with the West. This provides the context for the PRC’s bilateral friendships with individual African states, and Ethiopia and South Africa are such good candidates for friendship with China because they can easily be integrated into the more encompassing narrative of Sino-African friendship, and because they willingly subscribe to the identity China projects onto them.

In Chapter 5, the discussion will turn to Ethiopia. It will show how imperial Ethiopia’s relations with the European powers since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a deepening identity crisis that has troubled the weak and “backward” Ethiopia ever since, and which today provides the background for similar narratives of past

glory, foreign humiliation and national renaissance in Ethiopia and China. Afterwards, the discussion will turn to the struggle between different visions of a strong and modern Ethiopian Self, which ultimately was won by the EPRDF and its ideology of revolutionary democracy. This is of relevance because the shared worldviews of two ruling parties with a socialist vision of modernity today are central for enabling friendship processes between China and Ethiopia. The chapter will then focus on the EPRDF in power, and how it has sought to adapt to a changing and not very friendly international environment by giving token support to liberal reforms, while behind the scene staying as true to its own, non-liberal vision of Ethiopia as possible. Importantly, the rise of China has helped the EPRDF to alleviate the West's pressure for reforms, and provided the regime with a successful model to emulate.

The following Chapter 6 on China-Ethiopia relations will build on these insights. It will show how the two states, despite a rather brief common history and a complicated relationship during the Cold War, since the mid- to late 1990s have established a dense network of institutional and personal relations on various levels, including government-to-government and party-to-party relations, which today enable frequent cooperation, exchange and communication. It will also be analyzed how the relationship is constructed as friendship in official discourse, how Ethiopia's emulation of the Chinese model both expresses and facilitates mutual recognition and identification, and how pragmatic cooperation takes place within a common project of alternative modernization that provides both sides with a sense of purpose and virtue. Given these findings, it is argued that it indeed makes sense to understand Sino-Ethiopian relations in terms of international friendship.

In Chapter 7, the discussion will turn to South Africa. It will highlight how South Africa's state identity has been developed in relation to Others its Self was associated with or dissociated from, and how the anti-apartheid struggle of the currently ruling ANC to a large extent was a struggle to find international recognition for its vision of a progressive, non-racial South Africa. It will also be shown how the ANC after its coming to power in the early 1990s was forced to

compromise on its in many ways non-liberal vision of a transformed South African identity, how it has struggled to reconcile long-standing narratives of its Self as a transformative liberation movement committed to socialist notions of progress with being the ruling party of a liberal democracy with a free market, and how some of the perceived inconsistencies in South Africa's foreign policy are linked to continuing conflicts about "who" the country should be.

Why these things matter for an understanding of China-South Africa relations will become clear in Chapter 8. It will show that the bilateral relationship since the late 1990s has been characterized by an increasingly dense network of institutional and personal relations that facilitate mutual engagement and communication, and how the relationship's special qualities are emphasized in official discourse. It will also discuss the ANC's emulation of the CCP's experiences, which however are found not to be as central to the relationship as they are to Sino-Ethiopian relations. Instead, it will be argued that the shared commitment to a common project of global transformation provides the basis for friendship construction, and that both sides' view that the international balance of power is about to reach a tipping point provides the project with additional relevance. It will accordingly be suggested that Sino-South African relations indeed can be understood as friendship in the sense proposed in this study.

Chapter 9 will start with a summarizing discussion of the empirical findings, which on the one hand allows for a comparison of the two cases, and on the other hand provides the basis for an assessment of the qualities of the two friendships. It will especially highlight the role played by ideological similarities, historical narratives, conscious decisions, rationalist arguments, common projects and Self-referent rewards in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations, and how these factors have resulted in two international friendships. It will then turn to an assessment of the special qualities the two relationships exhibit on the behavioral level, especially whether they are characterized by voluntariness, openness, equality, respect, support, trust and loyalty. And finally, it will turn to the elite-centered nature of the two friendships, as well as the problematic role played by asymmetrical power.

The following Conclusion will present a concise summary of the overall argument and the empirical findings of the study. It also includes an assessment of the prospects of the two friendships, and a discussion of the study's limitations and the related areas for future research. In the end, it will return to the broader implications of the study, especially with regard to the post-Western order China, Ethiopia and South Africa seek to construct.



# CHAPTER 1: THE MODEL OF SELF-REFERENT MOTIVATION FOR INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

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In loving a friend, men love what is good for themselves, for in becoming a friend, a good man becomes a good for his friend.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (ca. 350 B.C.)

## APPROACHING FRIENDSHIP

International friendship is not the same as personal friendship, but up to a certain point the two can be thought of analogously, and since it is something we are all familiar with, it makes sense to start this discussion with a definition of personal friendship. It is notoriously difficult to define friendship, however, and not only because real-world friendships necessarily diverge from stated or implicit ideals, but also because the meaning of friendship ultimately depends on the friends themselves, and because flexibility and ambiguity are some of the distinctive features that set friendship apart from other, more structured relationships such as kinship or marriage. Friendship thus can mean different things to different people, and what counts as acceptable in one friendship may be unforgivable in another.

Drawing on treatments of friendship in psychology, Beverly Fehr accordingly argues that friendship as a natural language concept does not possess a clear-cut set of features, and therefore evades clear definitions. Instead, “such concepts are better described as fuzzy sets – a list of attributes that are typical of the concept, but are not always or necessarily present” (Fehr, 1996, p. 6). Similarly, from a more philosophical point of view, P. E. Digeser suggests that we should treat friendship with Wittgenstein as a family resemblance concept (Digeser, 2013). This means that there is no one true definition of what friendship actually is, but not that no definition can be given, nor that friendship is indistinguishable from other relations.

That friendship, despite its largely unstructured character, cannot just mean anything is due to the fact that it is negotiated within the confines of a specific social setting – a tension captured by the frequently cited characterization of friendship as “institutionalized non-institution” (Pain, 1969, p. 514). In a contemporary Anglo-European setting, for example, people tend to expect some degree of voluntariness, affect, trust, reciprocity, intimacy, honesty, loyalty, continuity, support and openness in a relationship, otherwise it is unlikely to be recognized as friendship (Fehr, 1996). Society and culture thus provide the framework friends negotiate their relationship in, and whether friendship must be expressed through certain practices and symbols, needs to be motivated solely by affect or can also include instrumental consideration, or is possible only between persons of equal status and gender, cannot be determined independently of a specific context. The many legends about notable friendships that contested the limits set by the unwritten rules of their time only highlight the relevance of such dominant social norms.

While culture may help us in defining friendship, differences between cultures make it largely impossible to come up with a universal definition of friendship (Killick & Desai, 2010). For example, how much room some societies give to instrumental reasoning in friendship may be baffling for those who have been socialized in a Western middle-class environment. In many societies (including the Chinese and most African ones) the line between affect and instrumentality is quite blurred, and friendship is naturally expected to comprise both emotional *and* functional dimensions (Smart, 1999; Grätz, 2011). Given these context-dependent properties, most anthropologists prefer an emic approach to the study of friendship, aimed at representing the internal language and meanings of a culture, and capturing how its members perceive of real-world events (Lett, 1990).

Another way of dealing with the ambiguity of friendship is to take a step back from specific friendships or cultural and social contexts, and to adopt an etic approach that builds on “accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers” (Lett, 1990, p. 130). This is the approach

avored by most sociologists and psychologists, who aspire to find patterns and dynamics that have the potential to transcend cultural boundaries – even though the practice of ascribing meaning to a relationship it does not have for the actors involved comes with its own dangers.

## FRIENDSHIP AND IDENTITY

The theory of personal friendship that has had the most immediate impact on the concept of international friendship in this study comes from psychology, and it does not define friendship in terms of certain culture-specific norms, but in terms of underlying psychological dynamics. In Paul H. Wright's (1984) model of Self-referent motivation for friendship, the connection between our identity and our friends is regarded as central for understanding friendship – an idea that has dominated the writings of European thinkers on this topic since antiquity. With his model, Wright both challenges and at the same time builds on influential rationalist theories in psychology – the so-called exchange or equity approaches – that explain the dynamics characterizing friendship exclusively with what each side gets out of the relation. He does so to address a prominent problem in friendship research, referred to as the rewardingness-intrinsicality paradox: While there is overwhelming empirical evidence that there is an essential link between some form of reward or reinforcement on the one hand and the formation and maintenance of friendship on the other, few people would accept a characterization of their friendships as a relation based on cost-benefit calculations.

Wright's central claim is that "friendships are, indeed, formed and maintained because they are rewarding," but that this "need not imply selfishness, self-centeredness or exploitation on the part of the persons involved," since what friends are rewarded with primarily is a "facilitated expression of behavioural tendencies related to the self and its attributes" (Wright, 1984, p. 117). This argument is based on the insight that, due to its ubiquity as a reference point for all of their experiences, individuals are inherently motivated to behave in a way that promotes the well-being and worth of their Self. As a result, people tend to behave in ways that reaffirm their important or highly valued Self-attributes and

their sense of uniqueness and individuality, that encourage a positive elaboration and evaluation of their Self, and generally try to avoid events that threaten its well-being or worth. Put differently, and taking into account more recent research, we are inherently motivated to find information that confirms our already existing Self-image (the motive of Self-verification), and information that casts our Self in a favorable light (the motive of Self-enhancement) (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008, pp. 128-30).

Friends therefore reward the individual primarily with allowing him or her to develop a stable and positive sense of Self – something Wright calls “Self-referent rewards.” And while rewards thus do play an important role in Wright’s model, he also maintains that,

if we look hard enough, long enough and with sufficient flexibility about what we are willing to consider costs (inputs) and rewards (outcomes), partners in even the most intimate relationships show a concern for the most favorable reward-cost balance or an equitable exchange. (Wright, 1984, p. 125)

Therefore, although it is theoretically possible to equate friendship with instrumental goal-maximization, he argues that this would not do justice to the concept.

Over the rest of this chapter, I will draw important parallels between Wright’s model of Self-referent motivation for personal friendship on the one hand, and the dynamics that are at the heart of international friendship on the other; I will argue that states are inherently motivated to find Others that confirm the correctness and worth of their Self as well, and that Self-referent rewards are responsible for creating some of the characteristics that set relations with friends apart from other forms of inter-state relationships. Once we draw such parallels between personal and international friendship, however, the question arises how it can be justified to use concepts and theories that have been developed with respect to individual human beings to analyze collective actors such as states. This issue will have to be discussed in detail over the course of this chapter. For now, I will simply on an “as if” basis treat the state as a person, complete with identity, intentionality and even emotions – a strategy that, although problematic, is

actually quite common in systemic theories of IR. Constructivists have claimed that states can be treated as “real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs and intentionality” (Wendt, 1999, p. 197; Wendt, 2004), and neoliberal or neorealist theories without much ado expect states to be afraid of each other and to have enemies (Crawford, 2000). If this is possible, can they not also have friends?

### THE UNFRIENDLY NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

There is a long line of philosophers who have written about the relation between friendship and politics, ranging from Plato through Thomas Aquinas, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Derrida (Nichols, 2009; Schwarz, 2007; Smith, 2011; Thomson, 2005). The most influential Western thinker on both the question of friendship and how it relates to politics arguably has been Aristotle (Schollmeier, 1994). Confucius, too, addressed the issue, and there are some striking similarities to Aristotle (He, 2007). However, these thinkers were mostly interested in the role of personal friendship in politics and how it affects politics within the state, and thus do not need to be discussed here.

Because he understood friendship as a quality of groups instead of individuals, because his friend-enemy distinction has an international dimension to it, and because his ideas about Self-Other relations are of relevance for the argument developed here, a political thinker who deserves some more room is Carl Schmitt, the infamous “Crown Jurist of the Third Reich” (Frye, 1966, p. 818). In his *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt, 2007 [1927]), Schmitt argues that the realm of politics in the final analysis rests on a distinction between friends and enemies, and uses this argument to vehemently reject the unruly party politics of the Weimar Republic. In his view, true democracy is not realized through elections, but when rulers and ruled belong to the same group of friends, united by a shared view about who the enemy is. While relations within the state should thus be characterized by mutual identification, the existence of this in-group presupposes the definition of an out-group as an existential threat, Schmitt’s definition of the enemy, with whom relations are characterized by antagonism. Defining an enemy thus is seen as a necessary step towards a strong, sovereign, and internally united

nation-state, and Schmitt later became an ardent supporter of Nazi rule, the persecution of Jews, and Germany's expansionist foreign policy.

While Schmitt's use of the term friendship is polemic rather than analytical, on empirical grounds it is indeed rather easy to describe international relations as the natural realm of enmity, and to make a point against international friendship. Countless historical examples can be invoked to show that it is just empty talk or, even worse, used to mask highly exploitative relations. In their analysis of the language of friendship in international treaties, Heather Devere and her colleagues accordingly conclude that it "is difficult not to come to a cynical conclusion about the use of friendship terminology" (Devere, et al., 2011, p. 65). Instead of talking about friendship, IR scholars thus generally prefer terms such as partners or allies that reflect the rationalist nature of international relations, and when the term friendship is employed, it is often put in quotation marks to show that the author is somewhat ironically mirroring the official language of international friendship.

Neorealism does a good job in explaining this un-friendly reality, and as Felix Berenskoetter (2007) has argued, much of its reasoning has to do with how states and the international system are theorized: States are perceived as autonomous and functionally equal units within an anarchical international system that constantly have to fear for their survival, and if atomistic states constantly struggle in a zero-sum competition for power, there indeed is no place for friendship in international politics. The same is true for neoliberalism: Although it highlights the possibility for cooperation, it uses the same ontology of the international as composed of autonomous units following the logic of rational goal-maximization. In this view states may become partners, but not friends.

## FRIENDSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Despite such widespread and indeed justified skepticism, there is also a rich intellectual heritage in IR that has asked why and how states can overcome the security dilemma and establish relations that are not only characterized by a high level of trust and stability, but also at times seem to offset the narrowly self-interested rules of international politics. Many aspects that are of relevance to the contemporary study of international friendship can be found in these earlier

accounts, including the relevance of mutual engagement and frequent communication, the role of self-perception and identification with the Other, and how this affects state behavior by changing the rationalist logic states are expected to follow. It is within this tradition that the contemporary study of international friendship needs to be placed.

A discussion of this tradition has to start with classical liberalism, and its focus on domestic processes, bilateral communication and transnational linkages indeed provides a more favorable context for thinking about international friendship than (neo-) realism and neoliberalism. For example, in the 1950s Karl W. Deutsch and his associates argued that in regions and relations with a very dense net of inter- and intra-state links (e.g. between USA and Canada) people would “come to agreement on at least this one point: that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of ‘peaceful change’” (Deutsch, et al., 1957, p. 5). The result would be a “security community.” Kenneth E. Boulding’s conception of a condition of “stable peace,” “in which the probability of war is so small that it does not really enter into the calculations of any of the people involved,” goes into a similar direction by seeing the peaceful relation between states mostly as an outcome of growing interdependence and communication (Boulding, 1978, p. 13). And since the 1980s the zone of peace that exists between democracies has been explained with similar arguments (Doyle, 1983). Nevertheless, in all these accounts friendship has remained a rather marginal concept that is either quite simplistically used to denote all kinds of good international relations, or avoided altogether.

This reluctance slowly began to change when constructivists took up the ideas of the liberals in the 1990s. Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, in their reformulation of Deutsch et al.’s concept of security community, highlighted the relevance of a collective identity that not only makes the use of violence highly unlikely between members of the community, but also leads to a generally higher level of trust and mutual understanding – something that already comes close to friendship (Adler & Barnett, 1998). In 1999, finally, Alexander Wendt in his seminal *Social Theory of International Politics* defined international friendship as

a role structure within which states expect each other to observe two simple rules: (1) disputes will be settled without war or the threat of war (the rule of non-violence); and (2) they will fight as a team if the security of any one is threatened by a third party (the rule of mutual aid). (Wendt, 1999, pp. 298-9)

Due to the narrow focus on security, Wendt's international friendship very much resembles an alliance, with the main difference that the relationship between friends is expected to continue indefinitely. Importantly, however, Wendt argues that if the idea that states can be expected to behave like friends becomes dominant within international society, the result will be what he calls a Kantian culture, which follows a logic very different from the one that can be found amongst states sharing a realist Hobbesian culture (where other states are expected to behave like enemies threatening each other's existence) or a liberal Lockean culture (where other states are expected to behave like rivals that will refrain from all-out war, but otherwise will not hesitate to use force if they deem it in their interest). In its "highest" form, when states have internalized the Kantian culture to a degree that they accept its normative claims as legitimate,

states identify with each other, seeing each other's security not just as instrumentally related to their own, but as literally being their own. The cognitive boundaries of the Self are extended to include the Other; Self and Other form a single 'cognitive region.' (Wendt, 1999, p. 305)

From here, it is only a small step towards the more recent literature on international friendship. In contrast to approaches from the late 1990s as proposed by the likes of Wendt, Adler and Barnett, however, this emerging literature stresses the special nature of bilateral relationships that can only inadequately be captured with general accounts of security communities or Kantian culture. The most important article in this regard has been Felix Berenskoetter's *Friends, There are no Friends? An Intimate Reframing of the International*, published in 2007, in which he gets rid of Wendt's narrow focus on security, and describes friendship as an intimate relationship between states that helps them in developing a stable sense of Self (Berenskoetter, 2007).

In their recent discussion of the friendship literature, Oelsner and Koschut (Koschut & Oelsner, 2014) have identified three main lines of inquiry: Firstly,



theory-driven attempts to demonstrate that there is an epistemological and ontological space for friendship in IR; secondly, more historically interested studies on the use of friendship language in international discourse and treaties; and thirdly, an empirically focused approach looking at case studies and processes of international friendship building on different analytical levels. Present study can primarily be understood as being part of this last line of inquiry. However, since friendship is far from being an established concept in IR, and in many regards our understanding of the concept is still lacking, this theoretical chapter is written in the spirit of the first line of inquiry, i.e. to show that there is an epistemological and ontological space for friendship in international politics. What sets the model presented here apart from existing constructivist approaches to international friendship primarily are its relative openness to rationalist theories of international relations, and that it reconciles contrasting views on the relation between friendship and order. The central concept nevertheless remains identity.

## IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Since the time of Aristotle, to regard (personal) identity as central for (personal) friendship is quite common. In its simplest sense, identity answers the question: Who am I? Identity, whose Latin root “idem” means “the same,” implies that something is congruent with itself – self-sameness would thus be a useful description.<sup>2</sup> This is in line with the Aristotelian notion that every object, including but not reducible to humans, has an essence that constitutes the object and that cannot change so long as the object exists, which for a long time was at the heart

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<sup>2</sup> To be sure, as Clifford Geertz (1974, p. 31) has observed, the “Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe; a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.” That a discussion of identity in international relations builds on this peculiar idea can, according to Iver Neumann, be justified on two grounds: That almost the entire social theory literature on the topic builds on this idea, and that Western cultural influence (including the conception of the person) was and remains of central importance to international society (Neumann, 1999, p. 2).

of European thinking about identity and the Self (Witt, 1989). Building on this intellectual tradition, which was later dubbed essentialism, to ascribe certain immutable and natural characteristics to ethnic, religious or national groups has a long history in the study of international relations. We do not have to go very far back in time to find examples for such thinking; even for Hans J. Morgenthau the existence of stable “national characters” was an incontestable fact (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 134).

By drawing on more sophisticated and psychologically informed accounts of identity as proposed by George H. Mead and Erik H. Erikson (Mead, 1967 [1934]; Erikson, 1950; for a discussion see Gleason, 1983; Weigert, 1983), some scholars since the 1950s tried to refine our understanding of such seemingly natural identities in international politics, and since friendship is intimately connected to identity, the names that have already been discussed with regard to the history of friendship in IR are of central relevance here as well. Karl W. Deutsch et al., for example, argued that a “we feeling” created through “partial identification in terms of self-images and interests” was part of the mechanisms that within security communities rendered the conduct of large scale violence between states unthinkable (Deutsch, et al., 1957, p. 36). Similarly, Kenneth E. Boulding stressed the relevance of the “images” a nation has of itself and other bodies in the international system for foreign policy making, and included these self-images in the factors that could support stable peace (Boulding, 1978, p. 62; Boulding, 1959). Another scholar who worked on the role of the Self and became especially influential in foreign policy analysis was Kal Holsti, who in the early 1970s used “national role conceptions” to explain foreign policy behavior with reference to the roles played by individual countries in the international system (Holsti, 1970).

True to the liberal spirit, these scholars thus proposed that there is more to international relations than an eternal struggle for power or security, and that furthermore not all states are essentially the same, but that some (mostly internal) characteristics such as national images or identification with others make a difference. The constructivists since the late 1980s built on these insights, prompting some to speak of a “return” of identity in IR (Lapid & Kratochwil, 1996).

Due to its intellectual roots in the debate between the positivist mainstream and its post-positivist critics, however, constructivist scholars more than their liberal forerunners vehemently rejected any essentialist thinking, and instead emphasized the constructed and therefore fluid nature of identities (Lapid, 1989; Price & Reus-Smit, 1998).

The constructivists found identity especially useful for challenging dominant rationalist approaches that were built on the assumption that all states have objective and fixed interests. In contrast, the contingent nature of interests was highlighted by arguing that (simply put) “an actor cannot know what it wants unless it knows what it is” (Wendt, 1999, p. 231). To support this argument, identity was often used to explain state behavior that can only insufficiently be explained with “rational” factors as proposed by neorealism or neoliberalism alone. For example, Erik Ringmar argued that Sweden entered the Thirty Years War to defend its national identity, although “there were several strong reasons for early seventeenth-century Sweden *not* to engage in a continental war of this magnitude” (Ringmar, 1996, p. 10; emphasis in original). Thomas U. Berger regarded German and Japanese hesitancy to behave like other states with comparable power resources and assume a more independent defense posture as a result of their historical experiences and the way in which those experiences were interpreted by domestic political actors (Berger, 1996). And both Adler and Barnett’s work on security communities and Wendt’s work on Kantian culture used identity to explain surprisingly peaceful international relations.

The 1990s thus witnessed a quick proliferation of identity research, which was not without problems; suddenly all sorts of state behavior appeared to be explainable with reference to identity, and in 2000, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper lamented that identity had become too stretched and ephemeral to be of analytical use: “If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 1). Some stocktaking took place over the following decade, but it has remained difficult to totally reject the accusation of conceptual vagueness. Nevertheless, by now there is a substantial body of empirical literature showing that identity indeed helps us in better understanding international relations, and “[i]f vagueness and

multiple meanings disqualify a concept, then IR scholars also must ban terms like power, interest, or the state from their vocabulary” (Berenskoetter, 2010, p. 3600). Since this a study about friendship between states, when I use the term identity I generally refer to the identity linked to the state as a collective actor – although in a time of nation-states it is often impossible to clearly differentiate between national and state identity. More precisely, identity is understood here as a socially shared understanding of what (or “who”) the state is, what it is in relation to others, and what this implies in practical terms, including corresponding rights and responsibilities, appropriate behavior, and status claims (Abdelal, et al., 2009). This shared understanding is rooted as well as expressed in a set of discursive, symbolic or enacted representations of the state, and identity construction is achieved through a never-ending process of contestation and de-contestation of established representations and their meaning, realized by a plethora of collective and individual actors that interact with another in various contexts (Adler, 2013). Identity defined this way is a collective identity, fit for a collective actor such as the state, and although in the final analysis every group consists of individuals, a constructivist perspective stresses that groups are more than individuals acting in aggregates (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008; Shannon & Kowert, 2012). This focus on collective actors should not be misinterpreted as a return to essentialism, however: While social structures by their very nature are homeostatic, and collective identities may reach a state in which they are so stable as to appear natural, there nevertheless is no “true” essence that forms the eternal core of any given identity.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SELF AND THE OTHER

Another point in which constructivist approaches to identity differ from essentialism is the assumption that identities are inherently relational. This insight gained influence in Western thinking since the time of Georg F. W. Hegel, whose understanding of the development of human self-consciousness in a dialectical exchange with another self-consciousness contrasted with earlier Aristotelian views of identity as simply made up of an object’s inherent essence. Hegel used the example of master and slave, two identities which can only exist in relation to

– and dissociation from – each other (Berenson, 1982). In Mead’s symbolic interactionism and Erikson’s stages of development, the theories that most directly influenced much of IR thinking about identity, the Self-Other relation had become a central concern. As a result, the constructivist literature has continuously stressed the necessity of collective identities to develop in relation to others.

Alexander Wendt, for example, has especially built on Mead to explain relational identity formation, arguing that “identities and their corresponding interests are learned and then reinforced in response to how actors are treated by significant Others” (Wendt, 1999, p. 327). Only by seeing themselves through the eyes of these Others, actors (including states) may come to perceive of themselves as subjects, and if an actor is consistently treated as if he had a certain identity (e.g. as a friend), or if he consistently acts according to an identity, both sides will eventually develop shared ideas about their interaction, turning even purely “staged” roles into social reality.

Unfortunately, in practice the relationship between the Self and the Other often has proven to be problematic. According to William Connolly, “the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates” may not be necessary for creating a stable national identity, but very tempting (Connolly, 1991, p. 64). Many works show how the West has Othered Arabo-Islamic cultures (Said, 2003 [1978]), China has Othered Japan (Suzuki, 2007), Europe has Othered Turkey and Russia (Neumann, 1999), or the US has Othered whatever it could find after it had lost the Soviet Union as its most significant Other (Campbell, 1998 [1992]). This is in line with findings from social psychology, where it is often argued that the creation of in-groups and out-groups goes hand in hand with an in-group bias.

To see Self-Other relations only as a source of conflict would nevertheless be misleading. In Mead’s symbolic interactionism, for example, the individual needs Others to reach Self-fulfillment, and according to Erikson, the Others we develop our personal identity in relation to are mostly positive figures such as parents, partners or friends (Mead, 1967 [1934]; Erikson, 1950). The social psychology

literature on this topic is also more ambiguous than is often realized, and concludes that negative Othering between groups, while common, is not a necessity (Brewer, 1999). Constructivist IR research on security communities or Kantian culture likewise argues that identities may help to overcome boundaries, and it is at the positive end of the Self-Other spectrum where international friendship is located.

### SELF-MOTIVES IN INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

In Wright's model, it is argued that a "true" friendship between individuals at least in part needs to be motivated by Self-referent rewards. However, while in relations involving human beings we can easily accept that "friendship and the reasons it provides are essentially connected to our nature as embodied, flawed, needy beings, with particular characteristic sources of flourishing and happiness," there seems to be no reason to assume that collective actors such as states should be driven by similar motives (Keller, 2009, p. 72). Interestingly, however, there are two established research themes in IR that roughly correlate with the two identity-related motives of Self-verification and Self-enhancement, namely ontological security and international recognition.

Research on ontological security goes back to Anthony Giddens' book *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Giddens, 1991). In it, the sociologist Giddens argues that human beings need to experience themselves as a whole, continuous person in time to be able to deal with the existential anxieties that are an inherent element of being in the world. Ontological security thus refers to a feeling of security that is derived from a sense of continuity in regard to the events of our life, without which we would neither know ourselves nor our place in the world, and overwhelmed by anxiety we would lose any potential for agency. One means to reach this sense of order and continuity is to establish routines. More importantly, however, we have "to keep a certain narrative going" (Giddens, 1991, pp. 54, emphasis in original), and it is this "biographical narrative" that extends our Self into the past and into the future, and thus tells us who and where we are.

Giddens' insights have been used fruitfully in constructivist IR research. Erik Ringmar as well as Felix Berenskoetter have argued that the state attains a sense

of individuality and agency only by weaving spatially and temporally distant events and experiences into a coherent narrative, and without its biographical narrative the state disappears into a myriad of individual institutions and actors (Ringmar, 1996; Berenskoetter, 2014b). Jennifer Mitzen has proposed that some long-standing conflicts such as the one between Israel and Palestine are so difficult to solve because they have become routinized behavior that provides the conflicting parties with a stable sense of Self, and thus ontological security (Mitzen, 2006). And Brent J. Steele has used the need for ontological security to explain why Great Britain stayed out of the American Civil War, why Belgium decided to fight militarily superior Germany during WWI, and why the NATO states felt the need to intervene in Kosovo, after their failure to intervene in Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia had resulted in a severe threat to their biographical narratives (Steele, 2008).

While states thus seem to be inherently motivated to find information that affirms their self-images, it also appears that they are motivated to see these self-images recognized by others – just as Giddens has argued that “self-identity [is linked] in a fateful way to the appraisal of others” (Giddens, 1991, p. 38). Hegel’s ideas about the relational dimension of identity have once more been central here; we can find their influence in Charles Taylor’s *The Politics of Recognition*, (Taylor, 1994 [1992]), and Axel Honneth’s *The Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth, 1996 [1994]). And just as with ontological security, the insights these authors have developed with regard to domestic social and political phenomena have been put to use for analyzing international relations.

Recognition in a legal sense, meaning the acceptance of states as full-blown members in the Westphalian world of sovereign states, is of course a well-established concept in IR. Constructivist notions of recognition are more encompassing than this, however. For example, already in his 1996 book on the Swedish entry into the Thirty Years War, Ringmar proposed that it was not only about defending Swedish identity, but also about the desire to have the country recognized according to its own self-image as an equal between its major European rivals (Ringmar, 1996, p. 11; Ringmar, 2002). Some years later Alexander Wendt, by roughly following Honneth’s distinction between cognitive respect and

social esteem, differentiated between “thin” and “thick” recognition in international relations (Wendt, 2003). While thin recognition means that the state in a traditional legal sense is recognized as a legitimate subject with rights and responsibilities in the international system, by making it an equal amongst many it also negates what is unique about it. In contrast, thick recognition goes beyond the legal dimension by focusing on what is particular and valuable about each individual state in its own right. This prominently includes recognition of the other’s status (Wolf, 2011; Paul, et al., 2014), but also a more general appreciation of what the other regards as important about its Self, and there are many examples for the lengths states go to in order achieve this kind of recognition (Lindeman & Ringmar, 2014)

In light of these theoretical arguments and empirical findings, it is justifiable to assume that there are functional equivalents in international relations to the Self-motives we find in psychological explanations of personal friendship, and we could hence continue to theorize international friendship on this basis. However, although concepts such as ontological security or thick recognition have been used successfully in IR research, we also stand to miss important insights into the dynamics we seek to understand if we simply ignore the mechanisms that underlie them. In one way or another, these mechanisms can be linked to the issue of order – and not just any order, but one that is recognized as legitimate by relevant actors.

## FRIENDSHIP AND THE CREATION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER

One of the most substantive critiques of the constructivist friendship literature in IR comes from Evgeny Roshchin, who builds on his research on the language of friendship in British as well as Soviet treaty making, and argues that, in practice,

friendship is employed to uphold and vindicate such principles and values as sovereignty, criteria for membership, balancing, great power interests, and, possibly, international hierarchies. The contingent groupings of friends continue to be tailored to respond to the pressing issues of destabilized, or in some way rearranged, global or regional orders. (Roshchin, 2014, p. 103)



He therefore rejects what he calls the “affective normative model of international friendship,” which he regards as being “implacably at odds with the existing principles and practices of ordering” (Roshchin, 2014, p. 103).

Roshchin is right when he says that international friendships remain subject to the interests of states, the power-related dynamics of the international system, as well as changing global and regional orders, and that we therefore need to be realistic regarding their real-world potential. His critique nevertheless misses that achieving order is one of the main benefits of international friendship, not its antithesis. As Janice Bially Mattern (2005) has shown, only if the international system is structured by dependable relationships among specific states that are guided by shared understandings of what to expect from one another can the uncertainty that is likely to result in the downward spiral captured by realist notions of anarchy and the security dilemma be avoided. International order thus not only is of inherent value to states, including or maybe even especially the weak ones, but also depends on the existence of stable and predictable Selves and Others. And importantly, this kind of order cannot be achieved in isolation, but crucially rests on interactions between states: State identities that are not recognized only exist in a self-referential “bubble” (Adler, 2005), and are not able to structure inter-state relations.

Order is nevertheless also possible between states that do not recognize each other according to their own self-images. Through continued interactions, states are likely to gain a certain idea of each other, even if this means that there is a mismatch between internally held and externally recognized identities. This idea allows them to make predictions regarding each other’s behavior, and since being treated in a certain way makes it necessary to adapt the own behavior, over time the predictions will become increasingly accurate – forcing states not to behave according to their own self-images, but according to the dictates of international politics. Unfortunately, the resulting stable and predictable relationship is likely to be one between rivals, maybe even enemies. The bipolar structure of the Cold War, for example, provided both sides with stable expectations, but it was an order based on mutual disregard. As such, an international order that involves a

discrepancy between internally held and externally recognized identities can be said to lack legitimacy – the states may accept it as reality, but they do not believe in its rightfulness.<sup>3</sup> This results in revisionist inclinations, mutual mistrust, reduced cooperation, and a general lack of efficiency.

One way to strengthen the legitimacy of order is to base it on thin recognition – to replace notions of uniqueness with universally valid rules and norms that make every state an equal amongst many, thus seeking to exclude identity from international politics. This is the Westphalian system of sovereign states, and even if individual states feel that they are not treated according to their specific rights, needs and visions, they still can recognize the principles this order is based on. The strength of such an international order is its potential to include very different states, and thus to reduce enmity. As such, it is likely to be made up of relationships that range from rivalry to partnership, and to provide a more favorable environment for peace and cooperation than an order based on mutual disregard.

Another way to strengthen the legitimacy of order is to base it on thick recognition – to recognize the involved states according to their self-images, and thus to achieve congruence between internally held and externally recognized identities. This kind of order either consists of partnerships – if states respectfully agree to disagree regarding identity-defining principles, institutions or goals, and thus limit their interaction to the attainment of shared interests – or of friendships – if states not only recognize each other’s “true” Self, but also identify with one another. Its main drawback is that it is very demanding, and we should not expect thick recognition to become the universally accepted basis for global order any time soon. Instead, it is likely to remain confined to special relationships or small groups of states.

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<sup>3</sup> Legitimacy is another central concept in political science that is characterized by vagueness and multiple meanings. I am guilty of contributing to this problem by using it in a rather unorthodox manner. However, its usage here still is in line with the dominant Weberian tradition of understanding legitimacy in terms of a relevant audience’s belief in the rightfulness of a power and its exercise. For a discussion, see Beetham (2013) and Clark (2007).

If we understand international friendship as a stable relationship between states that recognize each other according to their own self-images and on this basis identify with each other, it becomes clear why Self-referent rewards are of inherent value for states: They not only help them in the creation of legitimate international order that is likely to be relatively stable and to facilitate cooperation and the attainment of shared goals, but at some point mutual identification is also likely to turn purely instrumental partnerships into relationships that are about more than shared material interests. If this results in frequent exchanges and close cooperation between interlinked Selves and Others, the relationship can indeed be called intimate.

#### FRIENDSHIP AND THE CREATION OF DOMESTIC ORDER

A second, complementary explanation for the existence of state-level Self-motives does not rest on the relation between the state and its peers within international society, but between the state and the individual. It proposes that a stable, positive and recognized identity helps the state to satisfy the identity-related needs of its citizens, which strengthens feelings of belonging and believes in the legitimacy of power. As such, it once more is about the creation of legitimate order, but this time on the domestic level.

The basis for this argument is that it has been consistently confirmed by psychological research that humans are intrinsically motivated to develop interpersonal attachment and feelings of belonging to a group, and that we tend to define part of our Self in terms of group membership – which is why it may matter for our self-images whether we are protestant or catholic, Russian or Indian, or fan of one football club or another (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Importantly, this attachment to groups is seen as a crucial step towards achieving a stable sense of Self. Giddens, for example, argues that individuals look to society to provide them with a cognitive ordering of the world (Giddens, 1991, p. 38); William Bloom shows that the nation today provides the primary crystallization point for humans' inherent tendency to identify with others (Bloom, 1990); Jef Huysmans argues that individuals look to the state to help them deal with their existential insecurity (Huysmans, 1998); and Catarina Kinnvall agrees that the state

is of special relevance for providing ontological security for its citizens (Kinvall, 2004). Individuals thus can be expected to look to the state to provide them with a sense of stability, continuity and belonging, and for this reason Huysmanns argues that “[u]ltimately the legitimacy of the state rests on its capacity to provide order – not a particular content of order but the function of ordering, of making life intelligible” (Huysmans, 1998, p. 242).

Without external recognition, this kind of order is difficult to achieve and sustain, and a Self that is constantly being questioned by significant Others may result in disorder and ontological insecurity. In addition, human beings are not only inherently motivated to achieve a stable sense of Self, but also to evaluate themselves positively, and as such they will also be motivated to positively evaluate the group they identify with (Turner, et al., 1987). The state thus not only has incentives to construct a stable identity that helps its citizens cope with their anxiety, but also a positive one that makes them feel good about themselves. It is for these reasons that external recognition for the state is valuable to its citizens, and while signs of disrespect may quickly result in negative emotions, words of praise may do the opposite (Wolf, 2014).

It would be wrong to exclude politicians or civil servants from these psychological dynamics. After all, unless they are quite cynical about what they are doing with their lives, the collective identity of the state can be expected to play an important role for the self-images of political actors as well, and they thus may be very sensitive regarding threats to the well-being of “their” state’s Self. At the same time, however, even if they do not identify with the state they represent, leaders still will often seek to promote and satisfy the citizens’ attachment to the nation-state, since this not only strengthens the state itself, but also the legitimacy of those who rule. Likewise, even if they personally do not care about international recognition, they still are likely to seek to establish a specific and recognized identity of “their” state within international relations, if only to reap the benefits that come with it. What sets political actors apart from the rest of society thus is less their cold rationality, but that they are likely to be caught between an affective approach to identity that makes them want to believe in the Self they

help to shape, and an instrumental one that focuses on the legitimizing and enabling function of identity. Which dimension in practice is more important is an empirical question, however, and the relationship between interest and affect is likely to be a complex, ambiguous, and changing one.

## FRIENDSHIP AS PROCESS

In research on personal friendship, few things have been so consistently confirmed as the tendency for “homophily:” Numerous empirical studies show that on a statistical basis people are more likely (often much more likely) to form close relations with similar others than could be expected from their relative numbers (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson, et al., 2001). The most common explanation for homophily in personal friendship is that interacting with similar others validates our views about us and the world: Because they are so important for our own self-image, we tend to prefer friends who, by sharing similar social and personal backgrounds and our own values and norms, affirm our position, cement our status, support our belief-system, and generally give substance to our identities. Friends we have something in common with therefore on average are better at satisfying our Self-related needs. As always, however, this is difficult to disentangle from the more instrumental aspects of friendship, and a complementary explanation for homophily is that we expect interaction with people who exhibit similar interests, characteristics or behaviors to be more enjoyable, interesting, and generally worthwhile (Fehr, 1996; Allan, 1998).

For comparable reasons, we should expect international friendship to be more common between states that share some characteristics. This may refer to institutional similarities, ideological similarities, similarities in their respective biographical narratives, and so on. The reason for this is that similar Others are more easily integrated in representations of state identity, they are better in providing Self-referent rewards, and it is easier to grant thick recognition to them without calling into question the own identity. As Alexander Wendt has put it: “Categorizing others as being similar to oneself is not the same thing as identifying with them, but it fosters the latter [...]” (Wendt, 1999, p. 354). At the same time, similar states can also be expected to have similar interests or to have knowledge

and experiences that are of immediate relevance for another, whereas relations with fundamentally different states are more likely to result in tensions. Friendship with a similar Other thus is easier to establish and maintain on a very practical level as well.

While states may have an interest in having as many friends as possible, the problems associated with difference also explain why international friendship necessarily is a special relationship (and why an order based on thick recognition is so demanding): Due to the complexity and diversity of international society, being friends with everybody would do more harm than good for constructing a coherent and stable state identity, and expecting everybody to value what is unique and exceptional about this identity is not realistic – not to speak of the practical requirements associated with establishing and maintaining a friendship.

It is important to note that international friendship is an open-ended process rather than a stable property, and a continuous rather than a dichotomous category. Friendship accordingly is not an all-or-nothing proposition, and understanding friendship as degrees of “friendness” means that some features of friendship may be discernable even in relationships that are far from the ideal type of friendship developed in this chapter, or paradigmatic real types such as the British-American or German-French relationships. We should therefore not be too demanding with regard to what kind of relationship we analyze through the lens of friendship: While very close friendships indeed are rare, less complete ones are easier to achieve and to maintain, and therefore more common. Indeed, if we expect every international friend to be the state-level equivalent of a “soul mate,” we would miss many less-than-perfect friendships, which are nevertheless relevant.

The process of establishing friendship normally is a long and difficult one, and demands continued commitment and an ongoing stream of events and experiences that may not be very important in isolation, but together form a thick bond between the two sides. Sometimes, however, a “defining moment” can establish a friendship rather quickly. Lucile Eznack describes them as “an event that had a particularly significant impact on a given relationship either by founding

it or by determining the development of its special quality” (Eznack, 2011, pp. 242-3). This may be commonly fought wars, support in times of international isolation, or something comparable. Similarly, what Wendt has called a “common fate,” which exists if there is an external factor that has the potential to affect the well-being of both states, may be relevant (Wendt, 1999, pp. 349-53). This can be a common enemy, a natural disaster that can only be dealt with cooperatively, or something comparable.

Defining moments, a shared fate or fundamental similarity only affect the likelihood of friendship, and constructing a friendship generally includes agency: Using the right words and symbols in diplomatic exchanges, being responsive towards the needs and interest of the other, or showing an interest in elevating the relation to a special status may lead to the formation of friendship even in the absence of auspicious conditions. At the same time, many friendships that may be promising in theory are never realized. This is why what Berenskoetter has termed a “common project” can be expected to play a central role in friendship processes, examples being the British-American commitment to building “the West” or the Franco-German project of European integration (Berenskoetter, 2007, p. 670). Such a common project provides a vision of the future that gives meaning to the effort of building and sustaining the friendship, turns pragmatic cooperation into more than the sum of its parts by linking it to both sides’ narratives of the Self, and on a more practical level provides opportunities for mutual engagement and learning.

## FRIENDSHIP AND POWER

The normative dimension of friendship generally reduces the role of power in international politics. This is highlighted by Berenskoetter (2014a), who sees processes of mutual learning and the friends’ willingness to help each other in times of need as examples for the “productive” effect of friendship. And indeed, since friendships allow the involved states to create stable and recognized Selves and Others that cooperate under conditions of mutual trust and goodwill, for most parts friendship is a win-win situation. At the same time, however, it would be

wrong to ignore the power friends gain over each other, and Berenskoetter rightly maintains that the flip side of interdependency is vulnerability.

A good illustration of the “power over” dimension of friendship is Bially Mattern’s (2005) discussion of the Suez Crisis, during which the USA and the UK threatened the well-being of each other’s identity in order to extract political concessions. Reinhard Wolf similarly argues that

[e]ven disrespectful or humiliating treatment on the part of outsiders tends to hurt less than abuse by group members because it often can be ‘explained away’ with outsiders’ ‘bad character’ or their lack of better knowledge. (Wolf, 2014, p. 42)

Therefore, since identification with the friend lowers the walls that normally set the Self and the Other apart, friends are in a unique position to hurt the integrity and meaning of each other’s Self. This also explains why friendship can quickly turn into enmity; as Ted Hopf has written with regard to the quick deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1950s: “Similarity can promote discord, as disputes over authenticity are possible from actors who grant each other legitimate identities” (Hopf, 2009, p. 307).

These are extreme examples for the power friends gain over each other, but in practice “softer” forms of power, such as the ability to define shared visions or the meaning of friendship norms, are likely to play a more important role. Likewise, those who control the purse can be expected to have a stronger say regarding the realization of common projects, and strong organizational capacities are likely to help in setting the agenda for cooperation. There are accordingly many ways in which inequality can creep into a friendship, not least because its un-structured and non-contractual character gives powerful states a lot of leeway.

Just as research on personal friendship indicates that friendships between individuals of different social status or financial capabilities are difficult to establish and maintain (Zorn, 1995), therefore, a constant tension between the ideal of equality on the one hand and the reality of inequality on the other is likely to have a negative impact on international friendship, and ultimately the bonds of friendship will be in danger of turning into chains that tie weaker states to stronger ones in a fundamentally unequal relationship. At which point this



inequality makes it necessary to stop speaking of friendship is difficult to tell, however, and if both sides accept hierarchy as a legitimate element of the order they have established, we should be careful not to dismiss this friendship too quickly.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have proposed a model of international friendship that builds on Wright's model of Self-referent motivation for personal friendship, Wendt's theories about the social construction of international relations, Berenskoetter's conceptualization of international friendship as an intimate relationship between states, as well as the more general constructivist literature in IR. It denotes a dependable relationship between states which recognize each other according to their own self-images, and which due to mutual identification, frequent exchanges and close cooperation have developed an intimate relationship between significant Others that structures how they interact with one another.

Because it is an ongoing and multi-dimensional process, we should not think about friendship in absolute and dichotomous friend-enemy terms, but rather in terms of varying degrees of "friendness." Certain context factors, including similarity, shared fates and defining moments, make the establishment of international friendship more likely, but the social construction of friendship necessarily involves agency, which is why a common project appears to be an essential component of especially young friendships. And finally, although the identity-related dynamics of international friendship do not mean that power suddenly becomes irrelevant in friendships, it nevertheless is less central, and plays out in specific ways.

The model proposed in this chapter provides a new way of thinking about international relations. The ambiguity that is an inherent element of friendship as an institutionalized non-institution, the socially and culturally embedded nature of friendships, and the role of agency in their formation and evolution mean that discussing them on a purely theoretical level cannot substitute for a contextual analysis, however. Before this is possible, however, some methodological considerations are necessary.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Alone among unsympathetic companions, I hold certain views and standards timidly, half ashamed to avow them and half doubtful if they can after all be right. Put me back among my Friends and in half an hour - in ten minutes - these same views and standards become once more indisputable. The opinion of this little circle, while I am in it, outweighs that of a thousand outsiders: as Friendship strengthens, it will do this even when my Friends are far away. For we all wish to be judged by our peers, by the men "after our own heart." Only they really know our mind and only they judge it by standards we fully acknowledge. Theirs is the praise we really covet and the blame we really dread.

C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960)

### PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

The ontology of the Self detailed in the previous chapter is a constructivist one: State identities have no essence to objectively assess their correctness against, and Self-referent rewards are not tangible in the same way money or tanks are. However, I do not subscribe to the poststructural view that social scientists have no way of acquiring observable data that allow them to answer questions about reality.<sup>4</sup> There are "brute facts" out there, although they acquire meaning only for and through human beings (Searle, 1995). By and large, then, this study is informed by critical realism, sometimes also called scientific realism, a philosophy of science that has nothing to do with critical or realist theories of international relations, but instead on an ontological level posits that there is something we can

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<sup>4</sup> This opens the study to critique from those who scathe "mainstream constructivism" for neglecting important insights of the positivism – post-positivism debate. I do not want to enter this debate here, mainly because it is rather futile: The philosophical components of a specific scientific methodology can ultimately not be justified, because every test would already be based on certain ontological assumptions – choosing one approach therefore is "nothing else so much as an existential leap of faith" (Jackson, 2011, p. 197).

call reality, yet that on an epistemological level we must avoid giving in to “naïve” realism (Jackson, 2011).

The critical realist approach therefore rejects Hume’s empiricist notion that we must refrain from drawing causal inferences that are not grounded in sensory impressions, an assumption that has strongly influenced positivist thinking and resulted in a neglect of everything that cannot be measured. Instead of following the positivist focus on epistemology, critical realists argue that there are aspects of reality that are not directly observable, but relevant for our understanding of reality nonetheless, and we therefore need to take them into account (Kurki, 2008). To draw a comparison with the natural sciences: The existence of dark matter has not been proven by physicists, but their effects are observable, and numerous models in theoretical physics would not make sense without them. Similarly, if theoretical assumptions in the social sciences play an important explanatory function, we have good reasons to assume that what is being accounted for exists. This would, for example, provide a critical realist justification for treating the state as a person – it makes sense in numerous theories and models throughout IR. It would also justify assuming the existence of Self-referent rewards, as long as they fulfil a certain function in empirical analyses. However, as plausible and useful certain theories and models may be at one point, they are likely to be provisional, since they are only attempts to understand reality, not reality itself. Instead of being satisfied with our established models, we should therefore continue to ask questions about why they make sense, and search for alternative explanations (Jackson, 2011).

While it is skeptical about empiricist positivism, critical realism also rejects the poststructural argument that reality is completely constituted by our concepts and representations. The resulting self-referential relativism is seen as an unnecessary and misleading hurdle to scientific inquiry. In contrast to poststructural approaches, therefore, causation is important for a critical realist framework, a fact that is sometimes obscured when critical realist scholars pit their “constitutive” accounts against the “causal” accounts of positivists (Kurki, 2008; Jackson, 2011). In contrast to positivists, however, rather than trying to find

individual “fundamental factors,” critical realist researchers should aim at understanding “the historical causal process in a holistic way, that is, concentrate on accounting for the complex interactions of various causes in specific historical contexts,” thus providing “a narrative explaining how these factors, material, agential, ideational or structural, came together and conditioned the process referred to” (Kurki, 2008, pp. 285-6).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INDICATORS FOR FRIENDSHIP

Do Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations constitute dependable relationship between states which recognize each other according to their own self-images, and which due to mutual identification, frequent exchanges and close cooperation have developed an intimate relationship between significant Others that structures how they interact with one another? And if so, of what quality are these friendships? These are the central questions guiding the empirical part of this dissertation, and to answer them we need empirical observations which allow us to understand how relevant causal factors and their development over time have resulted in current Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations. What we need first, however, are indicators that allow us to assess the friendship-like qualities of a relationship, especially given the fact that the model of Self-referent motivation defines international friendship primarily in terms of underlying dynamics that are not directly observable.

*Mutual recognition* is the basis for international friendship, and the first thing we should look for therefore are discursive or symbolic acts which show that the respective Other is recognized according to his own self-images. Importantly, since what is needed for friendship is thick rather than thin recognition, these acts should go beyond those aspects that constitute the Other as a legitimate member of the society of states.

*Mutual identification* is what turns states that recognize each other according to their own self-images into significant Others. This once more can primarily be observed on the representational level, and includes narratives of intertwined national biographies, visions of a shared future, and generally processes that set the Self and the Other in a positive and significant relation to each other.

*Frequent exchanges* and *close cooperation* are necessary to turn a relationship that includes mutual recognition and identification to be turned into a dependable and intimate relationship between significant Others. If they are not accompanied by behavior, friendships are likely to remain mere rhetoric, and will not be able to structure how states interact with one another.

Exchanges and cooperation are directly observable. Because they are linked to mutual recognition and identification, however, it is not only their quantity that matters. Therefore, although the model presented in the previous chapter has consciously refrained from specifying concrete friendship norms, in order to account for the negotiated and context-dependent character of international friendship, it is possible to come up with some additional characteristics that can be used as indicators for friend-like behavior. We should keep in mind, however, that these indicators, in contrast to mutual recognition and identification as well as frequent exchanges and close cooperation, are symptoms of friendship rather than friendship itself, and that we always need to take into account what the involved actors themselves accept as legitimate signs of friendship.

*Voluntariness* means that states are expected to enter into a friendship without external pressure. In addition, it means that friendships should be voluntary in the sense that the friends continue to be much freer to choose what to do or not do with another than partners in more contractual relationships, such as an alliance.

*Openness* in the context of international friendship involves an unusual degree of self-disclosure, such as the willingness to share sensitive information or address problematic issues openly. The friend, in turn, is expected to listen and to be understanding. In general, both sides should be willing to let the other get involved in their own affairs.

*Equality* in international friendship means equality in terms of Self and Other rather than sovereign equality, or equality in terms of power. As such, it is a qualified equality that is based on thick instead of thin recognition, and due to different capabilities and sensitivities it may go hand in hand with quite differentiated rights and responsibilities.

*Respect* is indispensable for managing the intimate relations between friends. It is especially important when it comes to disagreements, since without signaling the other side that its views and interests are taken seriously, such disagreements can easily spill over into the identity-related dimensions of the relationship.

*Support* means that friends are expected to help each other to the best of their abilities, but not that they have to forgo their own interests. In addition, support in friendship should not follow the logic of *quid pro quo*, but rather the logic of gift exchange (Mauss, 1966 [1925]), where some form of reciprocity is expected and well-understood, but no explicit agreement on material or immaterial, immediate or future rewards is made.

*Trust* means that the friends should be both trustworthy and trusting. It includes the willingness to rely on each other at the risk of a bad outcome should the other cheat or renege, which in turn is predicated on a belief in the other's ultimately benevolent intentions.

*Loyalty* adds a temporal dimension, and means that friends should be unwavering in their commitment to the friendship and consistent in their friend-like behavior. Without it, the development of dependable relationship is impossible.

These seven standards for friend-like behavior are closely related to questions of identity, be it because they show that the respective Other is recognized as a unique entity with specific needs and capabilities, because they are informed by a specific logic of reciprocity that is linked to the existence of Self-referent rewards, or because they are a sign of an intimate relationship that lowers the barriers between the Self and the Other. They are also interrelated, and it is often difficult to think one without the other.

One last point that needs to be emphasized here is that my research questions – and the research design developed to answer them – focus on the inter-state level of international friendship, and not its domestic dimension. Assessing the strength of friendship discourses within the national context, or generating data concerning the personal beliefs of the wider public, would have necessitated a study that is very different from the one designed here, and there is no existing data to rely on. As such, while domestic politics will play quite an important role in the following

analysis, I will ultimately not be able to assess whether the state's interest in finding international friends indeed is linked to its citizens – or its representatives – need for Self-referent rewards.

## CASE SELECTION

Critical realism is often misunderstood to include the need for case selection according to the positivist logic of isolating variables and testing hypotheses by looking for systematic cross-case covariation, only with a stronger focus on processes. Yet while there is nothing in critical realism that negates the general logic behind this method of comparison, and under controllable laboratory conditions we may actually use it to isolate causal mechanisms, the inclusion of non-observable elements makes comparison a somewhat futile endeavor: Because the actual world is an “open system” that can only to a very limited degree be measured, or contained through quasi-experimental comparison, we cannot know whether the empirical fact that a certain causal factor did not manifest itself in a specific case means that it does not exist, whether other (unobservable) factors or conditions substituted or worked against it, or whether it maybe only played out in a way we were not able to detect (Jackson, 2011, pp. 109-10).

Hence, since it is very likely that there is a lot we cannot directly observe, empirical data is only useful in combination with concepts or models that make sense of it – statistical correlation does not mean causation, and we have to look elsewhere for determining whether there actually is a causal relation between different observations. All that comparison can do is to

elucidate the variety of ways that causal factors and the complexes into which they are arranged play out in practice – and this in turn can help to clarify the extent of their real-world potential. Critical realists compare not to isolate, but to individuate, and to gain a better sense of just what the limits of the possible actually are. (Jackson, 2011, p. 111)

What would be major weaknesses in a positivist research design – like a small number of cases or lack of variation in the dependent variable – therefore does not pose a problem here. Nevertheless, although I will not be able to isolate variables, determine fundamental factors or make sweeping generalizations, in an

implicit comparison with related work on other cases of international friendship this study will hopefully help in developing a “cumulative typological theory” or a “repertoire of causal mechanisms” of international friendship (George & Bennet, 2005, p. 241).

What is important in this regard is that this study goes beyond the few well-established cases that dominate the literature so far, the Franco-German and the Anglo-American relationships arguably being the most well-studied examples (e.g. Vion, 2007; Wallace & Philips, 2009; Harris, 2013). Other studies using a friendship perspective deal with the relation between Germany and Poland (Feldman, 2014), or the one between Great Britain and Norway (Haugevik, 2014). To my knowledge, the only empirical studies not focusing on developed countries are the ones by Andrea Oelsner on the relationship between Brazil and Argentina, as well as Chile and Argentina (Oelsner & Vion, 2011; Oelsner, 2014). Her work is also remarkable in that it touches upon the issue of friendship between non-democratic states – although she finds that in both dyads the relationship developed into a meaningful friendship only after all countries involved had transitioned to democracy. By looking at relations between geographically and culturally distant, non-Western and developing countries, amongst which only one is a liberal democracy, present study therefore breaks new ground for our understanding of international friendship processes in a “post-Western world” (Stuenkel, 2016), and in addition challenges the implicit assumption that autocracies by their very nature are unable to develop meaningful friendships.

China as the country that is part of both cases occupies a central position in the analysis, and the PRC provides a highly relevant research object on both empirical and theoretical grounds. Given its unprecedented rise in global influence and status, the special role it occupies within the Western-dominated international system, and its very active attempts to create a friendly international environment for its further economic development, whether Beijing can establish meaningful friendships with other countries has immense implications. At the same time, because of its complex and contradictory state identity, the regime’s increased need to find alternative sources of legitimacy because of a lack of democratic



procedures, as well as the increased stress put on its collective identity because of its rapid development, China arguably more than others is inherently motivated to search for the Self-referent rewards international friends have to offer.

Sino-African relations not only are frequently framed in friendship terms, but Africa is also often perceived as a sort of “battleground” between the established Western powers and a rising China. This is, of course, a problematic picture, but Africa indeed constitutes an important region for China’s attempts to find friends. At the same time, it would be a simplification contradicting the research design developed here to treat the more than 50 sovereign African states, with their unique histories, identities and institutions, as one big entity, and while multilateral Sino-African relations provide one context for this study, the focus generally is on bilateral relations.

Amongst African states, Ethiopia and South Africa were primarily chosen because their relationships with China are often described as particularly close, or even special, by both national and international observers. In addition, South Africa and Ethiopia are different enough to allow for variance between cases, and thus provide the potential for different causal complexes: South Africa is one of Africa’s socio-economically most developed countries, with a liberal-democratic system and a sophisticated and globally integrated market economy, whereas Ethiopia belongs to the continent’s poorest countries, with an autocratic political system and an underdeveloped economy with strong state intervention. As such, it should be easier to find communalities that may explain similar outcomes.

## GENERATING EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS

This study is not driven by methodology, and I have been quite eclectic in my approaches to data gathering and data analysis. In general, it adopts an elite-centered perspective on international friendship, with special emphasis on political elites as defined by their membership in ruling parties and state institutions. This is in line with my theoretical model, which ascribes a special relevance to the official representatives of the state, but also the empirical reality of China’s, Ethiopia’s and South Africa’s foreign policy formulation, which is far removed from society.

Given the importance of words for the construction of meaning, discourse analysis will play a central role in this study. Discourses, understood as “the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems” (Lemke, 1995, p. 7), are central for reproducing the categories defining who belongs to a group, what the group wants, how it relates to other groups, and how its members see the world. Discourse thus is more than an epistemological tool for getting access to what is inside people’s heads, but the very place where intersubjectively shared knowledge is created and spread, and therefore something that needs to be analyzed in its own right. Furthermore, discourse is the main arena in which the ongoing process of contestation that is an important aspect of all collective identities is being played out: actors trying to shape the content of an identity mostly do so through linguistic means.

Since state identities are not created out of thin air, but make use of a pool of representational resources amassed over time, there is a strong temporal dimension to my analysis. This means that the study adopts a long-term perspective, sometimes going as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although the focus will mainly be on developments that happened after 1990, when post-civil war Ethiopia and post-apartheid South Africa established relations with a rising China within the context of a rapidly changing international environment. The historical accounts presented necessarily will be selective, centered on historical narratives and ideational developments, which in all three countries analyzed are central for the ruling elites’ attempts to define the identity of the state. By ignoring or sidelining developments that are not of relevance for the argument presented here, I am thus consciously guilty of “reading history backwards” – since this study is not so much about the historical truth as it is about the contemporary use of history, however, this is excusable (Landa & Onega, 1996).

This study mostly relies on publicly available information as primary sources, especially policy documents, strategy papers, transcripts of speeches, press releases, party newspapers, and book chapters. The main criterion for text selection was their relevance for official identity construction, i.e. whether they contain representations of the state’s Self, the specific Other, and Self-Other

relations, and whether they are associated with powerful elite actors such as state and party leaders or foreign ministries. And due to the homogenizing power of the ruling parties and their ideological work, a central goal of text selection was achieved relatively quickly: Adding new texts to the analyzed corpus would not have changed the overall results.

A second research strategy I had originally included in my research design unfortunately failed to generate relevant empirical results. While decision-makers in the countries studied are aware of the need to address the widespread critique of Sino-African relations, for reasons that will become clear in the course of this dissertation they are also quite reserved when it comes to trusting outside investigators, especially those hailing from the West – and the fact that my research was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research did not help in convincing anybody that I did not have a hidden, supposedly sinister agenda. My attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the involved actors' personal views on the two relationships accordingly yielded few results; the officials I spoke with generally adhered to official narratives, and there was no way for me to tell whether this was due to true conviction or simply to uphold a façade. In addition, most of my interview partners vehemently refused to be recorded, which made it impossible to apply intersubjectively verifiable methods for interpretation. This is why the 31 interviews I conducted in China in September 2013, in Ethiopia in April 2013 and May and June 2014, and in South Africa in March 2013 and February and March 2014, will not be used here in a systematic way, and only the interviews that are cited in the text will be listed in the annex.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a discussion of the philosophical foundations the study is based on, and highlighted why they necessitate a research design that differs from the ones used in positivist studies. I then formulated two interrelated research questions that will guide the empirical part of the study, and proposed a set of indicators that will allow me to answer them; and while these indicators admittedly are somewhat fuzzy, this certainly befits a fuzzy concept such as friendship, which by its very nature tends to include a high degree of ambiguity.

The discussion then turned to the issue of case selection, and while it has been argued that a qualitative study provides the best way to deal with the underlying processes and dynamics of international friendship, the inclusion of two cases at the same time provides the analysis with some variance that will allow me to gain perspective on the individual cases. Lastly, I have expounded my strategy to generate empirical observations – and the limitations I had to accept.

After this translation of my theoretical model into a research design that will allow me to analyze two real-world cases, the discussion can now turn to the empirical part of this dissertation. Since international friendship rests on identity-related dynamics, however, we cannot start by looking at the two bilateral relationships directly; instead, we first need to establish “who” China, Ethiopia and South Africa are.

## CHAPTER 3: CHINA'S SELF AND ITS RELATION TO OTHERS

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A man's friendships are one of the best measures of his worth.

Charles Darwin, *Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, Browning* (1893)

### APPROACHING CHINA'S IDENTITY

This chapter is about identifying China in international relations. It does so primarily by exploring China's biographical narrative in relation to Others, and by tracing how the CCP has tried to shape the PRC's Self-Other relations through ideological means. This is necessary to understand the special quality of China's relations with Ethiopia and South Africa, but it also means that the relevance of some of the information provided on the following pages will only become evident later in this study.

The discussion starts with an analysis of how the PRC's identity is inextricably linked to the ontological insecurity that resulted from imperial China's contact with the European powers, and how the CCP defined socialist China in dissociation not only from its own feudalist Self, but also the imperialist and capitalist West. This is relevant here because these historical experiences and how they have been inscribed into China's biographical narrative link up with comparable elements in the biographical narratives of Ethiopia and South Africa, and because shared ideological roots today are important for the close relations the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC have established. The chapter then proceeds by discussing the meaning of "friendship" in Chinese ideology, and by showing how the Sino-Soviet split turned the Third World into China's primary peer group – which explains why the developing countries became so important for the PRC's self-image.

Subsequently, it will be shown how the post-Mao changes in China's outlook on development and international relations affected the PRC's approach to foreign policy and its place within international society, and how the CCP has tried to manage China's rise within the international system. This is important to

understand the norms that today are said to structure the country's relations with Ethiopia and South Africa, and to understand the role Africa continues to play in the PRC's management of Self-Other relations. The discussion will then turn to the current leadership under Xi Jinping, which gradually has distanced itself from its predecessors' more cautious approach to foreign policy and international partnerships, and instead has sought to establish a "new type of major power diplomacy" – of which China's relations with Ethiopia and South Africa are a surprisingly important part. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Chinese exceptionalism and the related search for external recognition, as well as a summary of China's official state identity.

Of the three states relevant for this study, it is China's identity that has received most scholarly attention, and there is a long tradition of explaining China and its international relations through (often essentialist) notions of "who" China is. Studies looking at culture, tradition and history to explain (or establish) China's otherness accordingly abound. Fortunately, if we confine the literature to those texts approaching the issue of Chinese state identity from the non-essentialist, constructivist IR perspective informing this study the list becomes more manageable, although selection is still necessary.

The seminal work that established constructivist identity research as an important approach in the field of China studies was Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim's edited volume *China's Quest for National Identity* (Dittmer & Kim, 1993). The contributions by political scientists, international relations scholars, historians, anthropologists and area specialists dealt with a wide range of topics, including China's imperial, cultural, regional, and international identities. Few areas of the PRC's foreign policy and its international relations have since not been analyzed through the lens of identity, from China's participation in anti-piracy measures (Black & Hwang, 2012) to participation in the human rights regime (Chen, 2009), from relations with Japan (Gustafsson, 2015) to arms trades with Russia (Donaldson & Donaldson, 2003). Foreign policy analysts likewise have looked to China's role conceptions to provide a better understanding of the country's international behavior (Shih, 1988; Beylerian & Canivet, 1997; Harnisch, et al.,

2016). Identity has also been used in conjunction with nationalism as one of the factors constraining or empowering policy makers in China (Zheng, 1999; Gries, et al., 2011). And in one way or another, identity has been regarded as important for China's international rise, both regionally and globally (Breslin, 2009; Callahan, 2005).

Chinese experts have been more hesitant to emphasize the constructed and sometimes even instrumental nature of state identity. Qin Yaqing, one of China's leading constructivist IR scholars and currently President of the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, has nevertheless proposed that the central question Chinese researchers should ask actually is "who is China?", because at its heart the country is still facing an "identity dilemma" that needs to be solved (Qin, 2006, p. 13). Many of his colleagues agree, which is why Zhu Liqun argues that "the Chinese IR community has given much thought to China's identity *vis-à-vis* international society," and proposes identity as one of the fundamental concepts structuring IR debates in China (Zhu, 2010, p. 19).

The path China has taken since the First Anglo-Chinese War (1839-42), commonly known as First Opium War, can indeed be stylized as one long search for a redefined Chinese Self, rooted in ontological insecurity that began to mount when continued military defeat on the hands of the imperialist powers questioned the collective identity the Chinese elites had long taken for granted, and which finally pushed a conservative and sclerotic China into the modern era. To be sure, historians since the 1980s have criticized this impact-response narrative as overly Western-centered, and the stark contrast it draws between "traditional" and "modern" China as too simplistic (Cohen, 1984). At the same time, however, it is a narrative that has had a lasting influence on China's state identity, which is why the following account actually has to start in imperial times.

#### QING CHINA'S CONTACT WITH THE "MODERN" OTHER

In contrast to the Westphalian vision of an international system made up of bounded units that interact with each other as sovereign equals, the vision of world order espoused by the Confucian scholar-officials of late-imperial China was on the one hand strictly hierarchical, and on the other hand did not strictly

differentiate between an inner and an outer realm. The emperors of the Qing dynasty claimed to rule the whole world, but this rule was only directly exerted over the people of the Chinese empire, which due to their cultural and moral superiority were put at the apex of the global system. Three graded circles of hierarchy were drawn around China, the so-called “Middle Kingdom.” The first was the zone of Chinese cultural influence, consisting of nearby and culturally similar states such as Korea and Vietnam. The second zone consisted of the tribes and states of nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples of Inner Asia, which at least were on the fringes of Chinese civilization. The third zone, finally, consisted of everything that was further away, including the rest of Asia, Europe and Africa, and was inhabited by barbarians who had not received the blessings of Chinese civilization. All states and tribes outside the Middle Kingdom were expected to send regular tribute to symbolically accept the authority of the emperor (Fairbank, 1968).

This is the Sinocentric world order and the tributary system as popularized by American scholars in the 1950s and 1960s. In reality, however, China’s relations with other states and people regularly deviated from this vision – just as European states’ international relations regularly contradicted notions of sovereign equality. Especially during the early years of the Qing dynasty, which was founded by invading Manchu and ruled China from 1644 until the end of the empire in 1911, there was a high degree of flexibility and pragmatism. In contrast to the official Chinese narrative, the Qing frequently fought wars of aggression and forged a multi-ethnic empire that included multiple techniques of governance drawn from different political traditions (Crossley, 1999). In 1689, the Qing even signed the Treaty of Nerchinsk with the Russian empire, which established a common border and terms of trade, and gave both sides equal status as two great empires of the Eurasian continent (Mancall, 2005). Odd Arne Westad thus flatly states that “there was no tributary system, unlike what some historians have claimed” (Westad, 2012, p. 10).

It is nevertheless telling that the Treaty of Nerchinsk was signed far away from Beijing, and that in public memorials and edicts the Qing upheld the illusion of Russian deference (Esherick, 2010). Indeed, to disguise pragmatism behind official



rhetoric had been quite common throughout much of China's imperial history (Rawski, 2010). Therefore, while notions of a Sinocentric world order and the tributary system are as much rooted in legitimizing narratives as in historical facts, and we should treat them as representations of reality rather than reality itself, it is exactly on this representational level that China did not have Others to its Self that were regarded as equals. Friendship with China thus was not based on equality, but required at least formal acceptance of Chinese superiority.

The discrepancy between Chinese and European visions of international order became evident during the famous Macartney Mission of 1793, during which the Confucian bureaucrats in Beijing prohibited any discussion of Great Britain as a sovereign equal. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, it became increasingly difficult to keep up the pretense of Chinese superiority. After two lost wars the Qing were forced to sign the treaties of Nanjing (1842) and Tianjin (1858), which explicitly recognized the equality of the Chinese and British empires. Similar treaties had to be signed with other European countries, the United States, and later also the Japanese empire. While China thus was forced into the Westphalian system of formally equal states, the treaties at the same time granted foreign powers far-reaching rights limiting Chinese domestic and international sovereignty. They were thus later dubbed "unequal treaties," and formal equality went hand in hand with de facto inequality (Esherick, 2010).

The first reaction of China's traditional elite was to selectively use foreign technology without compromising the integrity of China's cultural and political Self, nicely captured in the phrase "Chinese learning for essence, Western learning for application" (Wright, 1957). Although this so-called Self-Strengthening Movement achieved some limited military and economic successes, China's weakness and apparent backwardness continued to undermine the legitimacy of the imperial regime. The hardest blow to Chinese self-esteem arguably came with its defeat on the hands of the Japanese in the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. The Chinese elites had traditionally regarded Japan as a tributary state, and on a psychological level being beaten by another Asian power that had set out on a path of modernization along Western lines only in 1868 was devastating. At the

same time, however, the Meiji-reforms in Japan promised to show a way towards a strong and modern Self, and Chinese students flocked to the country to emulate the successes of this increasingly significant Asian Other. As such, Japan was both a model and a threat to China (Suzuki, 2009; Hunt, 1993).

In the last years of the Qing dynasty, reform-minded intellectuals finally started to go beyond the narrow limits of the reforms promoted by imperial officials. Still, for Kang Youwei, the most prominent of these reformers, a radical break with tradition was not conceivable, and he tried to establish a coherent narrative linking past and present: His famous article *Confucius as a Reformer* sought to justify changes within the political system, including a constitutional monarchy modeled after Western examples, by falling back on traditional teachings (Meissner, 2006). Although in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Qing court finally agreed to some fundamental reforms that were intended to turn the country into a constitutional monarchy, it was too little too late: In 1911 a small uprising was enough to bring down the imperial order that for so long had been central to Chinese self-understanding.

#### THE FAILED LIBERAL EXPERIMENT AND THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

The Republic of China (ROC) that was established in 1912 was modeled after the republics of Europe and America, with an elected parliament and a system of checks and balances. Despite initial hopes, however, the ROC proved unable to turn China into a strong and modern country. Not only did the representative system quickly degenerate into a personalist autocracy, but regional warlords became the real centers of power, and an internally fragmented China continued to be subject to international pressure. In his theory of imperialism, published in 1917, Lenin accordingly referred to China as a “semi-colonial” country, a term that later was taken up by the Chinese communists (Lenin, 1963 [1917]).

When the Treaty of Versailles that ended WWI handed the German possessions in China to Japan, despite US advocacy of the right to self-determination, popular dissatisfaction with the Republic found its expression in the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of 1919. In it, the growing conviction among many intellectuals that it was Chinese

culture – or national identity – that was responsible for the continued weakness of the state, and that a clear break with the past was necessary, culminated in demands for more radical solutions to China’s problems. The roots of the CCP can be found in this intellectual environment. Its founders regarded a social revolution and the destruction of China’s backward culture as the country’s only hope for greatness, and socialism with its scientific analysis of social change not only provided the analytical tools to explain China’s predicament and a practical guide to action, but also the promise of modern Chinese Self (Hunt, 1993; Zhao, 2000). As such, both China’s feudal past and its chaotic republican present became negative Others the CCP dissociated its idea of a radically new China from.

The late-developer USSR with its vision of socialist modernization, in contrast, was seen as a successful and easy-to-relate-to model, and the Soviets likewise were interested in exporting their revolution to China. In 1921, advisers from the Third Communist International (Comintern) were instrumental in the founding of the CCP, and in 1923, following the instructions of the Comintern, the party established a united front with the much bigger Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD). With this they followed an approach originally advanced by Lenin, who had argued that communists in colonial and semi-colonial countries should form tactical alliances with progressive bourgeois liberation movements such as the GMD, in order to combat imperialism and achieve national independence. After this transitional “national-revolutionary” phase, however, the communists were supposed to get rid of their nationalist allies and proceed towards a true socialist revolution (Shinn, 1963; Menon, 1986; Filatova, 2012).

CCP members now began to join the Nationalist Party in order to spread communism amongst its membership, and with the help of the Soviets the GMD was turned into a tightly organized Leninist party with its own army. Yet while this army under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) in 1928 indeed was able to militarily restore some measure of centralized authority in China, the plan of the communists to use the GMD for their own purpose failed: In 1927 Jiang decided to purge all communists from the party and its army, and the violence that followed nearly wiped out the fledgling CCP. It took 22 years that saw the

short-lived Soviet Republic of China, the Long March, the establishment of a new base for the communists in remote Yan'an, the invasion of the Japanese army, a Second United Front and the end of WWII before the CCP could finally win the civil war with its erstwhile ally (Spence, 2012).

During these years Mao Zedong emerged as the new leader of the CCP, and his rise went hand in hand with the demise of those who were close to the Soviet-controlled Comintern. In his theoretical writings from this era, Mao called for a combination of the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the specific national circumstances of China, and although the originality of his ideas has been greatly exaggerated, the "Sinification of Marxism" became a central element in the CCP's historical mission (Knight, 1990).

In his *On New Democracy*, written in 1940, Mao also adapted Lenin's theory of the national democratic revolution to China. He reiterated the idea of a two-stage revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries, but argued that the first revolution in China would not simply lead to a bourgeois democracy, but to a new type of democracy under the joint dictatorship of all revolutionary classes (Mao, 1965 [1940]). When the GMD forces finally had been driven to Taiwan, and Mao on 1 October 1949 proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China, the flag that was raised over Tiananmen Square symbolized the beginning of the new-democratic phase: Four smaller stars representing the proletarian workers, the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, grouped around the larger and guiding star of the Communist Party.

Although "new" China promised a fresh start, the lasting impact of China's forced entry into the international society of Western states and the domestic turmoil that followed can hardly be overstated. While Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism and Mao's additions now provided an official answer to the question "who" China should be, and an ideological justification for the CCP's claim to total power, on a more practical level the party's ability to end China's long fight against foreign intrusion and internal chaos was of at least equal importance for legitimizing its rule in the eyes of the people – and its own party members, who could perceive

their personal struggle as part of a national and even global march towards a better future.

As such, the party did everything to inscribe the years between the First Anglo-Chinese war and the founding of the PRC as a traumatic experience into the country's collective memory. In China, this period is generally referred to as "century of humiliation," a term not only common in official textbooks used in the PRC's patriotic education campaign, but also a popular theme in feature films, museums, novels, songs, poems, or on stamps. The narrative "knits together all the negative events – invasions, massacres, military occupations, unequal treaties, and economic extractions – of prerevolutionary history that can be blamed on outsiders" (Callahan, 2009, p. 14). This not only provides the backdrop for the historical mission of the CCP, but also serves as a constant reminder of the evils China can expect from its enemies. As Samuel Kim and Lowell Dittmer have put it, the

sense of being unjustly oppressed and exploited by the imperialist predators, bespeaking a deep and underlying sense of vulnerability and grievance, is so deeply encoded in Chinese historical consciousness that it can wane or wax in response to changing circumstances but never completely disappear as a determinant of Chinese national identity. (Kim & Dittmer, 1993, p. 281)

#### "FRIENDSHIP" IN THE PRC'S ORDERING OF THE WORLD

As part of the idealized Sinocentric world order discussed above, the language of friendship (and family) was habitually used by Chinese emperors to describe China's relations with its neighbors. However, over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the moralistic, feudal-personal understanding of friendly relations between the benevolent Chinese emperor and obedient kings and chiefs was increasingly challenged by Western ideas about law-governed relations between sovereign nation-states, and repeated appeals to international friendship or the family of nations did not thwart foreign aggression (Wang, 2013). When the communists took over the power of the state, their understanding of international friendship contrasted sharply with the traditional ideal of personal friendship between feudal rulers, and while Chinese cadres today often claim that Chinese friendship

diplomacy is rooted in Confucianism and traditional Chinese values, its Soviet origin is undeniable (Brady, 2003, p. 8).

In Soviet theory, the notion of friendship had become entangled with dialectics, the underlying antagonism between social classes, and socialist internationalism. The highly official *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* included a paragraph on friendship between peoples, defined as “a comprehensive brotherly cooperation and mutual help of peoples and nations who chose a socialist way of progress,” with the “voluntary union of peoples in the USSR [as] a perfect example” (cited in Roshchin, 2011, p. 85) This people-to-people connotation of international friendship was an important element of Soviet foreign policy, whose people-centered approach was contrasted with the statist diplomacy of the capitalist world, and presented as a moral challenge to the “‘cynical’ and ‘insincere’ friendships of traditional European diplomacy” (Roshchin, 2011, p. 8). In 1925, specifically to foster people-to-people friendships, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (in 1958 renamed Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) was founded, and in the following decades the organization established numerous national branches such as the American Society for Cultural Relations with Russia or the Society for Polish-Soviet Friendship, mostly with the help of local communist parties.

In practice, however, Soviet friendship diplomacy was clearly a tool of statecraft, rooted in the USSR’s interests and orchestrated by the party-state. The Soviet Union in a very traditional statist manner used them primarily to structure its relations with other states, and whereas in the beginning friendship treaties were only signed with fellow socialist states, in the early 1970s the USSR also started to sign treaties with non-aligned developing countries, as long as they opposed Western imperialism (Roshchin, 2011). Given this state-centric and seemingly purely strategic approach to international friendship, and of course the in reality often highly oppressive relations within the socialist camp, the normative and principled elements of international friendship stressed by Soviet ideologues were quickly lost in the realities of the Cold War. Nationalism, the interests of the Soviet

state and the dynamics of the international system all worked against international friendship, and the workers of the world ultimately did not unite.

The Chinese communists adopted the Marxist-Leninist understanding of and approach to international friendship promoted by the Soviet Union, including its normative, people-to-people claims and its instrumental, state-centric practice, and developed it further. Given Mao's preoccupation with class struggle, the friend-enemy distinction in fact became central to Chinese politics. Already in 1926, during the high times of the Soviet-promoted First United Front with the GMD, Mao began his *Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society* with the question "Who are our enemies? Who are our friends?", and proclaimed that the revolution could only succeed if the CCP united with its real friends in order to attack its real enemies (Mao, 1965 [1926], p. 13). In the context of China's revolutionary struggle, this turned "life into a simple binary choice of friend and enemy," and where one belongs "the only question worth asking" (Dutton, 2005, p. 3; Kim, 1977).

In subsequent years Mao made this kind of thinking the basis of his theoretical addition to the Marxist tradition. In his 1937 *On Contradiction*, generally regarded as his most important philosophical essay, Mao described the contradiction between opposites as the objective basis of reality, argued that all change is set in motion by such contradictions, and that everything can and should thus be analysed in these terms. This is also said to be true for society and politics, where contradictions between classes need to be solved through class struggle, contradictions between imperialists and subordinated people through anti-imperialist struggle, and so on. And importantly, even if

in any process there are a number of contradictions, one of them must be the principal contradiction playing the leading and decisive role. [...] Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can readily be solved. (Mao, 1965 [1937], p. 332)

Contradictions can not only be principal or secondary, but also antagonistic or non-antagonistic. While already addressed in 1937, this differentiation was further developed in Mao's *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*,

published in 1957.<sup>5</sup> In antagonistic relations such as the one between exploiting and exploited classes, the interests of actors are fundamentally opposed, and they can thus only be solved through a violent struggle in which one side defeats the other. In non-antagonistic relations, however, interests can be reconciled, and as such they can be solved by peaceful means. Whereas antagonistic contradictions exist between “enemies”, non-antagonistic contradictions can even exist between “friends” (Mao, 1977 [1957]).

The friend-enemy distinction in CCP ideology therefore is historically rooted in an understanding of social reality as conflict-ridden clash of objective interests differentiating “us” (meaning the CCP, the Chinese people and all friends who share one side of an antagonistic contradiction) and “them” (the enemies who find themselves on the other side of the contradiction), and it is the party’s duty to forge a united front with its friends in order to defeat its enemies. During the Mao era and afterwards, the search for the principal contradiction in the world – and how China should position itself along these lines – thus motivated much of Chinese IR analysis; in 1995, the renowned Chinese IR scholar Wang Jisi observed that for Chinese analysts “the fundamental issue is always an issue of ‘taking sides’ with a certain group, be it the socialist camp, the world proletariat and revolutionary people, or the Third World” (Wang, 1995, p. 492).

#### THE PRC AND ITS FRIENDS FROM THE SOCIALIST CAMP

During the early years of the PRC there was no doubt among the Chinese leadership as to what constituted the principal contradiction in international politics. Mirroring the basic division between social classes, the world was divided into two inherently hostile camps, and while cooperative relations between socialist states and members of the capitalist camp were desirable as long as they were beneficial, they were seen as purely instrumental and ultimately transitory. Relations between the socialist states, on the contrary, were regarded as being based on a common identity rather than transitory interests, and it was argued

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<sup>5</sup> The text has a complicated history from Mao’s original speech to the substantially altered published version, which reflects many of the domestic and international changes that took place in 1957 (Schoenhals, 1986).



that they constituted a new type of international relationship characterized by peace, long-term mutual interest, genuine cooperation, and fraternal solidarity (Levine, 1995).

The socialist states thus were seen as the natural friends of the PRC, and China was quickly integrated into the socialist camp: In 1949 the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association was founded, and in 1950 the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was signed. The Soviet Union thus became the PRC's most important international friend, and China's institutional structure to this day speaks testimony to the lasting relevance of the CCP's emulation of the Soviet model. At the same time, however, China's socialist identity as a new-democratic People's Republic was that of an "apprentice within the hierarchic international community of socialist powers," with the Soviet Union as the only true dictatorship of the proletariat in the role of a more advanced teacher (Kim & Dittmer, 1993, p. 285). It therefore was a friendship between unequals in terms of Self and Other.

While the notion of friendship was of special relevance in relations with other socialist countries, it played a role in China's relations with non-socialist countries as well, not least because many states continued to reject official relations with the new regime. The CCP therefore continued to use sub-state friendship diplomacy very actively, and saw no contradiction in having friendly relations with foreign peoples and individuals even if their governments remained hostile. This friendship diplomacy initially was channeled through rather informal organizations such as the Chinese' People's Committee for Defending World Peace or the China People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, but soon the CCP started to emulate the Soviet friendship organizations more thoroughly. In 1954 the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries was founded to strengthen the people-to-people dimension of the PRC's external relations, and in 1955 the Foreign Culture Department of the CCP was established. International friendship thus quickly became institutionalized, and in the following decades Friendship Hotels housed the country's few foreign visitors, Friendship Stores sold imported

goods, and what elsewhere is called sister or twin city today is called Friendship City in China (Brady, 2003).

China's new-democratic phase lasted much shorter than could have been expected – already in 1953, after all land had been nationalized and the economic base of the bourgeoisie been destroyed, the CCP argued that China had entered the phase of socialist construction (Meliksetiv & Pantsov, 2004, p. 198). Ted Hopf has explained the subsequent estrangement between the PRC and the USSR with clashing identities: Exactly because China followed in the Soviets' footsteps, it could not be allowed to deviate from the Soviet model. When Mao rejected the post-Stalinist changes in the Soviet Union, the USSR's identity as vanguard of the Socialist movement came under attack, and the quick deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations between 1956 and 1962 manifested itself in a stream of symbolic attacks on the other's self-image, and affirmations of the own identity vis-à-vis the respective Other (Hopf, 2009).

As Boris Kulik, former Soviet foreign ministry official and CPSU Central Committee International Department worker responsible for China, has put it, relations between the two states were henceforth based “on generally accepted norms, [not] on the principles of socialist internationalism” (Hopf, 2009, p. 311). Translated into the language of international friendship, this means that the mutually agreed friendship-norms had lost their relevance, and been supplanted by the generally accepted norms structuring relations with non-friends. The Sino-Soviet split thus is a good illustration of the dangers that come with international friendship.

## THE PRC AND ITS FRIENDS FROM THE THIRD WORLD

Initially the PRC had promoted a revolutionary foreign policy supporting Socialist forces in Korea and Vietnam, and chastising reactionary forces in Malaya, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Already in 1954, however, the Chinese under the leadership of Prime Minister Zhou Enlai began to follow a more conciliatory approach, and in joint statements with the Prime Ministers of India and Burma the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” were proclaimed: Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-

interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014c). These principles have since remained a constant element in China's official identity construction, even if in reality it often did not live up to them.

In 1955 the Asian-African Conference, commonly known as Bandung Conference after the Indonesian city where it took place, provided a symbolic point of engagement between China and the rest of the developing world, especially many of the newly independent states in Africa and Asia. Here, the five principles of peaceful coexistence were promoted by several states as a general code of conduct managing relations between developing countries (Acharya & Tan, 2008). In addition, some Chinese leaders also proposed their applicability to relations between socialist states. When the Soviet Union under Khrushchev in 1956 sought to link China's five principles to its own conception of peaceful coexistence with the capitalist states, however, the Chinese leadership rejected this idea (Keith, 1985/86, p. 109).

In the early 1960s, when the Sino-Soviet split turned into an open chasm, China in its search for new friends turned towards the developing world (van Ness, 1993). The CCP increasingly stressed the central role China intended to play in promoting revolutionary movements in the Third World, claiming that the center of world revolution had moved from Moscow to Beijing, and that China provided the best model of successful revolution for other developing countries. According to its own self-understanding, the PRC had thus evolved from a junior partner to the USSR to the primary challenger of a global system dominated by the forces of imperialism, and in a way quite similar to contemporary discourses, what the Chinese regarded as cement of their alliance with the Third World was the shared colonial experience and the continued opposition to any form of foreign intervention and oppression. Between 1960 and 1965 the PRC signed friendship treaties with no less than 17 countries from all over the developing world – long before the Soviets started to extend their treaties beyond the socialist camp – and while some of these states were socialist in orientation, such as North Korea, others were not, such as India (Devere, 2014, p. 188).

However, the contradictions inherent to China's dual identity as developing and socialist state, and the numerous inconsistencies in its foreign policy that followed – between revolution and peaceful coexistence, between engagement and autonomy, between national paths to socialism and the promotion of the Chinese model as new socialist orthodoxy – made it difficult to find friends. China did not exercise its claim to leadership through participation in Third World international groupings but with an “aloof distance” (Levine, 1995, p. 44), and especially during the radical early years of the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966, China with ideological zeal interfered in numerous countries of the developing world.

By 1969, the number of delegations travelling between China and foreign countries had dropped to 66, down from 1 322 in 1965 (Men, 2007, p. 12). Mao the same year declared the end of the Cultural Revolution, and although in the domestic arena many policies continued, internationally China started to tone down its revolutionary rhetoric and behavior. This more conciliatory approach quickly yielded tangible results – calling into question van Ness' assessment that the Third World line was a total failure (van Ness, 1993, p. 206). The acceptance of the PRC as a member of the UN in October 1971 was one of Mao's greatest international successes, and for the CCP, which prided itself on having ended China's identity crisis, being officially recognized as representing China in front of the global community was very valuable.

Although the Sino-Soviet split had turned the Third World into the PRC's primary peer group, the two negative Others USSR and USA in many ways remained more important for defining China's Self, and due to changing relations between the two superpowers, the 1970s once more proved to be a time of transition for China's place in the world. With the advent of the Nixon administration in 1969, rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the United States became a real possibility. Nixon, however, not only pursued a policy of détente with the USSR, but also undertook steps towards a normalization of relations with China. Mao, who by now had begun to see the Soviets as the more immediate threat to Chinese security and was weary of improving Soviet-American relations, went along: In 1972 Nixon visited China, and bilateral relations were gradually

normalized, although it took till 1979 for Washington to officially switch recognition from Taipei to Beijing (Goh, 2005).

In 1974, Mao's changing views on the international situation found their expression in the Three Worlds theory. In it, he declared that the two equally imperialist superpowers USA and USSR together belonged to the First World, while the Second World consisted of the lesser powers of Europe, Canada, Australia and Japan, and the Third World of the exploited countries, including China (Jiang, 2013). This meant that formal ideology or social systems had lost their relevance for categorizing states, and while the Second and the Third World were still divided by numerous contradictions, the principal contradiction now separated the two superpowers with their hegemonic aspirations from everybody else. Over the following years, this reordering of the international system allowed China to justify its rapprochement with the capitalist countries of the Second World, for example in the form of its 1978 Treaty of Peace and Friendship with Japan, while still firmly locating it in the developing Third World (Lee, 1979).

#### THE PRC'S OPENING TO THE WORLD AND ITS INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY

The CCP leadership already during the later years of the Mao era had started to view relations with most developed and Western states in non-antagonistic terms, but these changes became more evident only after the passing of Mao in 1976, and the subsequent rise to power of his old companion and rival Deng Xiaoping. In late 1978, Deng announced the official launch of the "four modernizations" in the areas of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology, signaling a turn away from revolutionary struggle towards economic development. The CCP Central Committee also issued a communiqué emphasizing pragmatism ("seek truth from facts") and that Mao Zedong Thought, just as Marxism in general, should not be treated dogmatically but as a way of analyzing reality – although it was soon made clear that some principles, including the adherence to the socialist path and the leadership of the party, were beyond questioning (Yan, 1995, pp. 22-51).

On the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in 1981, it was decided that the new principal contradiction in Chinese society was the one between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and China's backward productive forces (Hou & Zhao, 2012, p. 70). As such the role of class struggle was downgraded, and the new enemy was everybody who stood in the way of achieving development in China, while everybody supporting it was a potential friend. The 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1982 declared that China's socialist system was still in its primary stage, and the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1987 developed the "primary stage of socialism" into a full-blown ideological concept, arguing that it was about getting rid of poverty and backwardness; about transformation from an agricultural to an industrial country; about creating a highly developed economy; about the establishment of a socialist economic, political, and cultural system; and about the revitalization of the Chinese nation (Men, 2007, pp. 15-7; Qi, 2015).

The primary stage of socialism thus formally returned China to the stage of social and political development it had achieved in the mid- to late-1950s, after nationalization of the means of production had spelled the end of the new-democratic phase, but prior to the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. It could be argued, however, that the "socialist market economy" that was subsequently established, in which capitalist elements and market institutions serve the overarching goal of economic development, in fact resembles the mixed economy that was seen as characteristic of the new-democratic phase. In any case, while the Chinese constitution only declares that China will be in the primary stage of socialism for a long time to come, General Secretary Zhao Ziyang in his report the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress estimated that it will at least last for 100 years, starting with the establishment of the PRC (Zhao, 1987).

The policy of economic reforms was accompanied by a policy of opening-up to the outside world, and a distinct lowering of China's international ideological profile. In 1985, Deng Xiaoping described peace and development instead of war and revolution as the "dominant trends of the time" (Deng, 1994 [1985]). On this occasion, he also analyzed the international system in terms of East-West as well as North-South relations, and while China would be truly non-aligned with regard

to the former, it would firmly support South-South cooperation and North-South dialogue – indeed, Deng claimed that North-South relations actually were the more important of the two contradictions shaping global politics. While international contradictions thus still existed, they were no longer seen as antagonistic, and for the first time in its existence the PRC did not single out a principal security enemy.

As part of this reordering of its international relations, China also adopted a new “independent foreign policy” doctrine. Already on the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1982, General Secretary Hu Yaobang proclaimed that the PRC would continue to oppose hegemonism, was ready to develop relations with all states on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, and determined to consolidate its solidarity and cooperative links with the Third World, but would never again align itself with one of the great powers (Beylerian & Canivet, 1997, p. 191). He later explained:

There are two disadvantages for China to ally itself with a big power. First, it will impede, or at least affect China’s efforts to make friends. China advocates contact with all countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Second, it will prevent China from resisting the wrongs of others, and may even provide opportunities for some countries to attack friends of China. (Keith, 1985/86, p. 191)

The CCP thus decided that the PRC had to stay away from the dynamics of great power rivalry, and that great powers by their very nature did not make good friends.

Although China self-identified as a developing country that would stay at arm’s length from the great powers, its foreign policy during the 1980s was very much focused on the developed world. Writing in the early 1990s, Peter van Ness accordingly warned against taking China’s continued nominal identification with the Third World too seriously:

During the modernization/opening to the West line of the reform decade 1978-88, China in fact turned its back on the Third World. The new post-Mao leadership still repeated many of the old 1960s slogans in Chinese propaganda (such as ‘self-reliance’ and Third World solidarity against foreign threats to state sovereignty), but the entire thrust of PRC foreign policy had changed. [...] The countries that

became most important to China were those that had the capital and technology vital to PRC development. China had, in effect, adopted a 'first world' policy. (van Ness, 1993, pp. 207-8)

Van Ness without doubt was right when concluding that, if compared to the 1960s and early 1970s, the Third World had become less relevant for China during the first decade of its reform and open-up policy. China's representational identification with the developing world, dismissed by van Ness as empty rhetoric, nevertheless remained central to Chinese Self-construction, and when the PRC faced unexpected ontological insecurity in the wake of the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it once more was reminded of the value of having friends.

#### THE END OF THE COLD WAR AND CHINA'S POSTREVOLUTIONARY ORDER

A decade of reform and open-up policy as well as the rapidly unfolding developments in the socialist camp challenged the PRC's identity as a socialist country, and the Tiananmen protests showed that the CCP's answer to "who" China should be became increasingly contested within the domestic realm. In this state of heightened ontological insecurity, Deng Xiaoping in 1992 reaffirmed the regime's commitment to economic reform, thus strengthening China's emerging identity as a developmental state.

In contrast to the two African states discussed in this study, in the Chinese case this is an externally ascribed characterization. Many scholars nevertheless regard all central criteria of a developmental state as fulfilled: It is a goal-oriented state with a stable (elite) consensus to follow a top-down approach to development through state intervention in the economy, the state has the effective capacity to implement its policies, and it is autonomous enough to do so against particularistic interests of economic and social actors, while at the same time being embedded in a pervasive network of political, administrative and economic relations that fundamentally structure the economic realm. The attainment of its developmental goals in turn provides the regime with legitimacy (Heberer, 2013; Holbig, 2015; Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995). Therefore, as Heike Holbig and Bruce Gilley have put



it, “the reform era, and particularly the revival of reforms after the Tiananmen Crackdown in 1989 with its devastating effects on party legitimacy, can be seen as an attempt to rebuild legitimacy along postrevolutionary lines” (Holbig & Gilley, 2010, p. 397).

In addition, the CCP also turned towards nationalism to bolster the legitimacy of its regime, which included an increased emphasis on the parties’ historical mission to overcome the legacies of the “century of humiliation” and lead China back to greatness (Unger, 1996; Gries, 2004; Zhao, 2004). In 2000, General Secretary Jiang Zemin sought to bring these developments in line with formal party ideology by arguing that the CCP “has always represented the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people” (People’s Daily, 2006). The “Three Represents” subsequently became Jiang’s signature addition to the CCP’s ideology, and not only provided a justification for opening the party’s ranks to “progressive” capitalists, but also for its use of populism as part of its legitimation strategy. As such, the three represents concluded the party’s ideological shift from class-based revolution to nation-based development.

China not only was forced to deal with pressing internal problems, but also to critically evaluate its position within a complex and changing international context. Following the end of the Cold War, academics heatedly debated what the principal contradiction under these new circumstances could be, with suggestions ranging from North-South relations over competitive relations amongst the major capitalist states to relations between the hegemonic USA with everybody opposing this hegemony (Ren, 2010, pp. 104-5). Around the turn of the millennium, it was argued that the principal contradiction was the one between the international community’s struggle for peace and development, and the many factors negatively affecting this struggle – including the USA’s hegemonic inclinations and the deepening economic rift between the North and the South – and that China as the largest developing and largest socialist country was central for solving this contradiction (Huang, 2003). In 2008, the West’s universalist aspirations and the

attempts of the other civilizations to withstand them and follow their own path were proposed as most basic contradiction, affecting the two important contradictions between hegemonism and anti-hegemonism, and between North and South (Zhou & Jiao, 2008). And in 2013, a former vice director of the CCP's Central Policy Research Office argued that the two principal contradictions in the international system still are the ones between imperialism and the Third World, and between capitalism and socialism. Importantly, the balance of forces slowly appears to be tilting towards the Third World and a reinvigorated socialism, in both cases not least due to China's rise (Wei, 2013).

Despite this ongoing academic debate, however, both in official rhetoric and in academic discourse the notion of contradictions lost in prominence after the end of the Cold War. Instead, discussions about the relative power of sovereign states with their national interests came to dominate foreign policy thinking in China, and although it was generally agreed that the global trend towards multipolarity was a positive development, it was also seen as a slow and potentially dangerous process. In light of China's relative weakness, Deng Xiaoping in the early 1990s thus formulated a cautious approach to foreign policy. In a talk to members of the CCP Central Committee in 1990, for example, he argued:

There are many unpredictable factors affecting the international situation, and the contradictions are becoming increasingly evident. [...] Some developing countries would like China to become the leader of the Third World. But we absolutely cannot do that – this is one of our basic state policies. We can't afford to do it and besides, we aren't strong enough. There is nothing to be gained by playing that role; we would only lose most of our initiative. China will always side with the Third World countries, but we shall never seek hegemony over them or serve as their leader. Nevertheless, we cannot simply do nothing in international affairs; we have to make our contribution. In what respect? I think we should help promote the establishment of a new international political and economic order. (Deng, 1994 [1990], p. 350).

Two years later, Deng argued that “[w]e will only become a big political power if we keep a low profile and work hard for some years; and we will then have more weight in international affairs” (cited in Chen & Wang, 2011, p. 197). Over time,

this kind of thinking evolved into one of China's principal approaches to foreign policy, commonly referred to as "keeping a low profile."

## MANAGING CHINA'S RISE: PEACE, HARMONY, AND RESPONSIBILITY

China's strategy of keeping a low profile resulted in a continued focus on cooperation with the developed world, an ongoing willingness to adapt to the rules of the global order, and a further emphasis on peace and development as the central themes of an independent Chinese foreign policy. While the admission to the World Trade Organization in 2001 as a symbolic milestone marked the ongoing integration of China, however, events such as the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis and the following debate surrounding the publication of the anti-Western book *The China That Can Say No* in 1996, or the public reactions to the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by US forces in 1999, highlighted the difficult and contentious nature of China's relation with the West (Gries, 2001). An anxious Chinese party-state thus oscillated between further integration into the international order and rejection of Western claims and criticism. As part of this mutual Othering, the 1990s saw the emergence of so-called "China threat" theories, a term with which Chinese analysts continue to refer to a variety of negative views of China as having harmful and destabilizing international intentions, which are generally seen as a strategic tool used by foreign powers in order to sabotage China's rise.

In light of these developments, in the mid- to late 1990s it became heatedly debated within the CCP whether peace and development still were the dominant trends of the time (Medeiros, 2009). This debate officially ended when General Secretary Jiang Zemin in 1999 declared that the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century present a "period of strategic opportunity" for China to achieve its goals, especially the creation of a "moderately prosperous society," because both a war between the great powers and a war in China's vicinity were deemed to be very unlikely (Gill, 2007, pp. 6-7). In the end, therefore, the CCP adhered to the view that the main contradictions and conflicts within the international system could be dealt with in a non-antagonistic manner, at least for the foreseeable future.

In 2001, Jiang Zemin once more reaffirmed Deng's assessment that peace and development were the dominant trends of the time, but also said that in contrast to the Deng-era, both peace and development now essentially were about North-South relations (Jiang, 2001). In 2002, finally, Jiang in his report to the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress presented a comprehensive ordering of the international system, which summarized the views on China's external relations the CCP had developed since the end of the Cold War, and which has since remained unchanged. The respective formulations in the 2002 report are longer, but today Jiang's formula is generally condensed into the often-heard phrase "major powers are the key, neighbors are the first priority, developing countries are the foundation, and multilateralism is an important stage" (Jiang, 2002; Zhang, 2009). As such, while it is acknowledged that the great powers and the PRC's Asian neighbors are the most important factors determining Chinese foreign policy, and that the development of multilateral mechanisms is important, the PRC's developing country identity once more was confirmed.

Many of the concepts introduced by the following leadership under Hu Jintao can be interpreted as attempts to make use of China's period of strategic opportunity and manage its rise in a way that does not result in balancing behavior from other states. In 2003, the concept of "peaceful rise" was introduced, which one year later was rebranded "peaceful development," in order to avoid negative connotations and to bring it in line with peace and development as the dominant trends of the time. It maintains that China's neighbors and the world at large not only have nothing to fear, but that they will instead profit from a more developed China as well. As Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing put it:

China's development cannot materialize without the world. And a stable and prosperous world also needs China. So long as we hold high the banner of peace, development and co-operation, and hold on to the path of peaceful development, we will surely make new contributions to world peace and development. (Men, 2007, p. 30)

In 2005, in a speech given at the Asian-African Summit commemorating the 1955 Bandung Conference, Hu Jintao furthermore put forward the idea of building a "harmonious world." His report to the 17th Party Congress in 2007 fleshed out the

concept by arguing that it is about constructing a world in which countries respectfully collaborate as equals in order to promote democracy in international relations, in which countries cooperate economically on the basis of balanced development, shared benefits and win-win progress, in which countries should learn from each other and enhance human civilization while respecting differences, in which countries settle conflicts by peaceful means and prevent conflict through trust and cooperation, and in which countries cooperate and assist each other in order to protect the environment (Hu, 2007b). Hu later explained:

[E]ven though our world has different contradictions and conflicts, and there are an increasing number of factors concerning instability and uncertainty, [...] the historic trend of peace, development and cooperation provides an unprecedented opportunity for the realization of peaceful and harmonious coexistence among various countries and people, and there is objective possibility to construct a harmonious world. (People's Daily, 2009)

The third foreign policy concept that rose to prominence during Hu's time as General Secretary is that of responsibility. Yet while it is often associated with US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's call that China should become a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system willing to contribute its fair share to the common good, the notion of responsibility certainly was not new to Chinese foreign policy thinking and rhetoric (Zoellick, 2005; Yeophanton, 2013). In China, Zoellick's speech thus was mostly interpreted as another Western plot to sabotage the PRC's rise by putting burdens on the country's shoulders it was not ready to carry yet, or as an unfair belittling of the burdens it was already carrying. Rejecting overblown expectations, Hu Jintao stressed:

The developed countries should shoulder greater responsibility for a universal, coordinated and balanced development in the world [...]. The developing countries should make a fuller use of their own advantages to develop themselves, expand South-South cooperation and promote across-the-board progress in their own society. China will do its best and actively contribute to the common development of all countries. (Hu, 2005)

As such, while responsibility today is an established element in Chinese diplomatic rhetoric, it is also frequently argued that China's responsibilities not only are

limited by its power, but also that they primarily lie with its own people, secondly with fellow developing countries, and only thirdly with truly global issues.

In 2012, Hu Jintao's final Report to the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP included "three things that have not changed" since the beginning of the reform- and open-door policy, namely that China is in the primary stage of socialism, that China's principal contradiction is the one between the cultural and material needs of the people and its backward productive forces, and that China has retained its international position as the largest developing country (Hu, 2012). As such, where China sees its place within international society once more was made clear.

#### THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP AND CHINA'S "NEW TYPE OF MAJOR COUNTRY DIPLOMACY"

Chinese foreign policy discourse has always been tied to ideological concepts geared towards the domestic realm, and the harmonious world was the international dimension of Hu's stated goal of building a socialist "harmonious society" in China by supplementing the Deng-era's emphasis on high-speed economic growth with a focus on social equality and environmental sustainability. Hu's successor Xi Jinping has referred to harmonious society more sparingly and instead prefers to talk about his own concept, the "Chinese dream." The Chinese dream essentially reaffirms the PRC's developmental identity by invoking the goals that in 1987 already had been declared to be at the heart of the Primary Stage of Socialism – in its various descriptions it is about improvement of people's livelihoods, the construction of a moderately prosperous society, a strengthened military and, above all, national rejuvenation or renaissance.<sup>6</sup> According to Xi, "achieving the great renaissance of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times" (Xi, 2012).

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<sup>6</sup> The official English-language term for the ideological concept *fulixing* is "rejuvenation," not "renaissance," but both translations are correct. I have chosen the latter term here to highlight its parallels with the two concepts "African renaissance" and "Ethiopian renaissance," which will come up later in this study.

The idea of national renaissance is also linked to the “two centenaries:” by 2021, the one-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the CCP, China is supposed to achieve the status of a “moderately prosperous society,” and by 2049, the one-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the PRC (which Premier Zhao Ziyang in 1987 had estimated to mark the end of the Primary Stage of Socialism), China is supposed to be “a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious” (Xi, 2012). These goals, in turn, are to be achieved by “comprehensively deepening the reform” that brought about socialism with Chinese characteristics, a development path that depends on the foresight of the ruling party (CCP Central Committee, 2013).

In the international realm, and similar to the concept of peaceful development, the fulfillment of the Chinese dream is presented as the best way for other nations and regions to achieve their respective dreams as well (Xi, 2014). This is especially relevant with regard to other developing countries, and in 2013 Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that “even when China becomes stronger and more prosperous, it will remain a staunch member of the developing world because China and fellow developing countries have similar past, common development task and ever-expanding shared strategic interests. The developing countries are always the basis of China's diplomacy” (Wang, 2013). As such, the Xi-leadership has remained committed to China's identity as developing country.

To lay out the broad contours of his foreign policy, Xi Jinping in November 2014 gave a speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs – only the fourth of its kind, with prior conferences taking place in 1971, 1991 and 2006 (Swaine, 2015). While not publically available, this speech to date presents the most authoritative and comprehensive statement on the current leadership's views on foreign relations. Xi notably stressed that, while peace and development are still the dominant trends of the time and China continues to enjoy a period of strategic opportunity, the PRC also needs to “develop a distinctive diplomatic approach befitting its role of [sic] a major country” (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014a). Amongst other things, this includes “promoting a new type of

international relations featuring win-win cooperation,” and generally a more activist and involved Chinese foreign policy (Swaine, 2015, p. 14).

More recently, Foreign Minister Wang Yi has explained that the new type of international relations promoted by China rejects Cold War thinking, which to this day is said to be central to “Western theories of international relations [that] worship the law of the jungle which leaves the weak at the mercy of the strong and regard zero-sum game and winner-takes-all as unalterable tenet” (Wang, 2016). Instead, the vision of a new type of international relations

highlights the importance of common interests of mankind, and maintains that countries should respect each other and treat each other as equals on the basis of shelving differences and seeking common ground, and that they should work to build and expand shared interests, so as to achieve peaceful and harmonious co-existence of countries despite their differences in social systems, development paths and cultural traditions. [...] [C]ountries must have an enlightened view of its [sic] moral responsibility and national interests, and [...] every country, while pursuing its own development, should be sensitive to the interests of all sides and strive for win-win outcomes for all (Wang, 2016)

As such, the new type of international relations needs to be seen as a continuation of many ideas that already were contained in the harmonious world, yet combined with a more pragmatic approach focusing on win-win outcomes rather than harmony.

According to Foreign Minister Wang, one sign that China already is practicing a new type of international relations is its evolving “partnership network,” which is said to consist of more than 80 partnership agreements with individual states, regions, and regional organizations (Wang, 2016). This network has long been in the making – the first strategic partnership with another country was signed with Brazil in 1993. However, until recently observers have argued that China’s very uneven partnership diplomacy is insufficient for managing the complex international relations of a great power, and it has been debated amongst Chinese experts whether the country should modify its Independent Foreign Policy in favour of more dependable “quasi-alliances” or “special relationships” with individual countries (Feng & Huang, 2014). And while Chinese experts disagree on



whether Xi Jinping's adjustments to Chinese foreign policy already amount to an end of China's strategy of keeping a low profile (Yan, 2014; Qin, 2014), his statement in early 2017 that China "should guide the international community to jointly build a more just and reasonable new world order" and "guide the international community to jointly maintain international security" needs to be seen as a further step away from Deng Xiaoping's dictum that China will never seek leadership (Xinhua, 2017; CCP Central Party School, 2017).

As part of its "new type of major country diplomacy" and the associated developments over the recent years, the CCP has sought to more clearly define China's relations with other states. The concept that has received most attention in this regard is the "new type of major country relationship," which is primarily geared towards managing relations with the USA, although powers such as Russia or the EU have been subsumed under this concept as well. According to State Councilor and former Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, this type of relation is defined by non-conflict and non-confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation (Yang, 2013). In parallel, however, and largely unnoticed by Western observers, China also has proposed new models for the relations between developing countries, as well as between major developing countries. This is important here because, as will be detailed in the following chapters, China's relations with Ethiopia and South Africa have been selected as exemplary manifestations of these new types of bilateral relations.

## CHINA'S EXCEPTIONALISM AND STRUGGLE FOR STATUS

One important aspect that should have become clear in the preceding discussion is how deeply the CCP's self-understanding and its claim to authority are linked to its self-ascribed historical mission to correct past injustices and lead China back to greatness. As a result of this interweaving of the party's own identity with that of the nation and the state, the CCP has a strong interest in maintaining control over "who" China is, and to avoid ruptures in its historical and ideological narratives. Even quite fundamental policy changes thus are presented as prudent reactions to changing circumstances, whereas the party's principles and its long-term goals are depicted as unchanging. Because of such continuities, the Chinese state identity

has become increasingly complex and fraught with tensions, as is evident in rather crude ideological concepts such as socialist market economy, or China's nonchalant return to the primary stage of socialism.

If we ignore such contradictions, however, and reduce the PRC's state identity to the current pool of officially approved representational resources relevant for this study, it can be summarized as that of:

- a new type of socialist state led by a communist vanguard party that follows its own path and regards the choice of political and social system as an internal affair of every state;
- a developmental “reform- and opening-up” state in the primary stage of socialism that attaches priority to socio-economic development at home and the national interest in its international relations;
- a nation-state that is heir to a glorious civilization and which is in the process of regaining the status it lost due to foreign humiliation;
- a new type of peacefully developing and responsible great power which does not use its position to bully the weak but strives to achieve international harmony by promoting and practicing a new type of international relations;
- a large developing country that despite the coexistence of both underdeveloped and developed features, an independent foreign policy and a focus on economic relations with the North belongs to the South; and
- a progressive state that no longer pursues revolution but still holds on to its goal of promoting the interests of the oppressed by making the global order more equal and just.

Taken together, then, China's identity constitutes a strong claim to being an exceptional state. This is hardly unique to China – American exceptionalism has gained quite a lot of attention in IR, and as will be discussed later, Ethiopia and South Africa have their own versions of exceptionalism as well. Indeed, since a central element of all identity construction is to differentiate the Self from the Other, highlighting what is unique about a country arguably happens everywhere. Nevertheless, in the Chinese case this exceptionalism appears to be quite pronounced.

There are several reasons for this, including China's position as outsider to an international system dominated by Western states and ideas, which continuously puts pressure on China to justify itself. In addition to this social dimension, however, the notion of exceptionalism also has a long tradition in China, and as Chen Jian has argued, at least under Mao the old imperial narrative of China as the morally superior center of the world was still clearly visible in the PRC's attempts to re-establish China as a model for others (Chen, 2001). Today, China frequently stresses that it does not provide a fixed model for others to follow, but moralistic reasoning nevertheless has remained strong. In its international conduct, the PRC frequently claims to unwaveringly follow immutable principles that express universal values such as justice and equity, a morality that is contrasted with the West, whose representatives are accused of only using the language of democracy and human rights to achieve ulterior, self-interested goals. As such, Steven Levine's argument from the mid-1990s still holds true: That China's self-perceived morality, in combination with the idea of a historical right to being a great power, has resulted in "a claim to entitlement by virtue of China's ontological status rather than its behavioural characteristics. In effect, they are a demand that others recognize and respect China's exceptional qualities" (Levine, 1995, p. 44).

Political scientist Yong Deng accordingly argues that the "ancient "center-of-the-world" mentality has given way to a premium placed on cultivating legitimate recognition from the international society," and that "the PRC may very well be the most status-conscious country in the world" (Deng, 2008, pp. 6, 8). Whenever recognition is denied, the reaction is strong and emotional. This not only pertains to the wider public, although the reactions to the 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing or the repeated visits of Japanese Prime Ministers to the Yasukuni Shrine show that China's status and dignity are of widespread concern; it also includes members of the intellectual and political elite. For example, as William A. Callahan has argued, while without doubt there are a lot of negative and unfair depictions of an essentially evil China in the West, the Chinese reaction to such criticisms appears to be quite out of proportion (Callahan, 2005, p. 713). Other examples for the Chinese's desire for international recognition would be what Peter Hays Gries has called the "Kissinger complex" – the obsession of Chinese nationalists with

Henry Kissinger's words of praise for China's past and current leadership, and his predictions about China's future rise – and the “Nobel complex” – the infuriation about not seeing Chinese scientists and artists granted the recognition they deserve (Gries, 2005, p. 243).

While this sensitivity to questions of status, recognition and identity remains a source of tensions with especially the countries of the West, on a more positive note David Shambaugh has observed that “[f]ew, if any, other major or aspiring powers engage in such self-reflective discourse” as China (Shambaugh, 2011, p. 8). Being very aware of the negative historical precedents set by rising powers such as Germany and Japan, which were drawn into a destructive spiral of competition and mistrust, the Chinese leadership has worked hard to establish China as a new type of great power, which “will challenge the historical trajectory of power rise, redefine the meaning of being a great power, and reform world politics through the development and practice of its unique international relations principles and ideals” (Zhang, 2011, p. 311). Many of the more recent formulations of Chinese ideology – such as Peaceful Development, Harmonious World, or the new type of major country diplomacy – are expressions of this claim to great power exceptionalism. Without recognition by others, however, such claims are largely useless in establishing international order.

## CONCLUSION

To identify the PRC in international relations, this chapter has explored China's biographical narrative, and how the CCP has sought to position China within international society. It has been shown how China's state identity has evolved in relation to Others the Chinese Self was dissociated from – including the imperialist powers, its own feudalist Self, the revisionist Soviet Union and the liberal democracies of the West – as well as Others the Chinese Self was associated with – most notably the Soviet Union and the socialist camp prior to the Sino-Soviet split, and the developing world afterwards. It has been discussed how the CCP's outlook on international relations has changed from the Mao-era's preoccupation with war and revolution to the reform-era's focus on peace and development, and how this included a shift away from contradictions and the friend-enemy distinction

towards a more nuanced approach focusing on national interests and strategic partnerships. Finally, it has been shown how the CCP seeks to project an image of the PRC as a new type of peacefully developing and responsible great power that attaches priority to socio-economic development at home and the national interest in its international relations, but at the same time continues to struggle for global progress by practicing solidarity with its friends in the developing world, and by promoting a new type of international relations that refrains from hegemonism and power politics but instead focuses on mutually beneficial cooperation between strategic partners.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, it may not always be immediately evident why these developments matter for Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations. However, as subsequent chapters will show, we cannot understand the special qualities these relations have acquired without taking into account the similarities between the three states' biographical narratives, how their shared ideological roots and foreign policy principles provide the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC with a common language and a shared moral space, and how China's great power exceptionalism and its interest in international recognition are supported by the two African states. Before we can turn to these issues, however, it first is necessary to briefly discuss the role Africa plays in China's management of Self-Other relations.

## CHAPTER 4: AFRICA IN CHINA'S SELF-OTHER RELATIONS

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Speak, China, and tell your truth to Africa and the world. What people have been despised as you have? Who more than you have been rejected of men? Recall when lordly Britishers threw the rickshaw money on the ground to avoid touching a filthy hand. Forget not the time when in Shanghai no Chinese man dare set foot in a park which he paid for. Tell this to Africa, for today Africa stands on new feet, with new eyesight, with new brains and asks: Where am I and why?

W. E. B. Du Bois, speech held in Beijing (1959)

### THE “TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIP” BETWEEN CHINA AND AFRICA

China's relations with the West, while non-antagonistic and mostly cooperative, continue to be plagued by negative Othering on both sides. This stands in stark contrast to China-Africa relations, which at least in the official Chinese version constitute a “traditional friendship” (sometimes also referred to as “all-weather friendship,” a term coined in 1967 by Zambia's first President Kenneth Kaunda). This brief chapter does not aim to establish whether Sino-African relations indeed constitute a friendship in the sense proposed in this study. Instead, it analyses the narrative of “traditional friendship,” assesses the post-Cold War development of a “strategic partnership” between China and Africa, and discusses the role Africa plays in China's management of Self-Other relations. This is relevant here because, from the Chinese point of view, Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations need to be seen within the context of a multilateral relationship between China and the African continent, and the related notion of exceptional Sino-African ties.

The “traditional friendship” trope certainly is a strong one – few discussions with Chinese officials and academics go without it, and it is also frequently mirrored by Africans. The historical narrative underlying this trope generally starts with the 15<sup>th</sup> century Admiral Zheng He (although sometimes references to vaguely documented exchanges in earlier times are included as well, depending on the specific African country). An eunuch at the Ming-dynasty court of the Yongle

Emperor, between 1405 and 1433 Zheng He with a massive fleet of up to 250 ships and more than 20.000 military personnel undertook seven voyages to Southeast Asia, South Asia, and several times also the eastern shores of Africa, visiting Mogadishu and probably going as far south as modern day Tanzania (Levathes, 1994).

What turns these expeditions into an important element in contemporary discourse is not the mere fact that Ming-era China was able to project power as far away as Africa, but that the Chinese did not use their power in the way the European colonial empires later did. In a 2007 speech at the University of Pretoria, for example, Chinese President Hu Jintao said:

We believe in cooperation and harmony among nations, and we hold that the strong and rich should not bully the weak and the poor. Six hundred years ago, Zheng He, a famed Chinese navigator of the Ming Dynasty, headed a large convoy which sailed across the ocean and reached the east coast of Africa four times. They brought to the African people a message of peace and goodwill, not swords, guns, plunder or slavery. (Hu, 2007a)

The 2005 white paper *China's Peaceful Development Road* similarly uses Zheng He to make the point that “[i]t is an inevitable choice based on China’s historical and cultural tradition that China persists unswervingly in taking the road of peaceful development” (State Council Information Office, 2005), and when State Councilor Dai Bingguo in 2010 addressed the Secretariat of ASEAN, he argued that “China did not seek expansion or hegemony even at the time when it was the most powerful country in the world,” and that “[t]o this day, Zheng He is still remembered as an envoy of friendship and peace [...]” (Dai, 2010). Not only in the context of China-Africa relations, therefore, Zheng He is frequently employed to support the exceptionalist argument that China, due to its very nature, will rise peacefully, and that weaker states have nothing to fear.

This is a quite selective reading of Zheng He’s voyages, however. Using historical sources, and positioning them in the wider context of the Yongle Emperor’s expansionistic politics in Southeast Asia, historian Geoff Wade has provocatively described Zheng He’s voyages as “gunboat diplomacy” (Wade, 2005, p. 51).

Examples for the at least partially military nature of the enterprise include the invasion of Sri Lanka, which ended with the capture of the ruling king and the installation of a new king to China's liking, the intervention in a war on Sumatra in support of the side that was accommodating to the Ming, and several threats of force to assure the obedience of local rulers. Wade comes to the conclusion that the Ming were engaged in "maritime proto-colonialism," geared towards forcing other rulers to formally accept Chinese suzerainty and to gain control of the main nodes of maritime trade (Wade, 2005, p. 51). While there are thus good reasons to assume that Zheng He was not simply an "envoy of friendship and peace," they appear not to bother Chinese and African officials. Whatever the true nature of Zheng He's voyages, therefore, today they function as an important plot point in the narrative of Sino-African friendship that serves to differentiate China from the Western Other, and to establish the deep historical roots of Sino-African friendship.

The narrative goes on to contrast the respect- and peaceful nature of Sino-African relations in pre-colonial times with the shared experience of European invasion and exploitation. Although there are a lot of differences between European colonialism in Africa and China if one starts to look at the details, these differences do not change the overall message: Countries all over the developing world were invaded and humiliated by imperialist aggressors, and stopped from following development paths that would have suited their specific conditions and needs. As such, both Africa and China were actively suppressed politically and underdeveloped economically by outside forces, a notion which today provides China and Africa with the idea of a common fate, and the same negative Other. In addition, it serves as a rebuttal to accusations of Chinese neo-colonialism. As Prime Minister Li Keqiang put it in a speech at the African Union (AU):

Both China and Africa were subjected to aggression and oppression by colonialism and imperialism in the past, and we both deeply value independence and equality. Neither of us has imposed our own will on others or interfered in each other's internal affairs. We both stand for resolving problems arising from cooperation through equal consultation. China's aid to Africa has never been attached with



political strings. All this has constituted a defining cornerstone for the ever growing friendship between China and Africa. (Li, 2014)

The next plot point is the PRC's support for the African states' struggles during the era of decolonization, which became especially relevant after the Sino-Soviet split. In 1963-1964, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai embarked on a ten-nation tour to Africa, and during this trip he laid down many of the principles that to this day are said to structure China-Africa relations. The "Five Principles Governing the Development of Relations with Arab and African Countries" included support for anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, neutrality and non-alignment, African nationalism, peaceful conflict settlement, and sovereignty and non-interference. The "Eight Principles of Economic and Technical Assistance," in turn, included the principles of equality and mutual benefit, non-conditional help and respect for the sovereignty of the recipient country, economic assistance in the form of interest-free or low-interest loans, the stated purpose to facilitate the recipient country's future self-reliance, a focus on cost-effective projects and state-of-the-art equipment, a commitment to technical assistance and skill transfer, and the frugality of Chinese personnel (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000).

During this era, the friendship theme was ubiquitous in Chinese policy towards the continent. In 1960 the Chinese-African People's Friendship Association was founded, and China signed friendship treaties with Nkrumah's Ghana in 1961, Keïta's Mali in 1964 and Nyerere's Tanzania in 1965. While this friendship diplomacy also included cultural exchanges, more important were development projects such as the TAZARA railway linking Zambia's copper mines to the Tanzanian port city of Dar es Salaam, which were not presented as statist aid programs but as shared efforts of friendly peoples aimed at achieving common development (Monson, 2009). Today the highly symbolic TAZARA railway constitutes another element in the narrative of Sino-African relations, a "monument of China-Africa friendship" highlighting how the economically still fledgling Chinese did everything they could to help their African friends (Strauss, 2009, p. 787). To once more quote Prime Minister Li Keqiang's speech at the AU:

Over the past five decades, Chinese and African people have helped each other and fostered an unbreakable bond of friendship. As a poet once said, 'You may have forgotten the person whom you laughed with; but you will never forget the one whom you wept with.' In the 1960s and 70s, to support the cause of national liberation in southern Africa and smash the blockade imposed by the apartheid regime, the Chinese people assisted the construction of the Tazara Railway against great odds. Sixty-five fine sons and daughters of China gave their lives for the construction of the railway and were laid to rest on the African continent. (Li, 2014)

At the same time, however, whereas economic or technical exchanges despite some notable exceptions remained largely negligible, during the 1960s the PRC was deeply involved in rebellions and independence struggles in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Ghana, Niger and Burundi, and at least tacitly involved in many more (Alden & Alves, 2008, p. 49). While China's Cold War involvement in Africa could accordingly easily be framed in a negative way – arming rebellions and competing with the USA and the USSR for influence while preaching development, non-intervention and sovereign equality – these issues are missing from the official story today. Instead, the narrative mostly focusses on economic aspects such as TAZARA, and the major political event remembered from this era is Beijing's admission to the United Nations on the back of African votes. Till today expressions of gratitude for carrying the country into the United Nations are a common element in speeches of Chinese officials in front of African audiences, turning it into yet another plot point. In Prime Minister Li Keqiang's words:

In the same vein [of China's support for Africa], when China's lawful seat was restored in the UN, our African brothers burst into tears of happiness, celebrating this as a great victory of developing countries. The history of our common struggle for a common destiny will always be our precious memory and inspiration and an inexhaustible driver for the future growth of China-Africa relations. (Li, 2014)

## THE "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP" BETWEEN CHINA AND AFRICA

During the 1980s the PRC focused on domestic development, and promptly reduced its aid to Africa. It was in this context that Peter van Ness saw China's continued nominal identification with the Third World as empty rhetoric (van

Ness, 1993), and Gerald Segal argued that Africa “will remain the least important area for Chinese foreign policy” (Segal, 1992, p. 126). While it would be an overstatement to say that China abandoned Africa, it certainly lost interest. However, the Tiananmen crackdown at the end of the decade provided another crucial element to the narrative of Sino-African friendship. Foreign Minister Qian Qichen later remembered:

In 1989 it was again our African friends who stood by us and extended a helping hand in the difficult times following the political turmoil in Beijing, when Western countries imposed sanctions on China. [...] The first head of state, the first head of government, and the first foreign minister to visit China after the political turmoil of 1989 all came from Africa. They wanted to show the whole world the unwavering friendship with China in its most difficult times. China had helped them in the past, and now they would show their utmost support for China when China needed it most. All this formed a sharp contrast with the Western countries’ groundless censure of China [...].

The West made use of the drastic changes in Eastern Europe to increase its political pressure on African countries, and used its so-called aid program to incite fear and seek concessions. [...] In these circumstances, the African countries turned to China. Seeing the correctness of China’s adherence to the policies of independence, reform, and opening-up, they tried to defend their sovereignty and develop their national economies with Chinese support. This brought new meaning and significance to China’s relations with Africa. (Qian, 2005, pp. 200-2)

While China in 1988 only had provided USD 60.4 million in aid to 13 African recipients, already in 1990 this number had increased to USD 374.6 million, distributed among 43 African countries (Taylor, 2004, p. 87). Since then China has emerged as one of Africa’s most important development partners, although the Chinese practice of not clearly differentiating between aid and economic exchanges (and of avoiding transparency) makes it difficult to come up with actual numbers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For scholarly attempts to gather information about Chinese development finance in Africa, see the online platform [China.aiddata.org](http://China.aiddata.org).

In general, however, China now primarily encourages links with Africa on an economic basis. Already in November 1989, only a few months after the events on Tiananmen Square, it hosted a major China-Africa Seminar on Economic Reform and Adjustment (Taylor, 2011, p. 21). And while it took quite a while before economic exchanges really took off in the late 1990s and early 2000s, according to official sources (which, as always, need to be treated with caution) Africa's share in China's total foreign trade volume rose from 2.23% in 2000 to 5.13% in 2012, and China's share in Africa's total foreign trade volume rose from 3.82% in 2000 to 16.13% in 2012 (PRC State Council, 2013). Since approximately 2009, China is Africa's largest single trading partner. Furthermore, between 2009 and 2012, China's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa increased from USD 1.44 billion to USD 2.52 billion, raising the accumulated stock of Chinese FDI in Africa to USD 21.23 billion in 2012 (PRC State Council, 2013). While this still is only the sixth largest stock of FDI on the continent (behind South Africa but ahead of Germany), the speed with which it has risen is truly remarkable (UNCTAD, 2013, p. 43).

On the political level, the growing relevance of Sino-African relations found its expression in the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which in 2000 met for the first time in Beijing, was attended by nearly 80 ministers from 44 African countries, and institutionalized increasingly dense Sino-African interactions in a multilateral context (Taylor, 2011). FOCAC primarily consists of a Ministerial Meeting, which takes place every three years, alternating between Beijing and various African cities. The first FOCAC Ministerial Meeting on African soil took place in 2003 in Addis Ababa, and various other conferences and meetings, dealing with a wide range of economic and political issues, have since mushroomed around it. In 2006 a FOCAC Summit attended by numerous heads of states accompanied the Ministerial Meeting. Since the Summit only takes place every third FOCAC, the second FOCAC Summit only followed in 2015, in the South African city of Johannesburg.

The friendship terminology dating from the 1960s is still regularly employed in these increasingly dense Sino-African interactions. This includes quite unspecific notions of friendship between China and Africa, as well as between China and

individual African states. In addition, especially Chinese humanitarian or development projects such as the Tirunesh-Beijing Ethio-China Friendship Hospital the Chinese government donated in 2011 “to promote Sino-Ethiopian friendship” (China Daily, 2011), or the schools it has built as part of the China-Africa Friendship program (Xinhua, 2015a), are frequently couched in friendship terms.

In line with the general thrust of China’s post-Cold War foreign policy, however, China-Africa relations increasingly are framed in terms of strategic partnership rather than friendship. The first partnership agreement with an African state was signed in 2000 with South Africa (upgraded to a strategic partnership in 2004 and a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2010), followed by an comprehensive cooperative partnership with Ethiopia in 2003, a strategic partnership with Nigeria in 2005, a strategic partnership with Angola in 2010, comprehensive cooperative partnerships with Kenya and Tanzania in 2013, and a long-term friendly and cooperative partnership with Senegal as well as a comprehensive strategic partnership with Algeria in 2014 (Strüver, 2016, p. 31).

On the first FOCAC Summit in 2006, China and the representatives of 48 African states furthermore proclaimed the goal of establishing a “new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchanges” (FOCAC, 2006). Nine years later, on the second FOCAC Summit in 2015, China and the representatives of the AU and 50 African states agreed to establish and develop

a comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership between China and Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic cooperation for win-win results, exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and African civilizations, mutual assistance in security affairs, as well as solidarity and cooperation in international affairs. (FOCAC, 2015)

Therefore, just as bilateral friendships between China and individual African states are subsumed under the notion of an encompassing China-Africa friendship, individual strategic partnerships are integrated into the broader framework of a new type of multilateral partnership between China and Africa as well.

While there thus have been clear changes in China's Africa policy over time – including the ceasing of support for revolutionary movements, an increased focus on economic exchanges and strategic partnerships, as well as a new appreciation of the AU and multilateral mechanisms – the narrative of a special Sino-African relationship very much stresses continuity. And at least with regard to stated principles this argument indeed is easy to make. President Jiang Zemin in 1996 delivered a speech at the OAU headquarter in Addis Ababa entitled “Toward a New Historical Milestone of Sino-African Friendship,” in which he essentially reiterated the principles Zhou Enlai three decades earlier had described as structuring China-Africa relations: China and Africa should foster a sincere all-weather friendship, treat each other with respect and equality without interfering in the other's internal affairs, seek common development on the basis of mutual benefit, enhance consultation and cooperation in international affairs, and look into the future and seek to create a better world (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000). In 2004, Hu Jintao declared that China's basic policy toward Africa included a commitment to Sino-African friendship, mutual respect and equality, respect for African democracy, mutual support at the global and regional levels, and continued assistance to African states seeking common development (Yu, 2010, p. 132). The White Paper on *China's African Policy*, issued in 2006, equally described the principles and objectives guiding the PRC's policy towards the continent as sincerity, friendship and equality; mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity; mutual support and close cooperation; and learning from each other and seeking common development (PRC State Council Information Office , 2007, p. 377).

Xi Jinping on his first trip to Africa as president promised to continue to treat China's African friends with sincerity, strive for mutually beneficial cooperation and real outcomes, foster people-to-people relations, and resolve any problems that might occur in the spirit of mutual respect and with good faith. He also said that “no matter how strong it may grow, China will always see in Africa a tried and tested friend” (Xi, 2014, p. 340). And the 2013 White Paper on *China-Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation* concluded:

The Chinese people are working hard to realize the Chinese dream of national revival, while African people are committed to the African dream of gaining strength through unity and achieving development and renewal. With a spirit of mutual respect and win-win cooperation, China will continue to take concrete measures to build a Sino-African community of shared destinies featuring all-round, diversified and deep cooperation. It will work to advance China-Africa economic and trade cooperation to help both sides make their respective dreams come true. (PRC State Council Information Office, 2013)

## COLLECTIVE SELF-MOTIVES AND CHINA'S ALTERCASTING OF AFRICA

As the preceding discussion has shown, the PRC projects a very specific identity onto the African continent – a process known as altercasting (Wendt, 1999, p. 329; Mead, 1967 [1934]). Africa is casted into the role of “the continent with the largest number of developing countries,” thus forming a natural community with China as “the largest developing country.” African countries furthermore are said to be firm supporters of the principles guiding Chinese foreign policy, to have the same desire for independent development as China, to be intent on finding African solutions for African problems, to be interested in a restructuring of the international order, and to reject Western claims to universalism. Above all, they are casted into the role of China’s all-weather friends. As such, China is actively trying to shape Africa’s identity (Duggan, 2016).

To interpret Chinese discourses and narratives solely as strategic tools intended to deceive the African side would nevertheless be misleading. As discussed in the previous chapter, the PRC’s identification with the developing countries has remained one of the few constants in its Self-Other relations, and Africa more than any other continent epitomizes the Chinese idea of the South’s communion with the PRC. During the 1960s and 1970s, Africa helped to satisfy China’s interest in Self-verification (confirming its existing Self-image) and Self-enhancement (casting its Self in a favorable light) by providing an opportunity to act as a socialist, revolutionary and developing state fighting against colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism. At the same time, its self-proclaimed leadership role in Africa was a way for China to construct itself as a great power that had suffered during the

“century of humiliation” but now had stood up again, and a morally superior state that was using its regained power to help fellow victims of foreign oppression. As such, Africa historically was an important arena for the PRC’s identity claims and its struggle for thick recognition, and while its involvement in Africa’s revolutionary movements today is downplayed, the iconic TAZARA railway and Africa’s support for China’s admission into the UN are still depicted as embodiments of South-South cooperation and the spirit of Bandung.

The notion of Sino-African friendship not only is about the past, however, and while China has been transformed from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary state, Africa still functions as a main site for its identity-claims. It is here where China tries to enact its identity as a new type of socialist state that follows its own path and regards the choice of political and social system as an internal affair of every state; a developmental “reform- and opening-up” state that attaches priority to socio-economic development at home and the national interest in its international relations; a nation-state which is in the process of regaining the status it lost due to foreign humiliation; a peacefully developing and responsible great power which does not use its position to bully the weak but strives to achieve international harmony by promoting and practicing a new type of international relations; a large developing country that despite the coexistence of both underdeveloped and developed features, an independent foreign policy and a focus on economic relations with the North belongs to the South; and a progressive state that no longer pursues revolution but still holds on to its goal of promoting the interests of the oppressed by making the global order more equal and just. Therefore, if China wants to achieve ontological security and thick recognition, it cannot simply ignore its own rhetoric of Sino-African friendship. In this sense, Africa indeed is China’s significant Other.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed how the PRC makes use of historical narratives to construct its relationship with the African continent as a “traditional friendship” and “strategic partnership.” It has highlighted the symbolic relevance of pre-colonial contacts, the shared fate of Western colonialism, the common struggle for



national liberation and independence, as well as mutual support in international affairs, and how the more recent emphasis on shared interests and strategic partnerships adds a decidedly future-oriented element to the narrative of Sino-African friendship that promises to combine historically grown ties of solidarity with pragmatic initiatives that will lead to tangible outcomes. Taken together, these narratives and discourses establish a specific identity of China as a benevolent and respectful equal that will always remain Africa's good friend and partner, and set friendly China-Africa relations apart from the continent's relationship with the West. In addition, the chapter has touched upon the relevance Africa as a significant Other has for the PRC's Self, and why it would thus be misleading to interpret the narratives of Sino-African friendship and partnership as empty rhetoric.

This is the representational context we need to understand Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations in. Indeed, as the following chapters will show, one aspect that makes Ethiopia and South Africa good candidates for friendship with China is that they can easily be integrated in the more encompassing narrative of Sino-African friendship, have shown a willingness to subscribe to the roles China projects onto them, and to recognize China's identity-claims. The underlying reason for this, in turn, can be found in the two African states own identities – and the next part of this study thus will begin with a discussion of Ethiopia's Self, and how it has been developed in relation to Others.

## CHAPTER 5: ETHIOPIA'S SELF AND ITS RELATION TO OTHERS

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[W]e stand united with our Asian friends and brothers. Africa shares with Asia a common background of colonialism, of exploitation, of discrimination, of oppression. At Bandung, African and Asian States dedicated themselves to the liberation of their two continents from foreign domination and affirmed the right of all nations to develop in their own way, free of any external interference.

Haile Selassie, *Towards African Unity* (1963)

### APPROACHING ETHIOPIA'S IDENTITY

In parallel to Chapter 3 on China, this chapter is about Ethiopia's state identity. It will be discussed how it has historically been shaped in relation to Others, and how the today ruling EPRDF has sought to overcome the ontological insecurity that has troubled Ethiopia since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by defining a new Ethiopian identity. This is necessary to understand the special role China plays in Ethiopia's international relations, although the relevance of some of the information provided once more will only become evident later in this study, when the discussion will turn to Sino-Ethiopian relations.

The chapter begins with a look on Ethiopia's imperial past, and how the contact with the aggressive and "modern" European Other resulted in a deepening identity crisis that has troubled the weak and "backward" Ethiopia ever since. This matters here because it provides the background for comparable narratives of past glory, foreign humiliation and national renaissance in Ethiopia and China, which today facilitate mutual recognition and identification. Afterwards, the discussion will turn to the struggle between different visions of a strong and modern Ethiopia, including the last emperor's goal of conservative modernization, the military's vision of a communist Ethiopia, and the today ruling EPRDF's ideology of revolutionary democracy. This matters because the shared worldviews of two ruling parties with a socialist vision of modernity today are central for enabling friendship processes between the EPRDF's Ethiopia and the CCP's China.

The chapter will then turn to the EPRDF in power, and how it has sought to adapt to a changing and not very friendly international environment by giving token support to liberal reforms, while behind the scene staying as true to its own, non-liberal vision of Ethiopia as possible. This is relevant not only because the rise of China has helped to alleviate the West's pressure for reforms, but also provided the EPRDF with a model to emulate. The chapter will close with a discussion of Ethiopia's exceptionalism and lasting struggle for modernity, and a summary of its official state identity.

In contrast to the large IR literature on China, the small literature dealing with Ethiopia's international relations so far has shown little interest in questions of identity. This may have to do with Ethiopian researcher's limited exposure to alternative conceptualizations of international relations, but more importantly also with the indeed rather strong inward-orientation of Ethiopia's state identity. As the following two chapters will show, however, it would nevertheless be wrong to underestimate the role identity plays in Ethiopia's international relations. Similar to China, the path Ethiopia has taken since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century can be stylized as one long search for a redefined Ethiopian Self, which began when the material superiority of the European powers with their notion of modernity started to question the collective identity the Ethiopian elites had long taken for granted. And even though this narrative once more means to construct an overly simplistic contrast between "traditional" and "modern" Ethiopia, and to underestimate internal dynamics and continuities, Ethiopia's contemporary identity cannot be understood without taking into account the ontological security of the state that resulted from imperial Ethiopia's contact with the European Other.

#### IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA'S CONTACT WITH THE "MODERN" OTHER

Although the official state historiography that emphasizes continuity should be treated with caution, and in reality there were many twists and turns in the countries' history (Toggia, 2011), modern day Ethiopia can trace its origins back to the ancient Kingdom of Aksum, which existed in what today is northern Ethiopia and Eritrea since the first century B.C. The Ethiopian history of state building thus differs fundamentally from the pattern found in most other parts of Africa, where

multiethnic states were created almost arbitrarily by the European colonizers. In combination with a written language and the adoption of Christianity as state religion already in the fourth century, Ethiopia thus over time developed a distinct religious, cultural, and political identity.

The rulers of the last empire, which was founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until 1974, traced their lineage back to the biblical King Solomon, an official state mythology that was supported by the powerful Orthodox Church and presented the inhabitants of Abyssinia as god's chosen people (Keller, 2010). The Semitic-influenced people of Ethiopia thus treated other Africans with contempt, and since antiquity slaves from the Nilotic peoples surrounding the country not only were central to the Ethiopian empire's own social and economic order, but also played an important role in its trade with the Arab world (Pankhurst, 1961). Although over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia has accepted that it is part of Africa, a sense of being different is still very much alive in the country today, and its inhabitants have been found to be "the first to believe in the mythical quality of their motherland" (Prunier & Ficquet, 2015, p. 1).

Despite its long history, it was not until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that the Ethiopian state began to take its contemporary form by adopting more and more elements of the European model of state. After a century of internal turmoil and feuds between various noble houses, four Ethiopian emperors in direct reaction to the growing pressure of European colonialism gradually turned the traditional monarchy into a modernizing, but in many ways still conservative autocracy (Clapham, 1988, p. 26). Tewodros II, who ascended to the throne in 1855, was aware of his country's weaknesses, especially if compared to the European monarchies, and he turned towards them in order to gain support against internal and external enemies. In letters to the fellow Christian Queen Victoria of Great Britain he described himself as "blind" and "ignorant," contrasted the "darkness" of Ethiopia with the "light" of Europe, and asked for assistance against the Islamic people surrounding the country (Bahru, 2002, p. 37). The letters, however, remained unanswered, and in 1868 Tewodros committed suicide after a punitive expedition the British had sent to free some of their incarcerated compatriots

defeated his army and burnt his palace to the ground – only eight years after an Anglo-French expedition force had done the same to the Summer Palace in Beijing. While his successor Yohannes IV focused on continued internal unification against the backdrop of external pressure, it was especially the third of the modernizing emperors, Menelik II (1889-1913), who began emulating Western modernity in a systematic way. He did so by employing the services of foreign experts, and the early 1900s saw the introduction of formal government ministries, a centralized land-survey technique, a national currency, Ethiopia's first Western-style schools and banks, and the completion of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway line linking the new capital of Addis Ababa to the sea (Clapham, 2006). Menelik was also adept at using the rivalries between different European powers for his own advantage, and in 1896 was able to militarily defeat an invading Italian army. With the exception of the Italian colony in what today is Eritrea, and a short time of foreign occupation during WWII, Ethiopia thus was the only African state never to be colonized.

Whereas it had to be defended against the European “scramble for Africa,” in its relations with neighboring peoples Ethiopia was the aggressor itself. In parallel to its centralizing efforts since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ethiopian state in a string of military victories and negotiated settlements expanded from its traditional territory in the highlands of Abyssinia into the ethnically diverse lowlands to its west and south, and only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century acquired its current reach. There is an ongoing debate within the Ethiopian scholarly community on how to interpret this process, ranging from those who follow the legitimizing imperial narrative of positive nation-building and voluntary assimilation into the dominant culture to those comparing the oppression of the non-Abyssinian people, their systematic economic exploitation and forced cultural assimilation to Western colonialism (Merera, 2003). In any case, today's Ethiopia was built by incorporating peripheral peoples into a central state with an already strong identity, and followed by state-led attempts at constructing a common national identity based on the culture of the highlands (Aalen, 2011, p. 25).

Internationally, European encroachment remained a constant threat. Refraining from further attempts to establish direct rule, in 1906 Great Britain, France and Italy divided Ethiopia into spheres of influence and secured far-reaching economic rights for themselves, thus turning Ethiopia into a semi-colony. The Ethiopian state nevertheless continued to struggle for international recognition, and in 1923 indeed was allowed to join the League of Nations, after it had promised to end slavery and thus had proven to be willing to progress to the stage of “civilized” nations (Allain, 2006).

#### ONTOLOGICAL INSECURITY AND ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF MODERNITY

The last emperor of Ethiopia was Haile Selassie I, who became regent in 1916 and emperor in 1930, and remained in power until 1974. During his long reign, he equipped Ethiopia with “all the rest of the imported paraphernalia of the modern state,” including a system of modern education, a bureaucracy, and public services (Clapham, 1988, p. 29). The early years of his rule prior to WWII also signalled the peak of influence of a small group of advisers that had formed around a nucleus of missionary-educated intellectuals, some of whom had been sent to Europe for education as protégés of the emperor or other nobles, and now had become high-ranking officials. Clapham has described their efforts to reform the traditional Ethiopian state as

driven to a large extent by the cognitive dissonance between an inherited sense of cultural superiority and an acute awareness of Ethiopian ‘backwardness’, by contrast not only with the European states [...], but even with the colonised African peoples whom they were accustomed to treat with scorn. (Clapham, 2006, p. 211)

While Western observers mostly called them “Young Ethiopians,” reminiscent of other reforming groups such as the Young Turks and the Young Egypt Party, another label used for them was “Japanizers,” since they called for an all-out embrace of European modernity, including the establishment of a centralized, absolutist state – something they saw realized in Meiji-era Japan. This admiration for Japan had started to grow after the Sino-Russian War of 1905, and in contrast to China, Ethiopia had no reason to fear a rising Japan – it was simply a victory of

fellow “peoples of colour” over white oppression, and a model on how to turn a backward country into a strong and modern power (Clarke, 2004). Haile Selassie himself became an ardent admirer of Japan, and Ethiopia’s first constitution, adopted in 1931, was heavily derived from the absolutist Meiji constitution of 1889. One year later, Ethiopia’s foreign minister, after an official visit to Japan, published an elaborate comparison of the two countries highlighting the many parallels (such as the old imperial dynasty, the need to overcome the power of the feudal lords, or the manners of the two people), and urged Ethiopia to follow in Japan’s path (Clarke, 2004).

Partly because of such perceived similarities, and partly to counter the influence of European powers, Ethiopia sought to construct an alliance (and arguably a friendship) with Japan, including a proposed marriage between a member of the Ethiopian royal family and a Japanese noble woman, although ultimately not much came out of this (Clarke, 2004). In 1935, four decades after their defeat on the hands of Menelik’s soldiers, Italian forces once again invaded Ethiopia, and in 1936 Mussolini founded Italian East Africa, comprising Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. Haile Selassie went to the UK into exile, but after the British had driven Italy out of its short-lived colony, he was able to return to power in 1941.

After Japan had ended up on the side of the enemy during WWII and suffered a crushing defeat, it lost its status as a model for Ethiopia. However, since Japan had mostly been an example for how to emulate European modernity – a second-order model as it were – this did not result in a fundamental reorientation. Instead, Haile Selassie now directly turned to the West, which finally had stopped to push for colonial expansion. In a time when China assumed its role as an apprentice of the Soviet Union, the Ethiopian Empire largely accepted its role as “a tutee, a student painfully learning the Western ways,” as the historian Messay Kebede has put it (Messay, 2011, p. 102).

In the early 1950s, American support was vital for returning Eritrea under Ethiopian control, and a thankful Haile Selassie in turn gave green light for the establishment of a US communications base in Asmara, and sent a small troop drawn from his Imperial Bodyguard to support the American-led UN force in the

Korean War against the communist North. In the following years Ethiopia became a centrepiece of the USA's Africa strategy, received large amounts of military equipment, and three US scholars functioned as advisers during the drafting of a revised constitution that was promulgated in 1955 (Spencer, 1977).

Haile Selassie thus positioned Ethiopia in the capitalist camp, and according to the historian Bahru Zewde, the 1950s and the 1960s may "justifiably be described as the American era, as far as Ethiopia's international alignment is concerned" (Bahru, 2002, p. 186). At the same time, however, the emperor also began to stylize himself as a champion of decolonization, multilateralism and the African cause, making use of the fact that in many parts of Africa he was revered as a living legend. In 1961 he participated in the founding of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), and in 1963 he became the first chairman of the newly founded Organization of African Unity (OAU), which established its headquarters in Addis Ababa. Indeed, during his last decade as emperor, Haile Selassie more and more concentrated his energies on international relations, frequently traveling to other African states, but also to the capitals of the First and Second World (Clapham, 2015).

At home, however, the aging emperor was mainly occupied with securing power, and his unwillingness to share power severely limited the reach of his political reforms. While the revised constitution of 1955 formally established an elected lower house of parliament and an appointed upper house resembling the British constitutional monarchy, and also contained a bill of rights resembling the US constitution, in practice the absolutist nature of the regime remained unchanged. In the economic realm change remained equally superficial. Although peripheral Ethiopia's integration into the international economy and the establishment of a system of modern education had led to the development of a small educated and urban elite, for the majority of rural peasants little changed. Despite the state's stated preoccupation with development they remained in the traditional subsistence sector, subject to the wills of the landed aristocracy, and outside the reach of the newly established public services (Bahru, 2002).



The viability of conservative modernization thus became increasingly questionable, not only because Ethiopia was unable to catch up with the developed powers, but also because revolutionary states such as China and Cuba and even many only recently decolonized African countries appeared to fare much better. Discontent with the sclerotic regime started to grow within the imperial apparatus, and although in 1960 an attempted coup could quickly be suppressed, the period prior to the 1974 revolution “was suffused with the sense of an era nearing its end” (Clapham, 2015, p. 200).

It was in this context that many intellectuals and students turned to socialism as an alternative vision of modernity (Young, 1997; Aregawi, 2009; Clapham, 2015). They drew parallels between contemporary Ethiopia and pre-revolutionary Russia, and argued that the central problem of Ethiopia was its feudal ruling class, which had profited from the colonial expansion of the empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to exploit the masses, and which therefore had to be overthrown. In addition, in Lenin’s and Stalin’s writings on how to solve the problem of different ethnic groups within the borders of the Russian empire, the so-called “national question,” the ethnically diverse students found a way to combine the struggle for socialism with a call to end the dominance of the Amhara-controlled state over the various ethnic groups of the empire. As such, both feudalism and the failed promise of liberal-democratic reforms became Others the future Ethiopia was dissociated from.

Similar to the first leaders of the CCP, who were rooted in the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement of 1919, the early leaders of the currently ruling EPRDF emerged out of this revolutionary student movement. However, it were not the students who finally ended imperial rule, nor the revolutionary masses, but the military. In early 1974, in the context of a poorly handled famine that cost the lives of up to 200 000 people, and an ailing economy hit by the first oil shock, several small mutinies occurred amongst the politicized soldiers. An Armed Forces Coordinating Committee, originally intended to restore order within the military, increasingly opposed the government, became the real centre of power, and in September 1974 finally imprisoned the emperor. Upon officially assuming power the military

junta changed its name to Provisional Military Administrative Council, but it became generally known by its shorthand name Derg (Keller, 1988, pp. 166-87).

#### ETHIOPIA UNDER DERG-RULE – A FAITHFUL ADHERENT TO THE SOVIET MODEL

Initially it was largely unclear what the heterogeneous Derg stood for ideologically – its declaration “Ethiopia First” indicated some sort of African socialism as proposed by leaders such as Nyerere and Nkrumah, with a focus on nationalism and indigenous traditions. Within a year, however, without compensation it nationalized all major industrial, financial and commercial institutions, as well as all rural and urban land – death blows to the landed aristocracy and the small urban rentier class that had provided the economic basis for the old order. And in 1976, under the influence of Marxist student advisers, the Derg adopted a “Program for the National Democratic Revolution,” officially committing itself to the principles of “scientific socialism” as promoted by the Soviet Union (Clapham, 1987; Keller, 1988).

The national democratic revolution the Derg now stood for was part of the Soviet theory of the two-stage revolution necessary in colonial and semi-colonial countries, which had also informed the revolutionary struggle in China several decades earlier. At its core, this theory still maintained that a national-democratic revolution, brought about by a united front of all progressive forces, was necessary to liberate the country from the forces of imperialism and feudalism, and that the socialist revolution would have to follow later. In contrast to earlier formulations, however, in 1960 Soviet ideologues had argued that even after the transition to a national democratic state the progressive nationalist forces could be allowed to lead the united front, as long as the state the progressive forces jointly had captured remained non-aligned, minimized capitalist influence from abroad, tolerated the work of local communists, and developed the state economic sector. Such states of “socialist orientation” were deemed to follow a “non-capitalist course of development,” which would allow them to bypass the stage of capitalism and create the necessary preconditions for a smooth transition towards socialism (Menon, 1986, p. 35; Shinn, 1963).

Preparing the country for socialism was the task the Derg as a self-proclaimed progressive nationalist force gave itself, and after the first stage of the national democratic revolution had already been achieved with the capture of state power, the next step would now be realized through political education and agitation, a strengthening of the state apparatus, a reorganization of the productive forces of society, the development of a planned economy, the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party, and a solution to Ethiopia's national question (Keller, 1988). Many demands of the Marxist student movement were thus satisfied. However, ideological differences and the Derg's unwillingness to step aside and make room for a civilian leadership led to growing tensions. Several leftist groups started to compete with each other and the military for influence, and during the years 1977 and 1978 this resulted in what became known as Red Terror against the enemies of the Derg. By early 1978, the military under its now uncontested leader Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam had squashed all rival groups, and the country's intelligentsia was "either dead, imprisoned, exiled, or engaged in rural insurrections" (Young, 1982, p. 60). While in the end those who were purged from the united front of revolutionary democrats would emerge victorious, just as the Chinese communists had in 1949, for the time being the Derg and Mengistu were firmly in power.

Internationally, Ethiopia's revolution led to a fundamental reorientation of the country. The Derg heavily pushed an alliance with the USSR, but the Soviets, not convinced of the Derg's intentions and the long-term prospects of the revolution, were reluctant. Mengistu accordingly stressed Ethiopia's willingness to learn from the Soviet practice of building socialism and organizing society, and asked for programs sending young Ethiopians to Moscow for education and political training (Westad, 2007). With its official commitment to scientific socialism and the national democratic revolution, the Derg finally convinced the Soviets; in late 1976 a first agreement on military cooperation was signed, and the USSR started to pour arms and military equipment into Ethiopia. The USA had to withdraw its forces, and its military base in Asmara was shut down.

The alliance with the Soviet Union soon saved Mengistu's regime. Ethiopia's neighbor Somalia, although a Soviet ally as well, in mid-1977 invaded the eastern Ogaden region with its large population of ethnic Somali, and soon threatened the Ethiopian heartland. The Soviets had warned Mogadishu from doing so, and now the ties were severed: In an impressive show of military power that would cement their position as a real alternative to the United States in Africa, the USSR sent more than USD 1 billion worth of military equipment and almost 1 000 military personnel; the Cubans sent more than 11 600 soldiers, and more than 6 000 technical advisers and experts; and even the tiny People's Republic of Yemen sent two armored battalions. Not since the Korean War had the Soviet-led socialist camp engaged in such a massive military operation outside the area of the Warsaw Pact. In early 1978 the Somali forces had been driven out of Ethiopia (Westad, 2007, p. 276).

During the following decade Ethiopia and the Soviet Union remained international friends, although already in the mid-1980s fissures became visible. Nevertheless, for a while there was frequent engagement and cooperation (the assistance program with more than 7 000 advisors in early 1979 was the largest the Soviets undertook after China in the 1950s), cooperation was based on the principles of socialist internationalism, and the relationship was characterized by mutual recognition and identification. Central to this friendship was the Derg's strict adherence to the Soviet model, and the regime with consistency and determination implemented a development strategy thoroughly inspired by Marxism-Leninism (Clapham, 1987, pp. 151-165). As Crawford Young noted in the early 1980s, Soviet as well as Western observers suggested that Ethiopia indeed presented the only true socialist revolution in Africa to date, and that other revolutions on the continent, including Angola and Mozambique, in reality were nothing but "mere national liberation movements" (Young, 1982, p. 69).

This also meant, however, that "instead of Marxism adapting to Ethiopia, it was Ethiopia that was made to adapt to Marxism" (Teshale, 2011). In light of the numerous practical problems that followed, the Soviet advisors soon became disillusioned, and the Derg's successes in actually achieving development, or a

transition to socialism, were very limited. In the countryside, imposed collectivization and newly introduced farming techniques resulted in massive soil erosion and false production reports, and in the mid-1980s the country was hit by a devastating famine. It also took until 1984 before a communist vanguard party with Mengistu as its secretary general was established, and only after the official founding of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1987 the Derg was finally disbanded.

Most importantly, however, Mengistu's regime never was able to solve the national question it had inherited from the multi-ethnic Ethiopian empire. Already under Haile Selassie there had seen several small revolts amongst the country's non-amharic population, and under the Derg this problem only became worse. During the 1980s, especially the armed insurrections led by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) presented the biggest challenge to Mengistu's rule. While the EPLF in the 1990s finally achieved its goal of an independent Eritrea, the TPLF became the nucleus of today's ruling EPRDF, and will thus receive special attention here.

## THE TPLF AND THE IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE CURRENT REGIME

Although Tigray belongs to the Christian heartland of Abyssinia, poverty, the perception of Amhara dominance, and the brutal suppression of a peasant revolt by Haile Selassie in 1943 led to lasting tensions with the central state. While the Derg had remained committed to Ethiopian unity, arguing that the problem of different nationalities within the country would wither away once the problem of class-based exploitation had been solved, the TPLF, which in 1975 had been founded by Marxist university students, maintained that the national question could only be solved by granting the different ethnicities that had been forced into the Ethiopian empire the right to self-determination. For a while the TPLF accordingly promoted the idea of an independent state, but since the late 1970s it officially aimed at a self-ruled Tigray within a federal Ethiopia. In conjunction with this ethno-nationalism, however, the TPLF's leaders also continued to adhere to Marxism-Leninism, and saw the solution of the national question only as a first

step towards socialism. In 1979, on its first Organizational Congress, the TPLF thus adopted the “Program for the National Democratic Revolution,” which in content was virtually indistinguishable from the Derg’s program of the same name (Young, 1997; Aregawi, 2009).

In contrast to the Derg and some other rebel movements the TPLF was internationally largely isolated, but the search for models and potential friends nevertheless played an important role. While its adherence to the national democratic revolution pointed to the Soviet Union, the USSR was chastised for its support of the Derg and its interventionist policies, and in 1983 officially declared the movement’s enemy. China was seen in a more favorable light. The writings of Mao Zedong, with their emphasis on peasant revolution, guerilla warfare and the adaptation of Marxism to national circumstances, from the beginning had influenced the thinking of the TPLF leaders, and they agreed with Chinese views on Soviet revisionism and imperialism. Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, however, were criticized as strategic alliance with the national bourgeoisie, and the TPLF accordingly started to speak of Chinese revisionism as well. In the end, the TPLF began to praise the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania, which after its break with both the USSR and the PRC promoted a policy of self-reliance (Aregawi, 2009; Bach, 2011; Young, 1997).

As a result of this ideological journey, the organization’s international isolation and its ethno-nationalist tendencies, the TPLF developed a tradition of what Africanist Alex de Waal has called “intellectual self-reliance,” and in contrast to the dogmatic Derg was quite pragmatic in its adaptation of Marxism to Ethiopian circumstances – and its own needs (de Waal, 2013, p. 150). An important role in this process was played by Meles Zenawi, who since the late 1970s had quickly risen through the party’s ranks, and in 1983 became the leading ideologue in its Executive Committee. Meles was part of an informal grouping that described itself as consisting of the “leading elements” within the TPLF, and in 1985 this group formally set up the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT). Aregawi Berhe, a founding member of the TPLF and one of its long-time leaders, describes the following development as an all-out capture of the revolutionary-democratic TPLF

by the communist MLLT (Aregawi, 2009, pp. 169-192). Although Aregawi was subsequently purged from the TPLF leadership and had to go into exile in 1986, and his account therefore has to be treated with some caution, other sources agree that those who had organized themselves in the MLLT came to dominate the TPLF (Young, 1997, pp. 139-40).

By the mid-1980s, despite repeated military campaigns, the Derg had lost control of virtually all of Tigray, and the rest of the decade saw the gradual advance of rebel forces. The withdrawal of military support by the new Soviet leadership, which under Gorbachev became less willing to support regimes that had to struggle with internal resistance, was one of the reasons the rebels were able to beat what was generally regarded as one of sub-Saharan Africa's strongest armies. In the late 1980s, when the TPLF finally advanced on Addis Ababa, it established several organizations representing different ethnic groups, and joined them together with the TPLF under the umbrella of the EPRDF. As such, the EPRDF mainly was – and in many ways has remained – a means for the TPLF to sideline the various existing ethnic-based groups that had opposed the Derg, and a tool to maintain its dominance under a mantle of inclusiveness.

When Mengistu in 1991 fled to Zimbabwe and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) was established, many feared that ethnic domination by the Amharas would be substituted with domination by the Tigrayans. Even more worrisome, however, was the prospect of a second Somalia, where rebels some months earlier had captured Mogadishu, and where the establishment of a central authority has remained elusive ever since. Yet the Ethiopian transition progressed relatively smoothly. The main exception was a conflict between the EPRDF and one of the existing ethnic-based organizations, the Oromo Liberation Front, but the resulting armed insurrection was mostly quelled in 1993. The other possible contender for power, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, left the arena of Ethiopian politics after a referendum with overwhelming majority had opted for secession, and Eritrea became an independent state in April 1993. The TPLF-led EPRDF thus soon became the only real center of political and military power in Ethiopia (Ottaway, 1995; Lyons, 1996).

## ETHIOPIA AFTER THE COLD WAR – BETWEEN NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION AND WESTERN CONDITIONALITY

While the EPRDF domestically was in a position of unrivaled power, the international balance of power was not in its favor, and while the theory of the national democratic revolution had been based on the assumption that the stage of capitalist development could be sidestepped thanks to support or at least guidance from the Soviet Union, this crucial element was now missing. The problem was exacerbated by the miserable state of the Ethiopian economy after more than 14 years of brutal civil war. Considering the developments that followed over the next two decades, it appears as if the party leadership thus decided to construct a state persona that would be acceptable to the Western states, in order to avoid a counter-revolution and secure as much international money as possible, while at the same time trying its best to stay true to its own vision of a modern Ethiopia. As such, the party started to play a double game, surrounded itself with a wall of secrecy, and became very adept at extracting development aid by speaking the language of democracy and markets.

The 1994 constitution established a federal republic including a separation of powers, the provision of civil and political rights including the right to vote and form political parties, and multi-party elections for a national parliament. On paper, therefore, Ethiopia became a liberal democracy. From the beginning, however, the electoral process was dominated by the EPRDF, which continued to adhere to the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, effectively merged with the state, and single-handedly decided political outcomes. Given that the TPLF had never aspired to establish a “bourgeois democracy,” this should not have been surprising. In the ideological context of the EPRDF, democracy thus continues to be understood not as a process to select representatives, but as participation of the Ethiopian people at the grass roots level, mobilized by the party and government organs in order to implement policies and measures decided at the top (Abbink, 2009, p. 12).

The establishment of a federal system was an expression of the TPLF’s ethno-nationalist aspirations, and presented the EPRDF’s solution to Ethiopia’s national



question. There indeed were some fundamental changes: Administrative boundaries were redrawn, the bureaucracy decentralized, ethnicity for the first time became an accepted topic in public discourse, and local languages and cultures were no longer suppressed. Yet the model of state the EPRDF had in mind was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which in 1922 had been established as a federation of ethnic-based republics, and as such Ethiopia not only constitutes “the last post-cold war socialist federation,” but the devolution of power to the federal level in practice continues to be contrasted with the centralizing power of the hegemonic EPRDF and its ethnic-based satellite parties and organizations (Semahagn, 2014). It therefore “soon became clear that regional autonomy was, just as in the Stalinist model that the EPRDF adopted, subordinated to a monolithic party-state” (Clapham, 2009, p. 187).

With regard to its economic system, Addis Alem Balema, longstanding member of the TPLF leadership, has described the Ethiopian experience after 1991 as “a struggle to balance between the country’s perceived requirements and policy choices and the heavy-handed policy prescriptions of powerful multinational financial organizations,” and as “a formidable challenge for a poor country with very limited alternatives” (Addis, 2003). Since the price for financial support from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was to accept the structural adjustment programs they demanded, the EPRDF committed itself to a market economy, economic liberalization, and the privatization of state-owned enterprises. Behind the scenes, however, a large share of Ethiopia’s economy remained under the control of the state and the ruling party. Strategic sectors such as telecommunications and energy have continue to be in state ownership, and the EPRDF refused to privatize the land the Derg had confiscated, which means that all land in Ethiopia belongs to the state. The four constituent parties of the EPRDF formed endowment conglomerates or other legal entities which were de facto controlled by party leaders, took control of former SOEs, and came to dominate large parts of the market. And while a growing private sector exists in Ethiopia, political support remains crucial, and “many market sectors are de facto oligopolies dominated by state and party-affiliated businesses” (Hagmann & Abbink, 2011, pp. 586-7; Vaughan & Mesfin, 2011; Getahun, 2004). In general,

therefore, the foreign-imposed economic liberalization was sabotaged from within, and remained piecemeal and superficial.

The need to deal with the international system may also be the reason why the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray, whose members had dominated the TPLF during the later years of the struggle, simply vanished from the scene. Alternatively, it may be that those “leading elements” that had used the party to capture the TPLF did see no use in it anymore. In any case, while members of the regime in the late 1990s said that the MLLT had not been formally disbanded (Vaughan, 2011, p. 626), and observers have proposed that it at least existed until 2001 (Abbink, 2009, p. 10), the MLLT as an organization does not seem to play a role any more. Similarly, while revolutionary democracy to this day remains the guiding ideology of the EPRDF, references to socialism as a long-term goal have disappeared – the 2001 leadership split discussed below possibly being the last time the issue was raised. What may come after the transitional stage of revolutionary democracy thus is largely left unanswered, but it certainly includes a developed, strong, and modern Ethiopia.

All in all it is remarkable how true to its original strategy the TPLF/EPRDF has remained, and without making enemies in the West. Ethiopia in fact quickly developed rather cordial relations with the developed world, especially the United States. This initially largely aid-centred relation gained a military element after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, and the Bush administration’s subsequent “war on terror,” in which Ethiopia became one of America’s key geo-strategic allies in Africa (Woodward, 2006; Hills, 2006). Keeping a low profile thus has worked quite well for the EPRDF.

#### RUPTURES AND ADJUSTMENTS IN EPRDF RULE AND IDEOLOGY

While the EPRDF was able to entrench itself in the political system and the economy, two events in the early to mid-2000s highlighted the weak spots of the regime. The first was the internal split in the TPLF leadership in 2001. It followed a war with Eritrea, which was sparked by unresolved border issues and in 1998 started with the occupation of a small border town by Eritrean troops. The Ethiopian offensive drove the Eritrean forces out of the country, and in June 2000

a peace agreement was signed, but with an estimated 80 000 to 100 000 deaths it was one of the most intense and bloodiest wars in post-Cold War Africa (Abbink, 2003). Tensions between the two countries have run high ever since.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had allegedly rejected an all-out war, and in late 2000 and early 2001 tensions within the TPLF Executive Committee, which so far had maintained collective leadership, led to an open struggle for power. The main point of contention was not the war with Eritrea, however, but how far Ethiopia should deviate from socialist orthodoxies, and the more conservative members of the committee accused Meles and his supporters of planning to abandon socialist principles in favour of bourgeois democracy. Meles, in turn, criticized the “Bonapartism” that could be found within the EPRDF, which according to him had become corrupt, had distanced itself from the people, and was in danger of becoming a new ruling class. In the end Meles emerged victorious and was able to purge his main rivals. Subsequently the TPLF, the other constituent parties of the EPRDF and the military were brought into line under the slogan of “renewal,” and Meles remained as the now uncontested leader of party and government (Medhane & Young, 2003).

Meles’ victory meant that post-revolutionary pragmatism had won over revolutionary aspirations, and that Ethiopia would focus on economic development and hasten its integration into the global economy. In its 2002 white paper *Foreign Affairs and National Security*, supposedly written by Meles himself, the post-split leadership laid down its approach to Ethiopia’s international relations. The paper declared that, “while we are proud of our heritage, we are also ashamed of the current state of our country,” and “we observe with bitter regret the state of national humiliation in which the present generation finds itself” (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002, p. 11). The reason for this state of humiliation is seen in the country’s “poverty and backwardness,” which in turn is rooted in “the lack of democracy and good governance,” and the “inability to work together in a spirit of tolerance and cooperation forged by a common belief in our national destiny” (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002, p. 12). Therefore, “[t]he objective of our foreign and national security policy is the realization of our vision

of democracy and development and creating an enabling environment to this end” (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002, p. 25).

The paper goes on to discuss Ethiopia’s various bilateral relations, but apart from Ethiopia’s immediate neighbourhood in the Horn of Africa, which is largely discussed from a security perspective, the rest of the continent is dealt with rather briefly, due to the assessment that inter-African economic exchanges will remain negligible for the foreseeable future, and that African states therefore will not be central to the realization of democracy and development in Ethiopia. As such, while the EPRDF government expressly lauds its predecessors’ African policy and vows to continue along similar lines, it is also made clear that Ethiopia’s focus needs to be on its relations with the great powers that shape the rules of globalization, and what the AU and individual African states actually can do for Ethiopia is “to help us indirectly as we try to make ourselves heard in other parts of the world” (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002, p. 108). As we will see in the following chapter, China has played an important role in this strategy.

The general elections in 2005 were the second event exposing the weaknesses of the regime. In contrast to previous elections, the EPRDF had allowed the opposition parties to campaign and disseminate their party programs, and due to this broadened political space the elections for the first time included a real competitive element. They still did not take place on a level playing field, but to everybody’s surprise the opposition was nevertheless able to win almost one-third of the seats in parliament and fared especially well in large cities, even capturing all seats in the capital. After a few months of uncertainty, however, the regime arrested leading opposition figures on charges of furthering ethnic violence, and the anti-government riots that followed were violently suppressed, resulting in 7 killed policemen and 193 civilian deaths. Some days later leaders of civil society organizations and journalists from the private press were detained (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009; Gilkes, 2015). The EPRDF thus was able to abort a short phase of political opening that had gotten out of control. Nevertheless, the confidence in the party’s ability to muster the support of the masses was shaken.

The Western donors initially reacted strongly to the crackdown. In November 2005, the international Donor Assistance Group suspended all direct budget support to the Ethiopian government, which however did not give in to the pressure. Meles reportedly told the group's representatives to "pack up and go home if they were not interested in supporting the development of the country" (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009, p. 204). While direct budgetary support for the government remained suspended, in the end the amount of funds was not reduced, but instead channelled towards other programmes, especially those dealing with service delivery (Hackenesch, 2013, p. 20). And although the EPRDF has since made clear that it is not willing to discuss what Western observers would call substantial democratization, and has reacted strongly to any signs of criticism, it appears that "most donors are willing to accept a heavy dose of authoritarianism in return for 'stability' and 'for the sake of the Ethiopian people', who cannot be held responsible for the mistakes or abuse of their government" (Hagmann & Abbink, 2011, p. 590). Ethiopia therefore has remained a donor darling, receiving USD 3.585 billion in official development aid from OECD Development Assistance Committee members in 2014 (OECD, 2016).

## ETHIOPIA'S RENAISSANCE AND THE RISE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

While the EPRDF did not tolerate any foreign interference, it did draw numerous lessons from the election debacle. The ideological basis for this was provided by several documents most likely authored by Meles Zenawi (Tronvoll, 2010). In these documents, not only did the EPRDF reiterate its commitment to revolutionary democracy, but also reaffirmed and refined its post-2001 commitment to a market-led and export-oriented development strategy. This was epitomized in the notion of the "developmental state," which soon came to dominate the state-sanctioned public discourse in Ethiopia.

In an unpublished paper entitled *African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings*, Meles in 2006 spelled out what he regarded as the defining elements of such a state, as well as the rationale behind its establishment. He rejects the "neoliberal paradigm" of a night-watchman state as a "dead end" that is not able

to deal with the numerous cases of market failure across the developing world, such as the tendency of market actors to extract money from the economy without engaging in value-adding activities (Meles, 2006, n.p.). Taking East Asian states (especially Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) as examples, he argues that what instead is needed is a developmental state that is able to overcome such market failures. Because this necessitates long-term strategic planning and a far-reaching autonomy of the state vis-à-vis market actors, especially during its initial phase competitive elections would pose a threat to the success of the developmental project. At the same time, however, Meles stresses that it needs to be avoided that the state turns into a predatory state engaged in patronage and rent-seeking, as is often the case in authoritarian contexts. The developmental state therefore needs to be a democratic one, based not on competitive elections as in liberal democracies, but on a broad coalition of social classes. According to Meles, the first task of the developmental state thus is to forge such a coalition, “to build national consensus around its development project, make its ‘development project hegemonic’” (Meles, 2006, n.p.).

In a book chapter published in 2012, Meles further elaborates on some of these themes. He discusses the inability of an unregulated market to ensure technological catch-up and innovation in developing countries, and the need for late industrializers to protect and steer their markets via state intervention, arguing that “development is a political process first and a socioeconomic process second” (Meles, 2012, p. 166). He furthermore argues that the developmental state

needs to be autonomous from society at large and tower over it like a colossus. It can be semi-democratic, semi-parliamentarian at best. [...] At the ideological level, accelerated development is the mission, the source of legitimacy. Moreover, the development project is a hegemonic project in the Gramscian sense – the key actors voluntarily adhere to its objectives and principles. (Meles, 2012, p. 167)

Given Meles’ (selective) support of market mechanisms, it becomes clear why his opponents already in 2001 had accused him of abandoning socialism. However, although Meles’ thinking clearly evolved after the end of the Cold War, the vision of a developmental state he laid out in many ways actually resembles the state

and its role as depicted in Soviet writings from the 1970s and 1980s on the national democratic state, which is supposed to prepare the country for socialism by following a non-capitalist course of development. The main – and admittedly quite fundamental – difference is that gradually reducing the influence of capitalist forces in the country’s economy, a central goal of the Soviet approach, is no longer seen as feasible. Quite to the contrary, integrating into the global economy and receiving money and technology from the developed world are regarded as the only way to progress on the ladder of development under the conditions of globalization.

How close contemporary Ethiopia actually comes to Meles’ visions has to remain an open question here, but with regard to its economic strategies many assessments are remarkably positive. Although the reliability of the numbers has been challenged, according to the World Bank the country has experienced strong and broad based economic growth over the past decade, averaging a staggering 10.8% per year between 2003/04 and 2014/15 (World Bank, 2017). Tim Kelsall from the London-based Overseas Development Institute in addition argues that the Ethiopian state has been quite successful in combatting rent-seeking, and that its “developmental policy has been facilitated by a formidable concentration of political and economic power” (Kelsall, 2013, p. 93). In a similar vein, his colleagues Sarah Vaughan and Mesfin Gebremichael maintain that the government’s commitment to development is “beyond the question,” and that it has “achieved a high degree of rent management and allocation, retaining control of a large proportion of available sources of rents and economic levers” (Vaughan & Mesfin, 2011, p. 12). Others, however, warn of the dangers that come with the state’s heavy involvement in the economy, and point to inefficiencies and corruption (World Bank, 2009; Berhanu, 2011).

In any case, whether the state is to be made responsible for this or not, Ethiopia has made palpable economic progress over the last decade, albeit from a very low base. Emboldened by this development, in 2011 the government announced its ambitious Vision 2025, according to which Ethiopia strives to become a lower middle-income country by 2025 (FDRE Government, 2011). This is to be achieved

with the help of five-year plans, called Growth and Transformation Plans, the first of which covered the years 2010/11 to 2014/15, the second the years 2015/16 to 2019/20. And on an ideological level the ideas associated with state-led developmentalism have become central for Ethiopia's official state identity construction – public discourse is full of them, and there is nothing to suggest that they still face resistance from inside the EPRDF.

While the developmental state has thus become very important for the regime's claim to authority, the post-2005 attempts to renew its "coalition with the people" have been more encompassing, and also included attempts to change Ethiopia's national identity. For example, Izabela Orłowska has shown how the celebrations surrounding the turn of the millennium in the Ethiopian calendar, which took place in 2007, marked "a shift in the government's ethnic policy of 'difference' associated with ethnic federalism, to an approach labelled 'unity in diversity'" (Orłowska, 2013, p. 298). As part of this shift, traditional markers of Ethiopian identity that are strongly associated with the culture of the highlands were downplayed, and complemented with more inclusive symbols and narratives, such as the depiction of Ethiopia as "cradle of mankind." In his New Year's speech 2007, Meles also coined the term "renaissance," and invoked the country's glorious past in order to urge everybody to "join hands in rebuilding Ethiopia" (cited in Orłowska, 2013, p. 302). The celebrated symbol of this national renaissance is the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which after its completion in 2017 will be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, and in the official imagery "is replacing former historical icons such as the Gonder castle and the Aksum obelisks" (Orłowska, 2013, p. 313).

In the 2010 national election, the EPRDF and its allies won all but two seats in parliament (although 30% of the votes went to the opposition). Freedom House the following year changed the country's status from 'partly free' to 'not free', but while international observers criticized the EPRDF's use of state funds for campaigning and reported numerous cases of voter intimidation and harassment, there was little doubt that even without such irregularities the regime would have clearly won the election (Gilkes, 2015; Arriola & Lyons, 2016).



When Meles Zenawi surprisingly died of an infection in 2012, aged 57, observers feared the eruption of political violence and intra-party conflict. However, the transition to the new Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, who previously had served as deputy prime minister and foreign minister but is neither a Tigrayan nor has strong connections to the military, was remarkably smooth. So far the new leadership has meticulously followed in the path set out by Meles, a sign of the institutionalization of the party and the lasting relevance of its guiding ideology. While at least for the moment intra-party conflict thus seems to be dealt with, the fact that the party won 94.5% of votes and 100% of seats in parliament during the most recent national election also indicates that the regime is unlikely to be challenged through institutional channels (Arriola & Lyons, 2016; The Reporter, 2015).

The main threat to the regime thus continues to come from unrest amongst the country's different ethnic groups, which continue to feel politically and economically marginalized. In mid-2016, accusations of local corruption and illegal land confiscation fuelled massive and sometimes violent anti-government protests in the Oromia region, which soon spread into the Amhara region as well. The government met these protests with brutal force, and in October 2016 a six-month-long state of emergency was declared. At the time of writing, it is unclear whether the unrests will flare up again any time soon, but it is evident that the national question still is far from being solved.

## ETHIOPIA'S INWARD-ORIENTATION AND STRUGGLE FOR MODERNITY

The EPRDF's claim to authority is rooted in the identity crisis that resulted from imperial Ethiopia's interaction with the European Other, the related search for a strong and modern Ethiopian Self, and the self-ascribed mission to lead Ethiopia back to greatness. The regime thus has sought to intertwine its own Self with that of the state, and while it initially was forced to keep a low profile, since the turn towards what may be called revolutionary-democratic developmentalism in the early 2000s, and even more so since the 2005 elections, the EPRDF has become increasingly outspoken regarding the contours of what it recognizes as correct

definition of the Ethiopian state's Self. This identity remains contested, of course, but if we continue to restrict our analysis to official representations of state identity – and to those aspects that are of relevance to this study – since the later years of Meles' rule Ethiopia can be identified as:

- a revolutionary-democratic state led by a peoples-based united front committed to the national democratic revolution, which follows its own path and regards the choice of political and social system as an internal affair of every country;
- a developmental state which attaches priority to socio-economic development at home and the national interest in its international relations;
- a federal and multiethnic state that is heir to a unique civilization and is trying to regain the status it lost due to foreign aggression and internal weakness;
- a developing country that belongs to Africa and the South but follows an independent foreign policy and maintains close and cooperative relations with the North; and
- a progressive state that uses its limited influence to re-shape the rules of globalization to serve its interests and, by extension, the rest of the developing world.

The notion of Ethiopian exceptionalism frequently comes up in discussions with Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians alike. Such perceptions are rooted in the country's historical, religious and cultural insularity, its history of resistance against European colonialism, and, at least in the eyes of its own officials, increasingly also a sense that Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that can achieve sustainable economic growth. At the same time, however, for the time being this exceptionalism appears to be rather inward-looking, and there is little in the way of externally oriented great power exceptionalism as is the case in China. While this certainly has to do with Ethiopia's limited power, it is also in line with the tradition of autarky and intellectual self-reliance the TPLF developed during its struggle years.

This inward-orientation does not mean that Ethiopia's state identity has been developed in isolation, however, and for the last 150 years the country has

struggled to find a way out of its self-perceived weakness and backwardness by following the examples set by others. Christopher Clapham has called this persistent search for models “the politics of emulation,” which found their expression in

a series of attempts by ‘modernising’ Ethiopians to identify the mechanisms of developmental success of countries perceived as having some similarity to their own. The idea was to draw from these countries’ experiences in order to re-create Ethiopia in the resulting image of modernity. (Clapham, 2006, p. 109)

To put it differently, the advent of European imperialism and modernity resulted in ontological insecurity, and Ethiopia looked abroad to find successful friends it could identify with, and which could help to redefine a new and better Ethiopian Self. And as we will see in the following chapter, today China plays an important role in this regard.

## CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this chapter has been to identify Ethiopia by discussing its biographical narrative, especially how it has been developed in relation to Others Ethiopia was dissociated from – including the imperialist powers, its own feudalist Self, and the “neoliberal” democracies of the West – and Others Ethiopia was associated with – including Japan, the Soviet Union, as well as a rather amorphous group of late developers and developmental states since the mid-2000s. It has been shown how the biographical narrative of the state that finally emerged out of identity crisis, reactive modernization and competing models is one of past glory, long-lasting humiliation and final resurgence. This narrative is intertwined with the self-ascribed historical mission of a revolutionary-movement-turned-governing-party with a socialist vision of modernity, which today finds its expression in a non-liberal, revolutionary-democratic developmentalism.

If we compare the histories of China and Ethiopia, and how they have been interpreted by the current regimes, the similarities are obvious. Likewise, while the EPRDF is committed to the national democratic revolution rather than socialism, it nevertheless exists in the same intellectual universe as the CCP, and there is a fundamental compatibility regarding the two parties’ long-term goals and

approaches. These are important findings, given that similarity is a central factor making international friendship more likely, and as we will see in the next chapter, the PRC and the FDRE indeed have come to recognize each other as friends.

## CHAPTER 6: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SINO-ETHIOPIAN FRIENDSHIP

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Is it not a pleasure, having learned something, to try it out at due intervals? Is it not a joy to have like-minded friends come from afar? Is it not gentlemanly not to take offence when others fail to appreciate your abilities?

Confucius, *Analects* (ca. 500 B.C.)

### APPROACHING SINO-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS

Now that we have come to know the personas of China and Ethiopia, it is time to have a look at how they met each other on the stage of international politics, and how they developed relations that not only they themselves describe as exceptionally close, but which are also characterized as in some way special by many observers. As the US-based political scientist Seifudein Adem has put it: “Most African governments today [...] have friendly relations with China. But the Ethiopian government is (perceived as) a friend of Beijing in a special way” (Seifudein, 2012, p. 147).

The task of this chapter will be to interrogate such vague perceptions by analyzing Sino-Ethiopian relations through the lens of the model of international friendship proposed in Chapter 1. It starts with a brief historical overview, which shows that whatever special qualities the relation today may have, it apparently did not acquire them prior to the 1990s. Afterwards, an analysis of government-to-government, military-to-military and party-to-party relations will show that the current relationship is characterized by an increasingly dense network of institutional and personal exchanges, which provide the basis for frequent communication and close cooperation. The discussion will then turn to the economic and aid dimension of the relationship, which is found to be important, but not as exceptional as could be expected. The subsequent analysis of the EPRDF’s emulation of the Chinese model therefore suggests that what turns the relationship into a special one in the eyes of the involved elite actors is the

common quest for a non-liberal alternative to the dominant liberal vision of modernity. Given this finding, the final analysis of speeches and official statements that are intended to turn the notion of a special relationship into social reality shows that it would indeed be wrong to dismiss the idea of Sino-Ethiopian friendship as empty rhetoric.

## THE HISTORY OF SINO-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS

While the official discourse on the relationship routinely stresses its historical roots, in reality these roots do not go very deep. There was some limited and mostly indirect trade between China and the Horn of Africa reaching as far back as the Chinese Tang Dynasty (Pankhurst, 1961), but the Chinese and Ethiopian empires did historically not have direct contact with each other, and what brought them to each other's attention primarily was the shared fate of European aggression. For the Ethiopian "Japanizers," China above all was a reminder of what could happen to the Ethiopian empire if it should fail to modernize, and Ethiopia started to play a role for China only with the Italian invasion of 1935. The Nationalist government of China did not recognize the following occupation, and instead expressed its support for the imperial regime (Shinn, 2014). The CCP, in turn, issued a statement "To the Ethiopian people," which applauded their struggle against Italian imperialism and demanded support from the international community (Wei, 2011, p. 8). In 1936, an academic book on Africa written by Chinese scholars stressed the similarities between China and Ethiopia, and argued that "[t]he cruel threat towards them is an indirect threat towards us" (cited in Li, 2005, p. 62).

Chinese and Ethiopian soldiers stood on opposing sides during the Korean War, but in general the two states continued to be peripheral to each other's international relations. The first political contact between Ethiopia and the newly established PRC only took place during the 1955 Bandung Conference, which was attended by a large Chinese delegation as well as the Ethiopian ambassador to Washington. Despite some signs of mutual goodwill, however, the Western ally Ethiopia in 1958 still voted against the PRC's entry into the United Nations. While in the following years Haile Selassie adopted a more accommodating stance

towards the socialist camp in line with the approach followed by the non-aligned states, and started to support Beijing's bid for a seat in the UN, he did not put much emphasis on furthering bilateral relations with China either (Venkataraman & Gamora, 2009).

On the Chinese side, however, the increasingly antagonistic relation with the Soviet Union led to a growing interest in the developing world, and in 1964 Prime Minister Zhou Enlai on his tour to the African continent also visited Ethiopia. Yet while Haile Selassie welcomed Zhou, the Chinese delegation was not invited to the capital, and the emperor remained reserved; China after all supported the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Liberation Front of Western Somalia in their secessionist struggles, and urged people around the globe to overthrow their feudal rulers. This was hardly a good foundation for friendly relations with the Ethiopian monarchy.

Only with the toning down of China's revolutionary rhetoric and behavior, and the Sino-American rapprochement that started in the late 1960s, did better Sino-Ethiopian relations become feasible. In 1970, Addis Ababa and Beijing established official relations, and in 1971 Haile Selassie visited China and met with Mao Zedong. A trade agreement, an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, as well as an interest-free loan of RMB 200 million (approx. USD 81.3 million) were signed. The same year, Ethiopia belonged to the states supporting China's successful bid to join the United Nations (Wei, 2011). Still, when the Derg in 1974 toppled Ethiopia's imperial order, Sino-Ethiopian relations only were in their infancy.

Given Ethiopia's new socialist orientation, relations with China looked promising during the early years of the new regime. Both sides held on to existing agreements, and new ones were signed. In 1975, the Chinese Minister of Transport visited Ethiopia to talk about the continuation of financial and technical assistance for the construction of a 300 km road project the Chinese had agreed on before the revolution. In 1976, the head of a Derg delegation to China expressed appreciation for China's development, which could serve as a reference in Ethiopia's efforts to build socialism, and the following year a small delegation

headed by the Derg's Head of Press and Information visited China with the goal of gaining experience from the PRC (Wei, 2011).

In late 1977 and early 1978, however, the Derg's allegiance to Moscow, in combination with China's continued support for Somalia, effectively ended Sino-Ethiopian relations, even though they remained formally in place. During the Somali invasion of Ethiopia, China declared its support for "the Somali people in their just struggle to safeguard national independence and state sovereignty," and Mengistu in turn accused China of providing the bullets for the reactionary forces of Somalia (cited in Venkataraman & Gamora, 2009, p. 18). As such, bilateral relations had gone from non-existent to cool to promising to hostile in a short time span, and the main factor determining them had been both sides' relations with the two superpowers of the Cold War, and how they positioned themselves along the principal contradictions in the international system.

When in the early 1980s Sino-Soviet tensions showed signs of easing, and the Soviet Union under Gorbachev in the mid-1980s reduced its support for the Derg, the Mengistu regime again reached out to China. In the mid-1980s first contacts on the ministerial level were established, and in 1988 Mengistu visited the PRC. The same year a CCP delegation visited Ethiopia. A new agreement for economic and technological cooperation was signed, and China offered a loan of USD 15 million for the construction of a national stadium and a ring road in Addis Ababa. In the following two years, some additional steps towards cooperation were made (Seifudein, 2012). However, similar to the situation at the end of Haile Selassie's rule, this reboot of the relation did not have much time to yield tangible results. When in 1991 Mengistu had to flee the country, it was not clear where the bilateral relations were headed.

#### HOW TWO PARTY-STATES CONNECTED

While the EPRDF in the early 1990s had no choice but to focus its foreign policy on the developed world, the new revolutionary-democratic regime in Addis Ababa did not feel very welcome in a Western-dominated world of free markets and liberal democracies. Seifudein Adem, citing an interview with an undisclosed former EPRDF member, describes how a lengthy debate within the party leadership



regarding the country's foreign policy and the pressure coming from the West ended in a consensus on the need to

approach countries whose rhetoric and policies were not always in lockstep with the preference of leading Western powers. From this perspective, the establishment of closer relations with Russia and China was seriously considered. China was then singled out as the best candidate by virtue of its strong anti-Western ideological stance and other considerations. Senior members of Ethiopia's ruling party were subsequently sent to China to initiate a new relationship and tell Beijing about Ethiopia's desire to 'learn' from China's practice of market-led socialism and agricultural development. (Seifudein, 2012, p. 145)

On the Chinese side, this coincided with the renewed interest in relations with Africa after the international and domestic developments of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1994, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen on invitation of his Ethiopian counterpart Seyoum Mesfin visited Addis Ababa, and an EPRDF delegation including no less than six members of its Executive Committee visited China for two whole weeks (Ai, 2005, p. 28). In 1995, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi went to the PRC, and in 1996 President Jiang Zemin reciprocated the visit.

Increasingly frequent exchanges between the two governments followed these initial high-level visits. This included visits by numerous delegations from various ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation on the Chinese side, and the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development on the Ethiopian side. In 1998 a memorandum of understanding on economic cooperation, as well as an agreement concerning the encouragement and reciprocal protection of investment, were signed (Wei, 2011). After the first FOCAC in 2000, Ethiopia was one of the few African countries that established a follow-up ministerial committee (Taylor, 2011). In 2003, the first FOCAC Ministerial Meeting on African soil was held in Addis Ababa. The same year, China and Ethiopia officially elevated their bilateral relation to a Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership – only the second partnership agreement China signed with an African state – and already in 2005 the Chinese embassy hosted more high-level visits from Ethiopian officials than any other foreign mission in Addis Ababa (Shinn, 2014).

While the notorious 2005 election created a rupture in Ethiopia's relations with the West, it did not negatively impact on its relations with China. In contrast, only weeks after the violent suppression of opposition protests, Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin went to Beijing, where Vice-president Zeng Qinghong stressed the traditional friendship and growing cooperation between the two countries (Xinhua, 2005). Seyoum became ambassador to China after his term as foreign minister, highlighting the importance the Ethiopian government attaches to its relations with the PRC. During the third FOCAC in 2006, Hu Jintao welcomed Meles Zenawi in Beijing, and Ethiopia was the only country to receive support from all eight FOCAC policy measures (Hackenesch, 2011).

In 2008, Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Chinese National People's Congress, traveled to Ethiopia, and exchanges between the two parliaments have since continued on a regular basis, including in the context of an inter-parliamentarian China-Ethiopia Friendship Group. In addition, there have been delegations from Chinese provincial governments and various administrative agencies traveling to Ethiopia, and welcoming Ethiopian delegations at home. It is not possible to present a complete list of visits and exchanges here; between 2000 and 2010, the number of Ethiopian ministers visiting China reportedly doubled every year (Fourie, 2015, p. 300). While difficult to quantify in their entirety, there is thus a clear feeling in Addis Ababa that "our politicians meet the Chinese very often, they must be quite familiar with each other," as one journalist put it (Interview E1, 2013).

There are also some military-to-military linkages. Already in June 1994, the Ethiopian military in form of a delegation headed by General Tsadkan Gebre Tensay, Chief of the General Staff, had reached out to the People's Liberation Army. In November 1996 General Liu Jingsong, Commander of Lanzhou Military Zone, visited Ethiopia (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006a). The next year Beijing opened a new defence attaché office at its embassy in Addis Ababa, and it was revealed that China was providing military training to a small number of Ethiopian officers on a regular basis (Wei, 2011). Not much is known regarding the actual number of trainings or their specific nature, but they continue to be a part

of the relation (Thakur, 2009). In 2005, China and Ethiopia agreed to further their cooperation in military training, exchange of military technologies, and peacekeeping operations (Eisenman & Kurlantzick, 2006).

Two years later, the American embassy in a secret cable complained that the new Chief of the General Staff, General Samora Yonus, “makes no secret of his adoration for China,” and that the US support is constantly being negatively compared to the more forthcoming and unconditional Chinese military support (USA Embassy in the FDRE, 2007). Although the details are unclear, it has been reported that China sold artillery, light armoured vehicles and troop transport vehicles to Ethiopia (Shinn, 2014). In 2010, after a meeting with General Samora in Beijing, the vice-chairman of China's Central Military Commission, Xu Caihou, described the armed forces of Ethiopia as “good friends and partners of their Chinese counterparts,” and expressed the Chinese commitment to further strengthen the relationship (Xinhua, 2010).

Much more consequential than the military links, however, are party-to-party relations. While high-ranking government officials in both China and Ethiopia generally also hold important positions within their respective parties, party-to-party relations are not simply an appendix of official inter-state relations, but have their own actors and relevance. The first high-level delegation from Ethiopia visiting China in 1994 actually came from the party, not the government. In 1997, another high-ranking EPRDF delegation visited China to further discuss possibilities for economic cooperation not on an official state-to-state level but via party-to-party channels, and on later occasions the EPRDF frequently stressed its interest in fostering its relations with the CCP (Ai, 2005, p. 29). While the source for this is a Chinese diplomat, it seems indeed reasonable to assume that it was especially the EPRDF, with its complicated relations with Ethiopia's Western partners, that was interested in finding new channels for cooperation and exchange below the level of official bilateral relations. In 2000 Dai Bingguo, then Director of the CCP International Department, visited Ethiopia, and the CCP has sent high-level delegations to the bi-annual EPRDF Organizational Conference since at least 2008 (Interview E2, 2014).

In 2010, CCP International Department Vice Director and former ambassador to Ethiopia Ai Ping signed a MoU on exchange and cooperation between the CCP and EPRDF (PRC Embassy in the FDRE, 2010). Following this MoU, EPRDF Secretariat Head and Executive Committee Member Redwan Hussein in 2011 visited China with the aim of identifying areas of cooperation in party building, public mobilization and party leadership, and in 2012 received a follow-up visit by a delegation from the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong (CELAP). This delegation also met with the Director of the EPRDF Cadre Training Center, Addisu Legesse, who stressed how useful the Chinese experience in cadre education has already been. In June the same year, the two parties organized a joint workshop dealing with issues such as mass media capacity building, mass media institution management, and Internet management. In September 2012, an EPRDF delegation led by Bereket Simon, Head of the Government Communications Affairs Office, met with Liu Yunshan, head of the CCP Propaganda Department, to discuss cooperation in the areas of press and culture. In September 2013, a delegation led by Zhao Hongzhu, Deputy Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and Secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee, met with high-ranking EPRDF members, promising to extend the CCP's support in party capacity building, leadership skill training, and experience sharing in various areas.<sup>8</sup> And in July 2014, a new MoU intended to further strengthen their “strategic partnership”, and to work closely in the area of capacity building, was signed by EPRDF Vice Chairperson Demeke Mekonen and CCP Central Committee Member Guo Jinlong. On this occasion, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of relations between the EPRDF and the CCP was celebrated (Walta Information Center, 2014).

These examples show that the two regimes have established increasingly close working relations on numerous levels, which also provide them with channels for communication and mutual engagement. Cooperation and communication are not enough for friendship, however, and the first area we should look for the relationship's allegedly special qualities are economic relations; after all, the CCP

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<sup>8</sup> The information in this paragraph has been compiled using a variety of press releases, internal documents, and interviews.

has declared economic development – to solve the contradiction between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and China’s backward productive forces – to be its central strategic goal, and the Ethiopian government in its 2002 White Paper on *Foreign Affairs and National Security* likewise states that “our relations of friendship or otherwise should be based first of all on economic matters” (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002, p. 29).

#### ECONOMIC AND AID RELATIONS – QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCE OR MORE OF THE SAME?

A quick glance at the tables below indicates that economic relations between the two countries are not without problems. As is common across Africa, Ethiopia’s trade with China started to take off around the turn of the millennium, especially following the PRC’s accession to the WTO. Yet while China already in 2006 became Ethiopia’s largest trading partner (Cabestan, 2012, p. 57), Sino-Ethiopian trade in many ways replicates the classic pattern of the developed world’s trade with Ethiopia, and it also closely resembles China’s trade with other resource-scarce African countries: Ethiopia imports a huge amount of manufactured goods from China, and exports a relatively small number of agricultural products. This has resulted in a growing trade deficit, which also was not affected by the fact that China in 2010 exempted 440 Ethiopian products from tariffs when entering the Chinese market. By way of comparison, in 2014 Ethiopia’s trade deficit with China was USD 2.4 billion, USD 1.5 billion with the USA (Office of the US Trade Representative, 2016), and approximately USD 950 million with the EU (European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, 2017). And while imports from China make up more than a quarter of all Ethiopian imports, Chinese imports from Ethiopia are so insignificant that they are below the measurement threshold.

**Table 1: Key facts of China-Ethiopia trade in goods, 2014**

Bilateral trade: \$3.4 bn

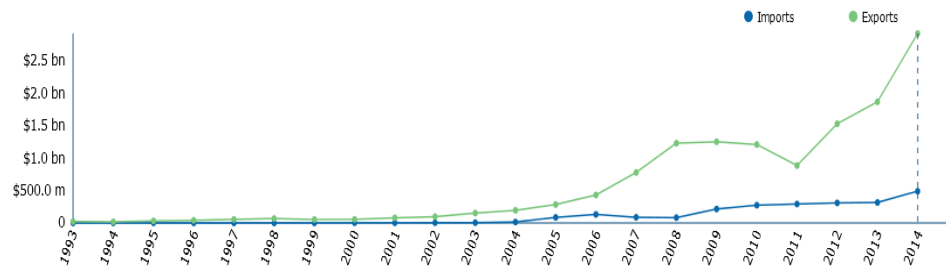
Chinese exports to Ethiopia: \$2.9 bn (0.1% of Chinese exports, 26.5% of Ethiopian imports)

Chinese imports from Ethiopia: \$489.9 m (0.0% of Chinese imports, 9.4% of Ethiopian exports)

Chinese trade balance with Ethiopia: +\$2.4 bn

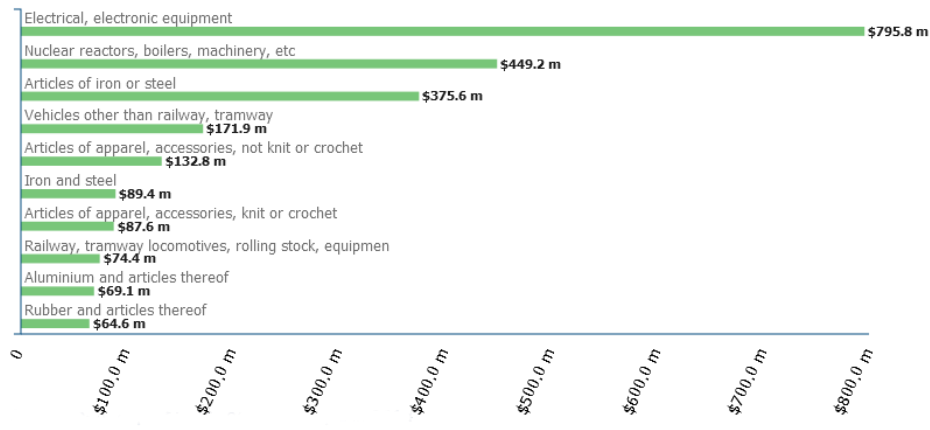
Source: UN Comtrade Database.

**Table 2: China's total trade in goods with Ethiopia, 1993-2014**



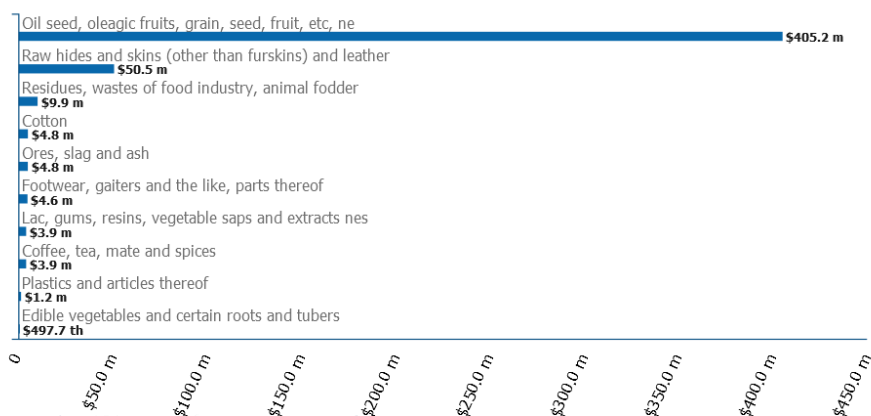
Source: UN Comtrade Database

**Table 3: China's top-10 exports to Ethiopia, 2014**



Source: UN Comtrade Database.

**Table 4: China's top-10 imports from Ethiopia, 2014**



Source: UN Comtrade Database.

Accordingly, Sino-Ethiopian trade patterns appear to support allegations that China is just one more neocolonial power engaged in exploiting Africa, and indeed a very successful one. Nevertheless, my interview partners in Addis Ababa frequently defended China from such accusations. The main argument put forward to support the PRC's positive economic role was that China, in contrast to the developed countries, not only is important for trade, but has also become an important source of foreign direct investment, and that this money is central for creating jobs, value-adding industries, technology transfer, and thus sustainable development.

Unfortunately, however, there is no consensus on the amount of Chinese FDI in Ethiopia, and the available data is notoriously unreliable. According to official Chinese statistics, by 2010 the stock of Chinese FDI in Ethiopia was USD 368 million, whereas economists from the World Bank put it at USD 403 million the same year (World Bank, 2012). By using data from the Ethiopian Investment Agency, two Ethiopian economists come to the result that China between 1992 and 2010 has invested USD 950 Million in Ethiopia (Alemayehu & Atenafu, 2010). And in 2015, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Chinese companies had invested USD 2.76 billion in Ethiopia between 1992 and 2014 (Ethiopian Herald, 2015b). In comparison, the USA puts its own FDI stock in Ethiopia at only USD 10 million (Office of the US Trade Representative, 2016), and the EU at roughly USD

450 million (European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, 2017). If we follow these numbers, Chinese FDI in Ethiopia thus indeed appears to be substantial.

In addition to FDI, Chinese loans and grants have become an important source for the financing of infrastructure projects in Ethiopia. According to official numbers, between 2002 and 2015 the Chinese Government has committed more than USD 10 billion in terms of commercial and interest-free loans and grants to Ethiopia (Ethiopian Herald, 2015b). This without doubt is an impressive sum, even if we compare it with the more than USD 3.5 billion in development aid the OECD Development Assistance Committee spent in Ethiopia in 2014 alone (OECD, 2016). Projects the Ethiopian government cites as being made possible by China's financial support include the Addis Ababa-Adama Expressway, the Addis Ababa Light Rail project, the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway project, the Gibe III Hydro Power Plant, the upgrading and expansion of Ethio-Telecom, and a water supply for Addis Ababa City (Ethiopian Herald, 2015b).

It needs to be kept in mind, however, that loans are not gifts, and by now Ethiopia owes China a considerable amount of money. In addition, Chinese loans are generally tied to hiring Chinese companies for realizing the associated projects. Thus, due to China's win-win approach to development cooperation, in which market access considerations for Chinese companies play a central role, to clearly differentiate between aid, trade and investment is often difficult. China's economic involvement in Ethiopia accordingly is seen critically by many international NGOs, and the criticisms about China's impact that have been voiced elsewhere in Africa – such as environmental degradation, generating only a very limited amount of jobs, or fostering corruption – have also been heard with regard to Ethiopia (AFRODAD, 2011).

All in all, and despite some lingering doubts concerning the reliability of some of the numbers presented above, China thus certainly has emerged as Ethiopia's most important economic and development partner, and played a significant role in the country's development over the past decade. What is more, it has generally honored the Ethiopian ownership of the development process, and its willingness



to finance infrastructure projects and encourage FDI not only are in line with the EPRDF's vision of how to achieve sustainable economic growth, but also contrasts with the Western donor's focus on poverty alleviation and service delivery. At the same time, however, the economic relationship remains characterized by extreme one-sidedness, and while both sides apparently have come to an agreement regarding the win-win nature of their relationship, it remains at least debatable whether market-driven exchanges can result in anything but partnership.

As the following discussion will show, however, Chinese support for Ethiopia's development is not limited to economic cooperation or development finance. It has already been mentioned that the ERPFD in the mid-1990s turned to the CCP in order "to 'learn' from China's practice of market-led socialism and agricultural development" (Seifudein, 2012, p. 145), and although the existence of a "Chinese model" is vehemently rejected by Chinese and Ethiopian officials, Elsjé Fourie has already shown that China indeed looms large in the minds of Ethiopian decision makers (Fourie, 2015). Importantly, the following analysis indicates that the EPRDF's emulation of Chinese experiences has had a wide-ranging impact on "who" Ethiopia is today.

## ETHIOPIA'S EMULATION OF CHINA'S REFORM- AND OPEN-UP POLICY

In the preceding chapter, I have described Ethiopia's tradition of looking abroad to find successful Others that could help to redefine a new and better Ethiopian Self – what Clapham has called the "politics of emulation" (Clapham, 2006). While Meles Zenawi has always been careful to stress that his vision of a developmental state is informed by a broad range of historical precedents for successful late-development, including Germany under Bismarck, Meiji-era Japan, South Korea under Park Chung-hee and Taiwan under GMD-rule, there is much to suggest that the model with the most acute relevance for his theory and practice actually has been China, and that this influence has continued after Meles' death.

Areas in which Ethiopia has learned from China include agricultural development, transportation, land administration, the education of civil servants, and the creation of special economic zones, the first of which was established in Ethiopia in

2007. To be sure, China is not the only country sharing experiences or “best practices” with Ethiopia, and Ethiopian officials therefore can plausibly claim that “we work with everybody who wants to support our development, as long as they accept that we know best what we really need” (Interview E3, 2014). China’s prominence across the board nevertheless does set it apart from other countries. Even more importantly, however, there are some areas in which China stands out in a special way, and which in addition point to the very heart of the EPRDF’s vision of the kind of state Ethiopia should be.

While the Ethiopian leadership already in the 1990s started to look to China for lessons, it was only after the 2001 TPLF leadership split and the subsequent ousting of its orthodox members that the reformers could systematically translate these lessons into actual policies. Following Deng’s policy of reform and opening-up, the new TPLF leadership now declared its goal to integrate the country more closely into the global economy, which necessarily would have to happen on the terms of the market (Medhane & Young, 2003, p. 392). In a 2002 policy paper on rural development, the government explicitly drew parallels with East Asia and argued that it was necessary to release the potential of the more successful farmers to reorient the current agricultural strategy towards an “export-oriented and market-led development” (FDRE Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2002/2003, p. 63). In its foreign policy paper of the same year, the government also argued that “we cannot attain development and democracy by closing our doors,” and that economic considerations had to be central to foreign policy formulation (FDRE Ministry of Information, 2002, p. 19). And when this development path came under attack after the 2005 election, the party leadership felt the urge to reaffirm that, while it

strictly opposes liberalism, it believes in taking lessons from other countries [sic!] constructive experience in which the free market economy is a good strategy on [sic!] helping the democratic system, and encouraging creativity as well. (cited in Bach, 2011, p. 652)

Even Meles’ ideological justification for focussing the national-revolutionary state’s energy on economic development via cooperation with the outside world

resembled Deng Xiaoping's rationale for China's reform- and open-up policy: While Deng declared the growing material and cultural needs of the people on the one hand and China's backward productive forces on the other to be the country's principal contradiction, Meles after 2001 declared the fight against poverty to be a matter of national survival, and everything else to be of secondary importance (Fana, 2014). Thus, both Deng and Meles turned underdevelopment into the country's principal enemy, which in turn allowed the two regimes to be much more open about cooperation with others that could be useful in a united front against this enemy.

There accordingly is much to suggest that the resemblance between China's so-called socialist market economy and Ethiopia's mixed economy, with its combination of competitive markets, interventionist industrial policies, quasi-state-owned enterprises, state ownership of land, special economic zones and a focus on attracting FDI, is not a mere coincidence, but instead the result of the EPRDF's conscious decision to follow the Chinese approach to economic development. At the very least, the success of China's development path provided the reformers within the EPRDF with the necessary theoretical arguments and practical examples to side-line those who wanted to follow an approach more in line with socialist orthodoxy.

The 2005 elections in many ways were Ethiopia's equivalent to the protests in Tiananmen Square, as they too called into question the support the ruling party could still muster among the masses. And given that the CCP had found new ways to gain control over the forces unleashed by economic reforms and international integration, the Ethiopian leadership apparently came to the conclusion that China's path to modernity was not reducible to economic policies. As a result, the learning processes subsequently became more systematic and comprehensive.

#### ETHIOPIA'S EMULATION OF CHINA'S PARTY-STATE

After the 2001 leadership split, Prime Minister Meles and his allies had emphasized the role of the state in the political process, while at the same time weakening the role of the party as an independent actor – possibly because there were still pockets of resistance within the party. This development, however, was

reverted after 2005; party institutions were strengthened again, and the EPRDF regained the primacy in the political process it had lost for a brief period (Vaughan, 2011). Importantly, earlier but parallel developments in China suggest that the CCP was the main model informing the reform of the EPRDF.

In his study of the CCP's organizational rebuilding since the late 1990s and early 2000s, David Shambaugh highlights several areas of reform, including an attempt to strengthen the local party apparatus and party structures within society (Shambaugh, 2008). This manifested itself in systematic efforts to establish party committees within the new social and professional groups that had started to emerge in the wake of China's economic reforms, and special efforts to rebuild defunct party committees in rural areas. In addition, to broaden its base within society, the number of party members was increased from roughly 66 million in 2002 to 80 million eight years later. The CCP has also increasingly focused on recruiting students, and in 2010 more than 1.2 million students joined the party, roughly 40% of the total (Economist, 2014). As such, while the CCP in 1998 started to downsize the state under the slogan "small government, big society," some observers have argued that a more fitting slogan would have been "big ruling party, small government, big society" (Thornton, 2013, p. 2).

The same tendency is visible in Ethiopia. When, in the aftermath of the disastrous 2005 national election, the EPRDF came to the conclusion that the party as an institution was in serious need of strengthening vis-à-vis state and society, several senior leaders were relieved of their bureaucratic responsibilities and tasked with this issue. In the following years the number of local party councils was dramatically increased, and mass associations (now often labelled NGOs) re-emerged throughout the country (Vaughan, 2011, p. 632). Party membership rose from 760 000 in 2005 to 6 million in 2010 and 7.5 million in 2015, roughly eight percent of the total population (Arriola & Lyons, 2016, p. 81). In a partial turn away from its traditional support base amongst rural poor, the party also started to focus its attention and recruitment efforts on better-off peasants, secondary school graduates, college students, university lecturers, and intellectuals and youth more generally (Gilkes, 2015, p. 326).

In 2014, during a meeting with CCP Central Committee Member Guo Jinlong, Prime Minister Hailemariam noted that “Ethiopia has learnt from the Chinese experience in regard to building a strong political party and in ways to manage replacement and retirement of party and government leaders” (FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014a). With the second point, he referred to the “generational transition” plan, initiated by Meles Zenawi and officially adopted by the EPRDF in 2009. The plan introduced a two-term limit and a ceiling of age 65 for party leaders, thus resembling the two-term limit for Chinese leaders and the ceiling of age 67 for members of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee. While Meles’ early death interfered with the timetable of the original plan, many top leaders have since stepped down, and the EPRDF appears intent on following the CCP’s example for dealing with the problem of leadership succession, one of the Achilles heels of autocratic regimes.

There are other areas in which the Chinese model of party-state appears to be at least a reference point for Ethiopian policy makers. For example, just as post-Mao China in an attempt to make good for the declining role of work units (*danwei*) and rural collectives experimented with new or revised forms of grassroots institutions (such as residential committees in cities and village committees in rural areas), state structures at the grassroots level have received a lot of attention in Ethiopia since 2005. This includes new emphasis on neighborhood associations (*kebele*) and sub-*kebele* structures (Emmenegger, et al., 2011, p. 738). Likewise, just as China experimented with reforms to increase the responsiveness of local authorities to public demands, for example by introducing direct elections for village chiefs, the EPRDF has sought to include the people into the political process by introducing direct elections for significantly enlarged *kebele* councils in 2008 (Lefort, 2010). While the actual role Chinese experiences play in these developments once again is difficult to ascertain, Prime Minister Hailemariam in an interview acknowledged that

we have areas where we can learn from the work the Chinese Communist Party is doing, simply because we are people centered, where Chinese Communist Party [sic!] has experience with working with people at the grass roots, so we learn with China [...]. (Voice of America, 2012)

## ETHIOPIA'S EMULATION OF CHINA'S THOUGHT AND PROPAGANDA WORK

In China, and in parallel to the strengthening of party structures and the enlargement of party membership, the CCP has invested heavily into improving its cadres' competence and political consciousness (Shambaugh, 2008; Pieke, 2009). According to a 2006 CCP Directive, all cadres are required to receive at least three months of training every five years at one of the numerous institutions associated with the extensive party school system. This system includes the Central Party School in Beijing, but also numerous provincial and sub-provincial party schools responsible for the majority of cadre trainings. According to official numbers, in 2001 roughly half of the then 6.9 million party cadres nationwide had received this kind of training in one of the more than 2 600 party schools (Shambaugh, 2008, pp. 143-5).

In Ethiopia, the years following the 2005 election witnessed an increased concern with ideological consciousness and leadership skills amongst party cadres as well. In 2006-7 alone, 300 000 EPRDF cadres received leadership training, and organizing training programs for new and old party cadres has since been described as a "central aspect of EPRDF activities" (Gilkes, 2015, p. 326). Subsequently efforts to establish a central leadership academy resembling the CCP's Central Party School became known, after the death of Meles in 2012 called Meles Zenawi Leadership Academy. Academy President Addisu Legesse has claimed that between 2011 and 2015 over 2 500 senior, more than 30 000 medium level and 12 800 junior leaders had received training from the academy (Ethiopian News Agency, 2015). It has established working relations with several Chinese institutions, including the Beijing Administrative College and the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong, and there have been regular exchanges and visits. In interviews, Ethiopian officials agree that the Chinese party school system provides "important insights" for the EPRDF (Interview E4, 2014).

As in contemporary China, direct political indoctrination in Ethiopia is largely restricted to party cadres, students, and the military. This does not mean, however, that the rest of society is simply ignored – or at least not any more. When Meles in

2006 declared that the first task of the developmental state was to make its development project “hegemonic” (Meles, 2006, n.p.), China provided valuable experience on how to approach this task. One of the central lessons the CCP had drawn from the Tiananmen protests and the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the danger of neglecting ideology and the battle of ideas, and “thought work” received new attention. In contrast to the Mao era, however, the masses today are persuaded rather than indoctrinated to believe in the legitimacy of the party-state and the correctness of its politics. The tools the CCP has developed to forge its hegemonic project can indeed be called sophisticated, and not only include pervasive censorship, but also more proactive attempts to guide public opinion by making use of the modern means of mass communication. The messages spread this way include a strong emphasis on social unity and cohesion, patriotism and loyalty to China (which is deemed to be synonymous with loyalty to the party), and on the overarching goal of economic development (Brady, 2007; Gilley & Holbig, 2009).

Prior to 2005, the EPRDF’s media strategy had been to maintain control over television and the public press, while largely ignoring the private press and keeping prices for Internet access so high as to make it out of reach for the vast majority of Ethiopians. After the elections, however, it was realized that this strategy had failed. In the following months and years journalists were harassed and imprisoned, newspapers closed, and critical blogs blocked. But instead of only clamping down on the previously ignored independent media, the EPRDF began to push its own discourses, and to actively shape the media landscape (Gagliardone, 2014; Stremmlau, 2011). That China’s approach has informed the EPRDF’s post-2005 media strategy has been confirmed by Ethiopian officials, who in informal settings have been quite open about their admiration for China’s “communications strategy,” and that Ethiopia “needs the China model [of state-controlled information dissemination] to inform the Ethiopian people” (USA Embassy in the FDRE, 2009). “Mass media capacity building,” “mass media institution management” or “Internet management” accordingly are typical issues debated with delegations from China.

Chinese influence and support is most clearly visible with regard to Internet surveillance and censorship. Prior to 2005, due to the state's neglect, the Ethiopian telecommunications market was still in its infancy, but several large companies from all over the world were competing for contracts and market access. In 2006, Ethiopia's state-owned Ethio-Telecom signed an exclusive deal with China's equally state-controlled telecommunications equipment provider ZTE. ZTE's local chief executive officer in 2009 proudly stated that "[t]his is the world's only project in which a national telecom network is built by a sole equipment supplier" (Zhao, 2009). Importantly, this upgrading of Ethiopia's telecommunications infrastructure would not have been possible without a huge loan – USD 1.5 billion according to Read (2013), USD 1.9 billion according to Gagliardone (2014) – from the state-owned China Development Bank.

In recent years, it has become clear that the EPRDF has not only massively increased its ability to monitor phone calls and internet traffic, but is also making extensive use of these possibilities in order to control critical journalists and opposition figures, and to block unwelcome websites. According to Human Rights Watch, technical parallels as well as interviews with former Ethiopian officials suggest that the latter is mostly done by using ZTE's centralized monitoring system, which is also used in China (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Ethiopia thus has with the help of Chinese loans, best practices and equipment established one of the most pervasive systems for filtering online content in sub-Saharan Africa.

To conclude, while we lack the information that would make a true process-tracing possible, there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that the EPRDF's emulation of Chinese experiences has resulted in actual policies. And while this in itself is an interesting finding, the important point to be made here is that these policies have been central for determining the identity of the Ethiopian state, and for lowering the barriers between the Chinese and Ethiopian Selves by making them more similar to each other. In addition, nothing expresses recognition and identification better than trying to be like the Other. China accordingly is casted in a role it is more than willing to accept – the experienced teacher and leader of the



developing world. Ethiopia, in turn, once more has taken on a role it is long accustomed to – that of an eager student.

#### A COMMON PROJECT OF ALTERNATIVE MODERNIZATION

It has been proposed in the theoretical chapter that, in the absence of a strong defining moment, the construction of an international friendship requires a common project which not only can serve as a focal point for cooperation, but also gives purpose to the relationship by linking it to a vision of the future, turns pragmatic cooperation into more than the sum of its parts by linking it to both sides' narratives of the Self, and generally it helps in establishing the "rational morality" that allows states to square the national interest with notions of international solidarity. In the case of China-Ethiopia relations, we can find such a common project in the two regimes' attempts to achieve "alternative modernization." With this term, I refer to their ideologically informed efforts to develop their countries without subscribing to the norms, practices and institutions associated with liberal democracy and market capitalism, while at the same time staying true to the master narratives of emancipation, rationality and progress, and thus to the very idea of "modernity."<sup>9</sup>

For the EPRDF and the CCP, the common struggle for alternative modernization above all consists of a rejection of Western claims to universalism, and a demand that every country, weak and strong, should be allowed to follow its own path into the future. In addition, however, the two parties are also united in their views on the non-liberal development path that best suits their in many ways similar countries. This view rests on a shared understanding of socio-economic development as a staged process that can best be realized by an efficient state, which under the leadership of a competent vanguard party ruling in coalition with the majority of the people is able to steer the forces of the market in the needed direction, and to create a social and cultural environment that is conducive to human progress. Their shared vision of modernity therefore is rooted in socialist

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of different conceptualizations of modernity – including alternative modernity – see Eisenstadt, 2000; Gaonkar, 2001; Therborn, 2003.

notions of change and progress – even though in Ethiopia the progression to socialism has been suspended indefinitely.

Regarding international politics, and in contrast to socialist orthodoxy, this vision of alternative modernity translates into an in many ways traditional Westphalian understanding of international relations as interest-driven interactions between sovereign states. However, as spelled out in China’s “new type of international relations,” in order to overcome the exploitation and zero-sum logic that has characterized the Western-dominated international system over the last centuries, and to facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation despite the unavoidable existence of unequal power and at times contradictory interests, states are urged to realize that using power politics to advance a narrowly selfish agenda in the long run only hurts the common interest of mankind. Despite its focus on national paths to modernity, therefore, there is a strong international dimension to the alternative modernity envisioned by China and Ethiopia as well, which is seen as a necessity in a time of ongoing globalization.

Because of their shared vision and common project, China has a direct interest in seeing Ethiopia succeed in becoming a successful developmental state. Indeed, if Ethiopia could achieve political stability and socio-economic development by emulating Chinese experiences – something it was not able to do when it followed Japan, the West or the Soviet Union – this would be a testament to the superiority of China’s approach to development, and of the new type of international relations that has facilitated this success. This not only would send strong signals to other developing countries, but also show that China has finally taken its rightful place as a great power that is both unquestionably modern and unquestionably Chinese, and that has overcome the pitfalls of great power hegemonism. At the same time, it would mean that the EPRDF has finally found the right answer to the question of how to overcome Ethiopia’s stigmatization and turn it into a strong and modern state without becoming inauthentic. And taken together, this would mean a victory for the global forces of progress.

Because the success of this common project to a large extent depends on Ethiopia’s developmental successes, in practical terms it mainly translates into

attempts to support Ethiopia in achieving homegrown and sustainable economic growth, but to do so without violating the principle of win-win cooperation, and to help the EPRDF create the kind of effective and stable developmental state it aspires to, but without violating the principle of sovereign equality. It is in this context that we need to understand President Xi Jinping, who in 2014 vowed that China “as a good friend” would continue to support Ethiopia in its development plans and help “developing Ethiopia into [...] a demonstration center for governance and poverty alleviation” (FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014b, p. 6).

#### “SINCERE FRIENDS, RELIABLE PARTNERS AND GOOD BROTHERS” – REPRESENTATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP

Seen in this light, we should understand the official discourse accompanying Sino-Ethiopian relations not as empty rhetoric, but as conscious effort to turn their shared notions of the relationship’s special qualities into social reality, and thus to create a bilateral relationship that is characterized by stability and efficiency. To give some examples originating from the Ethiopian side, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2006 called Sino-Ethiopian relations a “traditional friendship” (Xinhua, 2006), and then-Foreign Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2010 described the PRC as a “true and reliable friend” of Ethiopia (Hailemariam, 2010). When President Mulatu Teshome visited China in 2014, he said that “China is the most preferred cooperation partner of Ethiopia. The relations between the two countries are built on mutual understanding and trust, and mutual benefit and win-win results” (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014b).

On another occasion, when asked to explain resource-scarce Ethiopia’s close relationship with China, despite the fact that it does not fit into the narrative of the PRC’s quest for African resources, President Mulatu maintained:

We share many world outlooks as far as international politics is concerned. We share many values as far as humanity is concerned. That is why we have an excellent relationship; relationship between government-to-government, people-to-people, and above all party-to-party relations. (Xinhua, 2014)

During the 2015 FOCAC Summit in Johannesburg, finally, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in a speech in front of numerous other African state leaders

emphasized that the partnership between Ethiopia and China was built on “the principles of solidarity, equality, mutual respect, trust and benefit,” and that this has “increasingly enabled us to understand each other better, to understand better the common challenges we face as developing countries and on how to solve them” (FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, p. 11).

The Chinese side uses similar language. Just as his predecessor Wen Jiabao in 2006, the current Prime Minister Li Keqiang in 2014 emphasized the “profound traditional friendship between the two countries” (China Daily, 2014), and during a visit to Addis Ababa in 2015, China’s Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming said that “Ethiopia is a very close friend of China in Africa,” providing the basis for bilateral cooperation in almost all areas (Xinhua, 2015b). And with regard to party-to-party relations Zhong Weiyun, Vice Director for African Affairs of the CCP International Department, in a speech held at the EPRDF’s 10<sup>th</sup> Organizational Congress in 2015 stated that the two parties

have established all dimensional, wide-ranging and in-depth friendship and cooperation, leading with strong impetus to the development of Ethio-China relations. Our party to party relations have thus become a model for inter party relations between China and Africa and in the developing world (Ethiopian Herald, 2015a).

This last statement is in line with recent attempts to promote China-Ethiopia relations as a new model for South-South cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While largely ignored in the West, this presents the developing-world counterpart to the “new type of major country relationship” China has tried to promote with regard to Sino-US relations, and hence forms part of a more general attempt to define a “new type of international relations.” In contrast to the USA, however, which so far has refrained from adopting the Chinese rhetoric, the Ethiopian side has been very receptive. Or, to use the language of role theory: While China has been trying to altercast both the USA and Ethiopia, it has only been the latter that has decided to accept this role for itself.

In late 2014, a statement called *China-Ethiopia relations: An excellent model for South-South cooperation*, jointly authored by the foreign ministers of the two

countries, was emanated through the respective government channels and state controlled press organs (Wang & Tedros, 2014).<sup>10</sup> Only two pages long, the text provides a very good example for how the respective Other is turned into a significant Other via processes of mutual recognition and identification, and also helps to better understand how the rationale underlying China-Ethiopia cooperation is linked to narratives of the Self. It thus will be analyzed here in some length.

Fifty years ago, the first Premier of the New China, Zhou Enlai, visited Ethiopia during his first trip to Africa. He was warmly welcomed by the Ethiopian Government and people, and his visit provided a fresh start to friendly China-Ethiopia relations. Fifty years later, Chinese President Xi Jinping, during his first visit as President to Africa, made a point of arranging a meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang also chose Ethiopia as the start of his first trip to Africa as Premier. China and Ethiopia have, indeed, attached great importance to the development of bilateral relations. They regard each other as offering priorities for strategic foreign policy choices.

The text starts by emphasizing the relationship's continuity, even though drawing a direct line between Zhou's visit to Ethiopia and the more recent state visits by Xi and Li of course means skimming over many ups and downs in the relationship. Nonetheless, today they two states are said to attach priority to each other – not necessarily in every regard, but concerning strategic choices. As such, the relationship is presented as one that has already stood the test of time and will continue indefinitely, especially because its strategic relevance makes it immune to minor problems that may arise from time to time.

Ethiopia and China are both heirs of ancient civilizations and fifty years may only be a short phase in our long histories, but the fruitful achievements those years have given China-Ethiopia relations is something our two peoples can be proud of and cherish.

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<sup>10</sup> For the Chinese version published in *Guangming ribao*, see <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2014/1201/c157278-26121532.html> (accessed 24 May 2017)

In this short paragraph, the glory and fundamental equality of two nation-states with long and impressive biographical narratives is established. Sino-Ethiopian relations furthermore are integrated into these biographical narratives and related to the individual: The people are not only reminded that they are part of the relation, but also that they should be proud of it.

China and Ethiopia are natural partners. In the past we have both suffered foreign invasion and shared the same feelings towards invaders. We both follow an independent foreign policy and share the belief that development is the top priority for national renaissance. We have provided mutual support on major issues concerning each other's core interests, and have shared ideas, learnt from each other's experiences of governance and explored the paths of development suitable for our respective national conditions.

Here, the theme of similarity is developed further. This includes the struggle against imperialism, a commitment to an independent foreign policy, and a focus on economic development as the basis for national renaissance, a concept both the EPRDF and the CCP use in their domestic identity construction. This is deemed to provide the objective basis for the “natural” partnership between China and Ethiopia, which accordingly can help each other in forging their respective paths into a better future, including through the sharing of ideas and experiences and mutual support concerning each other's core interests.

Indeed, on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual respect and win-win cooperation, China and Ethiopia have developed multi-dimensional relations, with people-to-people, business-to-business, government-to-government and party-to-party relations as the cornerstones of the relationship. We are sincere friends, reliable partners and good brothers, sharing both happiness and adversity, rejoicing in successes that the other has achieved. In a nutshell, China-Ethiopian relations have become a real and excellent model for South-South Cooperation.

Equality, mutual respect and win-win cooperation are introduced as the central norms structuring the relation, and because both countries adhere to these norms, all dimensions of the relation are said to have thrived. By means of parallelism, it becomes clear that the “sincere friends” refers to the people-to-people dimension or the relationship, whereas business-to-business and government-to-government

relations are those between “reliable partners,” and party-to-party relations are compared to those between “good brothers” – which is remarkable, given that the notion of “fraternal relations” traditionally has been reserved for relations between communist parties only. Despite this differentiation between friends, partners and brothers, however, taken together the different links are said to form an overarching, multi-dimensional China-Ethiopia relationship in which both sides stand together in good times and in bad ones. In fact, the Other is described as another Self directly relevant for the own well-being, or what Aristotle would have called a friend. Other members of the South are encouraged to emulate this relationship.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1970, and even more following the start of the Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership in 2003, China-Ethiopia relations have developed rapidly. They have now reached their highest qualitative level. The leaders of the two countries have established close working relations and a personal friendship. Last year, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn met twice on different occasions. Prime Minister Hailemariam paid a very successful visit to China last year and in the same year there were also the visits of the Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister to China and of two Chinese Vice-Premiers to Ethiopia. The fruitful official visit by Premier Li Keqiang to Ethiopia in May this year and the successful state visit by President Mulatu Teshome to China in July also injected strong momentum into the continued development of our bilateral relations.

This paragraph introduces the Comprehensive Cooperative Partnership the two countries signed in 2003, and stresses that today relations are better than ever. It then goes on to add a human dimension to the relationship, including not only close working relations but also a personal friendship between the state leaders. It is made clear that the relation enjoys the unqualified support of top leaders on both sides, and that this plays an important part in advancing the relation further.

This has been apparent in many areas. Between 2003 and 2013, the yearly volume of bilateral trade between China and Ethiopia increased by more than 13 times. China has become the biggest foreign investor and the largest trading partner of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is now one of the main markets in Africa for Chinese products, equipment, technology and investment. Since 2006, China, through various

mechanisms, has provided a large amount of financial support for the construction of a number of Ethiopia's mega projects. These include the first Express Toll Way and the first operative Wind Power Plant, the Addis Ababa Light Track Railway and other modern railways developments as well as the Tirunesh-Beijing Hospital and the Confucius Institute. They are vivid illustrations of our fruitful and comprehensive relationship.

The text goes on to highlight the development-related benefits associated with the relationship. The theme of complementarity is supported with various examples, casting China as an investor looking for new markets and production sites and Ethiopia as an ideal partner that stands to profit from such endeavors. In addition, it is stressed that China financially supports the EPRDF's development strategy, and that this has already resulted in tangible outcomes.

On the international plane, China and Ethiopia work very closely to address global challenges including climate change, food insecurity, poverty and regional conflicts as well as the promotion of China-Africa relations within the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and in safeguarding the interests of developing countries generally.

This paragraph adds a multilateral dimension to the relationship, stressing that both countries have shared interests and views in the international arena as well. Above all, it is emphasized that the two countries strive for the common good, and that they do so in the interest of Africa and the South – which also needs to be read as an Ethiopian recognition of China's self-ascribed identity as a developing country, and a new type of great power.

Within the context of globalization, China unwaveringly pursues its 'Chinese Dream' and has been deepening the comprehensive reforms involved in this. Ethiopia similarly is committed to its Ethiopian Renaissance, to fulfill its five-year Growth and Transformation Plan and achieve its Vision 2025 to become a middle income country. China is now the second largest economy in the world; and Ethiopia is emerging as one of the fastest growing economies in Africa and the world. Given our complementary needs, both countries are looking forward to greater opportunities of in-depth cooperation, and we will be expanding bilateral relations in a number of areas.



The parallels between the two states are emphasized once more. The Chinese Dream, which above all is about national renaissance, is linked to the Ethiopian Renaissance, and China's program of comprehensive reforms to Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation plan. Ethiopian five-year plans and the goal to reach middle income status by 2025 in addition can easily be associated with China's own five-year plans and its stated goal to create a moderately prosperous society by 2020. The following sentence juxtaposes what China already has achieved with what Ethiopia has set out to achieve as well, putting the two countries in relation on the same continuum – on different stages of development, but with complementary needs.

In the first place, we will be maintaining the momentum of high level exchanges as the driving force for deepening and upgrading our relationship. Secondly, we will continue to deepen cooperation in infrastructure construction and in the development of industry, establishing more special economic zones. For China, Ethiopia is a potentially large market and an important investment destination; for Ethiopia, China is a major source for the transfer of industrial capacity and technology. We will not only be able to improve the infrastructure facilities in Ethiopia, but we will also work together for regional connectivity, including establishment of transportation networks, electricity and telecommunication links. Thirdly, the two countries will be able to tap into the great potential for cooperation in the fields of agriculture and mining and energy, especially green, clean, sustainable energy, and upgrade our cooperation to a fully-fledged strategic partnership. In the fourth place, we will be promoting cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and a Chinese Cultural Center will soon be established in Ethiopia, enhancing mutual understanding between our two peoples, and promoting the knowledge of our impressive and important civilizations.

The steps that will be taken in the near to medium future are concretized here, reaffirming the importance of close political relations and again highlighting the complementarity of the two economies. In the end the paragraph turns to the people-to-people dimension, and argues that for strengthening this friendship it is necessary to spread knowledge about the two impressive and important civilizations – about “who” China and Ethiopia are.

Fifthly, we will continue to strengthen coordination and cooperation on international issues and promote China-Africa relations healthfully and steadily through our joint efforts. We will continue to make new contributions to maintaining the peace, stability and prosperity of Africa and the world, and promote the establishment of a new, more rational and fairer international political and economic order. We will contribute towards the realization of the goal of a peaceful and prosperous Africa.

China and Ethiopia will continue to join hands to bring about an expanded and upgraded model of bilateral relations. We have no doubt, the China-Ethiopia relationship will certainly benefit and provide a brighter future for both our peoples and for us all.

Here, the international relevance of the bilateral relation is addressed again, and how the close relation between China and Ethiopia not only profits themselves, but also the rest of Africa and the world. Not only do the two countries contribute to peace and development, but they also aspire to bring about a new political and economic global order that overcomes the inefficiencies that are associated with Western powers' selfishness and power politics. This will not only help China and Ethiopia but also humanity as a whole, and it is for this reason that the two states promise to strive for a new type of international relations.

This text, coming from two foreign ministers, is a remarkably considerate representation of why the CCP and the EPRDF deem Sino-Ethiopian relations to be special. While inter-state relations are depicted as partnership rather than friendship, in combination with friendly people-to-people and fraternal party-to-party relations they are said to constitute a relationship that is characterized by historically grown ties of solidarity, outcome-oriented cooperation based on shared strategic interests and structured by mutually agreed norms, as well as the common commitment of two ruling parties with a shared vision of the future to the joint construction of a better world.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to analyze Sino-Ethiopian relations through the lens of international friendship. It has been shown that China and Ethiopia,

despite a rather brief common history and a complicated relationship during the Cold War, since the mid- to late 1990s have established a dense network of institutional and personal relations on the government-to-government and party-to-party levels, which today enable frequent cooperation, exchange and communication. The following analysis of the economic and aid dimension of the relationship highlighted how important China has become for Ethiopia's development, but also that it is largely structured by the norm of win-win cooperation, and as is not as exceptional as could be expected. The subsequent discussion of Ethiopia's emulation of the Chinese model, however, has shown that what brings the EPRDF and the CCP together are their attempts to turn their countries into strong and modern powers without following the path set out by the liberal democracies – to shed the stigma of the outsider without becoming inauthentic. What turns the relationship into a special one therefore are intersubjective shared notions of a common quest for a non-liberal alternative to the dominant liberal vision of modernity, and the involved elite actors have invested a lot of work into turning these notions into the commonly accepted framework for Sino-Ethiopian relations.

Due to mutual recognition and identification as well as frequent exchanges and close cooperation, Sino-Ethiopian relations therefore indeed qualify as intimate relationship between significant Others – it is a friendship in the sense proposed in this study. Friendship is not as dichotomous category, however, and if we ask how close the relationship comes to the ideal of international friendship developed in Chapter 1, the answer becomes more difficult. It will thus be discussed in more detail in the Chapter 9, when the possibility of comparison with China-South Africa relations allows for a more nuanced analysis. As should have become clear by now, however, there are certain problems that are likely to have a negative effect on the quality of Sino-Ethiopian friendship, including its purely elite-centered nature as well as the fundamental asymmetry not only in power, but also in the relationship between an advanced teacher and a backward student.

## CHAPTER 7: SOUTH AFRICA'S SELF AND ITS RELATION TO OTHERS

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You can only understand South Africa if you understand our history. That's why we try to educate our partners. [...] With the West we feel we are wasting our time, but the Chinese are listening

Senior ANC cadre, personal conversation (2015)

### APPROACHING SOUTH AFRICA'S IDENTITY

The focus of this chapter is on identifying South Africa in international relations. In parallel to the chapters on China and Ethiopia, on the following pages it will be discussed how the South African Self has historically been shaped in relation to Others, how during the Cold War different visions of "who" South Africa should be competed with each other, and how the ruling ANC today sees South Africa's place in the world. It will also be shown how the radical transformation the ANC had envisaged throughout its struggle years was cut short by an unfavorable domestic and international balance of power, how the state's biographical narrative continues to form an integral part in the party's claim to authority, and how the current leadership has sought to strengthen the ideological contours of the party. To conclude, it will be highlighted how South Africa's interest in being an accepted member of Africa, the South and the club of emerging powers goes hand in hand with an interest in gaining international recognition for its identity claims.

South African politicians and revolutionaries for a long time now have linked their respective political agendas to certain identity claims. This was true during the apartheid era, when the government's idea of South Africa as an essentially European state on African soil competed with various anti-apartheid movements' Africanist or socialist visions, and continued after the country's transition to democracy in the early 1990s, when the new ANC government set out to define a fundamentally transformed South African Self. As such, while the specific conditions of South Africa provided a context that was very different from the

situation in China and Ethiopia, it is once more possible to stylize South Africa's contemporary history as one long search for identity, and it is not surprising that there is an established strand of identity-centered research on South Africa in international relations (Barber, 1994; Klotz, 2006; Geldenhuys, 2006; van der Westhuizen, 2010; Landsberg, 2010).

As a liberal democracy, South Africa is the only state discussed in this study that provides opposition parties, independent media or civil society actors the public space necessary to challenge official definitions of state identity. In contrast to China and Ethiopia, where the CCP and the EPRDF have been quite successful in their attempts to establish a hegemonic discourse, the ANC and the government it leads thus are but one (very loud) voice in multifaceted processes of identity construction. However, as Janis van der Westhuizen and Karen Smith have pointed out, the ANC not only continues to dominate politics in South Africa, but alternative voices, while relevant in the domestic discourse, actually have very little influence on South Africa's external relations (van der Westhuizen & Smith, 2015, pp. 319-22). It is thus justified to focus the following discussion on official statements and elite actors – the marginal role the public plays in Sino-South African relations will be addressed later.

## COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICA – A “EUROPEAN” STATE ON AFRICAN SOIL

Compared to China and Ethiopia, the history of the South African state is a short one. Originally established in 1652 (eight years after the establishment of the Qing dynasty in China) as a re-supply and layover port for vessels of the Dutch East India Company trading with Asia, Cape Town and its surrounding territory in the following decades attracted a growing number of Dutch and later French Huguenot farmers. Until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the colony under the administration of the Dutch East India Company expanded its reach. In 1806, however, the British occupied the territory, and some years later the Dutch government formally ceded control to London (de Villiers, 2014). The influx of British settlers soon created lasting tensions within the white settler society, and a significant proportion of the descendants of the original settlers, known as Boers

or Afrikaners, evaded what they perceived as foreign rule by settling farther in the hinterland, where they founded their own, independent republics (Grobler, 2014). The discovery of significant deposits of diamonds and gold on their territories, however, led to growing tensions and finally two brutal wars with the British, which the Afrikaners lost (Pretorius, 2014).

In 1910, the Union of South Africa, comprising both the British colonies along the coast and the formerly independent republics of the Afrikaners in the interior, was established as a dominion of the British Empire. The Afrikaners were given equal political rights in the Union, including the right to vote, but they nevertheless maintained their distinctive identity, and tensions with the British continued. During the two World Wars, many Afrikaner nationalists thus took it as an insult that their country had to send troops to support Great Britain, some even going so far as to actively support Nazi Germany. Due to differing ideas of “who” South Africa was or should be, therefore, the decision over whom to make friends with was a difficult one (Giliomee, 2014).

The arrival of European settlers from the outset had resulted in the displacement and outright killing of the indigenous population – in contrast to one of the foundation myths of the Afrikaner people, per which the vast territories of the country were largely uninhabited (Shell, 2014). In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, both under British and Afrikaner rule, black Africans were not only denied access to broader economic opportunities and to political rights, but increasingly also to land. When the growing mining sector in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century demanded an endless supply of cheap and unskilled labor, the basis for indigenous peasantry was destroyed even more thoroughly, and Africans were driven off the land to work in the mines (Handley, 2014).

The political and economic disenfranchisement of the non-white population continued after the establishment of the Union of South Africa. Nevertheless, as Prime Minister Jan Smuts’ involvement in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the establishment of the League of Nations, and later the writing of the UN Charter indicates, what the Union did internally was “not regarded as being wildly out of touch with global norms,” and “[f]ar from being the pariah it would later become,

at this time South Africa was regarded as a state whose leadership was integral to the construction of a stable international world order” (Handley, 2014, p. 434). After its de facto independence in the late 1920s and early 1930s, South Africa accordingly sought to establish itself as “a center in the periphery,” a “frontier state” on the black continent, and an “outpost of Western civilization” (Landsberg, 2010, pp. 26-7).

#### SOUTH AFRICA UNDER APARTHEID – A RACIST, ANTI-COMMUNIST PARIAN

In 1948 the National Party (NP) won the general elections on a platform of Afrikaner nationalism, and a program of racial separation known as apartheid (Afrikaans for separateness). While race had always been a central category in South Africa, in the following years the country became thoroughly racialized. Different racial identities, decided over at birth, established very different sets of rights and determined which way a life would take – including education, health care, or job opportunities. To maintain racial purity, legislation barred marriage and sexual intercourse between interracial couples. People were forced to live in areas assigned to them according to their racial identity – which for the black population meant a forced relocation to poorly serviced and far-off dormitory townships. Colored<sup>11</sup> and Indian South Africans were a bit better off, usually having access to intermediary jobs and housing, but they were still systematically excluded and disadvantaged. It was only now, with the institutionalization of apartheid in a global climate of decolonization, that “South Africa began to split out from other states and colonies in the systematic, comprehensive, and thoroughly legislated nature of its discriminatory treatment of black people [...]” (Handley, 2014, p. 435).

The creation of apartheid included a massive state-building effort, with a growing and increasingly centralized bureaucratic apparatus, and later an expansive security apparatus (Scher, 2014). With regard to the economy the NP government followed a policy of import substitution, created a growing number of state-

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<sup>11</sup> In South Africa, the term colored refers to people of mixed ethnic origin.

affiliated companies (referred to as parastatals), and assumed a significant and guiding role for the state in the overall model of economic development. Cheap black labor remained readily available, and the 1950s and 1960s indeed witnessed steady economic growth. Thus, although apartheid entailed a program intended to advance specifically the economic interests of Afrikaners, most citizens of British descent were satisfied with the overall development as well.

In the early 1960s, with poverty amongst the Afrikaner population virtually eradicated, the NP shifted from Afrikaner nationalism to a more inclusive white nationalism. As Prime Minister Verwoerd declared: "I see the National Party today not as an Afrikaans, or English, or Afrikaans-English party. [...] I see it as a party that stands for the preservation of the white man, of the white government in South Africa" (cited after Barber, 1994, p. 71) Nevertheless, in order to once and for all reject its identity as a country born out of British domination, in 1961 the Union was renamed Republic of South Africa (RSA). It also left the Commonwealth of Nations, which had become increasingly critical of its openly racist member state (Scher, 2014).

It was in the context of the establishment of apartheid that the ANC, originally founded in 1912 as a rather liberal and moderate movement intended to further the interests of the small, largely Westernized black middle class, became reinvigorated and radicalized by a couple of activists from its Youth League, including Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela. Most importantly, the ANC now distanced itself from its traditional focus on blacks only, committed itself to the establishment of a non-racial South Africa, and formed an alliance with white, Indian, and colored anti-apartheid activists. In addition, however, the organization also turned towards socialist ideas: The 1955 *Freedom Charter*, which became the foundational document of the ANC's self-image, included demands for a fundamental socioeconomic transformation of the country, such as land redistribution and nationalization of key economic sectors (ANC, 1955). The ANC accordingly became an ideologically broad church, including Africanist, liberal and socialist ideas, diverse intellectual traditions that continue to inform its identity till today (de Jager, 2009).



The growing prominence of socialist ideas at least in part can be traced back to the increasingly close relationship between the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), founded as Communist Party of South Africa with the help of the Comintern in 1921 (the same year the CCP was founded). When the apartheid regime in 1950 outlawed the Communist Party, the struggling organization sought to convince the ANC that the establishment of a united front of all progressive anti-apartheid forces was the only way forward. The ANC leadership finally agreed, and the 1955 *Freedom Charter* as the founding document of the alliance between the ANC and the SACP presented the common denominator the two parties could agree on. Over the following years numerous ANC leaders joined the SACP Central Committee, including Moses Kotane, Walter Sisulu, Raymond Mhlaba, Joe Matthews, and most likely also Nelson Mandela (Ellis, 2011).

The ANC and the SACP were not the only organizations fighting against the apartheid state, however, and for a while the ANC actually was eclipsed by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which split from the ANC in 1959 due to the latter's new non-racial orientation and its cooperation with groupings such as the SACP. When the PAC in 1960 launched a campaign against restrictive pass laws, the police killed 69 people in the small township of Sharpeville, evoking international condemnations of apartheid. The NP, however, reacted with a further closing of political space. It outlawed the PAC and the ANC, and in 1962 incarcerated many of its leaders, including Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela. The remaining leadership had to go into exile, and the organizations' most immediate goal became survival (Saunders, 2014).

## THE ANC IN EXILE – STRUGGLING FOR RECOGNITION AND THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

International recognition became a highly valuable asset in this existence-threatening crisis, and an important dimension of the rivalries between ANC and PAC. The ANC in 1960 had decided to wage an armed struggle against the South African regime, and although it now was allowed to establish its bases in various African countries, including Tanzania, Angola, Zambia and Uganda, many of the newly independent governments in Africa actually favored the PAC over the ANC

with its communist allies and white activists. The Liberation Committee of the OAU supported both the ANC and the PAC, although largely symbolically. Thanks to the SACP's good connections to Moscow, however, the ANC quickly secured the help of the Soviet Union, which not only provided political and diplomatic support, but between 1963 and 1991 also trained more than 2 000 ANC members in its military institutions, and provided a substantial amount of money. The rest of the Soviet-led camp joined in, especially the German Democratic Republic and Cuba (Ellis, 2014).

It was in this context that the SACP's position within the united front became even stronger, and although this continues to be a contentious issue amongst experts, there are many who suggest that the ANC in exile did indeed get captured by the SACP. Historians Stephen Ellis and Tsepho Sechaba, for example, have argued that the SACP during these years turned the ANC from a broad-based nationalist movement into "something more closely resembling a socialist party" (Ellis & Tsepho, 1992, p. 201), and political scientist Krista Johnson has maintained that "the ANC was increasingly influenced by communist-style bureaucratic method of work and a vanguard Leninist strategy with democratic centralism as its organising principle" (Johnson, 2003, p. 209).

On the level of ideology, the SACP's influence was clearly visible in the ANC's continued drift towards socialist theories and concepts. In the early 1960s, the SACP had begun to refer to the situation in South Africa as "Colonialism of a Special Type," characterized by the coexistence of a colonial ruling class and the oppressed colonial majority within a single country, and to propagate the Soviet-derived concept of the national democratic revolution as a broad basis for all progressive forces fighting for national liberation (SACP, 1962). In its 1969 *Strategy and Tactics* document the ANC followed suit, and officially committed itself to the national democratic revolution,

which – by destroying the existing social and economic relationships – will bring with it a correction of the historical injustices perpetrated against the indigenous majority and thus lay the basis for a new – and deeper internationalist – approach.  
(ANC, 1969)

The ANC's vision of a radically transformed South Africa thus not only was contrasted with the country's colonial past and present, but increasingly also the bourgeois democracies of the capitalist West, and since the ANC now self-identified as a progressive national liberation movement committed to the national democratic revolution, which would set the country on a non-capitalist development path towards socialism, it is not surprising that its closest allies continued to be from the socialist camp. More surprising is that the movement during the 1970s and 1980s was able to gain recognition from a broad range of governments and civil society actors in the West, and Stephen Ellis has described the subsequent establishment of an anti-apartheid coalition that spanned the divide between the capitalist and socialist camps as "the most successful global campaign ever championed by Soviet-aligned parties" (Ellis, 2014, p. 43).

In contrast to the growing international recognition of the ANC, the apartheid regime of the Nationalist Party found it increasingly difficult to make friends. Faced with harsh criticism from socialist and newly independent states, South Africa proposed itself as a staunch anti-communist ally of the West, but while the dynamics of the Cold War indeed made many Western states reluctant to sever their relations with Pretoria, the South African regime's violation of the emerging norms against racial discrimination and colonialism became increasingly intolerable. The country was banned from many international cultural, academic and sporting events, and in 1963 the Western powers did not block a voluntary ban on arms sales to South Africa in the UN Security Council, followed by a mandatory ban in 1977. As such, South Africa slowly turned from a respected member of the community of (Western) states into a stigmatized and isolated outsider (Geldenhuys, 2006).

In this un-friendly international environment the South African government began to talk about a "total onslaught" against the country by its neighbors, to which the Republic had to react with a "total strategy." The South African military was expanded and frequently engaged in cross-border raids into neighboring countries. In the domestic realm South Africa increasingly turned into a police state, and anti-apartheid protests such as the Soweto uprising of 1976 were met with lethal

violence and the imposition of states of emergency that curtailed the already limited rights of the black population. Over time, however, the urban townships became ungovernable, especially after some 565 civic, political, and religious organizations in 1983 formed the United Democratic Front, started to propagate a strategy of civil disobedience, and succeeded in mobilizing the black population. While this grassroots organization had links to the ANC in exile, the liberation movement actually only played a minor role in organizing the protests, and “for much of the 1980s, the ANC appeared to be trying to play catch-up with very rapidly unfolding political developments inside the country” (Handley, 2014, p. 445; Grobler, 2014).

When internal turmoil and international sanctions increasingly interfered with the conduct of business, economic growth in South Africa dropped. In 1985, Western banks refused to roll over their loans to the South African government, making it increasingly difficult for Pretoria to pay its bills. The same year, the NP decided to talk to the imprisoned Nelson Mandela and the ANC in exile about possible future developments. Finally, with the unraveling of the Cold War order, Pretoria lost its last remaining trump card. In 1990 President Frederik W. de Klerk removed the bans on anti-apartheid organizations and released Nelson Mandela (Ellis, 2014). Shortly afterwards the ANC, the SACP and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) formally formed the Tripartite Alliance, a united front grounded in the common commitment to the 1955 *Freedom Charter* and the national democratic revolution, which despite frequent tensions continues to exist till this day.

## SOUTH AFRICA AFTER APARTHEID – THE SUSPENDED REVOLUTION

Although it was a difficult and contentious process, South Africa in the following years was turned into a functioning liberal democracy with regular free and fair elections, including multi-party competition and universal adult suffrage, with a rule of law safeguarded by an independent judiciary, and with a vibrant civil society and an outspoken and independent press. In 1994, the ANC emerged as

the clear victor of the first free and fair elections South Africa had ever experienced. Given the legacies of the past, these are no small achievements.

The transformation of the old apartheid-era order remained much less radical than many within the ANC and the Tripartite Alliance had hoped for, however. After all, they had fought for a revolutionary democratic state that would prepare the country for socialism, not a capitalist and bourgeois democracy. Yet the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union had not only weakened the National Party but also the ANC and its allies, and while the negotiated character of the transition to democracy was celebrated by many observers, to a large degree it was the result of a balance of power in which no side was able to dictate the terms of the transition. In contrast to Ethiopia, therefore, where the EPRDF around the same time established a revolutionary democratic state in all but name, in South Africa the numerous centers of political power outside its reach severely limited the ANC's options.

The frustrated revolutionary-democratic aspirations of the ANC have resulted in lasting tensions with the liberal-democratic setup of South Africa (Johnson, 2003; Lotshwao, 2009; de Jager, 2009; de Jager, 2013). While it has repeatedly stressed that it recognizes the legitimacy of South Africa's current political system, the ANC has also remained committed to its mass-based nature and its historical mission of fundamental transformation. Although the elections in South Africa are reasonably free and fair, the ANC not only has won every national election with more than 60% of the vote, but has also taken advantage of its two decades in government to establish itself as a dominant party with preferential access to state, media, funding, and symbolic resources. Opposition parties and critical voices from the press or civil society organizations, in contrast, are frequently rejected as illegitimate. Internally, the ANC continues to follow the principle of democratic centralism, and it has increasingly blurred the lines between party and state by staffing the bureaucracy, public broadcasters, universities, and state-affiliated enterprises with party cadres.

While the ANC thus has been able to establish itself as a dominant party, fundamental transformation in the economic realm was even more difficult to

achieve than radical political change, especially because economic power remained firmly in the hands of the white minority. During its years in exile the ANC had called for radical redistribution and the nationalization of key industries, but after the end of apartheid it quickly became more moderate in its approach; Nelson Mandela reportedly changed his view on the necessity to nationalize key industries after interaction with delegates from China and Vietnam during the 1992 World Economic Forum (Netshitenzhe, 2010). The economic policy proposed by Mandela's new government thus was social democratic rather than socialist in orientation, but South Africa's business community nevertheless reacted with fierce resistance and capital flight, which in turn led to currency fluctuations and the threat of economic collapse in South Africa (Marais, 2011).

To appease the markets, the ANC government in 1996 adopted a macroeconomic policy named *Growth, Employment and Redistribution* (GEAR), which signaled a clear break with the movement's ideological past. It focused on the creation of a favorable environment for market-led development, including a pledge to financial austerity, a focus on labor market flexibility, the reduction of tariffs, and the attraction of FDI. State-controlled business were privatized, tariffs lowered, foreign exchange deregulated, and a fiscal deficit reduction program enacted (Marais, 2011). And in contrast to Ethiopia, where foreign-demanded structural adjustment programs were sabotaged from within, in South Africa the liberalization of the economy indeed was successful. However, while this helped the government to strengthen its finances, lower its interest rates and bring inflation under control, the levels of inequality and poverty increased dramatically in the years following GEAR's adoption, and have since only been reduced slightly (Habib, 2013). In addition, South Africa's unemployment rate rose from an already staggering 22% in 1994 to more than 26% in 2016. The transformational character of the new South African state accordingly has been questioned by many left-leaning observers and activists, who have accused the ANC to "talk left, walk right" (Bond, 2004).

## NEW SOUTH AFRICA – A FRIEND TO THE WORLD

In his inaugural speech as president, Nelson Mandela invoked the identity of South Africa as a democratic and cosmopolitan “rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world” (Mandela, 1994). And as many observers have argued, the end of apartheid and the transition to democracy indeed resulted in South Africa’s “progression from the status of pariah to that of paragon,” and from “archetypal norm-violator” to “a model state reckoned in the councils of the world” (Geldenhuys, 2006, p. 93). The arms embargo was lifted, the South African delegation was allowed to join the UN General Assembly, and the Security Council removed “The question of South Africa” from its agenda. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali welcomed the country back in the international community, saying that “today, South Africa regains its rightful place in Africa, in the United Nations and in the family of nations” (cited in Landsberg, 2010, p. 80).

Much of this new global status had to do with domestic changes in South Africa, but the new government also consciously set out to transform South Africa’s foreign policy, in order to turn the country into what has been described by scholars as a “good international citizen” (Geldenhuys, 2006, p. 93). In a much-noticed article in *Foreign Affairs*, Nelson Mandela laid out his vision for South Africa’s foreign policy. He declared that “[h]uman rights will be the light that guides our foreign affairs,” that “[o]nly true democracy can guarantee rights,” and that “South Africa will therefore be at the forefront of global efforts to promote and foster democratic systems of government” (Mandela, 1993). He also acknowledged the country’s “African destiny” by highlighting its dependence on the continent, and promised that South Africa would play an important role in Africa’s development. The main contradiction Mandela saw in the post-Cold War era was the growing chasm between the developed North and the underdeveloped South, and he proposed that South Africa could play a special role in bridging this divide. At the end of the article, he stressed that South Africa would be a “friend to the world” (Mandela, 1993).

South Africa under Mandela indeed in many ways played an exceptional role. It became involved in solving tensions and crises in Angola, Zambia, Zaire, Israel,

Northern Ireland, Sudan, and many more. It also became an ardent supporter of multilateralism. Between 1994 and 2000, it signed 70 international treaties, (re-) joined 40 multilateral organizations, and played important roles in the 1995 indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1997 Ottawa Process to ban landmines, and the 1998 adoption of the Rome Statute to set up the International Criminal Court (Le Pere, 2010). However, being friends with everyone is not feasible, and the Mandela government soon had to realize that noble ideals often clash with harsh realities.

One of the most formative events in this regard was the strife between Mandela and the Abacha regime in Nigeria in 1995. When Mandela was informed that Abacha had nine activists executed, despite having promised to him personally not to do so, he was outraged, calling for sanctions and Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth. The reaction from other African governments, however, was cool. They accused Mandela of acting against the spirit of African solidarity, and the OAU described Mandela's actions as "not an African way to deal with an African problem" (cited in Jordaan, 2010, p. 86). The regime in Nigeria took advantage of such sentiments by calling South Africa "a white state with a black head" (cited in Jordaan, 2010, p. 86). From this and similar incidents, the Mandela government had to learn that the promotion of human rights and democracy stood in conflict not only with the norm of non-interference, but also the norm of African solidarity, and South-South solidarity more broadly. In 1996, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aziz Pahad admitted that there is "a possible contradiction between South-South cooperation and the values which we may want to project" (cited in Landsberg, 2012, p. 7).

South Africa's international behaviour under Mandela accordingly was often perceived as inconsistent by internal and external observers. For example, many Western countries were surprised that Mandela, despite his stated support for democracy and human rights, made a point by making Cuba the first country his government established diplomatic ties with, and in 1995 he declared that "[w]e will never forget those who stood by us in the darkest years of our struggle" (cited in Landsberg, 2010, p. 106). South Africa also continued to cultivate its relations



with Iran, and called for an end to Western sanctions against Gadhafi's Libya. In addition, the ANC on several occasions accepted donations worth millions of USD from autocratic leaders with tarnished human rights records. Facing international criticism for such good relations with states and regimes regarded by many as international pariahs, Mandela cautioned the West against dictating South Africa who its friends should be, saying that "we will choose our own friends" (cited in Landsberg, 2010, p. 111).

In a sense, therefore, the Mandela government wanted to have it all – South Africa was supposed to be a transformational state while also playing according to the neoliberal rules of a globalized economy; a good international citizen promoting human rights while also practicing non-interference and solidarity; a liberated country giving back to the world what it had received during the struggle years while also furthering the national interest; an equal amongst other African states while also being a regional leader; and a member of the South while also being close to the North. In light of the problems that ensued, the successor government of Thabo Mbeki set out to more clearly define South Africa's place in the world.

#### SOUTH AFRICA UNDER MBEKI – A MODERN AFRICAN STATE

In contrast to Mandela, who had spent 27 years in prison, Mbeki belonged to the group of ANC exiles. He had studied in the United Kingdom, undergone military training in the Soviet Union, and for a while had also been a member of the SACP Central Committee. In 1996, Mbeki had given a widely received speech called "I am an African," in which he had forcefully linked his personal identity to the African continent, and one year before becoming president, he had spelled out the idea of an "African renaissance" that would result in genuine liberation from neo-colonial relations, and could be achieved if African governments would bring to an end "the practices as a result of which many throughout the world have the view that as Africans, we are incapable of establishing and maintaining systems of good governance" (Mbeki, 1998). Some years later, he argued that "we must overcome the heritage of a millennium which has defined Africans as the despised among the peoples of the world" (Mbeki, 2000). International relations scholar Janis van der Westhuizen (2010, p. 23, emphasis in original) thus has argued that much of

Mbeki's foreign policy was motivated by an "*idée fixe*" to prove that South Africa and the continent at large could be both "unquestionably *African* and *modern*."

One hallmark of South Africa's foreign policy under Mbeki was the so-called "African agenda," a term used to describe the vast range of policy initiatives and institutional innovations spearheaded by the South African government to bring about the African renaissance. Mbeki played a central role in the creation of the AU and the establishment of a Southern African Development Community Free Trade Area. His foremost initiatives, however, were the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the related African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Having experienced firsthand other African governments' cool reaction to Mandela's demands for human rights and democracy, Mbeki envisaged NEPAD as a multilateral, institutionalized mechanism to foster good governance and sound economic policies in Africa. Through the APRM, governments were supposed to voluntarily let other African governments scrutinize their progress, and the stated goal of these endeavors was to attract FDI from the developed world. NEPAD and the APRM thus were supposed to provide a homegrown alternative to the structural adjustment programs demanded by the international financial institutions (Becker, 2010; Landsberg, 2010).

In addition to its African identity, Mbeki also stressed South Africa's identity as a member of the South. He described the inequalities amongst developed and developing states as resembling global apartheid, and emphasized the continued role the NAM had to play in this new era. He also became a strong supporter of the G77 plus China, was instrumental in establishing the India-Brazil-South Africa Trilateral Forum, and (unsuccessfully) tried to find international support for a G8 of the South consisting of South Africa, China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. And similar to the approach he followed with NEPAD, Mbeki sought to convince the states of the South that they had to go beyond mere sentiment and visions of solidarity, and become more focused on hard-nosed economic cooperation (Landsberg, 2010).

Over the course of Mbeki's presidency, South Africa's emphasis on its African and Southern identity started to interfere more openly with the country's role as

mediator and bridge-builder between Africa and the developed world. Although in inter-South relations he called for accountability and good governance, confronted with Western criticism Mbeki repeatedly put the norms of solidarity and anti-imperialism before democracy and human rights, and instead of openly criticizing autocratic leaders in Africa and the developing world for their human rights abuses, Mbeki preferred the non-confrontational backstage tactics of what became known as “quiet diplomacy” (Landsberg, 2010, p. 156). During South Africa’s two years as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2007 and 2008, the country in cooperation with China and Russia prevented the adoption of resolutions condemning the junta in Myanmar, the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe and the use of rape as political and military weapon, as well as the imposition of sanctions against Iran for violating the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – not on substantial grounds, but because it accused the Western states of either violating the existing rules of the UN system, or of selectively targeting individual countries they were hostile to. Many Western states and international human rights activists thus were happy to see South Africa’s tenure come to an end (Habib, 2009).

Although the West more and more emerged as an Other South Africa distanced itself from, the Mbeki government was careful not to alienate the West too much. Mbeki argued that in-group South-South cooperation had to be combined with out-group North-South dialogue, and that change of the established international order had to come from within (Habib, 2009). South Africa thus adopted a stance not unlike China’s and Ethiopia’s reformist-revisionist approach to the current global order. The Western powers, in turn, remained interested in fostering regional powers that could help in implementing their strategies, and South Africa still remained the most likely candidate in Africa (Hurrell, 2007). As such, South Africa’s willingness to play a regional leadership role was welcomed; in 2003 South Africa was the only African country to join the G20, and in 2007 it entered into a “strategic partnership” with the EU.

Domestically, the Mbeki government sought to square the ANC’s transformational ambitions with a continued focus on economic growth. To this end the ANC on its

National General Council in 2005 officially committed itself to the construction of a developmental state that would intervene to restructure the economy (ANC National General Council, 2005). As part of this readjustment of economic policy, social expenditure expanded rapidly (the number of recipients of social-support grants increased from 2 687 169 in 1999 to 12 386 396 by late 2007), and state intervention in the form of affirmative action programs (known as Black Economic Empowerment) and major infrastructure development projects came back into vogue (Habib, 2013, p. 88).

Nevertheless, despite this slow drift towards a more developmentalist approach – which in contrast to China and Ethiopia also included a strong welfare component – in many respects GEAR’s policies remained in place, including a commitment to austerity, to financial and trade liberalization, and a narrow focus of monetary authorities on inflation. Internal resistance against Mbeki continued to grow, and in a dramatic turn of events Mbeki in 2007 lost the post of ANC President to Jacob Zuma, who was supported by a broad coalition of leftist forces, including the SACP and COSATU. This spelled the end of Mbeki’s political career; in 2008 he also resigned as President of the Republic of South Africa, and was succeeded by Zuma after the general elections in 2009.

#### SOUTH AFRICA UNDER ZUMA – A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE COMMITTED TO THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

During the decisive 2007 National Conference, the ANC adopted a new *Strategy and Tactics* document, which once more emphasized the movement’s revolutionary-democratic identity. The national democratic revolution is described as the strategic goal of the ANC and its allies from the SACP and COSATU, which should “not be confused with tactical positions that the liberation movement may adopt from time to time, taking into account the balance of forces within our country and abroad” (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 23). The ANC is defined as a “disciplined force of the left” that, “[i]n terms of current political discourse, [...] seeks to put in place [...] a combination of the best elements of a developmental state and a social democracy” (ANC, 2007/2012, pp. 44-5). This identity is contrasted with “national liberation struggles which stalled at the stage of formal political independence”;

“neo-liberalism which worships the market above all else”; and “ultra-leftism which advocates voluntaristic adventures including dangerous leaps towards a classless society ignoring the objective tasks in a national democratic revolution” (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 45).

The ANC justifies this evolutionary rather than revolutionary approach to fundamental transformation with the fact that,

unlike before, when antagonists across the apartheid divide were locked in mortal combat, engagement around issues of transformation in a democracy forms part of legitimate discourse and electoral politics. [...] [The ANC] should strive to manage ‘contradictions among the people’ in such a manner that they do not undermine the long-term goal of national democratic transformation. (ANC, 2007/2012, pp. 40-1, 46)

Nevertheless, with the advance of the national democratic revolution,

[c]ommon interests will increasingly be forged across the racial divide within the various social classes and strata. And so, other defining issues in pursuit of other strategic objectives may become the paramount driving forces for continuing change. (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 43)

As such, the door to a future progression from revolutionary democracy to the stage of socialist construction is left wide open.

The document describes the relationship between the national democratic state and private capital as one of “unity and struggle,” and “[a] national democratic society will have a mixed economy [...],” in which

the balance between social and private ownership of investment resources will be determined on the balance of evidence in relation to national development needs and the concrete tasks of the NDR [national democratic revolution] at any point in time. (ANC, 2007/2012, pp. 42, 27)

The ANC therefore promises to build a developmental state that is characterized by a strategic orientation towards people-centered and people-driven development; that combines high growth rates with socio-economic inclusion; has the capacity to lead in the definition of a common national agenda and in the

mobilization of society; and has the organizational and technical capacity to realize its agenda.

In 2012, President Zuma in his *State of the Nation Address* reaffirmed that “[a]s a developmental state that is located at the centre of a mixed economy, we see our role as being to lead and guide the economy and to intervene in the interest of the poor, given the history of our country” (Zuma, 2012a). Later that year, the National Planning Commission that had been established in 2010 released the highly anticipated *National Development Plan 2030* (National Planning Commission, 2012). The plan serves as blueprint for South Africa’s long-term economic development, and states as its goal the elimination of poverty and the reduction of inequality by 2030. On its 2012 National Conference, the ANC also declared that the transition from apartheid colonialism to a national democratic society had entered into a second phase, and that whereas the first phase since 1994 had focused on political transformation, the “second phase of the transition” would have to focus on social and economic aspects (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 13).

Whether the changes associated with the creation of a developmental state and the second phase of the transition in practice account for a fundamental break with the market-driven and capital-friendly policies of the past is a heatedly debated topic amongst the South African left. Some argue that South Africa’s economic policies indeed have acquired “an increasingly neo-Keynesian flavour” (Habib, 2013, p. 103) under the Zuma administration, characterized not only by investments in infrastructure and social support grants, but also increased government spending and an activist industrial policy. Others warn that South Africa in reality is turned into a welfare state rather than a developmental state (de Jager, 2013), or see the developmental state as a thinly disguised attempt to continue with post-Washington Consensus neoliberalism (Marais, 2011).

The main criticism shared by most observers across the political spectrum, however, is that the ANC is not willing or able to turn its lofty rhetoric into political reality, and even within the ANC many admit that an increase in party leadership is necessary to realize the ANC’s developmental goals. Already on its National Conference in 2007, the ANC self-critically declared:

[O]ur accumulated weaknesses include [the] inability to effectively deal with new tendencies arising from being a ruling party, such as social distance, patronage, careerism, corruption and abuse of powers; ineffective management of the interface between the movement and the state; a flawed approach to membership recruitment, a decline in ideological depth amongst cadres; and a lack of institutional resources to give practical effect to the movement's leadership role. (ANC, 2007)

The conference therefore called for an “organizational renewal,” in order to preserve “the movement's character, culture and values in a changing context and new conditions of struggle” (ANC, 2007). On its National Conference in 2012, the ANC put even more emphasis on organizational renewal, declaring it to be of central importance for the success of the “more radical policies” associated with the second phase of the transition, and it was argued that “the neglect of cadre policy is at the centre of most of the current weaknesses and challenges faced by our movement” (ANC, 2012, pp. 4-5). The years 2013-2023 therefore were declared to be “a Decade of the Cadre in which there will be a key focus on the ideological, political, academic and moral training of a critical mass of ANC members” (ANC, 2012, pp. 4-5).

#### FOREIGN POLICY UNDER ZUMA – GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE SHIFTING BALANCE OF FORCES

With regard to foreign policy the transition from Mbeki to Zuma by and large was characterized by continuity, but certain trends that already had started under Mbeki became more pronounced (Landsberg, 2012; Landsberg, 2014; Alden & Schoeman, 2013). Generally speaking, the Zuma administration has maintained its predecessor's claim to consensus-oriented regional leadership, and a preference for non-confrontational, accommodative and mediated solutions to conflicts in Africa. In addition, it has exhibited an even stronger focus on economic pragmatism and the now much-heralded national interest, whereas democracy and human rights have received little attention. And lastly, while it has continued to emphasize South Africa's African and Southern identity, in recent years this has increasingly been accompanied by a negative Othering of the developed world.

This last point is related to the ANC's reassessment of the global "balance of forces," a Soviet concept the ANC adopted during its years in exile, and which has since remained central to the ANC's worldview. In its 1969 *Strategy and Tactics* document, the ANC optimistically argued that South Africa's national struggle

is happening in a new kind of world – a world which is no longer monopolised by the imperialist world system; a world in which the existence of the powerful socialist system and a significant sector of newly liberated areas has altered the balance of forces. (ANC, 1969)

The post-transition ANC was less optimistic regarding the global balance of forces: The 1997 *Strategy and Tactics* document dealt with the international situation rather briefly, and simply acknowledged that "the transformation taking place in our country is closely intertwined with the search for a new world order" (ANC, 1997). The new preface to the document adopted in 2002 was somewhat more optimistic, but saw progress primarily in new multilateral bodies such as the AU and NEPAD, and warned that the ANC "should not underestimate the difficulties posed by a unipolar world" (ANC, 2002). It was this perception of South Africa's vulnerability in a unipolar world, and the related notion that progress cannot be achieved by antagonizing the developed countries, that informed much of Mbeki's foreign policy – just as it had informed Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "keeping a low profile," or Meles Zenawi's strategy to hide the EPRDF's revolutionary-democratic agenda behind a veil of liberal-democratic reforms.

The end of the Mbeki era, however, also marked a far-reaching reassessment of the international balance of forces. In the ANC's 2007 *Strategy and Tactics* document, it is again argued that the global system of capitalism is underpinned by the unique dominance of one "hyper-power," but that this situation of unipolarity now also exhibits "secondary multipolar features reflected in geopolitical blocs among developed and developing countries, and the historical resurgence of China, India, Brazil and Russia as centres of growth and development" (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 51).

It is furthermore said that, because of its growing economic clout as well as the more assertive and progressive stance of many governments,



the voice of the South is growing stronger by the day. Both from the point of view of their common historical experiences and common current interests, countries of the South need to strengthen co-operation among themselves. They need to build people-centred and people-driven systems and pool their sovereignty through strategic partnerships. (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 55)

Expanding on this view, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane (2010) in a programmatic speech on South Africa's foreign policy on the one hand argued that the international society needs to overcome zero-sum thinking, since "friendship is hardly necessary for cooperation." On the other hand, however, she also maintained:

As South Africa, we should remember that some of the countries we characterise as emerging powers have been our fellow travelers as Africans in the struggle against colonialism. We have over the decades forged strong ties of solidarity and partnerships with these countries, with a view to promoting development and reconfiguring the structures of power in international relations in favour of developing countries. [...] The age of globalisation requires us to elevate these partnerships to a different level, building on the wells of goodwill and solidarity [...]. (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2010)

The most explicit formulation of the Zuma administrations' view on the ANC's and South Africa's role in this changing international environment can be found in an internal *Discussion Document on International Relations*, prepared for the ANC's National General Council in 2015:

The ANC is a revolutionary national liberation movement which is an integral part of the international revolutionary movement to liberate humanity from the bondage of imperialism and neo colonialism. Over the years of our struggle for liberation, our political, economic and ideological ethos has been based on our revolutionary principles of internationalism and solidarity. Our historic mission is to build a better World that is human, just, equitable, democratic, and free. [...]

The sudden collapse of socialism in the world [at the end of the Cold War] altered completely the balance of forces in favour of imperialism. It ushered in a new world hegemonic era of global socio economic agenda of capitalism and free market imperatives. The world is navigating through a complex period of a transition from a bipolar into an increasingly contested unipolar world led by the US. There is still

an increased contestation of ideas between the two previously opposing hegemonic systems of the world. [...]

While the economic situation described above presents a gloomy picture, the rise of emerging economies led by China in the world economy has heralded a new dawn of hope for further possibilities of a new world order. (ANC, 2015, pp. 159-61)

Given such views, it becomes clear where China fits into the ANC's view of South Africa and the world.

### SOUTH AFRICA'S SOCIALITY AND STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

The ANC can base its right to rule on the will of the people, expressed through regular elections. In addition, however, it continues to stress its historical mission, and although the transition from revolution to government has created numerous problems in this regard, the party leadership has also tried to maintain the movement's goal-driven character. The 2007 *Strategy and Tactics* document, for example, proclaimed that, instead of becoming "a party of the present, an electoral machine blinded by short-term interest, satisfied with current social reality and merely giving stewardship to its sustenance," the ANC should be "a party of the future, using political power and harnessing the organisational and intellectual resources of society to attain the vision of a national democratic society" (ANC, 2007/2012, p. 42). For this reason, the ANC has developed a complicated if not to say hostile relationship with the country's opposition parties, parts of the judiciary, as well as the independent media.

Prolonging the ANC's historical mission in this way necessitates a consistent narrative connecting the party to its revolutionary past and its transformational agenda, a consistent narrative linking South Africa's present to its colonial past and its national democratic future, and a close intertwining of these two narratives. As such, while the ANC has been far less successful in constructing a hegemonic discourse than the CCP in China or the EPRDF in Ethiopia, and its version of "who" South Africa is thus remains openly contested in the arena of domestic politics, the official identity relevant for South Africa's relationship with China can be summarized as that of

- a democratic state, led by a mass-based liberation movement committed to the national democratic revolution, which in its international relations follows a non-confrontational approach to political and ideological differences;
- a developmental state that attaches priority to socio-economic transformation at home and the national interest in its international relations;
- an African yet multi-racial “rainbow nation” with a unique history and cultural heritage;
- a primus inter pares within Africa that seeks to lead via multilateralism and consensus-finding;
- an emerging power that belongs to the South but is in a strategic position to engage the North; and
- a progressive state that seeks to promote the interests of the weak by striving for global transformation.

While these identity claims help to set it apart from other states, South Africa under the ANC nevertheless has defined large parts of its Self qua its membership in groups, especially Africa and the South, and shown a willingness to commit itself to binding multilateral institutions. South Africa therefore can be said to be the most “social” of the states analyzed in this study, and it lacks the sometimes grandiose exceptionalism we find in China, or the isolationist tendencies of Ethiopia. As a corollary of this sociality, South Africa has shown a strong interest in gaining recognition from those who can bestow legitimacy upon its claim to group membership, be it other African states, other emerging powers, or those who are deemed to be share its progressive agenda.

There are various reasons for South Africa’s sociality, including the ANC’s positive experience with international solidarity and the need to dissociate “new” South Africa from the apartheid regime’s narrative of radical exceptionalism. Another point that appears to be relevant in this regard, however, also is South Africa’s status as a middle power (Jordaan, 2003; van der Westhuizen & Grimm, 2014; Alexandroff, 2015). Almost by definition, middle powers tend to put forward normative claims and to use multilateralism and international institutions to play a role in international affairs, the alleged reason being that they on their own are

too weak to unilaterally affect global outcomes. In this reading, while China needs the recognition of others in order to mitigate the tensions associated with its rise to being a great power, and Ethiopia as a minor power is content as long as it is left alone, South Africa needs the recognition and support of others in order to internationally box above its weight.

## CONCLUSION

In order to identify South Africa in international relations, this chapter has explored the country's biographical narrative, and how its leaders have sought to position South Africa within international society. It has been shown how the South African state identity was developed in relation to Others its Self was dissociated from – including the socialist camp and decolonized African states during the era of apartheid, as well as its past Self and increasingly also the West afterwards – and Others the South African Self was associated with – including the capitalist West prior to the transition, and Africa and the South since. It has also been shown how the ANC after its coming to power was forced to compromise on its vision of a progressive, revolutionary-democratic South African identity, how it has struggled to reconcile long-standing narratives of its Self as a transformative liberation movement with being the ruling party of a capitalist and liberal democracy, and how some of the inconsistencies in South Africa's foreign policy are linked to conflicting views of “who” the country should be. In addition, I have briefly highlighted how South Africa's interest in being an accepted member of Africa, the South and the club of emerging powers goes hand in hand with an interest in gaining international recognition for its identity claims.

In the theoretical chapter I have emphasized the role similarities play in friendship construction. At first sight, liberal-democratic South Africa with its history of European settlement and its strong cultural, economic and political links to the West therefore appears to be an unlikely candidate for friendship with China. As this chapter has shown, however, there are also numerous similarities between the two states, including the shared experience of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggle, and the compatible worldviews of two ruling parties that hold on to socialist visions of progress and claim to strive for state-led development within

a reformed global order. And as we will see in the following chapter, these similarities – and what has been made of it – indeed matter for Sino-South African relations.

## CHAPTER 8: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SINO-SOUTH AFRICAN FRIENDSHIP

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Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share and which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden). The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, "What? You too? I thought I was the only one."

C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960)

### APPROACHING SINO-SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS

Many observers regard the relationship South Africa and China have developed as especially close, with descriptions ranging from "unique partnership" (Alden & Wu, 2014, p. 5) to "inexplicable love affair" (Olander & Van Staden, 2015). In parallel to Chapter 6 on Sino-Ethiopian relations, the purpose of this chapter is to interrogate these perceptions by analyzing Sino-South African relations through the lens of international friendship.

It starts with an historical overview, which shows that the current relationship, despite some links between the ANC and the CCP during the times of apartheid, primarily is a product of the post-Cold War era. The following discussion of contemporary government-to-government and party-to-party links will highlight how the two states and their ruling parties have developed an increasingly dense net of institutional and personal contacts, which today provides them with numerous channels for communication and cooperation. The subsequent analysis of trade flows and FDI will show that the economic dimension of the relationship, while important, is not as exceptional as could be expected. Instead, the ANC's emulation of the Chinese model – and the related search for an alternative development path – once more is found have resulted in a qualitative difference. Even more important than this, however, is the shared commitment to a reformed world order, and the related attempts to "build the South." Seen in this light, the

final analysis of speeches and official statements that seek to turn the allegedly special qualities of the relationship into socially shared knowledge shows that it would be misleading to dismiss Sino-South African friendship as empty rhetoric.

## THE HISTORY OF SINO-SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS

If we look at how the Sino-South African relationship is constructed in official discourse, we once more find that its historical roots are regularly stressed, but that this in most cases also means that a pleasing narrative is valued over factual accuracy. For example, in a speech given in Beijing in 2014, President Zuma not only mentioned the obligatory examples of Zheng He and the TAZARA railway, but, to specifically include South Africa into the narrative, also spoke about an ominous “Chinese mapmaker, who in 1320 had already charted Southern Africa on his maps,” and the existence of “people in Cape Town who claim descent from Chinese 13<sup>th</sup> century sailors” (Zuma, 2014a). Such quasi-mythical contacts between the peoples of China and South Africa predate the establishment of the European colonies by centuries, and thus allow depicting the bilateral relationship as being unrelated to the two countries’ relations with the imperialist powers.

More reliable are reports about a small number of Chinese migrants who settled in the British colonies and Afrikaner republics in the late 1870s, when the discovery of gold and diamonds attracted fortune seekers from all over the world. In addition to such spontaneous migration, a formal labor recruitment scheme initiated by the colonial mining companies soon brought several thousand Chinese workers into the region, an endeavor that in 1905 was accompanied by the establishment of a Chinese consulate in Johannesburg (Alden, 2001). While most Chinese workers were later repatriated, some remained in South Africa, and suffered from the racial discrimination of the apartheid state. Today the approximately 10 000 South Africans who trace their lineage back to this first wave of Chinese immigrants constitute a distinct group within the country’s population (Huynh, et al., 2010).

After the founding of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the country’s relations with China were largely determined by Great Britain, and while South Africa in the context of the formation of the Commonwealth in 1931 established official

diplomatic relations with the Republic of China, in reality these links continued to be mediated almost exclusively through London (Alden & Wu, 2014). This dependency on Great Britain only changed after the rise to power of the staunchly anti-communist National Party in 1948, which not only rejected British domination over South Africa, but also strongly disliked that London in 1950 switched formal recognition from Taipei to Beijing. South Africa refused to recognize the People's Republic, and in 1950 sent a squadron of fighter pilots to fight in the US-led coalition in Korea. Ten years later, China enacted economic sanctions against the South African apartheid state. And although in the early 1970s both sides considered the establishment of bilateral ties to combat Soviet influence, in the end even the common enemy USSR was not enough to bring them together (Taylor, 2006).

While the PRC and the RSA thus remained enemies divided by antagonistic contradictions, South Africa's relations with the fellow anti-communist ROC on Taiwan remained cordial, and in the late 1970s, in the context of both countries' growing international isolation and the related search for new friends, in fact slowly started to take on a special quality (Vale, 1997). In 1976 the relation was upgraded to the ambassadorial level, in 1980 Prime Minister P. W. Botha visited Taiwan, and in 1984 Vice President Lee Teng-hui came to South Africa. Bilateral cooperation soon included military and cultural agreements. Most importantly, however, trade started to flourish, growing from USD 30 million in 1979 to USD 5.8 billion in 1995 (Alden, 2001, p. 121). Taiwanese FDI also started to grow, reaching USD 100 million in 1987, with the labour-intensive textile industry being the leading sector (Anthony, et al., 2013). By 1994, the number of Taiwanese companies active in South Africa had reached 485 (Alden, 2001, p. 122). In conjunction with this, about 30 000 Taiwanese came to live in South Africa in the mid-1980s, and to avoid awkward situations they were granted the legal status of "honorary whites." Although they mostly have left the country since the end of apartheid, the Taiwanese and Taiwanese South African community today still consists of about 6 000 people (Huynh, et al., 2010).



## CHINA AND THE ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLE

In contrast to the NP, the organizations opposing the apartheid regime were sympathetic to Beijing. The South African communists had issued periodic declarations of support for the CCP since the 1920s, and starting in the Yan'an period the CCP likewise began to applaud its fraternal party's revolutionary struggle. After the establishment of the PRC, several SACP leaders went to Beijing, and in 1953 an ANC delegation, headed by Secretary General Walter Sisulu (who in 1958 also became a member of the SACP Central Committee), went to China on invitation of the All-China Youth Federation. The delegation's main goal was to acquire weapons, but the Chinese side argued that the ANC was not ready for an armed struggle, and refused to sell weapons at this point (Zhong & Xu, 2008; Taylor, 2006).

In 1960 the SACP and the CCP established formal ties, a status reserved for relations between communist parties only, and a SACP delegation in meetings with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping once more raised the issue of armed struggle. This time the Chinese leadership was more forthcoming, and the CCP agreed to provide nine months of political and military training to six SACP cadres, which took place in 1961. Two years later, five groups of ANC cadres came to China for study visits. The same year a delegation including both ANC Secretary General Oliver Tambo and SACP General Secretary Moses Kotane met with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai (Ellis, 2011; Zhong & Xu, 2008).

In late 1963, however, the Sino-Soviet split finally began to seriously affect the relationship. The SACP thus far had tried not to get involved, but given that the party had always maintained very close relations with the Soviets, it is not surprising that in the end it started to criticize China for splitting the international communist movement. In 1964 the CCP reacted by officially ending its relations with the SACP and the ANC. Instead, it switched support to the rivalling PAC, which remained close to the CCP until it started to fade into irrelevance in the early 1990s (Zhong & Xu, 2008).

During the 1970s there were occasional attempts to re-establish contact between the ANC and the CCP; in 1975 Oliver Tambo made a secret trip to Beijing, and in

1979 CCP Vice Chairman Li Xiannian met with ANC Secretary General Alfred Nzo (Taylor, 2006). However, relations between the ANC-SACP alliance and the CCP only started to improve again in earnest during the 1980s. In 1982, the CCP in its revised party constitution declared that it was willing to develop

relations with Communist Parties and working-class parties in other countries on the basis of Marxism and the principles of independence, complete equality, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. (CCP, 1982)

This was the party-to-party dimension of the open-up policy, and in light of the CCP's new readiness to establish relations with non-communist parties the SACP encouraged the ANC to reach out to the CCP. In 1983 ANC President Oliver Tambo went to Beijing and official relations were established. In 1986, after a further easing of Sino-Soviet tensions, relations between the SACP and the CCP were re-established as well (Zhong & Xu, 2008). Overall, however, the role the CCP played in achieving national liberation in South Africa was quite modest, and while both sides were drawn to each other, given their ideological orientation, due to the Sino-Soviet split they never became especially close during the Cold War.

In 1989, in a rapidly changing international and domestic environment, the South African government of the National Party reached out to the PRC, and while the Chinese side made formal relations contingent on an end to apartheid and to South Africa's relations with Taiwan, economic exchanges were quickly initiated. Finally, after the ANC's triumph in the 1994 election had brought an end to apartheid, it was generally expected that the ANC would also sever its links to Taipei and switch recognition to Beijing. To everybody's surprise, however, Mandela was hesitant, and over the following two years the new South African government tried to achieve dual recognition, i.e. formal relations with both the PRC and the ROC.

There are various explanations for this, including the ANC's need for money (in 1994 the Taiwanese government donated USD 10 million to the organization, the same sum the PRC government had donated in 1992 (Taipei Times, 2002)) as well as the importance Taiwan had acquired for South Africa's economy. In addition, the "two Chinas" issue became a heatedly debated topic in the South African

public, not only because it raised important questions regarding the relative importance of human rights and economic interests in the new government's foreign policy, and because it highlighted the ANC's difficulties to reconcile its own interests with that of the state, but also because the decision whom South Africa should be friends with was strongly linked to different ideas of "who" the new South Africa should be. Mandela, who both in domestic politics and in his foreign policy approach sought to overcome old antagonisms and "us-vs.-them" thinking, thus seems to have hoped to be able to avoid the difficult decision between China and Taiwan.

While Taiwan indicated interest in dual recognition, the PRC predictably would have nothing to do with it, and the Chinese side indeed appeared to be perplexed that a ruling party that was so clearly one of "us" could not understand that, in the words of Deputy Foreign Minister Tian Zengpai, it would be "a logical historical development for the new South Africa to establish diplomatic relations with China" (cited in Qian, 2005, p. 213). The majority of the ANC leadership agreed, and urged President Mandela to change his stance. In late 1996, Mandela finally gave in and announced that, starting on 1 January 1998, South Africa would switch recognition from the ROC to the PRC. The following years saw massive Taiwanese emigration and disinvestment, although it has been argued that this was mostly due to rising labour costs in post-apartheid South Africa, and had little to do with political relations (Anthony, et al., 2013).

## HOW TWO EMERGING POWERS CONNECTED

The relationship between China and post-apartheid South Africa hence had a surprisingly rocky start, but the intense round of high-level visits that ensued after the establishment of official relations highlighted the importance the two sides attached to the future of their bilateral relations. Thabo Mbeki and Frene Ginwala, Speaker of the South African National Assembly, traveled to China, and in 1999 Vice President Hu Jintao, Vice Premier Qian Qichen and Li Peng, Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee, visited South Africa. The same year, President Mandela made his first trip to Beijing as head of state. In 2000, Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma travelled to China twice, the second

time to participate in the first FOAC. Shortly afterwards President Jiang Zemin came to South Africa, and the *Pretoria Declaration on the Partnership between the PRC and the RSA* was signed. In it, the two sides agreed to further their economic relationship, to promote a new China-Africa relationship based on equality and mutual benefit, and to support each other in their efforts to create a new international political and economic order (PRC Presidency & RSA Presidency, 2000).

The practical outcome of the Pretoria Declaration was the establishment of a Bi-National Commission, a platform for high-level exchanges that has met every three years since 2001, when it was inaugurated by the Presidents Jiang and Mbeki. Four ministerial-level committees were also established, dealing with international relations, trade and investment, science and technology, and security and defense (Shelton, 2014). High- and mid-level visits between the two sides continued over the next years, too many to be listed here.<sup>12</sup> At the second meeting of the Bi-National Commission in 2004, the China-South Africa partnership was upgraded to a “strategic partnership,” and South Africa granted market economy status to China (RSA Department of Foreign Affairs, 2004). In 2006, the two sides signed a *Programme of Cooperation on Deepening the Strategic Partnership*, intended to promote common development through enhanced political dialogue and cooperation. And in 2008, a new Strategic Dialogue Mechanism meant to facilitate communication regarding long-term political and economic goals was inaugurated, which since has met once a year.

While the relationship thus developed rapidly, it has nevertheless been argued that the Mbeki presidency “maintained a largely cordial if not especially close relationship with China” (Alden & Wu, 2014, p. 8). As detailed in the previous chapter, instead of fostering special relationships on a bilateral level, Mbeki’s foreign policy was characterized by a focus on institutionalized multilateralism,

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<sup>12</sup> A Chinese-language overview over the most important official visits can be found on the website of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq\\_676201/gj\\_676203/fz\\_677316/1206\\_678284/sb\\_gx\\_678288/](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/fz_677316/1206_678284/sb_gx_678288/) [Accessed 1 August 2016].

and while he welcomed the creation of FOCAC, he also repeatedly voiced his concerns regarding the PRC. In 2006, for example, at a time when the negative effects of Chinese textile imports on South African manufacturing raised concerns amongst both entrepreneurs and workers, he warned Africa of the dangers of an “unequal relationship” with China, “the kind that has developed between African countries [...] and the colonial powers,” and that China “cannot just come here and dig for raw materials and sell us manufactured goods” (Mail & Guardian, 2006). Mbeki thus was reluctant to recognize the PRC’s developing country identity, and his doubts regarding China’s intentions in Africa were reportedly shared by many in his administration. It did not help that Beijing developed increasingly close relations with Zimbabwe, Sudan and Angola, regimes the Mbeki government had strained relationships with. When in 2008 dockworkers in Durban refused to handle a Chinese weapon shipment bound for Zimbabwe, diplomatic fallout was unavoidable (The Guardian, 2008).

Jacob Zuma nevertheless from the beginning of his presidency in 2009 was eager to push ahead in South Africa’s relationship with the PRC. In 2010 he led a delegation of 17 cabinet members and more than 300 business people to China, and he and President Hu signed the *Beijing Declaration on the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement*, which formally upgraded the relationship to the first “comprehensive strategic partnership” between the PRC and a developing country. In the declaration, the two sides vowed to enhance their joint efforts in the global arena, to maintain frequent contacts in order to enhance mutual understanding, and to improve the trade structure by encouraging Chinese imports of manufactured products from South Africa. It was also decided to set up a Joint Inter-Ministerial Working Group on China-South Africa Cooperation to monitor the implementation of cooperative projects, manage and solve associated challenges, and to elevate bilateral economic relations through the deepening of practical cooperation. In November 2010, Vice President Xi Jinping travelled to South Africa to sign several cooperation agreements covering, amongst other areas, energy, banking regulations and trade statistics (Liu, 2014).

In December 2010, China with the approval of Brazil, Russia and India extended an invitation to South Africa to join the BRIC group of states. This had been preceded by an intense South African lobbying campaign, in which the comparatively small and economically weak African state had sought to convince the BRIC states of its worthiness, and which some observers described as “embarrassing” (Alden & Schoeman, 2013, p. 115). The South African decision in 2009 to deny the Dalai Lama a visa, which was met with harsh criticism from civil society actors, including some heroes of South Africa’s own liberation struggle, can be seen in this light. Nevertheless, that South Africa could participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> BRICS Summit in 2011 as a full member, whereas other prospective members such as Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey were turned down, was a major foreign policy victory for the Zuma administration.

Frequent bilateral and multilateral exchanges between China and South Africa have continued since. In September 2011, the China Development Bank and the Development Bank of South Africa signed a deal worth USD 2.5 billion to provide financial support for bilateral cooperation in infrastructure construction, transportation, water resources utilization, housing, health and education (Liu, 2014, p. 28), and during a meeting with Vice President Xi Jinping, South African Vice President Kgalema Motlanthe suggested to turn the Sino-South African partnership into “a model of cooperation between developing countries” (South African Government News Agency, 2011). The following year, Zuma and several South African ministers participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> FOAC Ministerial Conference in Beijing.

In 2013, Xi Jinping went to South Africa to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit in Durban, which was themed *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation*. Amongst other things, the BRICS leaders agreed on the establishment of a BRICS Development Bank (later renamed New Development Bank) and a new BRICS Multilateral Infrastructure Co-Financing Agreement for Africa, intended to facilitate co-financing arrangements for infrastructure projects across the African continent. As such, not only could BRICS reiterate its claim to be

a champion of the developing world, but South Africa also could claim to have put the interests of Africa squarely on the BRICS agenda.

Next to the yearly BRICS Summits and the triennial FOCAC, another multilateral forum in which China and South Africa regularly interact is the UN. Here, South Africa especially since 2006 has quite consistently voted with the PRC (Bradley, 2016). This included the controversial decisions on Myanmar, Zimbabwe and Iran during South Africa's 2007-2008 membership in the UNSC mentioned in the previous chapter. In 2011-2012, South Africa served another term as non-permanent UNSC member. The two most controversial decisions were the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, which was supported by South Africa and on which China abstained due to prior consultations with the AU and the Arab League, and the condemnation of the Assad regime's actions in Syria in 2012, on which South Africa abstained but which failed due to Russian and Chinese vetoes (Graham, 2015). It thus seems that with regard to topics on which they do not agree, China and South Africa at least try not to directly antagonize each other.

In 2014 President Zuma travelled to Beijing, where the two sides signed a *Five-to-Ten Year Strategic Programme for Cooperation between the RSA and the PRC*, with the intention to further the comprehensive strategic partnership by outlining specific areas for cooperation. In the initial phase starting in 2015, these areas include alignment of industries to accelerate South Africa's industrialization process; cooperation in special economic zones; enhancement of marine cooperation; infrastructure development; human resources cooperation; and financial cooperation. In September 2015, Zuma attended the military parade that was held in Beijing to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China's victory over Japan during WWII. In December that year, the 2<sup>nd</sup> FOCAC Summit and the 6<sup>th</sup> FOCAC Ministerial Conference took place in Johannesburg.<sup>13</sup> While global headlines were dominated by China's pledge to support its economic relations with the African continent with USD 60 billion over the next three years,<sup>14</sup> China also signed 26

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<sup>13</sup> On the impressive amount of side events, see Wekesa, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> USD 5 billion in aid, USD 35 billion in lending, USD 5 billion for the China-Africa Development Fund, and USD 10 billion for a new industrialization fund (Xue, 2015).

agreements worth USD 6.5 billion with South Africa, including a USD 2.5 billion credit line for South Africa's state-owned rail operator (South African Government News Agency, 2015).

In 2016, Zuma met with Xi Jinping on the sidelines of a G20 meeting in Hangzhou as well as on the 8<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit in India. In November that year, Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao came to South Africa to preside over the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bi-national Commission (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). In addition, the establishment of a regular Consultation Mechanism on Human Rights was agreed on (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016a). In early 2017, finally, a High-Level People-to-People Exchange Mechanism was inaugurated, with the stated goal "to deepen mutual understanding between the peoples of South Africa and China and to enhance People-to-People exchanges and cooperation" (RSA Government, 2017). On this occasion, South Africa's Minister of Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa, stated: "Central to our efforts in the field of international relations and diplomacy is a notion of people-to-people relations with partner countries, jointly engaging each other and deepening our understanding of ourselves" (Cape Times, 2017).

#### HOW TWO RULING PARTIES CONNECTED

In addition of official government-to-government contacts, party-to-party links have played an important role in Sino-South African relations. In 1998 SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande, who was welcomed by CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin as a comrade of the Chinese people and a friend of China, visited the PRC. On this occasion a regular consultation process between the two communist parties was established, which allegedly is still active today (Shelton, 2014). In 2000, Dai Bingguo, Director of the CCP International Department, on invitation of the ANC visited South Africa. During the visit, he met with Blade Nzimande and Jacob Zuma, then Deputy President of the ANC. Later that year CCP Politburo member Jia Qinglin met with Nzimande, Zuma and Kgalema Motlanthe, General Secretary of the ANC, in order to discuss how to strengthen party-to-party relations. In 2001, Motlanthe and Nzimande attended the celebrations commemorating the 80th anniversary of the founding of CCP. Later that year, CCP



Politburo member Li Tieying visited South Africa, where he met Zuma to exchange views on party building. And in December 2001, Motlanthe went to Beijing to meet Li Tieying, Dai Bingguo and Li Peng, Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee. The two sides exchanged views on how to strengthen exchanges between two parties and how to coordinate their positions on major international issues (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006b).

In 2003, SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande went to Beijing, where he met with General Secretary Hu Jintao and Politburo Standing Committee member He Guoqiang. In 2004, delegations from the SACP and the ANC went to China, and a Chinese delegation visited South Africa. In 2006, Nzimande once more went to Beijing and met with Li Changchun, member of the Politburo Standing Committee (CCP International Department, 2007). In 2007, CCP delegations attended the SACP's 12<sup>th</sup> National Congress and the ANC's 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference, and delegations from the two South African parties went to China (Beijing Review, 2011a). In 2008, Nzimande again visited China, where he met with Politburo member Wang Gang. The same year, Jacob Zuma in his new function as President of the ANC went to Beijing, where he met with General Secretary Hu Jintao, International Department head Wang Jiarui, and Politburo member and Organizational Department head Li Yuanchao (Beijing Review, 2011b). Later that year, the CCP and the ANC signed a landmark *Memorandum of Understanding on Exchange and Cooperation*, which has since provided the official framework for the relationship, and in 2016 was extended for another five years (ANC Today, 2016).

In 2009, a CCP representative attended the SACP's 2<sup>nd</sup> Special National Congress, and 11 SACP cadres on a study tour to China met with the deputy head of the CCP's International Department, Liu Jieyi. Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang visited South Africa, where he met with President Zuma and ANC General Secretary Gwede Mantashe. Mantashe later that year also traveled to Beijing, where he met with Zhou Yongkang, Wang Jiarui as well as Li Jinjun, deputy head of the CCP's International Department. During November and December, finally, and as a result of the MoU that had been signed one year earlier, the first

delegation of 18 people from the ANC National Executive Committee went on a study tour to China, where they also met Zhou Yongkang, Li Yuanchao, Wang Jiarui and Li Jinjun (PRC National People's Congress, 2011). As will be discussed below, these yearly study visits of high-ranking ANC members have since continued on a regular basis.

Between 2010 and 2017, at least eleven high-level SACP delegations and nine high-level ANC delegations visited the PRC. SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande alone went to China on four different occasions, where he met, amongst others, with the two Politburo members Li Yuanchao and Liu Yandong. Other South African leaders that went to China include ANC Deputy President Cyril Ramphosa, ANC General Secretary Gewede Mantashe, ANC Treasurer-General Zweli Mkhize as well as Jeffrey Radebe, ANC National Executive Committee member and Minister in the Presidency. During the same time period, eight CCP delegations went to South Africa on invitation of the SACP, amongst other things to participate in the festivities for the party's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and four CCP delegations came to South Africa on invitation of the ANC, for example to participate in the 53<sup>rd</sup> National Congress and the festivities surrounding the party's centenary. Chinese leaders who went to South Africa or met with South African delegations include CCP Politburo member and Party Secretary of Chongqing Sun Zhengcai, Politburo member and Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission Meng Jianzhu, Central Committee member and Vice Secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection Zhao Hongzhu, as well as International Department head Wang Jiaru.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to government-to-government and party-to-party contacts, there are also growing military-to-military relations, even though security issues have remained marginal to the overall relationship. Soon after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1998, General Chi Haotian, Minister of National Defense of the PRC and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CCP Central

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<sup>15</sup> This paragraph is based on information provided by the monthly "Zhongguo gongchandang duiwai jiaowang jianxun" [CCP external relations newsletter] as published in *Dangdai shijie* between January 2010 and December 2016.

Committee, paid an official visit to South Africa. In 2000, South Africa's Minister of Defense, Mosiuoa Lekota, visited China, where he met Hu Jintao in his role as vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CCP Central Committee. Later that year Major General Huang Jiang, Chief of General Staff of the South China Sea Fleet, led a navy fleet to visit South Africa for the first time; the first South African Navy ship visited China in 2008, and there have been several small-scale joint military exercises (Cape Times, 2016). Already in 2003, a newly-established China-South Africa Defense Committee met for the first time, and its sixth meeting took place in 2014 (DefenceWeb, 2014). There have also been some interactions between South African and Chinese arms manufacturers. And on a political level, the Zuma administration has welcomed China's expanded role in peacekeeping missions in Africa, and voiced its willingness to improve military cooperation in order to bring stability to the continent (Alden & Wu, 2014).

All in all, therefore, and even though the list of government-to-government, party-to-party and military-to-military exchanges presented here cannot claim to be exhaustive, it is clear that China-South Africa relations are supported by an increasingly dense net of personal and institutional links on various levels that allow for frequent communication and close cooperation. Whether this is more than a partnership is still unclear, however, and the economic relations between the two countries analyzed below do not necessarily suggest otherwise.

#### MORE THAN ECONOMIC WIN-WIN COOPERATION?

In 2009 China became South Africa's biggest trading partner, and the picture that emerges from the tables below is one of dynamic growth. However, concerns regarding the balance of trade have repeatedly been raised on the South African side, given that South Africa in 2014 alone reported a trade deficit of USD -6.8 billion with China. Unfortunately, inconsistencies in the numbers provided by the two sides make an assessment of the situation difficult: Data reported by China include as the largest category "commodities not specified according to kind," of which China imported USD 26.7 billion in 2014 alone, but which are absent from the South African statistics. Including this category dramatically alters the overall picture, and China accordingly reported a huge trade deficit (USD -28.9 billion) in

2014. The nature of these unspecified commodities remains debated amongst analysts. The most likely explanation are gold and diamonds that are sold via third markets, and which accordingly are not accounted for as national exports to China by South African authorities, while China still considers them to be South African in origin. The two governments have set up an expert group to look into this issue, but so far no results have been published.

While the actual balance of trade therefore remains unclear, the composition of trade is clearly worrying for the South African side, since it once more repeats the familiar pattern of North-South trade: Whereas South Africa mostly exports natural resources to China, it imports manufactured goods. And according to one research project, cheap Chinese imports to South Africa not only have primarily taken away market share from domestic businesses, but also resulted in the loss of up to 145 000 jobs in the South African manufacturing sector between 1992 and 2010 (Edwards & Jenkins, 2015). Some of China's most vocal critics in South Africa accordingly come from the trade unions, and several industries have demanded protection from Chinese competition, especially in the textile sector. In 2006, the two governments thus reached an agreement on the imposition of quotas on imports of selected clothing and textile lines from China, which however only lasted for two years.

#### **Key facts of South Africa-China trade in goods, 2014<sup>16</sup>**

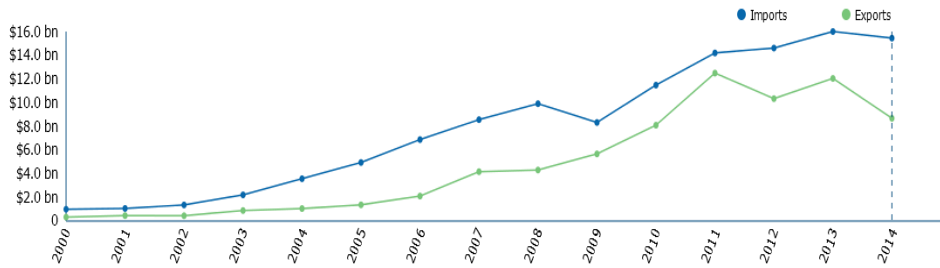
|   |
|---|
| Bilateral trade: \$24.1 bn  |
| South African exports to China: \$8.7 bn (6.8% of South African exports, 2.3% of Chinese imports)     |
| South African imports from China: \$15.4 bn (15.5% of South African imports, 0.7% of Chinese exports) |
| South African trade balance with China: -\$6.8 bn   |

Source: UN Comtrade Database.

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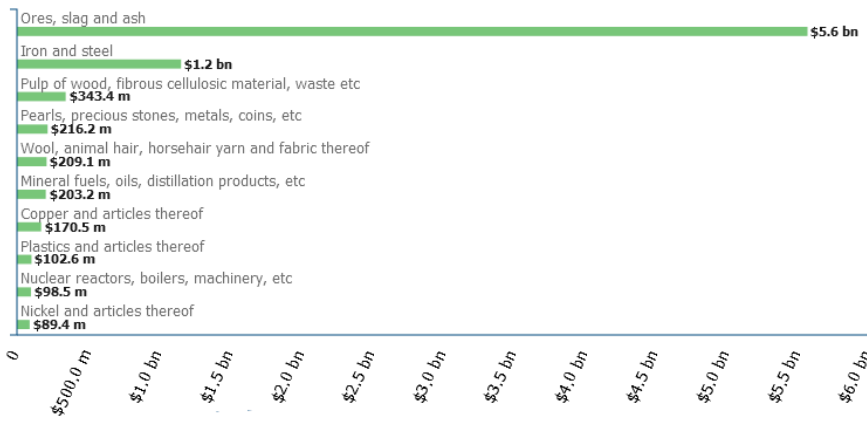
<sup>16</sup> The data used here is the one provided to the UN by the South African Revenue Service.

### South Africa's total trade in goods with China, 2000-2014



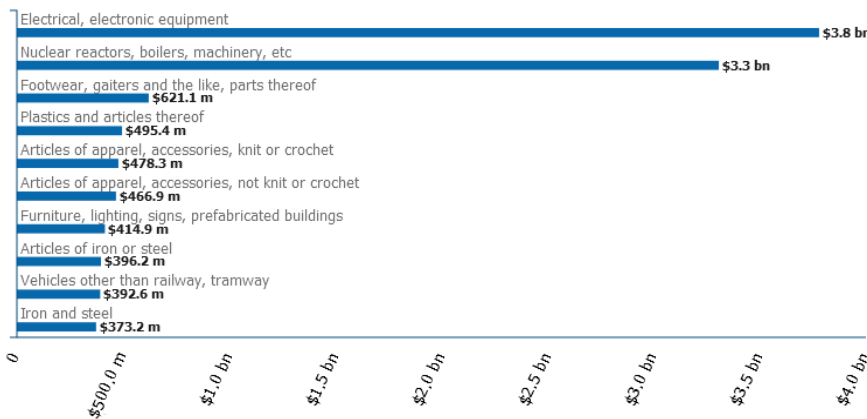
Source: UN Comtrade Database

### South Africa's top-10 exports to China, 2014



Source: UN Comtrade Database.

### South Africa's top-10 imports from China, 2014



Source: UN Comtrade Database.

While China has become South Africa's most important trading partner, it has not acquired the same dominance it has for the Ethiopian economy. By way of comparison, in 2014 South Africa's commodity trade with the USA stood at around USD 13 billion, with only a very small negative balance, whereas EU-South Africa trade was approximately USD 46 billion, albeit with a negative balance for South Africa of more than USD -5 billion. As an economic bloc, the EU thus continues to be South Africa's most important trade partner. At the same time, South Africa was responsible for a staggering 31% of Sino-African trade in 2013, turning it into China's largest trading partner on the continent, ahead of oil-rich Angola and Nigeria (van der Nest, 2014).

South Africa also seems to be the largest African recipient of Chinese FDI, although the actual numbers once more have to be treated with caution. According to data from the South African Reserve Bank (SARB), in 2010 Chinese FDI stocks in South Africa accounted for USD 5.16 billion (compared to USD 8.68 billion from the USA and USD 116.7 billion from the EU) (Sandrey, 2013). The same year, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) reported a stock of USD 4.15 billion. In 2012, SARB numbers had dropped to USD 5.08 billion, whereas MOFCOM numbers had risen to USD 4.78 billion (Gelb, 2014). And by the end of 2015, according to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the stock of Chinese FDI in South Africa suddenly stood at USD 13 billion (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016b). According to SARB, China in 2012 was South Africa's 5<sup>th</sup> largest source of inward direct investment, and MOFCOM ranked South Africa 12<sup>th</sup> amongst recipients of Chinese outward direct investment. The largest share of Chinese firms investing in South Africa is in infrastructure and construction, and most Chinese companies active in South Africa are market- rather than resource-seeking (Gelb, 2014).

China thus can be said to have become an important investor in South Africa, but not a dominant one. At the same time, South Africa is the only African country with significant investments in China. Indeed, SARB put the stock of South African FDI in China at USD 20.28 billion in 2012, up from USD 13.99 billion in 2010, which would mean that South Africa has invested significantly more in China than the other way round (Gelb, 2014). According to official Chinese sources, however, the

stock of South African FDI by late 2015 only was about USD 660 million (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016b). Nevertheless, from the South African IT/media corporation Naspers, which owns a 34% stake in China's largest IT company Tencent, over the multinational SAB Miller, which together with its domestic joint venture partner became China's largest brewer in 2006, to various South African mining companies active in China, there is no doubt that South African businesses over the last two decades have been part of the wave of foreign capital pouring into the PRC.

In general, therefore, and even though certain asymmetries continue to trouble the relationship, it is justified to talk of growing economic interdependence between China and South Africa, and not only one-sided dependencies as is the case in China-Ethiopia relations. Whether such market-driven exchanges can lead to more than an economic partnership, however, is doubtful, and simple win-win cooperation arguably is not enough to turn partnership into friendship. The ANC's attempts to emulate Chinese successes, on the other hand, have more potential in this regard.

#### THE ANC'S EMULATION OF THE CHINESE MODEL

While the ANC during its first two decades in government has frequently adopted economic policies that are described as neoliberal by its critics, it has remained formally committed to a fundamental transformation of the country's economic and social order. This was once more emphasized with the proclamation of the "second phase of the transition" in 2012, and it appears that China indeed has been a source of inspiration for the ANC on how to approach its transformative agenda. In 2014, for example, Zuma declared that "China sets us a good example in our second phase of transition by its economic growth, technological advancement and levels of entrepreneurship and industrialization which have drastically reduced underdevelopment," and that "our challenges, objectives and approaches to development are very similar" (Zuma, 2014a). Even more outspoken in this regard is the *Discussion Document on International Relations*, prepared for the ANC's National General Council in 2015, which declares China's economic development trajectory to be "a leading example of the triumph of

humanity over adversity. The exemplary role of the collective leadership of the Communist Party of China in this regard should be a guiding lodestar of our own struggle” (ANC, 2015, p. 161).

Given this stated admiration, it is difficult not to associate the ANC’s vision of a developmental state with the example set by China. In practical terms, however, and with some exceptions such as the establishment of special economic zones, the number of actual lessons China has provided for South Africa so far appears to be quite limited. Whether this primarily is due to the ANC’s inability to realize more ambitious goals, or whether the party has concluded that the details of the Chinese approach are not compatible with the quite different political, economic and social realities of South Africa, remains unclear. As such, China’s importance for South Africa primarily lies in its role as a successful champion of an alternative development path that combines market mechanisms and integration into the global market with varying degrees of state intervention, intended to put the economy into the service of the larger goal of social progress.

The impact of Chinese experiences and support has been more concrete with regard to the ANC’s attempts at “organizational renewal,” especially the goal to strengthen the political consciousness of its cadres during the “decade of the cadre” 2013-2023. Immediately after his election as ANC President, Zuma in 2008 held a speech at the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong (CELAP) in Shanghai – one of China’s top party schools, with a special focus on international cooperation – and expressed his party’s wish to learn from the CCP’s experiences with “cadre development and party organizational work on the ground” (Zuma, 2008). Following Zuma’s visit, the CCP and the ANC signed the *Memorandum of Understanding on Exchange and Cooperation* mentioned above, which specifically was about learning processes between the two ruling parties.

Soon afterwards, plans to develop a comprehensive ANC school system became known, and leading ANC members have acknowledged that the CCP’s schools are the primary model for this endeavour. China reportedly also has provided teaching materials and instructors to support the ANC’s efforts, and the unconfirmed rumour that the CCP has donated a considerable sum of money for its realization



has periodically resurfaced in the South African media (Time, 2014). In addition, in early 2016 the ANC announced plans to establish a joint regional school for the former liberation movements of Southern Africa, which allegedly will be funded by China as well (SABC, 2016).

While actual progress towards the establishment of a party school system has been slow (the central political school still has no permanent physical address, and the establishment of provincial schools has been uneven), the trainings provided for ANC cadres and leading South African politicians in China quickly became institutionalized. Yearly study tours for members of the ANC's National Executive Committee were established, and during the first four years alone, 56 ANC National Executive Committee members visited China for trainings under the general theme "From revolution to being in power – the theory and practice of the ruling parties of China and South Africa" (CCP International Department, 2011; Zhong, 2012). The delegation that in 2010 visited China, for example, included ANC national chairman Baleka Mbete, Minister in the Presidency Collins Chabane, Communications Minister Sphiwe Nyanda, Correctional Services Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and Deputy Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba. During their two weeks in China, they attended lectures on China's national planning system and its reform commission, on local government, on the party school system, and on China's role in the world and Africa (Times Live, 2010). According to the ANC, the main aim of the exchange program "is for comrades to gain exposure and to learn from experiences of China, particularly the policy of socialism with Chinese characteristics" (ANC National Executive Committee, 2009, p. 6).

Learning exchanges are not limited to the ruling party, however. After an official visit to China in 2015, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the Chinese Academy of Governance (the PRC's central school for middle and senior government officials directly under the State Council) had agreed to include South African government officials and business leaders in its training and skills development programs. In addition, the negotiation of a formal cooperation agreement between South Africa's National School of Government (the RSA's recently established central institution responsible for the education and training

of civil servants) and the Chinese Academy of Governance was said to be in its final stage (RSA Presidency, 2015). As such, the links between the two states are systematically expanded to include civil servants as well.

Another area in which the South African press and opposition parties have accused the ANC of showing a tendency towards following Chinese examples is in its approach towards critical media (Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2015). This perception was sparked in 2013, when an undisclosed Chinese consortium – allegedly linked to China Central Television, the China-Africa Development Fund and the China Development Fund – acquired a 20% stake in Independent News and Media South Africa, the largest owner of English-language newspapers in the country, while the South African state-owned Public Investment Corporation bought another 25% (Mail & Guardian, 2013). Anton Harber, a journalism professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, at that time argued that “the ANC is working with their Chinese allies – ruling party to ruling party, in the way the Chinese government so often works – to increase their influence in our local media and counter what they view as a hostile media sector” (The Globe and Mail, 2013).

In 2014, it was reported that Independent News and Media had signed a partnership agreement with China Central Television, with the goal of creating a new media platform for Africa that could highlight the development of the continent. One year later, a cooperation agreement was signed between South Africa’s largest media corporation Naspers and the Chinese State Council Information Office, resulting inter alia in a “Sino-Africa Media Summit,” put together by the State Council Information Office and co-organized by Naspers (China Daily, 2015), or in Nasper’s distribution of 210 000 copies of a special issue of the *ChinAfrica* magazine, published by the state-run *Beijing Review*, across the African continent (Li, 2015). And later that year, China and South Africa signed a *Plan of Action on areas of cooperation in Information and Communication Technologies*, which contains plans for future cooperation in cyber security and Internet governance (RSA Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services, 2015), and was met with criticism by opposition parties and NGOs. As such, while

fears of Chinese influence are frequently overblown, it would also be wrong to underestimate the political ramifications of China's increased presence in the South African media landscape.

Taken together, there is much to suggest that at least some recent political developments in South Africa have been inspired and supported by the PRC, and that the Chinese Other is of relevance for the transformational Self the ANC is trying to construct. However, these learning processes only took off with the advent of the Zuma administration, and so far they have been much more selective, indirect, and inconsequential than the ones discussed in Chapter 6 in the context of China-Ethiopia relations. This may be explained with the fact that the ANC continues to be influenced by liberal and social-democratic ideals, and that Ethiopia's political and economic system allows the EPRDF to follow the Chinese model more closely than is possible for the ANC. In any case, it means that learning and the associated cooperation appears to be less central to the relationship than is the case in Sino-Ethiopian relations. As such, while the idea of alternative modernization does play a role in establishing the special qualities of Sino-South African relations, more important for providing purpose to the relationship is the shared goal of global transformation.

#### A COMMON PROJECT OF GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

In the preceding chapter, it has been discussed how the ANC leadership since Zuma's coming to power in 2007 sees the international balance of forces as slowly but continuously tipping in the favour of the progressive countries of the South, which should work together and create strategic partnerships in order to achieve global transformation. And importantly, the PRC has been singled out as one if not the leader of the oppressed but rising South.

During a visit to the PRC in 2010, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Nkoana-Mashabane proudly declared:

The rise of countries of the South has begun, the momentum is intensifying, and indeed we marvel at our collective recognition, growing influence and improving geopolitical standing in international affairs. [...] The growing importance of China in the world economy and geopolitics should be leveraged by developing countries

not only to strengthen South-South cooperation but also to address the unequal distribution of power in the international system. (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2010)

In 2013, Zuma declared that “China’s development under the leadership of the Communist Party of China is a source of hope and inspiration for South Africa and encourages South Africa to strive for a better future,” and that “South Africa attaches strategic importance to its solidarity and cooperation with China, and is willing to work with China to achieve common development and pursue a more just and reasonable international order” (Xinhua, 2013).

In the ANC’s 2015 *Discussion Document on International Relations*, it is not only stated that “the rise of emerging economies led by China in the world economy has heralded a new dawn of hope for further possibilities of a new world order,” but also that the formation of BRICS “as a powerful political and socio economic bloc” is proof of the shifting balance of forces and the trend towards a multipolar order, and “a conscious political decision to roll back the post-World War II Washington Consensus” (ANC, 2015, p. 161). The USA, however, is accused of having declared a “cold war” against China and Russia, “two emerging world powers” (ANC, 2015, p. 162). Given such statements, it appears as if the underlying factor informing the Zuma administration’s forceful turn towards China has been the ANC’s evolving view on the international balance of forces, rather than the differing personal dispositions of Mbeki and Zuma some observers have proposed as explanation (Habib, 2009; Alden & Wu, 2014).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the CCP’s post-Mao preoccupation with domestic development has meant that the PRC over the last three decades has primarily focused its energy on achieving continued economic growth. It would be a misconception, however, to assume that China simply turned its back to the world, and the stated goal of Deng Xiaoping’s strategy of “keeping a low profile” from the beginning was to give the country time to increase its weight in international relations. Starting in the early 2000s, the PRC began to supplement its focus on domestic development with cautious attempts to build partnerships with other emerging powers and developing countries, and to establish parallel structures to a wide range of existing international institutions. Under Xi Jinping, these attempts

to create political quasi-alliances and China-centred international institutions have become ever-more visible, and have found their expression in calls for a “new type of major power diplomacy” with Chinese characteristics.

As an emerging power that has the potential to have a noticeable impact on the international balance of power, a developing country that has consistently expressed its interest in a reformed world order, and an African state that claims to represent the continent with the largest number of developing countries, South Africa combines three roles that make it important for China’s global strategy. As a result, China not only was instrumental in securing South Africa’s place in the BRICS group of states, but has also sought to turn South Africa into its key strategic partner on the African continent. During a visit to Pretoria in 2013, Xi Jinping accordingly expressed China’s readiness

to work with South Africa to build their ties into a model for the development of a new type of the [sic!] China-Africa strategic partnership and for the solidarity and cooperation between large developing countries. (Xinhua, 2013)

Seen in this light, the growing interaction between China and South Africa is more than pragmatic cooperation; it is part of the CCP’s and the ANC’s self-ascribed historical mission to bring about a reformed international order, and as such takes place within a common project that may be referred to as “global transformation.” The first step towards the realization of this project has been made with the establishment of a strong bilateral partnership that not only includes a shared commitment to change, but also a far-reaching agreement on how to achieve this goal, including a reformist-revisionist approach to the current order that seeks to avoid open conflict and instead to achieve incremental change from within.

For the time being, and given the lasting dominance of the developed countries, the project thus is centered on the building of a network of bilateral partnerships and multilateral institutions amongst emerging powers – on “building the South.” Ultimately, however, these networks and institutions are supposed to help in the creation of a balance of forces that allows for the realization of a new, and better, international order. Whether China and South Africa will succeed in their endeavor remains to be seen, however, and there are of course ample reasons to remain

skeptical. What their common project already has achieved, however, is to provide a focal point for cooperation that is closely linked to both sides narratives of the Self, and to create a moral space that provides the involved actors with a sense of purpose and virtue.

#### “COMRADES AND BROTHERS” – REPRESENTATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP

Given this context, it would be wrong to dismiss the official discourse accompanying the relationship as empty rhetoric. Instead, it presents a conscious effort from the Chinese and South African leaderships to turn their shared notions of a special relationship into social reality. On the South African side, especially President Zuma has been vocal in this regard. At the opening session of the 5<sup>th</sup> FOCAC Ministerial Conference in 2012, he delivered a speech that received a lot of media coverage in South Africa and abroad, mainly because he described the trade patterns between China and Africa as “unsustainable” and argued that “Africa’s past economic experience with Europe dictates a need to be cautious when entering into partnerships with other economies” (Zuma, 2012b). What most reports omitted, however, was that Zuma in his very next sentence said:

We are particularly pleased that in our relationship with China we are equals and that agreements entered into are for mutual gain. [...] We certainly are convinced that China’s intention is different to that of Europe, which to date continue [sic!] to attempt to influence African countries for their sole benefit. (Zuma, 2012b)

In 2014, praising the “warm and wonderful relations between South Africa and China,” Zuma said that “South Africa has a good story to tell of success since 1994, and the good and fruitful relations with China are part of that story” (Zuma, 2014b). On another occasion, Zuma argued that the ANC has

redeemed our country from the pariah it was in international affairs to a meaningful global player and partner. We are proud to count the People’s Republic of China as among such friends who lent moral, material and political support to achieve a free and just South Africa. In recent times, China helped us to belong to the BRICS family. Our twenty years’ story [since liberation] owes [as] much to our

loyal international partners like China as it does to the people of South Africa.

(Zuma, 2014a)

Zuma furthermore described China as “a true and trusted friend of South Africa,” said that “[w]e count on this formidable friendship [...] as we deepen our relation and forge ahead with our developmental agenda,” and that South Africa’s “future [...] is intertwined with the People’s Republic of China, both our friend and partner. (Zuma, 2014a)

As such, Zuma has frequently linked South Africa’s biographical narrative and its place in the world to China, and the ANC’s vision of the future to that of the CCP. In addition, he has explicitly recognized the PRC’s Self-image, including its great power exceptionalism, and while he consciously differentiates between partnership and friendship, he sees both realized in Sino-South African relations. Other South African leaders have voiced similar views. For example, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane in 2013 said that “[w]hen our two countries established formal diplomatic relations 15 years ago, we did so with the full knowledge of the special relationship that exists between our peoples. We count China among our best friends” (Nkoana-Mashabane, 2013). And her deputy minister Marius Fransman stated that South Africa hopes to further advance its “relations with like-minded states such as China,” and that “[o]urs is a vision of two nations bound by history to realise their common goals and aspirations” (Fransman, 2013).

Such friendly words are frequently voiced by the Chinese side as well, most recently especially by President Xi himself. In 2014, he described China and South Africa as “good friends and good brothers that mutually benefit each other” (Daily Mail, 2014). The following year, on the occasion of his attendance of the FOCAC Summit in Johannesburg, Xi said that the PRC attaches great importance to furthering the “special relationship between the ‘comrades and brothers’” China and South Africa (Xinhua, 2015c). This is noteworthy because the category of a “‘comrades and brothers’ special relationship” implies a strong ideological affinity, and has traditionally been associated with China’s relations with fellow socialist states. The term’s use in the context of Sino-South African relations therefore did

not go unnoticed by Chinese observers (in contrast to South African or Western ones), and David Tsui, an expert on the PRC's foreign policy during the Mao era, said that "[i]t seems that Xi is thinking about developing a new kind of strategic and diplomatic alliance in the absence of a shared communist ideology" (South China Morning Post, 2015).<sup>17</sup>

A few days prior to the 2015 FOCAC Summit, Xi Jinping also authored an article titled "A Rainbow of Friendship" in the South African newspaper *The Star* (Xi, 2015b).<sup>18</sup> The article in many respects resembles the statement on the exemplary nature of Sino-Ethiopian relations discussed in Chapter 6, and due to its relevance to the argument advanced will be analyzed in some length.

South Africa, the Rainbow Nation, is a shining pearl on the southern tip of the African continent. This amazing land with beautiful landscape, rich resources, hard-working people and diverse culture was home to Nelson Mandela and the legend of racial reconciliation that turned bitter confrontation into harmonious coexistence. Its glorious history of struggling for national liberation through trials and tribulations has given this country a unique and profound appeal that has captured the attention of the world.

Cherishing friendly sentiments for a dear brother, I will once again set foot on the beautiful land of South Africa. [...]

As a Chinese saying goes, "Nothing, not even mountains or oceans, can separate people with shared goals and vision." Though geographically far apart from each other, the people of China and South Africa have enjoyed a friendship that

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<sup>17</sup> Zhu Ming from the Shanghai Institute for International Studies interpreted the use of the "comrades and brothers" category as an attempt to link Sino-South African relations more strongly to the ties that had been established during the liberation struggle, and expects a proliferation of the term to other bilateral Sino-African relations built on similar historical foundations (Haiwainet, 2015). His colleague Zhang Chun is cited as saying "that by calling South Africa "comrade and brother" Xi was giving China an eternal identity as a third world nation" (South China Morning Post, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> *The Star* belongs to Independent News and Media, the publishing house partly owned by an undisclosed Chinese consortium and the South African Public Investment Corporation.



becomes increasingly solid with the passage of time. Back in the South African people's fight against apartheid, the Chinese people firmly supported the just pursuit of equality, freedom and liberation by the South Africans and stood in solidarity with them. [...]

After some nice words of recognition – which do not fail to relate South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle to the CCP's concept of harmonious society – the text starts by addressing the historical and people-to-people dimension of the relationship, stressing the ties of friendship and solidarity that allegedly connect the people of China and South Africa since the times of their common fight against apartheid. In general, however, the article deals with the apartheid-era rather briefly.

In 1998, China and new South Africa established diplomatic ties, ushering in a new era of China-South Africa relations. [...] Upgraded from a partnership to a strategic partnership and then to a comprehensive strategic partnership, our relations have made a historical leap forward and become one of the most dynamic and important bilateral ties in our respective foreign relations.

Over the past 17 years, our friendship and cooperation has grown from a small boat to a gigantic vessel, riding the wind and waves and forging ahead toward greater mutual benefit and common development. The China-South Africa relationship is at its best in history. The strategic importance of this relationship is manifested in the unprecedented level of political mutual trust, increasingly close international coordination, fruitful pragmatic cooperation and wide-ranging cultural and people-to-people exchanges. [...]

Turning to official inter-state relations, the remarkable progress that has been achieved is emphasized. The exceptional qualities of the relationship are expressed in the evocative language Xi uses to describe the two sides' shared commitment to a better future, and the stated strategic nature of the relationship means that it is based on shared fundamental interests and common long-term goals rather than tactical consideration. This is said not only to have resulted in cooperation across the board, but also deeply-held mutual trust.

In the past three years, President Zuma and I [...] have reached a series of important consensus on the development of China-South Africa relations under the

new circumstances, identified our bilateral ties as the strategic fulcrum and priority in our respective foreign policies and jointly formulated the China-South Africa Five-to-Ten-Year Strategic Program for Cooperation, thus injecting strong impetus into the China-South Africa comprehensive strategic partnership.

Here, Xi stresses that he and President Zuma are personally responsible for the progress that has been achieved over the recent years, and that they also agree on the future of the relationship, which is deemed to be of central importance for both states' international relations. The nature of the "new circumstances" Xi speaks of remains unclear; it does not seem too far-fetched, however, to associate these new circumstances with the shifting balance of forces.

China-South Africa relations have gone beyond the bilateral scope and gained growing strategic significance and global impact. China and South Africa, as two major developing countries and emerging market economies, hold identical or similar views on development, security and international order and share broad consensus on major international affairs and hotspot issues. [...]

While the text so far has stressed the intimate nature of China-South Africa relations, in this paragraph the global significance of the relationship between two "major developing countries and emerging market economies" is stressed. This is said to be true especially because China and South Africa agree on the most fundamental and long-term issues in international relations, namely development, security and order, and that there is also a general agreement on most current issues.

Our economic cooperation and trade have led to greater convergence of interests. [...] China has for six years in a row been South Africa's largest trading partner. Chinese investment in South Africa has risen from zero to US\$13 billion, making South Africa the top destination of Chinese investment in Africa. Projects invested and undertaken by Chinese companies [...] have created over ten thousand jobs for the local communities. [...]

Turning to the relationship's economic dimension, it is argued that their growing cooperation has brought the two countries closer together. Excluding the more problematic aspects of the relationship, the picture drawn is one of win-win

cooperation that directly benefits the people of South Africa, especially by creating much-needed jobs.

Seen in the context of China's friendship with all other countries, 17 years may not seem long. But thanks to the personal commitment of our top leaders and the tremendous efforts of our two sides, China-South Africa relations, after 17 years of growth, have become a model of solidarity and cooperation between China and Africa and between China and other major developing countries. [...]

While the relative novelty of the friendship between the two countries (not the people) of China and South Africa is acknowledged, it is stressed that personal commitment and unyielding efforts have already endowed the relationship with special qualities. As such, other African countries as well as other major developing countries – referring to the emerging powers of the South – are called upon to follow this model of cooperation and solidarity.

We stand ready to work together with South Africa and seize the opportunities and momentum to take our comprehensive strategic partnership to new heights to better serve our peoples.

- China and South Africa should be forward-looking strategic partners with strong mutual trust. [...]
- China and South Africa should be development partners - pursuing equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. [...]
- China and South Africa should be friendly partners who understand, accommodate and learn from each other. Friendship begins with knowing and understanding each other. [...]
- China and South Africa should be global partners who support and coordinate closely with each other. [...] We will remain firm defenders of developing countries' interests and active advocates for world peace, stability and prosperity. [...]

In these paragraphs, the future of the bilateral relationship is sketched out. As strategic partners, China and South Africa should always keep their long-term goals in mind; as development partners, they should follow a win-win approach to cooperation; as friendly partners, they should understand and learn from each

other; and as global partners, they should strive for their vision of a better and more just world order.

If we compare Xi's speech with the statement on exemplary Sino-Ethiopian relations analysed in Chapter 6, the parallels are obvious. Not only are Sino-South African relations praised as model others are invited to follow, but the themes of shared interests, common views and intertwined histories and futures are present as well. They also follow a very similar story arc that begins with a brief mentioning of historical relations, but generally focuses on the present and how the bilateral relationship will play a part in bringing about a better future for the people. One notable difference is that Sino-Ethiopian relations are deemed to be model for relations between developing countries, whereas China-South Africa relations are specifically presented as a model for relations between *major* developing countries, thus establishing a certain degree of stratification in the South. Irrespective of such differences, both texts not only need to be read as attempts to construct the specific bilateral relationship as more than a self-interested partnership, but also in the context of China's effort to construct meaningful and robust partnerships with developing countries and emerging powers, to gain support for its "new type of international relations," and to establish itself as a new type of great power.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed China-South Africa relations through the analytical lens of international friendship. Regarding the historical dimension of the relationship, it has been shown how the links the ANC and the SACP during the years of anti-apartheid struggle developed with the CCP today are used to depict the relationship as a "traditional friendship," but that these links in fact were rather weak. Mandela's idealistic goal to be friends with everyone – including Taiwan – further delayed the development of bilateral relations, but since the late 1990s the relationship is characterized by an increasingly dense network of institutional and personal relations, especially on the government-to-government and party-to-party levels, which today enable frequent communication and close cooperation.

The discussion subsequently turned to an analysis of economic relations between China and South Africa, which were found to be important but not necessarily exceptional. Learning processes and the role of China as a champion of alternative modernization, in contrast, do add a special dimension to the relationship, but they nevertheless appear to be less central as they are to Sino-Ethiopian relations. Instead, it has been argued that the shared commitment to a common project of global transformation provides the basis for friendship construction, and that both sides' view that the international balance of forces is about to reach a tipping point provides the project with additional relevance. As such, the current leaderships have made it very clear that they regard their relationship as a special one – as one between “comrades and brothers,” as President Xi Jinping has put it. And importantly, they have worked hard to turn these views into a social structure that is able to have a tangible effect on how the states interact with one another.

The result is a stable and dependable relationship between states that recognize each other according to their own self-images, and which due to mutual identification, frequent exchanges and close cooperation have developed an intimate relationship – it is a friendship in the sense proposed by the model of Self-referent motivation for international friendship. However, since it is more appropriate to think of friendship in terms of varying degrees of “friendness,” a final assessment of the quality of the Sino-South African friendship will only be possible after a discussion of its problems and shortcomings in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 9: THE QUALITY OF SINO-ETHIOPIAN AND SINO-SOUTH AFRICAN FRIENDSHIP

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The absolute condition for friendship is full agreement in life-view. If one has that, one will not be tempted to base one's friendship on obscure emotions or unaccountable sympathies. Consequently, one will not experience those ridiculous reversals, having a friend one day but not the next. One will not give unexplained sympathy less than its due, for one does not have a friend in the strict sense in everyone with whom one shares a life-view, but neither will sympathy in its mysterious ways by itself be the basis of one's friendships. A true friendship always requires consciousness and that saves it from being infatuation.

The life-view in which one is united must be a positive view.

Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (1843)

### IDEOLOGICAL FRIENDSHIP

In the preceding chapters, I have largely treated friendship as a dichotomous category. It is more appropriate, however, to think about friendship in terms of varying degrees of "friendness," and while I thus far have focused on those aspects that have resulted in an intimate relationship between significant Others, we still lack an assessment of the quality of the two friendships. To reach such an assessment, the chapter starts with a summarizing discussion of the empirical findings, to highlight why it makes sense to think of the two relationships in terms of friendship in the first place, and which allows me to compare the cases to each other – not in a systematic way intended to isolate variables, but to highlight what is unique about each case. The chapter then proceeds to assess the friend-like qualities the relationships exhibit on a behavioral level, especially whether they are characterized by voluntariness, openness, equality, respect, support, trust and loyalty. Afterwards, two important aspects that reduce the quality of the friendship will be highlighted, namely its elitist and shallow nature, as well as the problem of inequality and even hierarchy that comes with highly asymmetrical power. Given the ambiguity that is an inherent element of friendship, this strategy

will not allow me to present a clear-cut or definitive answer to my second research question – how we assess the quality of the two friendships – but at a minimum it will provide some perspective to the discussion.

At first glance, China and the two African states appear to be unlikely candidates for friendship. After all, the three states are located far away from each other, their shared history is rather brief, there are no cultural links, and due to their differences in power they also occupy quite different positions within the international system. In addition, there are important differences regarding their level of socio-economic development and their political systems. These things matter because differences make it more difficult to integrate the respective Other into narratives of the Self, to grant thick recognition without calling into question the own identity, or to find room for practical cooperation and mutual learning. As the preceding chapters have shown, however, there are also certain aspects the states have in common.

The most important communality, and in fact the main reason why China has become friends with Ethiopia and South Africa, is that all three countries are ruled by hegemonic or at least dominant parties with similar worldviews. To understand this similarity, despite formally different ideologies, we have to take into account the Soviet theory of the two stages of revolution necessary in Third World countries, which has had a huge impact on all three parties. Originally formulated by Lenin, this theory argued that colonial and semi-colonial countries first need to achieve a national-democratic (or new-democratic, as Mao termed it) revolution that liberates them from the forces of imperialism, and only in a second step can they go through a socialist revolution that ultimately will result in a class- and stateless society. The first, national-democratic revolution is supposed to be brought about by a united front of all progressive forces, including communists and nationalists, which after the capture of state power will not simply establish a capitalist bourgeois democracy, but follow the ideological guidance of the Soviets and set the country on the path of non-capitalist development. After this transitory phase, the country would be able to smoothly transition to the stage of

socialist construction, led by a communist party as the vanguard of the working class.

During their formative struggle years, the TPLF as well as the ANC self-identified as progressive nationalist forces that, together with their communist allies from the MLLT and the SACP, were fighting for the national-democratic revolution. After their capture of state power in the early 1990s, they accordingly should have set their countries on a non-capitalist development path. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War had resulted in radically changed circumstances, and since Ethiopia was in dire need of external help, the EPRDF had to at least formally give in to the West's demands and hide its true agenda behind a veil of superficial market liberalization and bourgeois-democratic reforms. In South Africa, the ANC's transformational agenda not only was thwarted by an unfavorable international balance of forces, but also by the fact that it had to share political power on the domestic level, and that economic power remained firmly in the hands of the apartheid-era capitalists. Both organizations thus had to tone down their socialist rhetoric and revolutionary ambitions.

Nevertheless, and despite some important ideological innovations that were necessary to adapt the theory to a changed reality, to this day the EPRDF and the ANC remain formally committed to their vision of revolutionary democracy. In Ethiopia, this has resulted in a revolutionary-democratic state in all but name, in which a hegemonic party uses the less controversial notion of the developmental state to increase its grip on the state and the economy, suppress alternative political forces, and exert ideological control. The situation in South Africa is more complicated, not only because the ANC despite its continued political dominance is not in a position to force its will upon the political system, the liberalized economy or the independent civil society, but also because the party itself is an ideologically much broader church than the EPRDF, and generally has accepted the country's bourgeois-democratic constitution as a legitimate framework for the current stage of the struggle. Nevertheless, the ANC continues to advance its revolutionary-democratic agenda through initiatives such as the creation of the developmental state, its cadre deployment strategy, or the "second stage of the



transition.” And while they have challenged some traditional markers of the revolutionary-democratic state, especially the goal to minimize Western economic influence, both Ethiopia and South Africa in their own way seek to come close to what Soviet theorists during the Cold War had called “countries of socialist orientation,” which are not yet ripe for a socialist revolution, but still adhere to the teachings of scientific socialism and follow a path of non-capitalist development. As such, in both countries the progression to socialism has been suspended, rather than abandoned.

In contrast to the FDRE and the RSA, the PRC is said to have already realized the second, socialist stage of the revolution, and as a communist party the CCP is deemed to be even more progressive than the two nationalist organizations from Africa. However, while communist parties traditionally claim to represent the proletariat, the CCP today rather stresses that it represents “the fundamental interests of the greatest majority of the people,” as stated in Jiang Zemin’s “three represents,” and while it is supposed to strive for communism, the party rather focuses on “national renaissance,” as maintained by Xi Jinping’s “Chinese dream.” In addition, with the help of ideological justifications such as the “primary stage of socialism” or the “socialist market economy,” the CCP has backpedaled on its more radical economic policies, and the economy it has established comes closer to the mixed economy that traditionally was seen as a hallmark of the national-democratic phase of the revolution, rather than the state economy that should characterize the socialist phase.

Thanks to the CCP’s ideological shift from class-based revolution towards nation-based development, therefore, the difference between socialist China on the one hand and revolutionary-democratic Ethiopia and South Africa on the other is less categorical than could be expected. As a result, the three parties not only exist in the same intellectual universe, but the language of fraternal party-to-party relations also shows that they are aware of their shared ideological roots, and the fundamental compatibility of their current approaches and long-term goals.

## TRADITIONAL FRIENDSHIP

Apart from the ruling parties and their ideologies, another fundamental similarity can be found in the three states' histories. To be sure, these histories do not speak for themselves, and turning them into a coherent narrative rendering of the past involves a conscious act of inscribing meaning to a huge number of seemingly disparate historical events. As such, it is better think of them in terms of biographical narratives of the personified nation-state, rather than historical truths. Yet even such biographical narratives are not simply fabricated out of thin air, and the similarities between the narratives pushed by the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC rest on indeed comparable historical experiences, and on similar answers to comparable historical challenges. To draw a clear line between narratives of the past and the historical truth thus is difficult.

The historical parallels are most striking regarding China and Ethiopia, two ancient civilizations with a long tradition of statehood and notions of exceptionalism. Starting in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, their forced entry into the Westphalian system of sovereign states in combination with the universalizing claims of post-Enlightenment modernity made it increasingly difficult to protect the worth of China's and Ethiopia's Self against the humiliations brought about by the unfriendly European Others. Unequal treaties and spheres of influence degraded the two countries to the status of semi-colonies, and the collective identity the Chinese and Ethiopian elites had long taken for granted became unable to provide order and value. The resulting stigmatization and ontological insecurity went hand in hand with a lingering legitimacy crisis. In this context, different visions of a strong and modern national Self began to compete with each other, and although in both countries the struggle that followed was a long and complex one, in the end it resulted in the capture of state power by a revolutionary movement with a socialist vision of modernity, which defined the country's Self not only in contrast to its own feudalist and semi-colonial past, but also the capitalist and bourgeois-democratic West.

In contrast to China and Ethiopia, South Africa was founded as a colony of white settlers, who for a long time sought to maintain its identity as a modern European

state on African soil. This went hand in hand with the marginalization and oppression of the country's black majority population, and when South Africa in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century began to institutionalize its system of apartheid in the context of changing global norms on colonialism and racial discrimination, it not only increasingly failed to gain international recognition for its identity claims, but also faced growing resistance at home. The anti-apartheid struggle that followed in many ways was a struggle between different answers to the question "who" South Africa should be, a struggle that also took on a strong international dimension, and which was finally won by a revolutionary movement with a socialist vision of modernity that defined the country's Self not only in contrast to its own racist and colonial past, but also the capitalist and bourgeois-democratic West.

Due to such similarities, in all three countries the officially sponsored biographical narrative of the nation-state contains comparable tropes of a glorious or at least peaceful past that was ended by an era of foreign-induced exploitation and humiliation, of a long and ultimately successful fight of a revolutionary movement that sought to free the people from political and economic oppression, and of this movement's continued struggle to lead the country to its renaissance and a better future. One does not need to follow a Schmittian reading of politics as friend-enemy distinction to see how the shared fate of foreign aggression and comparable experiences with fighting against a common Other today can help to unite these states, and it has accordingly been relatively easy for the three ruling parties to relate the biographical narratives of their respective states to each other. In addition, the three narratives could easily be integrated into the more general narrative of traditional friendship between China and Africa. As such, China and the two African states are presented as "traditional friends" that have been brought together by the forces of history, and as "all-weather friends" that have stood the test of time.

#### CONSTRUCTED FRIENDSHIP

Despite ideological and historical similarities, Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations would not have become close without a series of conscious

decisions by the involved actors, and while their development was marked by certain milestones, none of them amounts to a defining moment that single-handedly established them as special relationships. Instead, the states were brought together by a continuous stream of smaller events, the willingness to invest in the relationship, and the readiness on both sides to learn and adapt. As such, we cannot explain the current relationships with similarities alone, but instead need to highlight the role played by agency.

While contacts during the Cold War era were shallow and at times even antagonistic, the relationship between China and Ethiopia started to become closer after 1994, when the EPRDF leadership in its search for an alternative to Ethiopia's meddling partners from the West turned to the CCP, and the Chinese regime in the volatile international situation after the end of the Cold War was looking for new partners as well. Some years later an increasingly self-confident China began to institutionalize its rapidly developing relations with the African continent through FOCAC and the establishment of strategic partnerships with individual states. These initiatives were welcomed by the EPRDF, which since Meles Zenawi's ousting of his more conservative rivals in 2001 had begun to emulate China's economic policy by fostering the selective use of market mechanisms and Ethiopia's integration into the global market.

In 2003, China and Ethiopia signed the second partnership agreement between China and an African state, and Ethiopia became one of China's most vocal supporters on the continent. Ethiopia's contested 2005 election, after which the EPRDF in its state-, nation- and party-building efforts made use of Chinese experiences and support, resulted in another upgrade of the relationship, and the fact that Meles' death in 2012 did not result in political infighting or drastic policy changes further convinced the CCP that the EPRDF indeed is a reliable partner. Today, political exchanges between the two sides are frequent and institutionalized.

The importance of leadership is even more apparent in China's relations with South Africa. During the Cold War relations between the ANC and the CCP had been overshadowed by the Sino-Soviet conflict, but due to their shared pasts and

similar worldviews, many within the two parties saw the establishment of official relations between “new” South Africa and China as inevitable. Yet Nelson Mandela’s goal to turn South Africa into a friend to the world and to establish relations with both the PRC and the ROC resulted in a surprisingly rocky start for the relationship. As soon as Pretoria switched recognition to Beijing and Thabo Mbeki became president, however, the relationship developed rapidly, and in 2001 the two sides signed the first partnership agreement between China and an African state. Nevertheless, due to its focus on multilateral institutions and the African Agenda, and an unfavorable assessment of the global balance of forces, the Mbeki administration preferred to stay at arm’s length from China.

This changed with the rise to power of Jacob Zuma and his supporters, who due to their renewed emphasis on the ANC’s transformational agenda, a more favorable assessment of the global balance of forces, and a new focus on strategic partnerships with emerging powers supported the development of more robust ties with the PRC. The most visible outcome of this new approach was South Africa’s bid to join the BRIC club of states, which received strong support from China. Some years later, Zuma’s strategy dovetailed nicely with President Xi Jinping’s vision of China’s international relations, including the “new type of major power diplomacy” and the related emphasis on political quasi-alliances. Consequently, the two states have established increasingly dense and institutionalized exchanges on numerous levels.

## RATIONAL FRIENDSHIP

Although the involved actors argue that shared worldviews and historical experiences have resulted in strong bonds of solidarity, they explain the ever-closer cooperation between China and Ethiopia as well as China and South Africa primarily with their states’ shared strategic interests. This stands in contrast to socialist notions of class-based internationalism and people-to-people friendship, or emotionally charged visions of South-South solidarity, but past experiences have taught the three parties to be careful regarding overly ambitious claims of morality and selflessness: During the Cold War neither the Soviet Union nor China had been able to reconcile their internationalist ambitions with the national

interest, and the Third World's attempts to overcome the self-centered nature of international politics likewise failed.

Deng Xiaoping solved this tension in favor of peace and development, and today there is no doubt about the primacy of the national interest in Chinese foreign policy. The same is true in Ethiopia, where the TPLF in fact never developed a strong internationalist tradition, but in light of its international isolation and the hierarchical relationships within the socialist camp instead for a long time had promoted the idea of autarky. The ANC remains the most vocal supporter of internationalist ideals amongst the three parties studied, probably due to its long and positive experience with international solidarity during its years in exile and the relatively strong outward-orientation of South Africa's state identity. Even here, however, the Mandela government's harsh encounters with the realities of international politics had resulted in a much more pragmatic approach, and the Zuma administration has made it very clear that the national interest needs to be at the heart of South Africa's foreign policy.

In all three countries, the national interest therefore has prevailed over internationalist ambitions, and solidarity is deemed to be a shaky ground to build a country's international relations on. What is more, the three ruling parties maintain that, as long as they focus on common interests and shelf their differences, all states are potential partners – a view reminiscent of the united front strategy, in which the common struggle for a shared goal justifies tactical alliances even with those who stand on the wrong side of a contradiction. At the same time, however, due to their common identity as developing countries with progressive domestic and international agendas, the strategic partnerships between China and the two African states are deemed to be based on shared interests and common goals regarding the most fundamental contradiction in the current international system – the one between the developed North and the developing South. In addition, although this conflict is relegated to a distant future, they are also expected to have compatible goals regarding the conflict between capitalism and socialism. The three states thus are regarded as jointly standing on the right side of history, and as having a direct interest in seeing the

respective Other succeed in achieving domestic development and furthering its national power. As a result, their partnerships are reckoned to fulfil the objective preconditions for being truly comprehensive and long-term, and the three states accordingly are not only deemed to be “traditional friends” with “fraternal ruling parties,” but also “natural partners.”

#### VISIONARY FRIENDSHIP

The three states’ commitments to shared long-term goals find their expression in two common projects. In the case of China and Ethiopia, I have termed this the “project of alternative modernization,” which seeks to contest the universalist claims of the developed West by promoting national paths to modernity, and by presenting a specific, non-liberal alternative to the dominant liberal model of statehood and economic development. Since China is unanimously regarded as the more advanced of the two countries, in practical terms the common project primarily evolves around Chinese support for Ethiopia’s goal to establish a stable, revolutionary-democratic developmental state that can repeat the PRC’s economic successes. It does so not by handing out gifts, however, but through (allegedly) mutually beneficial cooperation, and by helping the EPRDF to emulate Chinese experiences. As a result, Ethiopia increasingly is turned into “Africa’s China.”

The Sino-South African “project of global transformation,” in turn, is built around a common commitment to challenge certain aspects of the current world order that are deemed to be unfair, undemocratic, and inimical to progress – most of all the continued dominance of a few developed states that use their power to further their narrow self-interest on the expense of the majority of states in the developing world. The necessary next step for this project is seen in strong partnerships between emerging powers, including China and South Africa – at least for the time being, therefore, the project might also be described as “building the South.” Over time, however, these partnerships are expected to tip the global balance of forces in the favor of progress, and as part of this process, a “new type of international relations” that does away with Cold War-style zero-sum thinking and presents an alternative to the selfish and power-driven politics of the West

needs to be established. China and South Africa see themselves as pioneers of this new approach.

While their practical focus is quite different, the two projects nevertheless are interconnected. Due to their continued adherence to central tenets of Marxist-Leninist analyses of international politics, the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC view domestic and international developments as heavily interrelated, and as part of a highly complex interplay between numerous interests and forces that determine the course of history. They also agree that the path their countries should follow is different from the one the liberal democracies would like them to pursue, but that development cannot be achieved by decoupling their economies from the global market, or by antagonizing the developed powers – a point of view that can be traced back to Deng Xiaoping’s policy of reform and opening-up, but which has also been adopted by the EPRDF since at least the 2001 TPLF leadership split, and by the ANC since at least the Mbeki presidency. The result is a shared reformist-revisionist approach to the international order, and the conviction that domestic development and the related increase in national power must come prior to any attempts to achieve global transformation.

Given its level of socio-economic development, Ethiopia is deemed not to be in the position to influence global outcomes, and therefore first needs to concentrate on achieving domestic development. Over time, however, the successes of Ethiopia’s non-liberal developmental state are expected to help in challenging the ideological dominance of the West, and to strengthen the forces of progress. Therefore, although the Sino-Ethiopian project primarily is about domestic development, it nevertheless also entails an international dimension.

The primarily internationally oriented Sino-South African project, on the other hand, also includes attempts to help South Africa to strengthen its governing capacity, increase the ideological consciousness of the ANC’s cadres, and generally enable the party to advance its revolutionary-democratic agenda on the domestic level. In contrast to Ethiopia, however, the CCP and the ANC apparently have come to the conclusion that their states’ power and the shifting global balance of forces finally allow them to be more assertive in their external relations. This is visible in



new international institutions such as BRICS and its New Development Bank, in Xi Jinping's "new type of major power diplomacy" and his statement that China should "guide" the international community towards a better world order, or in South Africa's increasingly anti-Western stance. This does not mean that the two states have stopped seeing domestic development as their primary concern, or abandoned their goal to cooperate with the developed world, but they certainly feel that they no longer need to accept that they are at the whim of forces beyond their control, and that the time has come to complement their domestic focus with more robust initiatives on the international level.

These two projects are an outgrowth of the three ruling parties' shared ideological commitment to socialist notions of progress, and as such they are lofty, if not to say utopian. It is exactly for their symbolic value, however, that they add a normative dimension to the respective relationship, and they need to be understood as part of a discourse of Self-representation rather than a concrete policy agenda. In combination with the narrative of traditional friendship, they thus constitute a historical mission that provides Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations with value beyond their immediate material or political returns, establishes structures of meaning and purpose, and creates a shared moral space that provides the involved actors with a sense of virtue.

#### SELF-REFERENT FRIENDSHIP

What in the eyes of the involved actors sets Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations apart from most other inter-state relations are common strategic interests, historically grown ties of solidarity, compatible worldviews of the ruling parties, and a common commitment to the building of a better future – including the willingness to translate these strong bonds into practical cooperation. In official discourse, this intersubjectively shared knowledge finds its expression in a combination of rationalist reasoning with idealist formulations of morality, solidarity and universality, two discursive strands that are impossible to completely disentangle. China and Ethiopia accordingly are depicted as providing an excellent example for relations between developing countries, as striving for an international order that is not only more fair but also more rational than the

current one, and as other Selves whose well-being is of immediate relevance for the own well-being. China and South Africa, in turn, are said to provide a model for relations between major developing countries, to be joint in an exceptional “comrades and brothers’ special relationship” of global significance, and to be linked by a splendid “rainbow of friendship.”

While most observers dismiss this official discourse as empty rhetoric, its ideological sophistication, the fact that it is a dialogue rather than a monologue, and the lengths to which it goes to support its claims with concrete examples, logical arguments and Marxist “science” provides them with an undeniable sense of sincerity. In addition, the discourse is intimately connected to the identities the three ruling parties have sought to construct for themselves and their respective states. China’s relations with Ethiopia and South Africa form part of the CCP’s image of the PRC as a new type of peacefully developing and responsible great power that attaches priority to socio-economic development at home and the national interest in its international relations, but at the same time continues to struggle for global progress by practicing solidarity with its friends in Africa and the developing world, and by promoting a new type of international relations that refrains from hegemonism and power politics but instead focuses on mutually beneficial cooperation. The EPRDF, in turn, uses China and Ethiopia’s relationship with China to support its claim that the revolutionary-democratic developmental state it seeks to construct presents the best answer to Ethiopia’s backwardness, that it is successful in furthering the national interest and in re-shaping the rules of globalization by leveraging its ties with the great powers, and that it is in the process of solving Ethiopia’s lingering identity crisis by turning it into a strong and modern state. The ANC, finally, can point to China and the relationship with China in order to strengthen South Africa’s identity as a revolutionary-democratic developmental state that can bring about both economic growth *and* socio-economic transformation, a progressive state that is committed to a fundamental transformation on a global level while at the same time furthering the national interest, and as a modern African power that uses its regional leadership position to promote the interests of the continent and the South.

Through processes of mutual recognition and identification, China and the two African states accordingly have become significant Others. This also means that the involved actors cannot simply ignore their own words, even if they were using the language of friendship in a cynical and purely instrumental manner. At a minimum, the three states need to manage their relations in a way that does not directly interfere with their identities. For example, other African states would listen closely if China's friends in Addis Ababa or Pretoria would start to accuse the PRC of neocolonialism or of harboring un-friendly intentions, and maintaining the narrative of Sino-African friendship or China's great power exceptionalism would become much more difficult. Likewise, if Ethiopia could no longer justify its growing dependency on China with the notion of mutually beneficial cooperation between sovereign equals, this not only could result in tensions with the Western donors, but also run contrary to the EPRDF's attempts to install a sense of national pride in Ethiopia's ethnically fragmented society. And South Africa needs to walk a fine line between its role as a champion of democracy and human rights and its increasingly close relationship with China. Whatever the true intentions of the involved actors, therefore, the two friendships by now have become social reality, and accordingly need to be taken seriously.

#### PRACTICED FRIENDSHIP

The preceding discussion has shown that China and the two African states, due to mutual recognition and identification as well as frequent exchanges and close cooperation, have established intimate relationships between significant Others. This is expected to have a tangible effect on how states interact with one another, and in Chapter 2 I have proposed seven indicators that can help us to assess the quality of friend-like behavior, namely voluntariness, openness, equality, respect, support, trust and loyalty. And to some degree, all of these characteristics are present in the two relationships under study here.

In both cases, the *voluntariness* of the relationship is evident. If we look at the development of Sino-Ethiopian relations, it is apparent that both states entered into their friendship without external pressure (except for the pressure to find friends in an unfriendly international environment), and that indeed the Ethiopian

side has been the more active one – contrary to the common view of a Chinese charm offensive towards Africa (Kurlantzick, 2009). The Sino-South African friendship was entered into voluntarily as well, and while the Chinese side from the beginning of the relationship had expressed its interest in forging closer ties, the more recent upgrading of the relationship appears to have been initiated primarily by the Zuma presidency. In addition, the ongoing institutionalization of both relationships primarily focuses on the establishment of stable channels for communication and cooperation, rather than specifying certain rights and duties. They thus have remained unstructured, non-contractual relationships, in which the two sides are relatively free in their behaviour towards each other.

The *openness* of the two relationships manifests itself in an unusual degree of self-disclosure, and the involved parties' willingness to listen, to be understanding, and to get involved in each other's affairs. This includes the sharing of experiences and lessons, and the common search for ways to overcome perceived weaknesses; in 2015, Prime Minister Hailemariam expressly lauded the "demand-driven nature" of China's approach, and that "flexibility on the Chinese side" had been key for achieving win-win cooperation (FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, p. 11). In addition, the friends apparently have been quite open regarding their long-term strategies and visions of the future, and thus shown willingness to expose their "true" Self to their friend. And lastly, this openness has been met with open ears, or as one senior ANC cadre has put it: "You can only understand South Africa if you understand our history. That's why we try to educate our partners. [...] With the West we feel we are wasting our time, but the Chinese are listening" (Interview SA1, 2015).

Given the differences in power and influence, whether the two relationships are characterized by *equality* is at least debatable. Equality in friendship does not mean sovereign equality, or equality in power, however, but instead refers to equality in terms of Self and Other, and is based on a recognition of the friend as a unique entity with at times different but never nevertheless equally legitimate needs and sensitives. This kind of equality can indeed be found in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations, and the involved actors do everything to avoid

the impression that one side is worth more than the other, while at the same time recognizing that the more powerful friend (in both cases China) bears greater responsibility for achieving common goals. Despite this sensitivity to questions of power, however, it is impossible to avoid that the reality of highly asymmetrical capabilities affects the two friendships – an issue that will be raised again later, when the discussion turns to the role of power in the two friendships.

Related to this kind of qualified equality are signs of *respect*. China does not criticize Ethiopia for its lack of democracy, but instead affirms the EPRDF's right to make its own decisions, and by promoting win-win cooperation rather than development aid is sparing the Ethiopian side the shame of having to beg. The PRC also treats South Africa according to its own self-image as a benevolent regional leader and an important force for progress. Ethiopia, in turn, misses no chance to highlight the positive difference between China and the Western powers, and South Africa does not criticize China for its autocratic political system, its human rights abuses or its behavior in conflicts with its neighbors, but instead seeks to address critical issues behind closed doors. In addition, through the signing of partnership agreements, the organization of cultural exchange programs, or the emphasis on their equally glorious civilizations, the three states express their mutual respect as well.

Whether the relationships are characterized by *support* is the second issue that remains debatable. Support in inter-state friendship does not imply selflessness, but that the friends help each other to the best of their abilities, and that this help is informed by a specific logic of reciprocity. In China's relations with Ethiopia and South Africa, however, the support the friends can expect from each other is consciously qualified by the mutually agreed norm of win-win cooperation, and given the overriding role ascribed to the national interest, the best or at least most realistic way to support each other at this stage of history therefore is seen in fair cooperation between self-interested states, rather than selfless acts of solidarity between peoples or classes. The CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC thus maintain that to be truly efficient and rational, foreign policy needs to be self-interested without being selfish, and be informed by a shared responsibility for the progress of

humanity. In the eyes of the involved actors, the kind of limited support that characterizes Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations, which focuses on capacity building and diplomatic support but shies away from interfering too much in their highly asymmetric economic relations, accordingly is seen as a manifestation of this enlightened pursuit of the national interest – whether we agree with this assessment is another question.

*Trust* between China and Ethiopia as well as China and South Africa above all manifests itself in both sides' willingness to cooperate in sensitive areas, and to link narratives of the Self to the respective Other. That the CCP has selected Ethiopia and South Africa to showcase its vision of a “new type of international relations” indicates that it is confident in the long-term development of the two relationships, and trusts in the EPRDF's and the ANC's integrity. The EPRDF and the ANC, in turn, apparently trust that China will not use its economic power and political influence to hurt their interests, and instead will stay true to its principles of mutually beneficial cooperation and non-interference, and establish itself as a new type of great power. As such, while especially China and Ethiopia are very careful when it comes to guarding their national sovereignty and their independent foreign policy, there appears to be sufficient trust to have resulted in a virtuous circle of cooperation.

This trust is related to the perceived *loyalty* of the friend. While there have been many ups and downs in China's relations with Ethiopia and South Africa, and even though the relationships between the ruling parties were not always close, since the mid- to late 1990s the relations have stabilized. China, Ethiopia and South Africa did not enter into their respective friendships lightly, and they have since remained true to their mutually agreed norms, and committed to their partnerships. If anything, the current leaderships have put more emphasis on the fostering of bilateral relations than their predecessors. Therefore, while two decades are not an especially long time when it comes to inter-state friendship, at the moment there appears to be no reason to question the loyalty of the friends.

Taken together, the two friendships therefore can be said to indeed structure how the states interact with one another. At the same time, there are also clear limits

to their effects on state behavior, especially because in the eyes of the involved actors they are not intended to overcome the self-interested nature of international relations, but to make them more stable and efficient. In addition, there are two more areas that appear to be especially problematic with regard to the quality of the two friendships, the first being the fact that the public plays a minimal role in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations.

### SHALLOW FRIENDSHIP

While all research on friendship between states emphasizes the crucial role played by political elites, it is also often assumed that a complete or mature friendship includes a societal dimension as well. The two friendships analyzed here lack this basis within society, and can therefore be described as shallow. To depict the Ethiopian public as outright opposed to closer relations with China would nevertheless be misleading. A representative 2015 PEW survey found that 75% of Ethiopians have a favorable view of China (PEW Research Center, 2016a). In South Africa the situation is more complicated, and mirrors the country's polarized political landscape. On the one hand, the 2015 PEW survey found that only 52% of South African respondents have a favorable view of China, which is very low for African standards (PEW Research Center, 2016b). On the other hand, 26% of respondents to another survey conducted in 2012 named China as the country South Africa should be seen as an "ally or close friend" to, with only 19% choosing the USA, 15% Europe, 13% South Africa's neighbors, and 11% Brazil or India (van der Westhuizen & Smith, 2015, p. 338). In addition, most respondents (26%) regarded China as the country South Africa could learn the most from with regard to poverty and unemployment alleviation (van der Westhuizen & Smith, 2015, p. 338). As such, while many South Africans are critical of their state's close ties with China, there is also a sizeable proportion of the population that supports them.

Unfortunately, we lack comparable data for China – nobody has bothered to ask the Chinese public about South Africa or Ethiopia. It appears likely, however, that the two countries tend to disappear in the homogenizing discourse about Sino-African friendship, and that few Chinese would look towards Africa if they were to name the PRC's most important international partners. This lack of strong societal

linkages may not be surprising, given the geographical, cultural and historical distance between the three countries, but it still means that Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations clearly are friendships between states, not nations or people.

In addition, although the three ruling parties frequently stress the need to foster people-to-people relations, it appears unlikely that the top-down character of the two relationships will be fundamentally altered anytime soon. China and Ethiopia lack independent civil societies, and the state-sponsored links that are created with the help of friendship associations and other institutions that have their roots in people's diplomacy and socialist mass organizations may help to create the impression of people-to-people contacts, but they cannot hide the fact that the friendship between the two states is a political project that is formulated and executed at the top. The people, in contrast, are not expected to provide input, but to express their consent in a tightly regimented manner. South Africa's vibrant civil society could make a difference here, but even if it did not have a generally sceptical view of China, or did possess the financial resources to establish transnational links on an intercontinental scale, it would lack compatible partners in China.

While people-to-people relations thus at least for the foreseeable future are unlikely to play a relevant role in the two friendships, they do rest on strong party-to-party relations: In both cases the development of closer inter-party ties not only predated but also enabled and conditioned the development of closer ties on the inter-state level, and to this day it is here where personal connections are formed, knowledge is shared, and a sense of community is established. They also create a safe space in which conflicting views and interests can be discussed more freely, and in which the involved actors not primarily have to think of themselves as representatives of their state and its national interest, but rather as representatives of their party and its progressive goals. As such, while party-to-party links cannot substitute for people-to-people links, they nevertheless add another layer to the relationships, and one which is central for imbuing them with a sense of moral purpose.



## ASYMMETRICAL FRIENDSHIP

Despite their carefully maintained equality in terms of Self and Other, the two relationships are characterized by a clear asymmetry not only regarding material power, but also the ability to influence meaning, define standards for appropriate behavior, or formulate a common agenda. By and large, then, it is China that is setting the tone in the two friendships, and it is also China that has the financial and organizational resources that are necessary for enabling the diverse friendship processes analyzed in this study.

Especially Sino-Ethiopian relations have taken on many qualities of a hierarchical relationship. The EPRDF certainly is aware of this, but nevertheless appears to have enough trust in the CCP to have voluntarily entered into this relationship – or at least to have come to the conclusion that Ethiopia is too weak to stand on its own, and that a friendly patron China is preferable to the rather un-friendly Western powers. On the level of Self-Other relations, this de facto inequality is managed with the above-mentioned emphasis on principal equality, and with the construction of Ethiopia and China as fellow travelers on the same path towards modernity and the national renaissance, which however for the time being are located at different stages of development. Even though they therefore are linked in an inherently unequal role relation between a teacher and a student, being an eager student with agency arguably is more conducive to Ethiopia's Self-worth than being a hopeless victim of the past. And for China, being a teacher clearly is preferable to being a hegemon.

In contrast to Ethiopia, which sometimes appears to be simplistically treated as a less-modern version of China, China and South Africa are mainly regarded as unequal in terms of power rather than in terms of modernity, and too different to be easily compared. For example, when I asked my Chinese and Ethiopian interview partners whether they thought China could learn something from Ethiopia, none of them could think of a relevant lesson. Confronted with the same question, South African officials and Chinese diplomats frequently mentioned South Africa's sophisticated financial sector as an area in which China could make use of South African experiences. Additional suggestions included the country's

economic and political experience in Africa, and its practice of working through multilateral institutions. Several South African officials also mentioned human rights and labor standards as areas in which they regarded South Africa as more advanced than China, and some argued that the ANC's experience with multi-party elections could become relevant for the CCP, should China's political system change in the future. As such, while the asymmetry between China and Ethiopia is so strong and encompassing as to negatively affect Self-Other relations, in China-South Africa relations this asymmetry does not spill over into the relationship's identity-related spheres to the same degree.

Despite the negative role played by inequality, it is also important to note that power in friendship is neither a zero-sum game nor a one-way street. While China has gained many ways to exert structural or "soft" power over its friends, the inclusion of a normative dimension that comes with an intimate relationship between significant Others means that the two African states have more influence on Chinese behavior than they could have achieved in a partnership structured solely by Realpolitik considerations. And by providing each other with Self-referent rewards, the friends not only gain power over each other, but also are empowered. Asymmetrical power thus does matter in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African friendship, but at least for the time being there is nothing to indicate that China has consciously used its power on the expense of its two African friends. Whether this will always be the case remains to be seen, of course, and at some point Ethiopia and South Africa might find it difficult to disagree with their powerful friend.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has summarized the empirical findings by highlighting the role played by ideological similarities, historical narratives, conscious decisions, rationalist arguments, common projects, and Self-referent rewards, which justify speaking of two international friendships in the sense proposed in this study. Afterwards, it has turned to the behavioral characteristics and qualitative limitations of the friendships, which now allow for a final assessment of the degree of "friendness"

they exhibit. And indeed, there are clear limits to how close the two friendships come to the ideal type developed in Chapter 1.

To begin with, while the relationships espouse important characteristics of friendship, the friendship norms the three states have negotiated between them consciously qualify some of them. This is especially relevant regarding mutual support, and even though a win-win approach to cooperation may be more realistic than notions of international solidarity, it nevertheless sits uneasily with the ideal of friendship. In addition, the shallow nature of the two friendships means that friendship processes are limited to a small if crucial sub-set of the three countries' population, and that they thus lack the stability and comprehensiveness of other, more complete friendships. And lastly, while principal equality is carefully maintained through expressions of respect and the valuing of the friend's interests and wishes, it nevertheless is under constant threat by the reality of highly unequal power. Therefore, although China's superior status is accepted by the two African states, the order established by the two friendships also contains an undeniable element of hierarchy.

As such, due to mutual recognition and identification as well as frequent exchanges and close cooperation, Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations indeed qualify as intimate relationships between significant Others that structure how the states interact with one another. At same time, they are unlikely to overcome their shortcomings, and while we should take the notion of Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African friendship seriously, we should also remain sober regarding our expectations.

## CONCLUSION: FRIENDSHIP OF THE OUTSIDERS AND THE CREATION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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Friendship is the only thing in the world concerning the usefulness of which all mankind are agreed.

*Cicero, On Friendship (44 B.C.)*

### SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Contrary to the common knowledge that states have interests instead of friends, this dissertation proposes that a refined understanding of international friendship can help us to better understand the reality of international relations – and that a rising China may not be as lonely as many observers suggest. To support this argument, I have built on the existing literature on international friendship, as well as findings from psychology, sociology, anthropology and the more general constructivist literature in IR, and developed a model of Self-referent motivation for international friendship. It designates a dependable relationship between states which recognize each other according to their own self-images, and which due to mutual identification as well as frequent exchanges and close cooperation have developed an intimate relationship between significant Others. This kind of relationship is deemed to be of inherent value to the involved states, and friendships consequently are expected to have a tangible effect on how states interact with one another. To show that the proposed model indeed helps us to better understand reality, I have subsequently used it to analyze Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations.

A more thorough discussion of the results can be found in Chapter 9, which allows me to only present their broad contours here. In general, the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC have been central for the processes described in this study, and it has been shown how the two bilateral relationships gradually acquired their special qualities through a series of conscious decisions by these hegemonic or at least dominant parties. There hence is nothing inevitable or “natural” about Sino-

Ethiopian and Sino-South African friendship; instead, they are political projects brought about by purposive actors – who, however, are entangled within complex webs of meaning.

This includes intersubjectively shared notions of their countries' histories, which in addition are central to the three parties' claim to power. Despite some variation, these official "national biographies" of the three states consist of comparable narratives of a glorious or at least peaceful past that was ended by an era of foreign-induced exploitation and humiliation, of a long and ultimately successful fight of a revolutionary movement that sought to free the people from political and economic oppression, and of this movement's continued struggle to lead the country to its renaissance and a better future. The resultant ideas of shared fates, common Others and a history of joint struggle have made it easy to relate the three states' identities to each other. China and the two African states therefore are presented as "traditional friends" that have been brought together by the forces of history, and as "all-weather friends" that have stood the test of time.

While these similar national biographies are rooted in indeed similar historical experiences and challenges, ultimately they are the result of the similar worldviews of three ruling parties that in search for a solution to their respective country's weaknesses had turned to socialist visions of progress rather than Western notions of liberal democracy and market capitalism. And while in theory there is a qualitative difference between the CCP's commitment to communism and the two African parties commitment to the national democratic revolution, the CCP's post-Mao shift from class-based revolution to nation-based development, the EPRDF's and the ANC's more recent emulation of the Chinese model, as well as the shared experiences and problems of three revolutionary-movements-turned-governing-parties that have to pursue their goals in a post-Cold War international system, have resulted in strong ideological affinities. As such, the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC not only exist in the same intellectual universe, but they also have developed party-to-party links they themselves describe as "fraternal."

The three parties' ideological similarities include shared visions of domestic politics, for example a focus on state-led development under the guidance of a strong ruling party, which especially in the Sino-Ethiopian case have resulted in numerous learning processes. Importantly, however, they also include a shared reformist-revisionist approach to the global liberal order, and a commitment to an international system that consist of strong and sovereign nation-states that interact with each other based on the principles of equality, respect and win-win cooperation. This means that the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC not only have similar ideas about where their states are coming from, where they stand now and where they should be headed (about "who" they are and what this means), but also in what kind of international society they are supposed to exist in, and how to get there. Consequently, due to their common identity as developing countries with a progressive domestic and international agenda, the three countries are said to not only be all-weather friends with fraternal ruling parties, but also "natural partners" with shared strategic interests.

Over the last two decades, theses notions of historically grown ties of solidarity, shared strategic interests and a common commitment to the building of a better future have been central to the construction of what I have called the common projects of alternative modernization (more pronounced in the Sino-Ethiopian case) and global transformation (more pronounced in the Sino-South African case). These interrelated projects on the one hand seek to overcome the universalizing claims of Western modernity – especially the elements that are associated with liberalism – and on the other hand to bring about an international system that is not dominated by selfishness and power politics, but by an enlightened pursuit of the national interest that takes into consideration the common good of mankind. Whether the three states indeed are able – or willing – to live up to these lofty goals and visions of course remains questionable; what is important here, however, is that these projects have indeed provided a focal point for practical cooperation, and succeeded in turning this cooperation into more than the sum of its parts by linking it to narratives of the states' Selves. As such, the two projects constitute a joint historical mission that provides the two relations with purpose – and the involved actors with a sense of virtue.

In official discourse, the “rational morality” that informs the two relationships finds its expression in a combination of rationalist reasoning with idealist formulations of solidarity and universality, two discursive strands that are impossible to completely disentangle. China and Ethiopia accordingly not only are depicted as strategic partners that provide an excellent example for South-South cooperation, but also as other Selves whose well-being is of immediate relevance for the own well-being. China and South Africa, in turn, are said not only to provide a model for relations between major developing countries, but also to be joint in an exceptional “‘comrades and brothers’ special relationship.” By thus intertwining their identities in official discourse, the states have become significant Others that provide each other with what I have referred to as Self-referent rewards, i.e. ways to construct and maintain a stable and positive sense of Self.

On the behavioral level, this has resulted in two relationships that are characterized by voluntariness, openness, equality in terms of Self and Other, respect, trust and loyalty. Where friend-like behavior reaches its limits, however, is with regard to mutual support, and while it would be wrong to underestimate the political, ideological, organizational and in part also financial help the Chinese side is extending to its African partners, they nevertheless still cooperate within the framework of self-interested states that first and foremost have to foster the national interest. This is justified with the mutually agreed upon norm of win-win-cooperation, however, and given their experiences with socialist internationalism, Third World solidarity and Western development aid, this is deemed to be the best way countries can help each other at the current stage of history. In the eyes of the involved actors, therefore, the kind of limited support they receive from each other, which focuses on political support and capacity building, is deemed to express rather than contradict the special qualities of the two relationships.

It is not only in the limited amount of material support that the two relations deviate from the ideal of international friendship, however. While they contain strong links on the government-to-government and party-to-party levels, there exist only very weak people-to-people links, and what little exchange there is cannot hide the fact that the public is not expected to provide input, but only to

support the decisions made by the ruling parties. The result is a shallow friendship that may exhibit exceptional qualities on the level of the political elites that formulate and execute foreign policy, but does not include the state's citizens, and thus misses an important stabilizing element that is one step removed from the strategic dimension of friendship.

Another source of problems is the asymmetrical nature of the two relationships: Although they seek to maintain equality in terms of Self and Other, the ideal of equality stands in stark contrast to the reality of inequality, and by defining meaning, setting the agenda or financing practical cooperation, China is able to exert power over the two African states. Especially Sino-Ethiopian relations therefore exhibit a pronounced element of hierarchy. This hierarchy is managed in ways that do not interfere with the involved states' self-images, however, and the normative dimension of their relationships in addition provides the two African states with more influence over China than they could have achieved in a purely instrumental partnership. As such, while unequal power continues to present a challenge, and there is a constant threat that the bonds the three states have developed turn into chains that link weaker and stronger states in a fundamentally unequal relationship, it would nevertheless be wrong to perceive of power in the two relationships in zero-sum terms, or to see it as a one-way street. This is an issue that will be taken up again at the end of this chapter, when the discussion will turn to the relationship between friendship and order.

Despite some important problems and shortcomings that reduce the quality of the two relationships, therefore, it is justified to speak of Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations as international friendships in the sense proposed in this study – they are dependable relationship between states which recognize each other according to their own self-images, and which due to mutual identification as well as frequent exchanges and close cooperation have developed an intimate relationship between significant Others that structures how the states interact with one another. This is an important finding, and not only because it shows that friendship between states indeed is a relevant category in international relations, or that Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations exhibit special qualities



that can only inadequately be captured with alternative concepts such as alliance or partnership, but also because it potentially has important implications for the future of international order. Before we can turn to a final discussion of these implications, however, the prospects of the two friendships as well as the limitations of this study need to be discussed.

#### PROSPECTS OF THE TWO FRIENDSHIPS

Friendships have a stabilizing effect on international relations, and we should expect the two friendships analyzed here to be characterized by continuity rather than change. This includes their positive qualities, such as mutual recognition and identification as well as frequent exchanges and practical cooperation, but also their self-interested, shallow and asymmetrical nature, be it because it is an accepted part of the relationship, because it appears unlikely that the three states will be able to develop people-to-people links that are more than regimented expressions of consent, or because it would be unrealistic to expect them to overcome the inequality in power that affects their relationships.

Generally speaking, the Sino-Ethiopian friendship appears to be the more established and stable, but also the less promising of the two. Given the many parallels between China and Ethiopia, and the lack of controversial issues, it has indeed been rather easy to achieve and maintain mutual recognition and identification, and it is difficult to think of a scenario in which the CCP or the EPRDF would be tempted to unsettle this established Self-Other relation. In addition, there are no relevant opposition parties or civil society actors that could interfere with official friendship construction, and the public has a very limited influence on foreign policy. The main threat to Sino-Ethiopian friendship thus remains regime change, something that at the moment appears to be unlikely in both countries, but which nevertheless cannot be completely ruled out – especially given the lingering ethnic tensions in Ethiopia. A continued economic downturn in one or both countries could challenge the friendship as well, since this would unhinge the mutually rewarding Self-Other relationship between the successful teacher China and its equally successful student Ethiopia, and thus threaten the common project of alternative modernization. This would not happen quickly, however, and

without a dramatic turn of events, the Sino-Ethiopian friendship is unlikely to experience any short-term reversals.

At the same time, the relationship can be expected to exhibit relatively little dynamism. Especially for the Chinese side the friendship with the economically irrelevant and politically only regionally important Ethiopia is “nice to have,” rather than an essential element of its international strategy. The Ethiopian side, in turn, has little interest in alienating its Western partners, or in losing its international maneuverability, and therefore appears to be quite content with the status quo as well. A substantial upgrade of the relationship hence is likely to happen only if Ethiopia can sustain its economic trajectory and political stability for the coming decades, and thus is able to at least reduce the fundamental asymmetry between the two friends – at which point it may be tempted to re-define the established Self-Other relationship, however.

The Sino-South African friendship, in contrast, includes both more risks and more opportunities. On the South African side, the relationship’s rapid development over the past years is very much connected to the Zuma presidency, and whether the current momentum will be maintained after the next leadership change remains to be seen. There are prominent figures and factions within the ANC that are very critical of Zuma’s policies, and while it is not clear who will succeed him in 2018, the result might as well be a reduced emphasis on China – even though a complete policy reversal appears unlikely. What is more, the ANC’s electoral dominance has gradually eroded over the last decade, and while it can be expected to remain the strongest party for years to come, competitive elections always include some degree of uncertainty. Given the South African public’s critical view of China, and the fact that in many areas South African businesses need to deal with Chinese competitors, it may be tempting for opposition parties or competing factions within the ANC to construct China as a negative Other that violates human rights and threatens the country’s economy. An additional source of tensions may arise from diverging views and interests regarding the international relations of Africa – the tensions that in the past were created by Chinese weapon shipments to Zimbabwe come to mind. And as South Africa’s and

China's diverging positions on a range of international issues have shown, for example regarding the UNSC decisions on Libya and Syria, it would be wrong to assume that the two countries are always in lockstep with each other.

While the Sino-South African friendship thus faces some potential stumbling blocks, at least for the moment it is also the more dynamic of the two friendships, and if we compare the list of actual policy initiatives, bilateral agreements or institutionalized meetings between China and Ethiopia on the one hand, and China and South Africa on the other, it becomes clear that the latter is also of greater practical relevance. This is due to South Africa's status as an emerging power and a member of BRICS, which not only is of greater geopolitical relevance than Ethiopia but also can mobilize more financial and organizational resources to match Chinese initiatives. In addition, while the Sino-Ethiopian project of alternative modernization is a long-term project that in practical terms is much more important for Ethiopia than it is for China, the Sino-South African project of global transformation is of at least equal importance and immediate relevance to China as it is to South Africa. China and South Africa thus indeed attach great importance to the respective friend, and both sides are capable and willing to invest a lot in the future of their friendship.

#### LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In many ways this study is exploratory in nature, on the one hand because it suggests a new model of international friendship, on the other because it analyses two cases that so far have been largely absent from the IR literature. It therefore not only comes with numerous implications, but also several limitations. The most important one arguably is that the study has been focused on the inter-state level, and consequently lacks empirical observations regarding the role friendships are proposed to play in the creation of domestic order. This is especially problematic because the shallow nature of Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations challenges the theoretical assumption that international friendship helps the state to satisfy the Self-related needs of its citizens. It is a weakness present study shares with the IR literature on friendship in general, however, and the domestic

dimension of international friendship therefore is in urgent need of empirical research.

Two aspects may be especially relevant in this regard, and they both hint towards a possible difference between the social mechanisms underlying democratic and autocratic friendships. First, even friendships that fail to gain traction amongst the wider public may still form part of the hegemonic discourses and ideological language games autocratic regimes can use to quell dissent and provide incentives for proper behavior – and thus to uphold at least a mantle of legitimate order (Holbig, 2011; Holbig, 2013). And second, the highly ideological nature of the two friendships studied here suggests that they are less about the Self-referent needs of the citizens than they are about the Self-referent needs of the ruling elites: They allow the CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC to link up with other “progressive” parties that have made the transition from revolution to government, and to maintain a coherent narrative of their Self by prolonging the teleology of struggle that has let them through their formative revolutionary years. As such, autocratic friendships may help to address the “problem of self-legitimation,” which arises because the “authoritarian elite sustains itself in power not just through force and the threat of force but, more importantly, because it has some vision of the future by which it can justify itself to itself” (Schöpflin, 1990, p. 6). If this is true, even meaningful autocratic friendships might exhibit an inherent tendency towards being shallow, and to be focused on those groups that are of central importance to regime survival.

Another important aspect this study is missing is a “smoking gun” – exceptional events or developments that are impossible to explain without friendship, and thus “prove” the correctness of my argument. Most of the time, however, this is not how friendship between states works, and instead of expecting friendship to result in seemingly irrational behavior, we should look for actors’ attempts to behave rationally *and* stay true to who they are. Therefore, while we could think of reasons why China should get rid of the normative baggage of Sino-African friendship, why Ethiopia should emulate the Western democracies rather than China, or why South Africa should not risk its mediator role between the North and

the South by becoming too cozy with the PRC, whether we accept actors' behavior as rational ultimately depends on whether we agree with their views of themselves and the world. I have sought to include this dialectic between rationality and identity with the notion of Self-referent rewards, and my model thus in fact remains more open to rationalist theories of international relations than most other constructivist conceptualizations of international friendship. At the same time, however, just as the psychologist Paul H. Wright maintains that it is theoretically possible but in reality misleading to explain personal friendship exclusively with what each side gets out of the relationship, I hope to have shown that we would miss important aspects of Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations if we continued to treat them solely as partnerships.

One goal of this dissertation has been to overcome the stark contrast the field of China-Africa studies draws between reality on the one hand and rhetoric on the other, and to show that the latter matters as well. I thus have focused the analysis on narratives and discourses, but the flip side of every focus is that it risks neglecting aspects that are deemed not to be central to the presented argument. Future researchers – especially those who regard “myth-busting” as the primary duty of studies on China-Africa relations – therefore may want to focus on areas such as economic or security cooperation, or cooperation in international fora such as FOCAC, the G20 or the UN, and critically evaluate whether behavior in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations indeed can be called at least minimally friend-like. To assume that some discrepancy between stated ideals and actual practice automatically negates the argument presented here would mean to miss the point of constructivist IR research, however.

While it has allowed me to discuss Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations in detail, the small number of cases presents another important limitation of this study. This on the one hand means that we need to refrain from sweeping generalizations (although the critical realist approach to science informing this study would have urged us to be cautious anyway). On the other hand, it also makes it impossible to accurately assess just how special Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations actually are, especially in the context of China's relations

with other African states. For example, while the wave of liberal democracy that swept the African continent in the 1990s resulted in the downfall of many openly non-liberal regimes, countries such as Zimbabwe or Angola still remain under the control of former liberation movements that are formally committed to some kind of reformed socialism, and given their close relationships with China, it might be interesting to investigate these cases through the lens of international friendship as well. At the same time, it would be important to examine cases that lack such ideological similarities, but which nevertheless are deemed to be close, such as China's relationships with Kenya or Sudan. And finally, it would be interesting to go beyond China and examine Ethiopia's and South Africa's relationships with other states that appear to be especially close. For the time being, therefore, our knowledge of friendship processes between China and Africa, and between the three studied states and the rest of international society, remains piecemeal.

This brings us to a final limitation that needs to be emphasized. Critical realism reminds us that our theoretical models are epistemological tools rather than reality itself, and while I argue that there is something at play in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations that we cannot directly observe but which we can capture with the concept of international friendship, I am also aware of the fact that the analysis I have presented is only one way of looking at reality, and that many of my findings are likely to be provisional. The best thing this study can do thus is to push the boundaries of what we hold to be true far enough to stimulate more research in the future. On the remaining pages, I will therefore return to an issue that would warrant a more thorough discussion than is possible here: The link between friendship and the creation of an international order that is both legitimate and hierarchical.

## FRIENDSHIP OF THE OUTSIDERS AND THE CREATION OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER

In the introduction to this dissertation, I have proposed that the Established-Outsider figuration that to some degree continues to set the Western core of international society apart from the stigmatized rest provides an important

context for the contemporary study of international friendship, especially amongst developing countries. As Ayşe Zarakol has put it:

Most communities in the world exist in a constant state of identity struggle. While it is extremely difficult to live up to the standards of modernity – which, despite its universal language, has undeniable Western origins and therefore carries certain assumptions about proper social and institutional configurations – without feeling inauthentic, it is also almost impossible to be authentically non-Western. (Zarakol, 2011, p. 5)

This problematic relationship between the stigmatized Self and the Western Other is clearly visible in China, Ethiopia and South Africa, and according to Rebecca Adler-Nissen (Adler-Nissen, 2014), states have three options for how to deal with this challenge to their identity: They can recognize their apparent shortcomings and seek to emulate those who are perceived as superior in order to be accepted as “normal,” they can reject their stigma and claim to already be normal, or they can engage in counter-stigmatization by turning their stigma into a virtue and identifying with the group of outsiders. We can find all three approaches amongst developing countries, and often they exist in parallel to each other. Whatever strategy they predominantly follow, however, this study suggests that international friendship may play an important role in all of them, either through recognition from those who define the standards of international society, or through the creation of groups of outsiders that reject their stigmatization, identify with each other, and establish their own value systems.

Finding friends among likeminded countries of the South thus appears to be especially important for states which seek to overcome the Insider-Outsider figuration by being both modern *and* authentically non-Western. This is the path chosen by the ruling parties of China, Ethiopia and South Africa, which have accepted many central tenets of an at least originally European modernity, but at the same time are intent on finding their own way into a better future. As a result, and even though their reformist-revisionist approach to the existing liberal order means that it is accompanied by parallel attempts to gain formal recognition from the developed world as well, their search for alternative modernity means that they have a lot to gain from a unified group of outsiders.

To turn the Third World or the South into a political force that needs to be reckoned with of course has been the goal of many developing countries for a long time now, and while their successes should not be dismissed, in practice South-South solidarity has often stalled at the level of symbolic politics. The CCP, the EPRDF and the ANC hence have come to the conclusion that what the South needs is a common project, built around a shared vision of the future and translated into tangible outcomes. This is why they not only seek to build institutions that provide the South with avenues for exchange and cooperation – BRICS being one example – but also to supplement moral notions of South-South solidarity with interest- and outcome-oriented notions of South-South cooperation – to augment the community of sentiment that originally was established at Bandung with an overlapping community of interest. In this sense, they not only have learned from the failures of the past, but also from the successes of the liberal world order.

Whether this strategy will succeed in overcoming the many divisions within the developing world, or to eventually overcome the Established-Outsider figuration of international society, remains to be seen. One region of the South where especially Chinese attempts at community building appear to be quite successful, however, is Africa. From China's point of view, therefore, relations with Ethiopia and South Africa above all are important elements in its more encompassing relationship with the African continent, and the PRC's rhetoric as well as its approach to development aid and partnership agreements are carefully crafted not to give the impression of picking favorites. Since they self-identify as members of the community of African states, however, the narrative of Sino-African friendship nevertheless is conducive to China's friendships with Ethiopia and South Africa in that it allows the two African states to reconcile their African identity with their role as friends of China. Therefore, just as the Anglo-American relationship has acquired many of its special qualities in the context of the construction of the West, and the Franco-German friendship is intimately linked to the construction of Europe, attempts to build a Sino-African community or the South may provide a fertile ground for bilateral friendship construction as well.



In the theoretical chapter, I have proposed that friendships between stable and predictable Selves and Others are an important building block of a legitimate international order, i.e. one that is recognized as rightful by the involved states because it accepts them according to their own self-images. China, Ethiopia and South Africa have succeeded in establishing this kind of order between them, and the result has been increased stability and efficiency. At the same time, however, and despite the three states' attempts to maintain both sovereign equality and equality in terms of Self and Other, it is a legitimate order that contains a strong (in the Sino-Ethiopian case) or at least noticeable (in the Sino-South African case) element of inequality. As such, a friendship perspective has a lot to contribute to the growing IR literature that maintains that hierarchy, not anarchy, is at the heart of the international system (Bially Mattern & Zarakol, 2016).

One aspect many works on international hierarchies highlight indeed is that a relationship characterized by super- and subordination not necessarily needs to result in exploitation, especially because it not only limits the choices of the small but also of the great powers. This includes liberal accounts, which perceive (legitimate) hierarchies primarily as the result of negotiated trade-offs between weak states in search for security or material rewards on the one hand and strong states that have an interest in an efficient international order on the other (e.g. Lake, 2009; Ikenberry, 2011; Bukovansky et al., 2012), as well as constructivist accounts that emphasize the socializing effect a hierarchical relationship has on both weak and strong states (e.g. Towns, 2012; Keene, 2013; Pouliot, 2016). The qualified equality of asymmetrical friendships can hence be seen as a way to deal with the hierarchical reality of international relations in an especially productive manner, and to turn factual inequality into legitimate authority.

The construction of a legitimate hierarchical order in Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations to some degree supports those who argue that the CCP's attempts to position the PRC within a changing regional and global order are strongly informed by traditional Chinese notions of world order, in which hierarchical relationships among unequals are governed according to Confucian principles of benevolence, and which ascribe an important role to the observance

of ritual (e.g. Kang, 2007; Womack, 2010; Liu, 2010). To be sure, to draw such a direct line between contemporary and late-imperial visions of world order means to ignore the evolution of political thought in China over the past century. For example, while the so-called Sino-centric world order was built on formal inequality, the order the PRC would like to stand for today rests on formal equality, and while traditionally the exceptional status of the Chinese empire was grounded in its superior culture and virtuousness, today relative national power provides the basis for Chinese status claims. In addition to such Westphalian ideas, the CCP's worldview continues to be heavily influenced by socialist theories, and there are many parallels between China's idea of exceptional relations between the developing countries and Soviet arguments for the exceptional relations between the socialist states, which were deemed to constitute "a new type of international relationship characterized by peace, long-term mutual interest, genuine cooperation, and fraternal solidarity" (Levine, 1995, pp. 37-8).

We should therefore not expect history to repeat itself. Nevertheless, the current Chinese leadership's vision of a "new type of international relations" indeed not only contains a pronounced symbolic element but also strong notions of benevolence, and since they are said to embody this type of international relations in an exemplary manner, Sino-Ethiopian and Sino-South African relations provide important insights into what a China-centered international order might look like – at least for those states that accept this order as legitimate and forge friendly relations with China. As such, it is likely that future researchers will discuss China's relationship with its friends in the developing world from a comparative perspective intended to highlight the parallels and differences with European, Soviet, and American attempts at establishing order, and how the creation of order tends to go hand in hand with the production of insiders and outsiders.

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## ANNEX

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### LIST OF CITED INTERVIEWS

Because of ethical considerations, only the position of the person being interviewed, as well as the date and the place of the interview, are stated.

Interview E1, 2013. Ethiopian journalist [Interview] 19 April. Addis Ababa.

Interview E2, 2014. Senior cadre, EPRDF Public Relations Department [Interview] 2 June. Addis Ababa.

Interview E3, 2014. Senior official, FDRE Government Communications Affairs Office [Interview] 10 June. Addis Ababa.

Interview E4, 2014. Senior official, FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Interview] 23 May. Addis Ababa

Interview SA1, 2015. Senior cadre, ANC International Relations Unit [Interview] 14 March. Johannesburg.