Abstract

China’s conspicuous entry into Africa has raised critical voices, not least from the European Union and the United States. Western powers fear that the increasingly strong position of China in Africa will lead to conflict and confrontation. This chapter argues the opposite. It argues that China is increasingly adopting a number of Western values and norms which guide the behaviour of some important non-African powers – in relation to interventions in the field of security and development assistance. The chapter looks at the interactions of China, the EU, and the US with the African Union within these two policy areas. It concludes that it is possible to identify the contours of an African governance regime covering both security interventions and development assistance. China, the EU, and the African Union participate in this regime, whereas it is doubtful that the US does. It appears that China, the EU, and the African Union share a minimum set of values and norms guiding their behaviour. In comparison, the US is so preoccupied with its own national interests that it shares hardly any norms and values with the other actors.

Introduction

During the past 10 years or so, China has engaged strongly in Africa. The official rhetoric of the Chinese government is that the Chinese-African relationship is not a threat to anyone. Rather, it is a win-win situation based on the principles of non-interference in domestic affairs and on the principle of non-conditionality in the provision of development aid and direct investments. Nevertheless, non-African
actors and, in particular, the European Union and the United States have been sceptical and openly critical towards Chinese policies and initiatives launched towards the poor continent. The underlying expectation seems to be that the Chinese progress in Africa will inevitably lead to conflict and confrontation with the Western powers.

The rise of China in Africa is certainly a challenge to the traditional positions of the European Union, the old colonial powers of France and Great Britain, and the United States. However, the Chinese involvement on the continent will not necessarily lead to conflict with Western powers. It may just as well lead to cooperation, owing simply to the increasing political and economic interdependency among all the actors involved. Because of the growing ‘complex interdependency’, conflict is also simply too costly for all parties if the confrontation is restricted to Africa.

It is the argument of this paper that the increasingly strong positions of China in Africa do not lead to conflicts. On the contrary, it is possible to observe the contours of an emerging governance regime where China, together with the African Union, increasingly adopts Western norms and values in relation to the promotion of security and economic and social development. In this context, governance refers to the acceptance of a limited number of rules and norms guiding the interaction of countries and organisations sharing several goals in the policy field. The paper has chosen to examine two areas in Africa: security interventions and development assistance interventions.

In order to draw the lines of the analysis, the following section briefly introduces the international debate on China’s entry into Africa. The next section introduces the theoretical reflections which have inspired the empirical analysis, a framework which emphasises the significance of aims, values and norms when discussing cooperation between the three non-African partners (China, the US, and the EU) and the African Union.

**China into Africa: Conflict or cooperation?**

China’s growing involvement in Africa in the current decade has produced a number of reactions pointing in different directions. The rhetoric of the Chinese government has been that the Chinese-African relationship represents a ‘win-win’ situation for the two parties, based on the principles of non-interference in domestic politics and non-conditionality in the provision of aid and investment (Alden &