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Daniel Lemus Delgado
Asia Pacific Center, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico, dlemus@itesm.mx

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Discourse, Identity and International Development Cooperation: China, Africa and FOCAC

Daniel Lemus Delgado
Asia Pacific Center, Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico
dlemus@itesm.mx

This article analyses the relationship between discourse and identity in the case of the People's Republic of China in Africa. It assumes that the interests of the Chinese government in Africa can be understood from a theoretical constructivist approach. So, the activities of International Development Cooperation of China into Africa are a result of material and ideational aspirations. Thus, the ties of China in Africa have been boosted by the identity of the Chinese state in the international arena. To understand how identity and interest are linked, this article analyses the official discourse of China in Forum on China Africa Cooperation. Thus,14 official discourses areanalyzed to determine how these discoursesreinforce theidentity of the Chinese state and how that identity is reflected in these discourses, inan intersubjectiveprocess.This article concludes that words and ideas have become an institutional mechanism that is consistent and well defined, and in which the relationship between China and Africa has been oriented.

Keywords: China-Africa- Forum on China-Africa Cooperation-Constructivism-International Development Cooperation

CHINA, AFRICA AND THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW MODEL OF COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

The rise of the People's Republic of China is reshaping the international arena(Gongwu &Yongnian, 2008). This reconfiguration is evident in the economic and political structures of the international system in which China's presence has become progressively morepalpable (Lee, Chan,& Chan, 2012). As a result, the international community is witnessing the emergence of a different model of International Development Cooperation (IDC) (Kragelund, 2011; Simplicio, 2011). In actuality the Chinese model is a *silent revolution* that challenges the traditional hegemonic vision of Western civilizationbecause it spreads what should be a successful formula for development (Woods, 2008). In relation to Africa, the Chinese model has been an evolving approach that include trade, investment, and cooperation(Gill, Huang,& Morrison, 2007; Ncube& Fairbanks, 2012).

Apparently, this model is simple: cooperation programs are oriented towards improving and increasing infrastructure, raising productivity, and extending training of human resources through college scholarships. This model is based on the experience of development in China[1] (Brautigam, 2009). In addition, the Chinese way of cooperation promisesto establish a win-win relationship (Mai & Wilhelm, 2012).Although Chineseaid to Africa has been viewed with suspicion by Western observers and African civil society groups (Samy, 2010), the Chinese formula for development cooperation has been welcomed by many African leaders as a new path to development (Alden, 2007; Konings, 2007; Jianbo & Xiaomin, 2011). The Chinese model of IDC has few strings and does not appear to compromise national sovereignty, making this model highly seductive to African nations (Samy, 2010). From a Chinese government perspective, this model of cooperation is a mixture involving aid, investment, debt cancellation, technical training, and scholarships (Bhattacharya, 2011).

The Chinese cooperation model is not only unique but challenging. Kjøllesdal and Welle-Strand (2010) have highlighted that it is different for four fundamental reasons: first the idea of the relationship between the donor country and the receiver country where the relationship is horizontal, presupposing that countries are equal in the international system; second, the idea that cooperation is sustained by mutual benefit and that cooperation is a way to help both the donor and the recipient; third, the idea that cooperation should not be unconditional, with the assumption that it can be entered into freely without relinquishing or conditioning sovereignty, and finally the idea that cooperation is more effective when a particular actor, individually rather than multilaterally, builds the structures required for cooperation to take place.

The kind of international cooperation that China deploys in Africa is the focus of considerable debate. Some authors believe the aim is to promote genuine development in African communities (Enuka, 2011; Mai & Wilhelm, 2012; Rebol, 2010). Others believe that the priority has been the exploitation of African resources, and that in actuality a new form of colonization is taking place. These countries effectively suffer terrible environmental damage and their citizens are witnesses to increasing inequality and the increasingly negative effects on good governance (Davies, 2007; Moyo, 2008; Taylor, 2011; Thompson, 2005).

Inside the debate about the Chinese model of IDC, I propose that it is necessary to think about the reasons that boost cooperation activities in Africa. The reality is complex and dynamic and it is possible that this model can contribute simultaneously to development and backwardness. We cannot categorize the Chinese model eitheras a genuine search for development or as a new form of exploitation. These explanations are fragmented and partial views of reality because the Chinese government hopes to build a friendly image in Africa and take advantage of African resources. The discussion has previously been focused on highlighting only one part of the complexity of the Chinese model of IDC. In order to contribute to this debate, I suggest that IDC is a multifaceted reality. In this sense, this model is more like a Swiss army knife, insofar as it is an instrument with multiple tools, each useful in specific circumstances (van der Veen, 2011). Evidently, the goals that states seek from cooperation are sheltered by the interests that states defend (O'Neill, Balsiger, &VanDeveer, 2004). Therefore, the interests of states determine the real reasons behindIDC. China is no exception. The way that China conducts its cooperation programs is closely linked to the interests of the Chinese state (Hong, 2012).The key question therefore is: How does the Chinese government define its interests in the international scenario, specifically regarding IDC into Africa?

In order to answer this question I build the arguments on the theoretical approach of constructivism. Constructivism argues that the interestsof actors are framed by material and ideational structures (Ba &Hoffmann, 2003).[2] In this way, constructivism suggests that states act in the international arena with the intention of reaching specified objectives, but these goals cover a wide range of purposes beyond material needs. Thus, these decisions are linked with non-material aspirations, such as prestige and national pride (Kubálková, 1998). I suggest that constructivism allows us to understand the intangible benefits that the Chinese government expects when supporting the development efforts of African countries. These benefits allow the building of a positive image of China as a responsible actor on the international system capable of relating in a different way to developing countries, particularly when compared to the traditional approach of Western nations. I propose that China's ideational aspirations are linked to the desire to build its international image as a friendly nation. However, this aspiration emerges from the identity of the Chinese state. In other words, this aspiration is the result of a collective thought that has molded the moral duty of the Chinese state according to Chinese identity. And lastly, this identity explains how the Chinese government chooses and implements its actions in the field of IDC.

When we think therefore about what China is looking for in Africa through the IDC model, the answer has two perspectives, both responding to a specific type of need. The first perspective has a material dimension. China is seeking to ensure material resources, markets, and business opportunities for its companies, all of which are essential to ensure economic growth. The second answer provides a non-material outlook. This answer argues that China expects to build a favorable reputation as a friendly partner for development by undertaking concrete measures, such as fighting malaria, building infrastructure,

developing vocational training, and improving the living conditions of vulnerable African communities. This perspective strives to portray China as a partner who can relate differently to African nations in order to impulse their development.

In this article I will examine the ideational perspective. My intention is to analyze the ideational interests behind IDC. Specifically, I will examine the Chinese discourse at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The objective of this article is to tie the official IDC discourse of the Chinese government in Africa with the identity of the Chinese nation. It intends to determine how creating a friendly image of China helps the nation to obtain resources vital to its growth while simultaneously gaining a reputation as a good partner, although of course words do not always correspond to reality.

This article is organized in five sections. First, I will discuss some basic assumptions about constructivism as a theoretical approach in the field of International Relations. Second, I will introduce an overview of the context of the Chinese discourse about cooperation and development in the framework of Chinese Foreign Policy. Afterwards, I will analyze the discourse on cooperation in FOCAC. In order to do this, I contrast the discourses considering seven elements: security, power/influence, wealth/economic self-interest, enlightened self-interest, reputation/self-affirmation, obligation/duty, and humanitarianism. Finally, I discuss the results and highlight the importance of this discourse for the construction of the social reality of the practices of international cooperation.

CHINA, AFRICA AND IDC
FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH

China is building an image of a player in the international system concerned with establishing a more peaceful and developed

world (Mierzejewski, 2012). Particularly in Africa, the Chinese government has directed its foreign policy to sow an image of what China claims to be: a country that promotes the development of all countries without intervening in their domestic issues. The construction of this image is important because it reaffirms the identity of the Chinese state in the international context. This identity helps us to understand the behavior of China in Africa.

So, constructivism is a theoretical approach that helps us to analyze the relationship between identity and interests.[3] The common starting point of constructivism is the loosely-defined assertion that reality is *socially constructed.*[4] Although this concept is unclear, the constructivists assume that international relations are not only material, but social. The social world—ideas, identities, and interests—are constructed, not given (Kubálková, 1998). The two basic principles of constructivism are that the structures that frame human society are primarily shaped by shared ideas rather than by material forces, and that the identities and interests of actors are constructed by shared ideas, rather than being given by nature (Wendt, 1999). Reus-Smith (2008) remarked that structures shape the political behavior of states, and it is important to note that ideational structures are more important than material structures. Therefore ideas, beliefs, and values are the factors that have a dominant role in international politics. This is because on one hand, these factors constitute the social identities and interests of political actors, and on the other hand it is through ideas, beliefs, and values that actors give meaning to material structures.

It can be understood therefore that institutions are socially constructed from ideas derived from the identities of the actors, the origins of which are derived from a social interpretation of reality (Guzzini, 2000). The identities and interests of actors are made up of social structures, particularly systems of values and beliefs (Reus-Smit, 2008). Social reality and how it is perceived

influences the way in which social groups in turn perceive themselves and others—creating, shaping, or strengthening their own identities. In the case of states, identity defines preferences and therefore dictates actions: a state relates to others according to its own identity—one which is attributed to them—while simultaneously reproducing their own identity through everyday social practice (Hopf, 1998). Therefore, our identities and interests do not exist separately from the social context in which they arise (Sterling-Folker, 2006).

In this way, a state's foreign policy discourses—accompanied by the concrete actions that reinforce them—have an impact in turn on the material structures of the international system. As highlighted by Onuf (1998), if the world is the result of what we do, then language has a fundamental role in the construction of this world: "saying is doing: talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world what it is" (p. 59). It should not be forgotten that we are social beings that develop and use language to achieve our goals, even though they might believe there are individual goals. In the same way, discourses are the means by which states build, shape, and modify the international scenario to which they belong (Kubálková, 1998).The key point is to determine what these discourses are, how they are associated with the strategies of national foreign policy, and how this relationship between discourse and foreign policy shapes and is shaped by national identities as exemplified in FOCAC.

The discourse provides a privileged means of building and strengthening the identity of actors on the international stage, and that this identity in turn influences the construction of these discourses. In the Chinese case, analyzing the official position of the state in the FOCAC framework allows us to better understand the aspirations of China on the international scenario. These aspirations respond to the ideational needs of the Chinese state, which in turn are rooted

in identity. These needs are embodied in the material world, in actions designed by China within the framework of Chinese cooperation for Africa.

THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE DISCOURSE ABOUT AFRICA

The discourse on international cooperation, particularly the links between China and Africa, can only be comprehended from the context of Chinese foreign policy. However, Chinese foreign policy is also influenced by discourse in an inter subjective process. In this sense, the ideas and praxis of foreign policy since the 1990s are the result of a transition in that the Chinese narrative transformed from that of victim to power (Mierzejewski, 2013).

The aforementioned foreign policy has been at the head of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. These principles are: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.[5]

Under the principle of peaceful coexistence, in 2005 the then Minister of Foreign Relations, Li Zhaoxing, presented the international community with a document entitled "Peace, Development and Cooperation – the Banner for Chinese Diplomacy in the New Era." This document stated that at the dawn of the 21stcentury the international arena experienced significant changes brought about by globalization, multipolarity, and the advancement of science and technology. This required that "all the peoples of the world" had the common goal of preserving peace and promoting common development (Zhaoxing, 2005). From this perspective, Zhaoxing said that peace was the only way for Chinese development and that the international relations China had with the rest of the world were framed by five

thousand years of history. These relations had been marked by "cordiality, benevolence and good neighborliness" and had sought to build a harmonious world. This outcome could be reached if the principle that "all countries, big or small, rich or poor, powerful or weak, should be equal and live in friendship" was respected (Zhaoxing, 2005, p. 3). Thus, China's foreign policy was aimed, according to Zhaoxing (2005), at promoting them ultilateralism, democratization, and legitimization of international relations with the intention of establishing a fair and reasonable world order. At the same time Zhaoxing reflected China's official stance by proclaiming a new concept for development based on equality and mutual benefit.

Chinese government cooperation is essential because it is an indispensable means of maintaining international security. Zhaoxing (2005) stated that "only through international cooperation the common security problem of countries can effectively be solved. The Cold War mentality of unitelarism and the primacy of force is unviable"(p. 4). At the same time, cooperation to achieve common development must be based on the premise that a global economy requires global cooperation. Cooperation is also seen as necessary to promote the harmonious coexistence of different civilizations as it allows respect, dialogue, and mutual trust. And in the case of cooperating with developing countries, Zhaoxing(2005 described this as a "fundamental pillar of Chinese diplomacy" (p.6).

As for China's stance on South-South cooperation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the developed a guidance document which outlines the government's position. In this document the Ministry stressed that developing countries (80% of the total) have many natural resources and huge market potential and could support each other for mutual benefit(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People´s Republic of China, 2003). This benefit can be assumed from "taking other experiences as a reference

and using them as a springboard for common development"(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People´s Republic of China, 2003, p. 1).It is clear therefore that China believes the experiences of others should serve as a development model:

> As one of the emerging economies, China is willing to develop in-depth economic, scientific, technological, educational and cultural cooperation with Southern countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit with the aim of achieving practical results and diversifying common development. To underdeveloped countries that have certain difficulties, China is willing to offer assistance. Although the assistance is limited, it reflects China's sincerity, as no conditions are imposed. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People´s Republic of China, 2003, p. 1)

The approach of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is of interest from the perspective of the perception of China on the international stage, which comes from the following assumptions: first, China sees itself as a developing country which despite experiencing remarkable economic growth in the last few decades, is still not seen as a country of average consumption: this means it is still not seen as a member of the group of developing countries. Second, China may prove to be a more empathetic partner to other developing countries, suggesting a different approach might be required from the international community: an approach requiring cooperation in order to achieve common goals and, as a result, gain a position in a cooperative but hierarchical world. And third, China promotes a different model of cooperation by establishing no "required conditions", that is, not expecting specific patterns of behavior from other states prior to offering them cooperation.

The abovementioned vision of cooperation and development is complemented by the paper "China's Peaceful Development", which was presented to the public by the State Council

Information Office in September 2011. The document warns that the importance of China for other countries means that "China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, and prosperity and stability cannot be maintained without China" (Information Office of the State Council, 2011, p. 12).China's achievements are inseparable from its friendly cooperation with the outside world; in pursuing development, it needs further understanding and support from the rest of the world. The pervading idea is that China's achievements are inseparable from its commitment to outside cooperation, as well as Chinese development being impossible without the understanding and support of the rest of the world (Information Office of the State Council, 2011)

This same view was expressed by President Hu Jintao at the third meeting of BRIC leaders in the city of Sanya, in 2011. At this meeting, Hu said that at the beginning of the 21st century, despite the world moving towards multipolarity and economic globalization, there is still "a long way to go before lasting peace and common prosperity can be achieved" (Jintao, 2011, p. 1). Faced with this dilemma, Hu suggested that the major challenge to be solved by the international community is to find a way for the 21st century to become an era of peaceful development which permits humanity to enjoy common prosperity. Hu puts forward four measures that reflect the discursive vision of the Chinese bureaucratic elite about how to proceed on the international stage. The first step is maintaining world peace and stability as a prerequisite for development, as outlined by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The second step is the promotion of development that is common and possible for all countries; this includes bolstering global economic growth, in which China plays a leading role. A third step reflects the need to strengthen international cooperation and exchange. And finally the fourth step highlights the desirability of strengthening the BRIC

partnership for common development, promoting the basic principles of solidarity, mutual trust, openness and transparency (Jintao, 2011).

The perspective on development and cooperation continuously expressed by the Chinese bureaucratic elite demonstrates a vision of cooperation that goes beyond economic growth and development in beneficiary countries. Chinese cooperation is a key diplomatic strategy which allows the building of an image that reinforces its identity on the international stage and that configures its global aspirations. Cooperation is also a means of promoting economic growth in China through favoring agreements that supply raw materials and offer access to conventional energy sources. Furthermore, as Jacques (2009) noted, it is also a vehicle allowing Chinese political and cultural influence to become so deeply entrenched as to initiate a new international order. It is this vision that has defined the relationship between African countries and China, particularly in the framework of the FOCAC.

Fundamentally, the Chinese discourse on international relations is derived from a vision based on the fact that both Africa and China experienced the consequences of European imperialism in their own territories during the 19th century (Samy, 2010). Each state, in its own historical circumstance, found ways to achieve liberation, although not all African states have yet gained this fully. As a result of this shared experience, China respects the sovereignty of African states and does not intend to establish a political and economic hegemony over Africa, or assume the status of colonial occupier. China's presence in Africa therefore is presented as the image of a country whose interest in cooperation is qualitatively different.

This idea was expressed by Du Xiaconcog (2010), member of the Permanent Mission of China to the UN, at a symposium held at the University of Syracuse. He referred to China and Africa being "friends in adversity". Africa holds huge potential for the world due to the amount of resources it possesses and the number of people who live there. Du outlined the role that China would like to fulfill, and spoke of "a constructive and strategic cooperation for mutual benefit and common development with our brothers and sisters in Africa, contributing to safeguarding world peace and ensuring common prosperity"(Du, 2010, p. 2).

In this speech Du (2010) recalled the four basic principles established in 2006 that determined the relationship between China and Africa. The first of these principles envisages a Sino-African relationship based on sincerity, friendship, and equality, having as a starting point the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China therefore is committed to respect the sovereign choice of African countries regarding the determined model to be followed and is obliged to support these countries in their efforts to strengthen political unity.

The second principle is based on the idea of mutual benefit, reciprocity, and common prosperity. China is committed to supporting the efforts of African countries for economic development, carrying out several projects that impact economic and social development, and promote, at the same time, common prosperity.

The third principle that frames China's relationship with African countries is based on mutual support and close coordination in order to highlight and discuss points of shared interest with international organizations. In this way China seeks to cooperate with Africa in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, by supporting the demands proposed by African countries and requesting the international community to pay more attention to issues regarding peace and development in Africa.

Finally, one last point is the pursuit of common development and mutual learning. The rationale is that China and Africa should learn from each other's experience in governance and development, strengthening exchange and

cooperation in fields such as education, science, culture, and health. China hopes to work together with Africa in exploring methods of sustainable development, supporting the efforts of African countries to foster their own development capacity.

In this discursive construction of reality, Africa is considered a major force for peace and development as it has the largest number of developing countries. African countries are seen as having a long historical tradition, immersed in varied territorial extension, rich in natural resources and with huge potential for development. After long years of struggle, the African people freed themselves from colonial rule, ended apartheid, won independence and emancipation, and contributed to the progress of civilization (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2009. The shared histories of China and Africa illustrate the dual position of the Chinese government today: both China and Africa share a common past of colonial exploitation (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012). As China has surpassed this stage of its history and become the largest developing country—the metaphorical "older brother"—it believes there is an obligation to "help" others on the path of liberation and development. Africa has a long history, vast expanse of land, rich natural resources and huge potential for development.

China's Relations with AfricaChina's relations with Africa are characterized therefore, by a "deep friendship", and China maintains that since the founding of the People's Republic, the nation has, "to the extent of its ability… provided assistance to African countries" (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2009. Sincerity, equality, and mutual benefit, plus solidarity and common development are the guiding principles of the links between China and Africa, with cooperation being the driving force behind these relationships.

However, it is clear that there is always a distortion between the discourse and the material

bases that support it. China is no exception. Rupp (2008) has evidenced that the interaction of the material structures of China and African states support a relationship that assimilates more of the ancient practices of the colonizing countries than true solidarity and unselfish movement.

FOCAC: BETWEEN DISCOURSE AND PRAXIS

In October 1999, Premier Jiang Zemin called a meeting with African heads of state and the President of the African Union in order to establish a forum to function as a permanent contact between African countries and China. A year later the meeting was held in Beijing in the presence of six African heads of state, 80 Foreign Affairs Ministers and the Trade Ministers of 45 African states as well as representatives from 17 regional organizations (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2000).

The first Forum on China-Africa can be considered successful due to the agreements reached and the projections obtained for China. First, the two documents generated in the Forum—The Beijing Declaration on the Forum on China-Africa and the Program for Economic and Social Cooperation China-Africa—were instrumental in establishing the parameters of the relationship between both parties. Second, the forum provided a mechanism for future dialogue between China and Africa. Third, the forum reflected the desire of the Chinese and African elites to promote the Southern position in international forums and to raise the need to reconfigure international policy for the benefit of developing countries. Finally, the forum was an opportunity to cement a tangible South-South cooperation project (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2000).

The Second Ministerial Conference of the FOCAC was held in the city of Addis Ababa in December 2003. The meeting was

attended by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi; six African Presidents, three Vice-Presidents and two Prime Ministers. It was also attended by more than 70 ministers from China and 44 from African countries responsible for foreign affairs and international economic cooperation. Representatives of some African regional and international organizations also attended the conference (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2003).

On the 4th and 5th of November 2006 the third ministerial conference of the FOCAC took place in the city of Beijing. It was attended by 24 heads of state and ministers from 48 African countries, 1,700 delegates and over 20 organizations from the United Nations and African regional organizations (Taylor, 2011). As a result of the meeting the Beijing Declaration was drawn up, establishing FOCAC as an important platform for collective dialogue and an effective mechanism for pragmatic cooperation. Participants also agreed to enhance the role of the Forum with the intention of strengthening cooperation between both parties and jointly presenting to international forums those positions that supported the development of countries with fewer opportunities. A new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa characterized by "political equality and mutual trust" was also developed (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2006a).

This time, the Chinese government took the opportunity to launch the New Partnership for African Development with the intention of promoting the participation of Chinese companies in the African market. The Chinese plan was to facilitate three billion dollars in loans and two billion in preferential loans, and in addition, a five billion dollar fund was established to encourage Chinese companies to invest in the region[6]. The cancellation of 10 billion dollars of debt to the poorest countries of Africa was also contemplated (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2006b).

The Fourth Ministerial Conference of the FOCAC was held in the Egyptian city of Sharm El Sheikh in November 2009 (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2009). At the meeting the Chinese government made eight commitments to give continuity to the cooperation policy initiated nine years previously. Among these commitments, the first focused on combating climate change. China committed itself to facilitating cooperation on satellite weather monitoring, strengthening the use of new energy sources, preventing and controlling desertification, and promoting environmental protection in cities. As part of this commitment, China promised to construct 100 energy projects including solar energy, biogas utilization, and the development of micro-hydroelectric projects (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2009).

The Chinese government also promised to deepen scientific and technological cooperation, providing 10 billion dollars to strengthen the financial capacity of some African nations by continuing preferential tariffs for the import of African products from the least developed countries; increasing the number of research and development centers in the field of agriculture; deepening cooperation in the field of medicine and health through the donation of medical equipment; constructing 30 hospitals and 30 centers for malaria prevention and treatment; expanding cooperation for the training and educating of human resources through the coaching of 1,500 school principals and teachers; building 50 schools and granting up to 5,500 government scholarships; and finally, multiplying cultural exchanges for promoting a better understanding of China and Africa and more appropriate measures for development (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2009).

The 5th Ministerial Conference of the FOCAC took place in July 2012. Fifty African state representatives were present, and recognition was given to FOCAC for its 12-year contribution to "consolidating the traditional friendship between

China and Africa, strengthening political mutual trust, deepening practical cooperation, enhancing exchanges and mutual learning, and advancing the comprehensive development of the new type of China-Africa strategic partnership" (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2012, p. 2).

In his opening speech, President Hu Jintao clearly summarized the vision of the Chinese ruling elite with regard to Africa and how the relationship regards International Cooperation:

> China is the world's largest developing country, and Africa is home to the largest number of developing countries in the world. China and Africa, together with over one third of the world's population, are an important force for advancing world peace and development. China and Africa share a common destiny, and Chinese/African friendship is cherished by the Chinese and African peoples, who have always treated each other as equals and with sincerity and friendship, extended mutual support and pursued common development. No matter how the international landscape may change, China will remain unchanged in its commitment to supporting African peace, stability, development and unity. We will give genuine support to African countries' independent choice of development paths and genuinely help African countries strengthen their capacity for self-development. We will continue to stand firm with the African people and forever be a good friend, good partner and good brother. (Jintao, 2012, p. 6)

This Ministerial Conference consolidated FOCAC as a high-level mechanism allowing China to project its own world vision, a vision of the role that this new world order can have in establishing a new international scenario, and of the leadership position envisioned by China. These ministerial conferences are a privileged space for creating or strengthening socially-constructed identities at the discursive level, and they allow for the projection of particular state images by bureaucratic elites. At the same time, these meetings have fomented concrete cooperation, which ultimately impacts practically on people's lives.

CHINESE DISCOURSE IN FOCAC

Epstein (2011) argued that discourse comprehends privileged meanings that reflect the identity of the states. It is possible therefore to analyze the identity and interests of China in Africa through official discourse at FOCAC. Discourse can be defined in two ways: a particular unit of language and a particular focus (Schiffrin, 1999). As a particular focus, discourse is conceived through functional approach. In this approach, discourse is regarded primarily as a societal phenomenon. Thus, discourses are a practical, social, and cultural phenomenon; those who make speeches undertake social acts and participate in social interactions. These interactions are embedded in various social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Van Dijk, 1997).

I assume that the official discourse of the Chinese government in FOCAC is a political discourse. In this kind of discourse textual structures, syntaxes, or lexicon itself are of limited interest, but the focus is rather the manner in which these discourses build complex meaning and generate different interactions. This implies that the most important element is the use of the words and the formulations of phrases and statements because these contain meanings compatible with general knowledge and values (Chilton & Schäfnner, 1997).[7]

From a functional perspective, Van Dijk (1997) proposed that discourse analysis involves four possibilities. These options are: action, context, power, and ideology. Discourse as action can be analyzed from these standpoints: (1) intentionality; (2) perspective; and (3) implications, consequences and components, and interaction. My objective is to understand

the intent of the Chinese discourse in FOCAC in order to understand how this speech supports the identity of the Chinese state. Therefore, shared meaning governs actions. According to this analysis, discourse is a form of action. Van Dijk(1997) affirmed:

> [Discourse] It is mostly intentional, controlled, purposeful human activity…Although intentions and purposes are usually described as mental representations, they are socially relevant because they manifest themselves as social activity, and because they are ascribed or attributed to us by others who interpret this activity: they construct or define us as more or less rational persons and at the same time as social actors. (p. 8)

My starting points for the analysis of the Chinese state for Africa discourse are official documents. This analysis comprises14documents, covering the five ministerial meetings that have taken place since the founding of FOCAC in 2000. The documents analyzed are of three types: the discourses of the President or Prime Minister of China as part of the opening of the ministerial meeting, action plans derived from these meetings, and joint statements at the closures.[8]

With the intention of analyzing the official discourse of China, I adopt a methodology that emphasizes the presence of keywords. These words identify, describe, construct, and reaffirm the identity of the Chinese state, so I chose relevant words linked with the ideas associated to identity like harmony and friendship. These words were subsequently classified. This classification originated from considering each key concept in the context of the general idea it was expected to communicate. Thus, it was not an attempt at an automatic classification by relating words with the motivation behind cooperation, but rather each word was classified in the general context of the idea expressed. Therefore, a single word may appear in multiple classifications. In fact, the same word in the context of the same

idea may have been classified simultaneously in two categories as I did not adjudge the texts to be enclosed in themselves, but to be open to multiple readings and interpretations, avoiding a reductionist textual interpretation.[9]

A frequency analysis of the key concepts in the documents was subsequently undertaken. The intention was to complete the first analysis, highlighting recurring concepts. The concepts chosen for this part of the analysis were: common development, justice, South/South cooperation, peace, freedom, harmony, friendship, solidarity, dialogue, equality, mutual benefit, trust, civilization, and rights.

The keywords were classified in a framework proposed by van der Veen (2011). He suggested that it is possible to classify the motivations for which a state carries out activities of international cooperation into six broad frames. These comprise the following: (a) security, power/influence, (b) wealth/economic self-interest, (c) enlightened self-interest, (d) reputation/self-affirmation, (e) obligation/duty, and (f) humanitarianism. Evidently, these categories are not exclusive. In daily life more than one of these reasons are present in the normal activities of cooperation. Finally, I registered the presence of certain words and repetitions to determine their importance in the imaginary construction of Chinese identity (See Table 1).

In summary, the methodology that I used in this analysis has five steps. First the selection of texts under the criteria that will be treated as official speeches as part of FOCAC. Second, reading and classification of texts. This step includes the reading of documents and short paragraphs for the identification of main ideas, and classification in one of the categories proposed by van der Veen (2011). Each paragraph will be allocated a specific color, according to the assigned category. Third, quantification of the text: once assigned to text categories, I will proceed to count the number of words per category in order to assign the percentage that each represents in

the corresponding text. Thus, it is possible to discern the most important ideas throughout the text, and these are classified from the discursive point of view, revealing aspects about the objectives, implicit and explicit, of the members of the FOCAC. Fourth, representation of data in graphs and tables will illustrate the discursive construction of the text. Finally, evaluation of the results obtained in the discursive treatment in the texts will be examined.

In terms of the opening speeches, words associated with the construction of ideas related to concepts of security and influence were those with a smaller presence (only 3.0% of the total), while words associated with concepts of enlightened self-interest and reputation appeared most frequently, having a representation of 36.5% and 30.4% respectively. As for joint statements, words associated with influence continue to have a marginal representation (1.8%), whereas ideas related to safety increase to 20.3%. Additionally, it became apparent that words associated with enlightened self-interest and reputation were the most frequently mentioned, at 33.1% and 25.6% respectively. Finally, regarding action plans, the presence of words related to influence is negligible, at 0.93%, while words related to security represent 6.1%. Words related to enlightened self-interest and reputation are in the majority, at 45.5 and 24.0% respectively.

If we analyze the specific concepts in official documents we find that in joint declarations the most frequently-mentioned concepts are peace, (mentioned 23 times), followed by dialogue, (mentioned 13 times), and equality, mentioned on 11 occasions. In the action plans, concepts such as dialogue, peace, and friendship stand out with 42, 36, and 15 repetitions respectively. Finally, when I analyzed the welcoming speeches from the Chinese authorities, the most frequently-mentioned concepts are peace, friendship, and dialogue, appearing 42, 41, and 14 times.

In the case of the analysis of concept-specific ideas related to key elements in FOCAC

documents, it is clear that the Chinese discourse at such meetings has been aimed at presenting the Chinese state as both concerned with building a better world and as an actor committed to achieving benefits for all countries in the international community. This discourse is especially notable in the case of African countries that are most vulnerable to the dynamics of an international order that has limited their development. In this sense, discourse on international cooperation is intended to meet aspirational needs related to enlightened self-interest.

The second most common idea within the discourse is linked to the reputation of the Chinese state. In this sense, a reason for justifying Chinese/African cooperation is associated with the interest in strengthening the identity of the Chinese state as an increasingly-important player on the global stage, one which seeks to distinguish itself on the international scene by appealing to multilateralism. Ultimately, the objective is to increase the reputation and status of China in the international arena.

The key question is why China exclusively uses this type of discourse to justify its cooperation programs in Africa. The constructivist response suggests that this discourse reveals the driving motivation to be related to the identity of the Chinese state. While this identity is multidimensional, I will highlight the three characteristics which most effectively explain the relationship between discourse, aspirational needs, and identities.

The first characteristic is the idea of China as heir to the classical civilization of East Asia. The ruling elite of the People's Republic has skill fully linked historical Chinese civilization to the current communist state, highlighting four thousand years of continuous civilization and imperial history and linking it with contemporary China. This Sino-centric reading of the past is somewhat idealized, particularly the relationships Chinese dynasties maintained with neighboring peoples, where international order was based

Table 1. *Chinese Discourse of FOCAC About Intentions of IDC*

Framework	Goals	Example of FOCAC Discourse	Source
Security	Increasing donor's physical security.	The two sides will take concrete and necessary measures to protect the life, property, assets as well as rights and interests of people and businesses from each side.	5th Action Plan
Power/influence	Pursuing power, increasing leverage over others, winning allies, and positions of influence in international fora.	We reaffirm the need for strengthening the role of the United Nations through reform and, as a matter of priority, increasing the representation of African countries in the Security Council and other UN agencies.	3rd Declaration
Wealth/economic self-interest	Furthering the economic interest of the donor economy; supporting the export industry.	The two sides will continue to work effectively to establish overseas business cooperation zones in Africa, intensify efforts to attract investment, actively encourage more Chinese companies to invest in the cooperation zones and assist African small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop business in the zones.	4th Action Plan
Enlightened self-interest	Pursue global public good: peace, stability, environmental health, population control.	In the new international order, the right of all countries to sovereign equality and to freedom from outside interference in their internal affairs must be assured.	1st Discourse
Reputation/self-affirmation	Establishing and expressing a certain identity in international relations; improving international status and reputation.	Both China and Africa are the cradles of ancient human civilizations, their time-honored histories and cultures are an important part of world civilization.	1st Discourse

Framework	Goals	Example of FOCAC Discourse	Source
Obligation/duty	Fulfill obligations, whether historical or associated with position in the international system.	We believe that the development of the new type of strategic partnership between China, the largest developing country, and Africa, the largest group of developing countries, is of great significance for the peace, stability and development of the world and serves the fundamental and strategic interests of both sides.	5th Declaration
Humanitarianism	Promoting the well-being of the poorest groups worldwide.	The two sides call on the international community, developed countries in particular, to promptly deliver their pledges of assistance and debt relief, continue to step up assistance and investment, and help African countries in particular to overcome their difficulties and realize their MDGs expeditiously.	4th Action Plan

Source: Author's own analysis based on theoretical proposal of van der Veer, 2011.

on hierarchy and privilege. Through the tax system, mechanisms that permitted regional stability were established (Kang, 2012). The most fundamental aspect of this order is that China thought of itself as the center of this system through moral superiority rather than material superiority. Material superiority—inventions, navigation techniques, hydraulic engineering, greater agricultural productivity, long-distance trade, and so forth—resulted from this ideational superiority, which was itself framed by knowledge of the Confucian classics and adoption of a model of government based on virtue. As a result, China at that time was at the center of a world where there was a commitment to differential treatment based on the moral capacities of the actors. From this perspective, benevolence should be the realization of idealization. Contemporary China views solidarity with Africa as an important part of its identity: the collective imaginary with deep historical roots in an idealized vision of the past

dictates that China must manifest an ideational, moral superiority in relation to other players in the international community when dealing with African nations.

The second characteristic is the past humiliation of China by European powers in the 19th century. Historical experience shows that the decline of China originated in the imperialist ambition of the European nations who imposed a separate international order by force of arms rather than the conviction of words. Chinese voyages of exploration such as those led by Admiral Zheng He, unlike those led by Europeans, were not primarily focused on acquiring land or products, but on sharing the greatness of China (Mai & Wilhelm, 2012). Humiliation of other nations, dispossession of achievements, territorial partition, and imposition of ideas were not unique to China. The weight of imperialism also struck a chord in other regions, particularly Africa. Today, at the beginning of the

21st century, China is a country that has advanced material capabilities and a responsibility to share the formula for growth and provide opportunities for African nations to develop in like manner. In this collective aspiration, China seeks to regain the place it once held in the world by sharing its formula for success, its abilities, and its skills in a cooperative model described as a win-win relationship. From this perspective, it is more than a matter of business, it is a matter of pride related to building a reputation linked to the ability to be supportive. Finally, the third characteristic appeals to the identity of a state that respects the internal affairs of each sovereign nation. The driving idea is that with the will of the people, without the intervention of third parties, it is both necessary and possible to change the specific situation of underdevelopment, poverty, and injustice. This could be described as laudable, as long as intervention is not driven by ideological considerations. That is why China calls for unconditional support, and why it claims that the rise of Chinese influence demonstrates socialism with Chinese characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

FOCAC has been a space that has reflected the relationship between discourse and identity. While this article shows only the discursive aspect of the Forum on China-Africa cooperation, it is evident that the relationship of China with African nations is varied, deep, and complex and cannot only be explained from the discourse. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that this discourse has exceeded the world of ideas. The words and the ideas have become an institutional mechanism that is regular and well defined, and in which the relationship between China and Africa has been oriented.

Therefore, it is a fact that the forum is now a consolidated mechanism that has functioned for over a decade and that has provided a focus-

point for Chinese and African officials. But from a constructivist approach, is more than that. In fact, the Forum is a good example of how the identity of actors has influenced the way they perceive the international system and the role that they should play. These discourses, ideas, representations, and identities make the real world. In other words, the discourse in FOCAC is important because it not only shows how the Chinese identity is built and re-built, but how this identity supported by specific words translated into actions. These actions affect real people in African communities. At the same time, these discourses illustrate how interests are a result of the identities of the actors. That is, if China decides to go to Africa it is not only to obtain indispensable resources for its economy, but also because Africa represents an excellent opportunity to strengthen its identity as a country that assumes a different relationship with African nations. This possibility to act differently in the field of IDC is a product of China's own identity.

Finally, this forum has promoted a distinct kind of IDC. The basic difference is the fact that the aid from China is not conditioned to requirements of transparency, human rights or effectiveness. In this sense, the Chinese model of IDC is not better than the Western model. The reason why China has built its own model of IDC is because the discourse associated with a specific identity plays an important role. The material capabilities—capital and human resources—are important. But more important is the capability of Chinese discourse to imagine a different world based on multilateralism. Of course, from the Chinese perspective, multilateralism does not mean equality, but a world ordered by hierarchy in which China sees itself as an older brother: a guide, an assistant, and a role model.

ENDNOTES

[1] Halper (2010) has noted that the Chinese development model is shown as a different and exportable experience,

which combines a formula based on economic growth without liberal democracy.

[2] Constructivism affirms that: "Actors do not just look around at the material capabilities of their neighbors nor do they simply perform cost/benefit analysis when deciding what their behavior is going to be. Instead, actors are also influenced by their social context: shared rules, meanings, and ideas. Notions of what is right or wrong, feasible or impractical, indeed possible or impossible are all a part of an actor's social context, and it is these ideas that shape what actors want, who actors are, and how actors behave" (Ba &Hoffmann, 2003,p. 21).

[3] When we consider aspects related to identity, the world of facts is left behind and we enter into the realm of feelings and beliefs; identity may be more apparent than real, as well as being a sense of belonging based on the belief that a community exists and that people belong to that community (Wachman, 2008). As noted by Melissa Brown (2004), although the identity is commonly seen as a product of culture and / or personal lineage, identity is rather the result of a social construction through narratives accepted and rejected as a result of an intersubjective process. Lin, Wu, and Lee (2006) warned that the adoption of a national identity is not the exclusive result of the will of individual consent but that identity is the result of a cognitive exercise that inevitably involves the calculation of rewards and sanctions; therefore, individual choice is influenced by social context.

[4] Guzzini (2000) has warned that this blurred idea of what is meant by constructivism has led to a review by constructivists themselves of the often-used term "social construction of ...", which has led in turn to eclectic or redundant approaches in which even theoretical coherence is lost in the research results.

[5] These principles were proclaimed by China in 1954. A year later, at the Bandung Conference in the presence of 29 representatives of African and Asian states, they were proposed by the Chinese government as the basis for cooperation between developing countries (Information Office of the State Council, 2011).

[6] Theseandotherfiguresarein USdollars.

[7] Chilton and Schäfnner(1997) suggested that political discourse can be divided into two groups. The first group is made up of "meta-political" speech. This discourse embraces those texts that reflect the political ideas, beliefs, and practices of a society. The second group includes basic texts to promote the emergence of a community or political or ideological group. Within this second group is the interstate discourse about foreign policy and diplomacy.

[8] It is possible to argue that in the case of the opening speeches, they are prepared entirely by Chinese diplomats, while joint statements and action plans are documents resulting from negotiations between Chinese and African authorities. In other words, they are result of interactive process. Both types of documents do not set aside the Chinese perspective on what is and should be international cooperation, but rather merge with the African perspective.

[9] Also, the texts were analyzed from the official version written in English. This was done as English has been used as the lingua franca for understanding the texts in the FOCAC framework in order to overcome issues of significant linguistic diversity among FOCAC members. From the beginning therefore the texts are presented as the official version of government positions.

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