**Development, but on whose terms?**

**Rebecca Richards, Keele University**

**Abstract:**

*Sixty years of liberal development engagements with African states has had a significant impact upon socio-political relationships and expectations within the state. Societal expectations for the liberalisation of economic-political space are evident within many African states, shaped through forms of normative intervention and liberal conditioning. However, with a rise of Chinese intervention in the African state, primarily through relationships centred on economic exchanges between China and African elites, the pressure for political change is being removed. This hegemonic shift not only changes who is influencing the African state, but also what is influencing as a normative shift is concurrently taking place. If societal expectations of liberalisation are no longer supported by external pressures for change, what impact will this have on socio-political relationships within African states? This article questions the impact of a normative shift, or a potential normative shift, within development interactions and transactions, arguing that the removal of direct external liberal demands will raise socio-political tensions, and thus threaten stability, within African states engaged in Chinese development interactions.*

Within both the practice and the study of development, you do not have to go far before you run into one of two words: democracy or liberal. So entrenched are these concepts within the realm of development, an area of practice and study that has moved far beyond its economic roots, that they are mentioned but not often discussed. Instead, they exist as assumptions and as certainties. We know that democracy, liberalisation, and from that, what is deemed ‘modernisation,’ are the end goal of internationally-led development policies and objectives. We discuss how one relates to the other, or which one should come first and how to get there, but we rarely encounter discussion that imagines their absence. Development, by definition, demands an actualisation of change (see Veltmeyer (ed), 2011; Kingsbury *et al*, 2008). Intentions of development, what Cowen and Shenten (1996) identify as the basis of doctrines of development, thereby aim to bring about a change from the status quo. In modern development policies and practices, this change from the status quo intends liberal change through reforms targeting economic, political, and social institutions. Indeed, whilst development is often discussed in economic terms and measured using economic indicators, development today is inseparable from liberal institutional change in the realm of politics as well as economics: it is a complex socio-political process that cannot be reduced solely to economics. However, with the rise of Chinese intervention in the African state, new possibilities for development are appearing. Centred on direct economic transactions, Chinese interactions target a change in the economic status quo without liberal change in the political status quo. The economic incentives used to bring about liberal political or structural reform commonly found at the core of the dominant development practices are thus supplanted by economic exchanges that do not carry the those same conditions. China’s increasing economic activity in the continent confronts commonly accepted understandings and expectations of development intent. If these activities continue, the rarity of imagining the absence of liberal change is likely to become commonplace, and we will be faced with the need to question the placement of democracy, liberalisation, and modernisation within practice. Further, we will also be forced to question the impact that decades of the embedded proliferation of liberal expectations have had not only on development practices, but on societies that have been their target.

The rise of Chinese intervention in the African state raises significant challenges to the dominant liberal practices of development in terms institutional change, but it also brings significant challenges for societies that have been socialised in the framework of liberal expectations. Developmental interactions do not take place in isolation. Decades of externally created demands for liberal institutional change and the liberal normative dominance have undoubtedly impacted upon societal expectations and demands of the state. The question here, then, pertains to what happens if development interactions become primarily an economic transaction rather than a force for political change. The Chinese model becomes the favoured and therefore dominant form of development interaction in Africa will result in a normative shift underpinning both direct and indirect engagement with the continent. What could this shift tell us about contemporary socio-political development in Africa, particularly in relation to increasing expectations of democracy held by populations?

This article questions the impact of a normative shift, or a potential normative shift, within development interactions and transactions, arguing that the removal of direct external liberal demands will raise socio-political tensions, and thus threaten stability, within African states engaged in Chinese development interactions. In order to do this, first the dominant normative framework within development practice is identified. How these norms inform social expectations of the state and thus can act as catalysts for social demands and social change is also addressed, comparing the impact of conditional development with non-conditional development on society. Finally, this article addresses what impact the normative shift brought with non-conditional Chinese development practices will have on the relationship between society, governance and institutions of government within target states is questioned. This paper argues that this normative shift is potentially destabilising, not for the West, but rather for the societies and states that are the targets of Chinese development policies due to the liberally cultivated demands and expectations of society not being met by the systems of governance in which they exist.

**Development, Norms of Practice and Norms of Expectation**

Development is a diverse concept, and thus the field of International Development is an eclectic area of practice and of study. What is consistently found within the literature, though, is a liberal dominance; a dominance that derives from the overwhelmingly Western role in the practice and in the ideological underpinnings of development. Whilst also evident within smaller, more human-centred projects such as those delivered by NGOs, the liberal norms underpinning today’s development practice are most visible within state-to-state development agreements such as restructuring policies, budget support, capacity building, governance reform, and even the fostering of civil society and other groups in opposition to a non-democratic regime – means through which the motivation of improving the human condition are to be achieved. This emphasis on the liberalising of economic and political systems – the liberalising of human life (see Duffield, 2001) – is almost a second language to both the practitioner and the academic, and thus noting its dominance is nothing new. However, the liberal emphasis within development is less frequently associated with normative dominance; outside of the more critical literature, it is not really conceptualised as being a part of or an agent of the power structures that guide and shape action of Western states and institutions as well as non-Western states and actors. It is part of the loose web of power that constantly circulates around the globe, and normative power can be just as impactful as economic power or direct political engagement. Development as practice and the expectations of developmental action are forms of intervention, and whilst the former usually involves direct action between two or more actors, the latter is a form of indirect, or normative, intervention (see Richards and Smith, 2015). The practice and expected outcomes shape domestic perception and, eventually, domestic expectations and demands. In other words, norms of developmental action and expectation have agency themselves, acting as an agent of political socialisation.

Models of development have largely been dictated by the dominant discourses of the period: they are determined by the expectations and norms proliferated by dominant, hegemonic, or most powerful states that take an active and determining role in the political space of others within global political space. Today’s development policies reflect those expectations of Western liberal democracy. Policies such as the push for political reform based on democracy’s third wave, the economic sector oriented Washington Consensus and its predecessors, and increased awareness of and concern for social and human security within sovereign states have significantly informed today’s development policy and the normative framework underpinning that (Williamson, 1994; Milliken, 2003; Carothers, 2004; UN, 2002). There exists a notion of the type of state that is preferred by the international community; it is the expectation of what a state *should* be. These expectations can be explained in a number of different contexts: these are what are needed for a secure (externally) state; these are what are needed for a safe (domestically) state; these are what are needed for a friendly and safe member of the community; or these are what are needed to enable control of the state. In short, it is a type of state that is viewed as secure and stable and is preferable to engage with on the social, economic and political levels. Rotberg (2003: 3) exemplifies this succinctly in his identification of key political goods that hierarchically are used as tools of judgment and evaluation of state stability. Physical and human securities are at the top of the list. However, other more socio-political goods are also ranked as being fundamental to a state’s legitimacy and success; goods very much linked to liberal expectations such as democratisation, participation, social provision, private ownership, facilitation of economic gain, and even the promotion of civil society.

Under these assessments, states are not functioning or legitimate – they are not ‘complete’ (see Jackson, 1990) – if they are lacking in the empirical provision of public goods that are perceived of as essential to effective rule. States that fail this assessment are deemed ‘in need’ and thus become targets for attention or some form of intervention, be it through a direct presence or through conditional aid. The justification for this intervention typically falls into some category of protection: protection of the economy, of the state, of the human, or of the system. Weak, insecure, failing or failed states must be ‘fixed’ for the benefit of all, and frameworks of good (read: liberal) governance are the ‘“silver bullet” capable of assisting states in coping with the problems of our complex globalised world’(Chandler, 2010: 1; Ghani and Lockhart, 2008). It should be noted, though, that many states in the Western world fail to meet Rotberg’s criteria on some level, especially post-2008, yet the perception of ‘in need’ is largely absent from the Western states. Rotberg stresses that the provision of political goods is vital to the domestic legitimacy of the state, and this is perhaps where the label reflects perception: even though many Western states struggle to meet the expectation of public provision, they do not fail to meet the structural and ideological standards underpinning these expectations, and thus their legitimacy is rarely questioned. Indeed, as the normative values underpinning what it means to be ‘a state’ centre on performance markers or benchmarks of ‘acceptable’ statehood based on the ideals of the Western liberal state (see Finnemore, 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998), ideological liberalisation becomes more important than provision in determining the worthiness or security of a state. Thus, modernisation and liberalisation of state political and economic institutions and practices are, as Berger (2007: 1203-1204) notes, part of the ‘technocratic prescriptions for the creation or stabilisation of particular collapsing or failing nation-states or the rehabilitation of the nation-state.’ Democratisation, good governance practices and liberal economics become the main components of the ‘silver bullet’ approach of development.

Discussing liberal development norms and practices forces addressing conditionality as it is instrumental in advancing the expected and targeted reforms. This conditionality is typically discussed in structural terms; development policies, such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (both past and present), demand phases of reforms of government institutions in order for further assistance to be given. However, this conditionality can also be discussed in non-structural, indirect terms as well. As Dollar and Levine (2006) identify, between 2000 and 2003 aid donors tended to favour recipients who exhibited liberal characteristics and practices, such as rule of law or respect for human rights. Baulch (2004), in examining the result of aid in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), notes more consistency in criteria for who receives than in expectations for progress or change. Further, when attached to foreign policy considerations, conditionality becomes more multifaceted as donors balance geo-strategic considerations with security and humanitarian concerns (see Human Rights Watch, 2002; Howell, 2006; Padilla and Tomlinson, 2006). The complexity of conditionality is apparent: Some assistance programmes may demand change in order for assistance to continue, yet there is also conditionality lurking within who can obtain that assistance. In other words, liberal conditionality is a pre-requisite as much as it is an outcome of change, and normative expectations for the receipt of developmental assistance comprise part of that conditionality equation. These expectations set the conditions for further engagement with the donating actor, but in that, they also establish parameters of and sometimes even a path for change. Conditionality is a dictate, but in exerting top-down pressure it is also conditioning. Importantly, conditionality does not stop at the institutions of the state, but also extends to the society found within the state. It is a form of normative intervention, and as such it is part of the process of development as an agent of socialisation.

One area of practice where this is particularly visible is statebuilding-as-development within unrecognised states. This is a useful example through which to elucidate some of this normative conditionality and its impacts in an interventionist capacity. Unrecognised states are state-like entities that exist and operate as states in every capacity except for legal recognition of statehood (see, for example, Caspersen, 2012; Caspersen and Stansfield, 2011; Richards, 2014). Unrecognised states have undergone some form of statebuilding process, and in many that process continues. With recognition of statehood as a goal underpinning these development projects, most unrecognised states reflect the normative expectations of liberal democratic statehood. In short, unrecognised states work to demonstrate their worthiness to be a state, and for those seeking recognition from Western states, their worthiness is defined by their ability to meet liberal democratic expectations (Kölsto, 2006; Richards, 2014). In unrecognised states we can see the start of the normative ‘outcome’ ideals of development being worked into the processes of creating reality.

Finnemore asserts that normative values ‘may make uniform behavioural claims upon dissimilar actors. They may shape and define the preferences of actors in ways not related to internal conditions, characteristics, or functional need’ (Finnemore, 1996: 22). In the absence of direct international intervention,[[1]](#footnote-1) unrecognised states have ‘learned’ what is expected or, more accurately, have ‘learned’ the conditions and pre-conditions of developmental assistance (see Richards, 2014). Whilst not all unrecognised states subscribe to a set liberal democratic path, it is prevalent enough to draw significant attention from scholars of these entities (See, for example, Pegg, 1998, 2004; Caspersen, 2012; Caspersen and Stansfield, 2011; Kölstø, 2006; Kölstø and Blakkisrud, 2008; Richards, 2012, 2014). In the larger context, this exemplifies the power of normative intervention. States and state-like entities cannot function in isolation in today’s increasingly interconnected world. Even those not in direct contact with international institutions, developmental organizations or the system of states are still subject to being externally influenced by normative standards and policy precedents. In these cases, conditionality – expectations of liberal change, progress, and modernization – predicate developmental assistance, and meeting these conditions is internally determined to be necessary for attracting that developmental attention. In these cases we can clearly identify the indirect nature of this conditionality, and in that we must recognise the agency of the political forces enacting the conditions. In unrecognised states, these development projects are much more complex than institution building, governance reform, or capacity building; they are more involved than increasing economic output or the strengthening of democratic institutions and mechanisms of good governance. Because of the self-led nature of statebuilding-as-development in unrecognised states, and because they operate largely outside of formal international frameworks, unrecognised states depend on domestic support for the ongoing development processes to continue. Unrecognised states depend on these forces of political socialisation and socio-political change as vital components of lasting developmental success.

Society-dependent liberal development in unrecognised states raises important considerations about the impact of normative expectations on developing states. Development, specifically development dictated to by liberal norms and practices, is defined by change, either political change or economic change. It is commonly a top-down exercise that is aimed at liberalisation of the economy, political system, and state institutions. Even within literature critical of development practice and motivations there is still an expectation for change and indeed ‘betterment’, although not to be achieved through externally imposed means. The expectation is that development is progress and a process of modernisation, and thus the change is defined by the conditioning agents. In the first assumption, those conditional agents are liberal. In the second, presumably they are local, although given the rejection of homogeneity within this assumption it would be unfair to claim any generalisations. What is omitted, or even marginalised, within these assumptions about development, though, is society. Society is implied within both of the categories, and it looms within the two assumptions, but development is rarely conceptualised as a process of socio-political change; there is an artificial divide between politico-economic development and development within political culture and society. However, excluding society assumes its complicity and its complacency. In removing society from the equation, the agency of society is also removed. Further, removing the role of society in the process of development also excludes the impact development has on society. Within top-down assumptions, it is maintained that liberal change in either economic structures or political structures will lead to liberalisation in the other. In this it can be argued that society’s position, albeit implied rather than explicit, is one of a facilitator of change: for example, economic liberalisation will lead to political liberalisation through society. Yet the socio-political link lurks in the background and systemic or structural political and economic considerations remain the cause-effect components of the equation. Indeed, even though society is the facilitator, the political and economic components hold the power of importance, simplifying the complex networks of politics and state relationships. The state is more than just institutions; it is a socio-political relationship between the population, governance, and the institutions of governance (see Richards and Smith, 2015). Excluding society within the liberal framework is perhaps a reflection of the perceived need for modernisation – it is a patronising stance that assumes that society has yet to be enlightened and therefore could be inconsequential in the development equation. However, this hubristic exclusion paints an incomplete picture of what development is. Development is change, but that change must include society at its heart.

**Development as Social Change**

Admittedly, it is inaccurate to claim that all development literature completely excludes social change. This is obviously not the case, as the human is often the target of development practice. Indeed, development is easily couched within the language of human betterment, either on the individual level or in terms of community. However, this is not the same change as is discussed above. When we talk about socio-political change, we are not talking about a change in the status or condition of the human. Rather, we are talking about a change in the political culture of the state. The state is a complex political entity encompassing multi-layered relationships between the population, politics, governance, and institutions (see Richards and Smith, 2015; Lemay-Hebert, 2009). A change in one area, such as politics or economics, will inevitably lead to a change in another. Thus, any conception of development seen as change must also encompass socio-political change.

Development as socio-political change is development as a change in political expectations of the state and its apparatus. In his work on polyarchy, Robinson (1999) begins to identify this recognition of types of change within development. Robinson maintains that the purpose of development is for the control of the nation-state in order to facilitate or enable the flow of global capital. Control, according to Robinson, is of the periphery by the core. Through the Gramscian lens, this control is an exercise in hegemonic power and proliferation, and, according to Robinson, in the contemporary world this hegemonic power cannot solely be coercive. Thus, hegemonic control must be at least in part complicitly accepted by the periphery: a consensual form of domination must be established. Robinson examines American foreign policy, specifically that operating within the realm of development, and identifies trends towards supporting domestic civil society within the periphery as a means of establishing that complicit relationship. Similar to what Harrison (2004) identifies as complicit technocratic elite within states engaged in World Bank supported structural reform, this engagement with agents of change within the periphery serves to ‘soften the blow’ of hegemonic dominance whilst facilitating the changes required by the core. Robinson discusses this in terms of a “culture ideology,” referring specifically to consumerism and structurally hegemonic ideals consistent with his theoretical view (see also Robinson, 2004). However, outside of the tacitly Gramscian perspective these ideas still hold. When considered within the normative context of liberalism and democratisation, without the more political economy rooted Marxist or Gramscian overtones and connotations, this need to foster compliant dominance within society is a need to foster socio-political change, or, more specifically, socio-political expectations. Within the study of development, though, this is not always recognised as such. Instead, it is largely regarded as an institutional mechanism through which the institutions of government and the practices of democracy are reformed. In other words, it is a mechanism of political change rather than a mechanism of social change. However, as Robinson makes it easier for us to conceptualise, this proliferation of hegemonic – normative – ideals is a form of political socialisation, and one that is aimed at changing the patterns of socio-political action and, indeed, the political expectations of the population.

Development is a process of expectations and demands, not just benefit or extraction. Expectation of change is where conditionality comes into development as both demanding and socialising: it is dictatorial, but it is also dictating. If part of development is understood to be the proliferation and reproduction of a “culture ideology,” then, to return to Finnemore, this conditionality is both teaching as well as an avenue for learning. It acts as a form of pressure from above in the ‘development is top-down’ equation, and as such is an agent of direct as well as indirect socialisation. Western-led developmental assistance is not an altruistic exercise, nor is it aimed solely at the extraction of wealth. Meeting the demands of the donors – conditionality – is a significant component of this process. Interactions that focus on structural changes do not operate in isolation to society, and excluding society from understanding development paints an incomplete view. Development and its side-effects, namely the proliferation and reproduction of normative ideals either directly or indirectly, can have drastic impacts on socio-political space, especially if the dominant ideology exerts long-term pressure from above. With development as a means of not only bringing about economic or political change but also as a mechanism for political socialisation, development and conditionality become much more than just structural adjustment or direct demands for action. With the long-term proliferation of liberal democratic norms, it is expected that those aspirational hegemonic ideals at some point become domestic demands and expectations for reality. Because of this, even if the structural or institutional reforms idealised within direct development policy do not take place, dominant development practice and discourse can still enact change in the form of changing social expectations of what the state should be, should provide, and how it should function. Development practice and discourse can liberalise society even if it does not succeed in directly liberalising institutions and practices. In this way, even in states where development practice has been interventionist, the indirect proliferation of liberal norms and expectations of state have power and agency themselves, and we must recognise their role in fostering socio-political change within target states, particularly those that have been exposed to decades of this normative intervention. This thus raises questions and points of concerns if that normative pressure is removed.

**The China-Africa Development Relationship**

All of the above helps set the stage for asking the question, ‘What happens when China takes the place of the Western developmental practices?’ In other words, what happens when the hegemonic ideals and expectations change?

In the last two decades, China’s increasing presence in sub-Saharan Africa has been ‘emblematic of its broader emergence as a global power’ (Le Pere, 2007: 13). It has rapidly become the continent’s largest trading partner, and in some of Africa’s largest countries it is the largest new investor, trader, buyer, and aid donor (Rotberf, 2008: 3). It is no secret that for a number of years China has been a powerful economic actor in the African continent, especially within southern Africa and in countries with significant oil or other resources used in manufacturing processes (see Chan, 2009). This increasingly prevalent relationship has led many scholars to look at China’s involvement as a new model of development for Africa; a model that replaces the conditional reform-led practices that have dominated development in Africa for decades.

As previously stated, the Chinese development model is almost exclusively an economic one. It is based on trade, direct investment, access to raw materials (especially oil), and limited infrastructural investment in areas such as roads, schools, and hospitals. In short, the relationship between the Chinese government and African states is primarily an economic deal that, depending on the states involved, aims to be mutually beneficial to the Chinese state and to the African governments and elites. To be clear, Chinese development practices are conditional, but this conditionality typically pertains to maximising profits or ensuring the use of Chinese labour rather than to structural reforms or liberal demands. As these exchanges are state-to-state economic transactions rather than a top-down loan or assistance typical of Western development practices, the African state has more power to set its own, albeit limited, conditionality. In some agreements, governments mandate the building of roads and hospitals in exchange for access to oil. In others, China offers direct investment or limited aid, with the provision that the state meets a purchase quota of Chinese goods (see Alden *et al,* 2009; Rotberg (ed), 2008; Knowledge@Wharton, 2016). China boasts political neutrality and has a stated policy of non-interference in internal affairs – it makes agreements with states regardless of regime type, and it does not make political reform demands upon that state (Eisenman, 2008: 232). Rather, China has taken steps to extend economic relationships beyond the institutions of the state, indicating importance on the economic exchange rather than regimes and governance. Its political outreach policies have been developed to engage ruling parties in a capacity outside of official structures of government in order to ‘cultivate long-standing and stable relationships that underpin and augment official ties, regardless of ideology’. (Eisenman, 2008: 233). As a political cartoon by Patrick Chapette (2007) humorously depicts, the only thing China will not sell Africa is democracy.

Whilst the China-Africa political relationship is not the top-down reform relationship of the liberal development paradigms, it can easily be characterised as China ‘currying favour’ from African leaders (The Economist, 2011). Some have even gone as far as claiming the China-Africa relationship is rooted in and dependent upon a mutual admiration, and benefit, between governments (The Economist, 2015). The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2002) maintains the stance of non-interference in emphasizing that China and Africa are making ‘joint efforts to maintain the lawful rights of developing countries and push forward the creation of a new, fair and just political and economic order in the world.’ However, all development interactions carry political power, and thus cannot be removed from the realm of politics. Despite its primarily economic focus, the China-African state relationship is also a political relationship. The above statement follows an anti-imperialist, anti-Western line, indicating a recognition that African states have been marginalised or harmed by Western systemic dominance. Thus, it could be concluded that the China-Africa relationship is one united against an unfair system. However, the political relationship goes far beyond this systemic context, as Chinese development interactions inherently enter the political realm of the target state through not only offering support to the institutional political status quo, but also through interrupting and potentially disrupting previously existing external relationships and exchanges. In these relationships, society and socio-political change are inconsequential, and the divide between Chinese and African is a clearly maintained one. Indeed, an insular stance characterises the Chinese position – both physically as well as ideationally – within Africa. When China has attempted to become more politically involved, such as in an attempt to end conflict in South Sudan in 2015 by sending peacekeepers, it has ‘failed miserably’ (The Economist, 2015). Maintaining a politically and culturally insular stance highlights the importance of economic benefit over political action for the Chinese state, and it clears political space for African leaders and elites to operate with minimized external interference and pressures for change.

For many of these reasons, how to label China’s increasing involvement in sub-Saharan Africa is a topic of some contestation. Many scholars refrain from classifying it as ‘development,’ and it is not difficult to see why they maintain this position. Looking at Chinese involvement in sub-Saharan Africa from an economic perspective, this investment is what Rotberg (2008: 1) deems a “remarkably symbiotic relationship;” perhaps an odd characterisation from a scholar so intent on the expectations of liberal good governance in earlier works. China’s involvement does result in a form of economic change in terms of growth (Knowledge@Wharton, 2016), and thus would fulfil developmental intent for progressive change in the realm of economics. It is debatable as to how sustainable this growth is, though, as many China-Africa agreements involve little more than an injection of goods or capital and do not have a transfer of knowledge or an investment in the long-term economy of the African state. Further, as many agreements centre on the extraction of raw materials, that economic growth is tied to a continuation of that extraction. In that way, the economic growth is akin to a house built on sand - if China stops exporting oil from South Sudan, economic growth will regress as nothing has been built below that agreement to foster economic resilience. Further, many of the capital agreements are made between the Chinese government and African governments, with little to no demands for transparency or even public investment. Some have identified these agreements as those between individuals rather than between state governments. In this way, these relationships have been labelled as exploitative, both to the African state (by China) and to society (by African elites), and it must be questioned as to whether that can be classed as ‘development.’ Whether the label ‘development’ is appropriate or not is likely to remain contested. However, it must be recognised that the China-Africa relationships starkly contrast, and in some ways compete, with the dominant modes of development that have engaged with the African continent for decades.

**Development, but on whose terms?**

When we discuss the rise of China, we often discuss it in terms of a hegemonic rivalry with the United States. In the field of development this is no different. Analysis of the involvement of China in African development often leads to discussion of a US-China rivalry over the continent, both economically and ideologically. If this shift is indeed taking place, and we can assume that it is to some extent given the rapid growth of Chinese economic engagement in parts of the continent, then we also have to consider the impact this shift is having on development in the African states which have established relationships with China, particularly in relation to the placement of society within the broader picture of the state. Western models of development are primarily focused on bringing about political or economic change: they are processes of, or attempts at, betterment, progress or modernization. Chinese models, on the other hand, have a different target; rather than targeting change, they target extractionary benefit. Chinese development does bring influence and political power, and Chinese investors often leave physical developments in the building of infrastructure. However, it is difficult to argue that Chinese assistance brings with it the conditionality, or the lasting impact, that Western development relationships and normative structures do. Further, the question in the bigger development picture is how does economic growth sans political change at the top match up to socio-political expectations of the state? Is economic growth enough for the societies of many African states, especially those where the socio-political change fostered by liberal normative demands and expectations has taken place?

If we view development as a process of change including socio-political change, when looking at the rise of China as a development actor in Africa we also must consider the shift in normative power. The economic shift has been fairly rapid. However, socio-political shifts take much longer than economic ones. Africa has had long-term exposure to liberal democratic norms, and we can safely assume, and in some instances even empirically support, that those norms had a socialising impact on socio-political space in some African countries and have affected societal expectations of political action. We can also safely assume that even with this socialisation, the pressure of direct external conditionality is a necessary component of the political change that would meet those societal expectations. With governments and ruling elites turning to the non-conditionality of China, though, that top-down external pressure is removed. The normative shift that may occur with the hegemonic shift is only a nominal concern at this point, as the normative dominance of liberalisation is not being significantly challenged through Chinese developmental interactions. What is of more importance is what happens when the lasting impact of the last 40 years of socio-political socialisation no longer exists within a system that is under pressure to meet those expectations? In other words, and in an extreme way, what happens to society and the relationship between society and the state when African leaders no longer have personal or economic reasons to comply with liberal demands and the liberalising of the African state comes to a halt?

There is some empirical as well as anecdotal evidence suggesting that there is a rift between societal expectations and the impact of Chinese investment within some African states. The Economist (2011) reports that some Africans are concerned with China becoming a new colonial power, and wondering ‘whether China is making their lunch or eating it’. There are also signs that the expectations of economic investment have liberal social and political expectations attached. For example, there is a backlash against the poor working conditions within Chinese managed firms, concerns over corrupt business practices, anger over the lack of jobs or capital investment in local economies, and demands for more transparency surrounding economic agreements with state leaders (The Economist, 2011; The Economist, 2015; Alden *et al*, 2008). Anecdotal evidence from correspondence also indicates a dissatisfaction with what many are identifying as a socio-political disconnect between what people ‘have come to expect’ and what the government is now no longer willing to promise, let alone provide. For example, one political activist in Zimbabwe is acrimoniously vocal about how Chinese investment has made it more difficult within the country, as Mugabe no longer has external pressure that acted in favour of the opposition parties fighting for social, political or economic change and justice (Personal Correspondence, 2014-2016). Others from states seeking Chinese investment, including some from Nigeria, also express frustration and sometimes fear in these changing relationships (Personal Correspondence, 2015). Within these anecdotes is one exceedingly apparent commonality: Within many African societies, expectations for liberalisation exist and demands for change are increasing, but activists know that they need the assistance of external pressure in order to bring about this change. In this way, liberal expectations of development and societal expectations of their state match, even if societal expectations came to be as such through imposition or conditioning. The removal of external pressure for change threatens the transition from social expectation to political reality.

More significantly, opposition parties within African states imbued with Chinese money have begun placing anti-Chinese promises at the centre of their platforms. In the 2006 Zambian presidential elections, opposition candidate Michael Sata almost won with a manifesto that was incredibly hostile to China (Chan, 2008). Similar anti-China platforms can be found in opposition parties in states such as Ethiopia, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Senegal, and Tanzania (Hees and Aidoo, 2015; The Economist, 2015). In 2011 The Economistclaimed that ‘every country south of Rwanda has had acrimonious debates about Chinese “exploitation”. Even in normally calm places like Namibia, antipathy is stirring.’ (The Economist, 2011). These parties, together with and fuelled by thriving civil societies, exhibit frustrations with their own governments in light of Chinese investment. This can be seen as a backlash against a new form of imperialism. However, the primary focus of these campaigns is not the economic exchange itself, but rather the illiberal consequences that come from that exchange; consequences such as environmental degradation, increasing corruption, and a ceasing of political reform. These campaigns also extend beyond the borders of the African continent. Recently a British university with a large international student body hosted a Chinese delegation on their campus. Part of the delegation’s visit was a request to hold an event for African students. At this event, the head of the Chinese delegation extolled the virtues of Chinese investment and what China could do for Africa. It was widely acknowledged by those in attendance that this event was a recruiting event for Chinese companies and a propaganda event for the Chinese government; an event that was targeting African students studying within Britain, and therefore likely to become political and business leaders within their home countries. Whilst some students in attendance sat quietly or politely left early, there was a group that engaged with the Chinese delegation, and in that engagement the animosity towards Chinese investment was made very clear. Amongst the students involved in this engagement were opposition party activists from Zimbabwe, Ghana, Mozambique, Zambia, and Nigeria. The accusations made by the students were about corruption and damaging practices by Chinese businesses, but they were also about the impact that Chinese dominance was having on political reform in their countries.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is difficult to say exactly how much impact China has had on development, especially in terms of socio-political expectations for change. As Chan (2008) notes, there is very little empirical evidence or statistical data on African attitudes to China, and further, because of the size and diversity of states within sub-Saharan Africa, it is impossible to claim any broad generalisation about ‘African attitudes’ as they exist only in homogenising literature. Further, statistical methodologies in relation to African states are likely to be urban-biased, to not reflect genuine attitudes, and to not be representative of the population as a whole. However, the most comprehensive study compiling social statistics about African attitudes towards China has recently been published (Hess and Aidoo, 2015), and the findings are interesting. If we are to take this study at face value, it appears that the majority of those polled view China’s involvement in their state as positive. Taking the urban bias into account is somewhat inconsequential here, as the urban dominance would disproportionately represent political activists and members of civil society who are more likely to reside in urban areas than in rural. At face value, concerns over Chinese imperialism being more harmful than the benefits of an economic relationship appear to be a minority view. The two significant exceptions to this were Uganda and South Africa – South Africa’s significance comes from its status as China’s largest and most involved partner in Africa (Hess and Aidoo, 2015).

Within the mass of statistics trying to survey every possible facet of Chinese involvement within African states, though, one area stands out quite starkly: Whether China’s policy of non-interference in the politics of the African state was positive or negative. Amongst results from Ethiopia showing 67% approval rating of Chinese companies, with 86% of those surveyed believing China’s path of development is a positive model for their country, 51% suggested that there were problems with China’s policy of non-interference. Twenty-seven percent surveyed believed that this policy is harmful (Hess and Aidoo, 2015). This is interesting not only because it is repeated in other states but because even in light of positive attitudes towards economic relationships, this perception of the lack of Chinese involvement in politics raises questions about expectations for political action and reform. It also raises questions about the role that external development actors, through conditionality, play in that. Preliminary evidence suggests societal concerns over the path that Chinese development relationships may lead in terms of aspects of development outside of the realm of GDP growth. It is an interesting deviation to note as it is one that raises numerous questions and areas of consideration, particularly in relation to how the removal of conditionality and normative pressures will impact upon the relationship between society and state in the realm of political reform. A form of development may take place, but how this happens has the potential for increasing socio-political tension within African state.

**Conclusion**

The question here is not which is a superior form of development, the liberal or the Chinese model, but rather what impact these models have and have had on the various components of development, as well as what this shift tells us about how development takes place. This is also relevant for observations of the impact of other development actors increasingly present within the continent. As the Chinese economy contracts, Chinese involvement and investment in African states is reducing (BBC, 2016). However, new actors, including Turkey and Brazil, are increasing their economic-developmental relationships with African states (see Shinn, 2015; Schlesinger, 2014). How these actors will balance economic considerations with political pressure is yet to be fully seen.

In the liberal model, the economic and political realms are treated as inseparable, meaning that economic growth cannot take place or be sustained without political change. In the same way, liberalisation of political space is dependent upon the economic growth that will allow for political and social provisions. In the Chinese model of development, though, the economy is treated as existing outside of the realm of politics, meaning that the link between political change (good governance) and economic growth is not recognised. This divorcing of politics and economics is a stark contrast to the developmental expectations of nearly sixty years, and it threatens to overshadow the important question of where does society fit? In the Western model society is seen as both a facilitator of change (bottom-up) and a beneficiary of change (top-down), with the protection of the human being an end goal of both economic and political development. In the Chinese model, however, social emphasis is on improving the effectiveness of the workforce rather than the security of the human. In this, society becomes a tool of economic growth and accumulation, and as such is subject to, rather than a subject of, change and development.

What we are seeing in this is a shift of power and influence in which the state and development are seen very differently by the two shifting actors and models. It is the placement of society in the state and the processes of change that could be the biggest points of rupture in the shift between the Western and the Chinese models of development. Currently, democracy and liberal governance are an expectation within many states and, importantly, societies; what has long drawn criticism for being an imposition has become a reality as normative socialisation has occurred. Direct Western action is a form of direct conditionality that maintains top-down pressure that has both facilitated and works in tandem with bottom-up action. Direct liberal developmental engagement is an agent of accountability in societies where the societal-level expectations match external conditional demands. Conversely, Chinese money opens the door for a return to ‘old’ forms of governance in the absence of political conditionality. These are likely to favour those who benefit from the Chinese investment, meaning a strengthening of or return to non-liberal or authoritarian governments are a real possibility. However, this does not mean liberal demands within society will also cease. A shift in socio-political expectations resulting from a hegemonic shift will take much longer to materialise than an economic shift, and it is here that there is the greatest possibility for backlash.

How this hegemonic shift impacts upon how society views its relationship with, and place within, the state will have significant implications for politics within African states. Within the field of development, and particularly in determining what development means, this is a significant area to bring into consideration. It is still too early to fully assess the impact of changing development policies and practices within the continent, particularly within the realm of political development. However, watching this realm is as likely to tell us as much about the reaction to Chinese involvement as it is to tell us about the real impact of 60 years of the proliferation of liberal norms. The question looming, then, is what kind of development, and on whose terms?

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1. Because these entities exist in the condition of non-recognition, for legal and political reasons international interaction with them is primarily through their parent state, or the state that they are still legally a part of but from whom they are seeking sovereign independence. As such, unrecognised states exist in a state of limbo (Caspersen, 2012), and they exist in relatively isolation from international institutions and organisations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This meeting was observed by the author in Coventry in March 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)