

OLD VERSUS NEW DIPLOMACY IN THE SINO-SOUTH AFRICAN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP: PRACTISES, OUTCOMES AND REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines old versus new diplomatic practices in the Sino-South African bilateral relationship. The question is whether negotiation and representation follow traditional styles of diplomacy or embrace new political and economic discourses. Diplomatic exchanges between China and South Africa in the last decade is characterized by a set of ‘new rules to deal with more complex set of issues’. This ‘new diplomacy’ is not outmoding the old diplomacy but comes to complement the works of traditional diplomacy to meet new demands and making the two country’s economies more open and inclusive. Negotiations are not concerned only with defining the rules of trade, treatment of citizens and operational rules for transport and communications but also address environmental, health and information technology issues. The main players in dealing with old diplomatic practices are still high-ranking officials from the state and representatives from government departments, while new diplomatic practices are increasingly negotiated from non-governmental and actors on the margin. In the Sino-South African relationship this complex set of issues need the attention of individuals who can minimize non-traditional security threats. These threats are difficult to manage from the machinery of the state because of pressure on the distribution of resources and therefore need a ‘new set of rules or fresh approach’ to find solutions to the set of issues.

INTRODUCTION

What is Old and New Diplomacy?

The Geneva School of Diplomacy defines diplomacy as: “the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or states. It usually refers to international diplomacy, the conduct of international relations through the intercession of professional diplomats with regard to issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics, and culture. International treaties are usually negotiated by diplomats prior to endorsement by national politicians. In an informal or social sense, diplomacy is the employment of tact to gain strategic advantage or to find mutually acceptable solutions to a common challenge, one set of tools being the phrasing of statements in a non-confrontational or polite manner (Geneva School of Diplomacy and International Relations, 2009). The terms “old diplomacy” and “new diplomacy” have been in common use for twenty-five years or more. The system of alliance set up by France, England and Russia to ward off the German danger in the decade before 1914 is dubbed ‘old diplomacy’. The system of so-called international security which took shape in the League’s Covenant of June 1919, and afterward regulated or was supposed to regulate the relations of the fifty-odd states of the world, is labeled “new diplomacy.” All the implications of the word ‘alliance’ connote ‘old diplomacy’. In the same way, ‘new diplomacy’ connotes the twin ideas of replacing the bilateral alliances of the past with a universal or semi-universal association of states pledged to compliance with a set of general principles embodied in international law, and the abandonment of ‘power politics’, that is, the use of force to settle conflicts between nations (Mu, 2014: 3). New diplomacy is international relations in which citizens play a greater role (Moomaw, 2007). Under the old diplomacy, global policy making is more strictly the purview of governments. New diplomacy began to be observed in the 1990s amidst easing tensions in the wake of the Cold War and streamlined communication among

activists in the burgeoning Internet age. New diplomacy is being used to address many issues such as human rights (e.g. the campaign to end South African apartheid and the Save Darfur campaign), humanitarian assistance, labor rights, environmental issues, and fair trade. New diplomacy began to be observed in the 1990s amidst easing tensions in the wake of the Cold War and streamlined communication among activists in the burgeoning Internet Age (Géraud, 2015). Strange and Stopford (1988: 15) labels new diplomacy as an architecture of power, encapsulated in the evolution of the structural power of finance, production, exchange and technical expertise for the world market and its implications (Strange, 1991). In other words, the means of access between agents under the new diplomacy, if one evaluates new diplomacy according to Kenneth Waltz' levels of analysis, occurs on the first and second level, i.e. being driven primarily by actions of individuals, or outcomes of psychological forces and being driven by the domestic regimes of states (Waltz, 1959:25-26). One aspect that needs examination is the type of diplomatic typologies that defines this relationship. Typically, treatises on diplomacy are short on theory, but generally long on typologies and distinguish the various functions of diplomacy. Almost all authors' list representation as the primary function and some identify sub-categories (Jonsson, in Carlsnaes, Risse & Simmonds, 2004: 215). Hans Morgenthau, for example makes a distinction between symbolic, legal and political representation (Morgenthau, 1967: 525), whereas Sharp offers a slightly different trichotomy of symbolic representation, representation of ideas (such as the idea of peace and dialogue (Sharp, 1997: 618). Information exchange is usually listed next to representation. This includes being a listening post, clarifying intentions and trading valued information. A fourth category is protection of citizens and commercial and legal interests of the sending state in the receiving state. Fifth, promotion of economic, cultural and scientific relations is an increasingly important function of diplomacy (Jonsson, in Carlsnaes, et al, 2004: 216). Barston, (1988) and Berridge, (1995: 394) add policy preparation and policy advice as a sometimes used sixth function of diplomacy.

The modern era of diplomacy and communication between states are characterized by a move away from old-style-traditional diplomacy to communication that embraces new issues in international relations. The exchange of ideas, knowledge and culture in a public, non-governmental capacity are the all-important concepts cultivating the intellectual flow of information. For a clear and concise discussion of the Sino-South African situation, one has to incorporate elements of new style diplomacy. The old, traditional style of diplomacy, however, forms the foundation of negotiation between both countries and its value cannot be disregarded. Traditional diplomacy is regarded as an effective tool of communication and will continue its bargaining power in bilateral relationships, no matter if issues of new diplomacy dominate negotiation agendas. Traditional diplomacy is here to stay, especially in the light of military security and trade relationships, diplomatic protocol and the use of international transport and communication. The delivering of results is what agents in a bilateral relationship aim to achieve and 'old diplomacy' traditionally had a tendency to produce results.

Diplomatic Practices in the Sino-South African Relationship

The question is if new diplomacy has found a pathway into the cooperative framework of Sino-South African relations? Since the establishment of political and socio-economic ties, citizens in a private capacity, acting to enlarge self and mutually beneficial arrangements, started to engage in transnational dialogue. Dialogue that encompassed issues over a broad spectrum and involving agents from different backgrounds in life. The promotion of individual and cooperative enterprises, setting up of business meetings, either at home or abroad and aspiration to negotiate successful trading results, formed part of this new interest in China and its people.

Entrepreneurs from both countries in the latter half of the twentieth century, did not nearly achieve such a high rate of 'first-hit' contacts, as when formal trading ties were established. Trading with the 'centre of the world' (China), presents challenges and open doors to an economy, ever since the 'going-out' strategy was launched, and this enterprise is making unprecedented inroads into the African business sector. China actively set their sights on the African business environment from the start of the twenty first century and has not looked back. The first steps to an agreement on joint cooperation on trade and business happened on 18 May, 2001 with the establishment of the South African Chinese Business Council. The council was established under the sponsoring of 16 South Africa-based China-funded enterprises. The aim of the Council is to unite all South Africa-based Chinese enterprises to promote mutual cooperation and strengthen communications with the local government and relevant departments, so as to achieve joint results and better development (China-South Africa Bilateral Relations, 2012).

The idea behind the creation of the South African Chinese Business Council was to create an administrative body, which could facilitate joint agreements on trade and business. Besides members' individual commitments to promote trade cooperation; on a one-on one or multipurpose basis, the South African government oversees the activities of the agents (business and trade sector role-players) by closely monitoring developments. The government, however, does not act in a controlling capacity, merely as 'independent observer', listening to requests and giving advice but relies on a trade and business relationship that is effective in the long-run and beneficial in terms of strengthening bilateralism. In the context of approaching South Africa as trading and strategic partner, negotiation paves the way for meaningful discussion and solidifying future points of contact. And trade is one area, where South African benefits in its relations with China. Solomon and Cilliers (1996: 24) comment on South Africa's ambiguous position within the international political economy. It is the most developed state on the continent of Africa. Within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, its Gross National Product (GNP) contributes 84 per cent to the regional GNP.

Although other Chinese partners, such as, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, Chad, Angola, (maintain bilateral ties with and receive economic aid and assistance from China), intermittently flex their muscles, they don't pose a real threat in influencing China's economic agenda at the cost of South Africa. The bargaining power of these states is simply too weak, to act as offset for China's courting of South Africa. It is true that Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product Growth (GDP) is larger than South Africa in recent years, but the country still remains less developed and more unequal than its rival (Nigeria becomes Africa's biggest economy, 2014). Considering the benefits China wants to achieve from its African partners, a situation where the country first has to develop and provide incentives for negotiation, stands as a negative factor in China's courting of African countries. What it means is that Nigeria's diplomacy, whether on a state-to-state basis or driven from the actions of individuals to advance non-traditional security issues, is incomparable to the Sino-South African negotiation position. This is due to a lack of power in persuasion, producing a favorable climate for negotiating and its apparent unwillingness to negotiate economic goods for the region. Bargaining between China and its African allies originally commence on issues of reciprocal concern. It is however true, that most of China's African partners possess very weak bargaining power. The disproportionate character of this relationship allows China to set the agenda, which often leads to outcomes benefitting China's negotiation goals. From the viewpoint of African states bargaining is not an effective tool for producing results. It more often than not leads to more confusion than achieving intended goals. Accepting basic rules and regulations and usually adopting an unsatisfying position towards the negotiation process is viewed as major obstacles.

For this reason it is not uncommon for negotiations to end up in a stalemate and the calling for another round of talks. The inability to conform to standard negotiation practices and following the rules of the game leads to non-reciprocal results. Even though conformity practices exist before the commencement of the negotiation process, for example agreeing on the number of agents to be represented, uniformity on agenda-setting, majority vote, respecting of sovereign decision-making power, a results-oriented policy outcome and the implementation procedure, China possess a strategic and comparative advantage that is difficult to match by African allies. This advantage presents China with leverage and is instrumental in swaying the bargaining results in their favor.

Looking at the outcome of decisions, China's strong economic influence and partners' willingness to agree by common consent leads to unanimity. Basically speaking, the relationship is to curry favor with Asia's rising political and economic giant and the building of a trust, credibility and 'friendship'. If game theory is used to explain the negotiation process with China and its diplomatic allies, both parties naturally desire a win-win situation. China is a winner in the sense that it is capturing the 'hearts and minds' of political leaders, influencing domestic political processes and unwittingly determining the African political discourse. Economically, because of its huge investment, aid and infrastructure development projects, African states tacitly allow China to gain market shares and increase its economic significance in the region. The financial benefits attached to cooperation influence individual and regional economic power. States which receive lucrative investment, aid and assistance deals are inclined to build stronger financial relationships. In simple terms, the old saying 'the more you get the more you want' is a valid sweeping statement. But you can only get as much as you earned. States which possess little or no economic power or strategic value, not contributing to the attainment of goals, of insignificant use in expanding China's economic influence, nationally or regionally, will find it difficult to arrogate financial assistance.

Bilaterally, China's African allies negotiate economic issues which affect state to state or 'one on one' relations and are not constituted across borders or in a regional cooperative framework. These include single economic issues, for example policy guidelines on import quotas from oil-producing countries. China established specific state to state policies on the import of oil from each of its African oil-producing partners. The policies are mutually exclusive, in other words, decisions and cooperative agreements are reached on individual supply and demand conditions and not influenced by outside factors. No other actors are involved in the composition of transactions between the agent, China in this case, and its supply chain, the individual economic dependent states. This forms part of 'old diplomacy', where government to government contacts resolve around issues of high politics. Individual state's behavior and decision-making with China does not affect the outcomes and diplomacy of other states. The protection of independent economic power to a great extent rests on the spirit of free enterprise and maximizing of individual profits. If economic empowerment within national borders is advanced, as in the case of South Africa, where all citizens under the current regime enjoy equal economic status, autonomous interaction will also increase. Although trade is regarded as an issue of low politics, it is China's main strategic focus with its African partners. Sino-South African economic relations has at its roots the encouragement of business cooperation, whether it occurs in a formal capacity between government role-players, intergovernmental organizations (IGO's), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or between private entrepreneurs or non-state actors. The latter increased in scope over the last couple of years and is instrumental in determining the direction of trade. Western observers admit that China's Africa expansion is unstoppable. To keep or catch up with China's 'African imperialism' is a nearly impossible task. The speed with which developments are taking place is simply too fast

to compete. On the other hand, local populations feel ostracized by strong economies and feel that negotiation at the cost of producing goods for the people does not produce a winner on either side. In dealing with South Africa and laying all 'cards' on the table, the outcome is not one based on a win-lose situation but more a non-zero-sum game, in which the interacting parties' aggregate gains and losses is either less than or more than zero. On the contrary, outcomes don't always abide by the 'rules of the game' and are altered according to sub-issues involuntarily laid down on the table. This degenerates the negotiation process merely to a 'talk shop', with no substantial outcomes reached. One might assume that South Africa as the weaker negotiating partner is in a stranglehold that is difficult to disentangle from. From China's perspective, following steadfast approaches based on regional negotiating power can advertently slow down China's dominating negotiation power. In this regard it is important to show up at the negotiation table with clear and concise points of discussion, strategically and tactically inclined to favor the host and not the recipient. The furthering of individual interests for economic and social purposes, contributes to the success rate of new diplomacy in its practical application on a state-to-state level. Here, the way in which citizens of South Africa impact the relations with China is significant, because it lays down principles of negotiation and helps with agenda formation. Firms of South Africa investing in China set the pace for diplomatic negotiations and are starting to have a bigger say in trans/cross-national areas of interest.

Diplomacy between both countries is an area where comprising issues, for example humanitarian rights, national and global environmental concerns and agreements on free trade are lacking in negotiation. The transition of ideas and identity formation characterizes the conduct of modern diplomacy between countries. In this way, as argued by scholars, constructivist thinking plays a leading role in shaping the communication between transnational actors. Issues of high politics form the backbone of sound diplomatic relationship between sovereign countries of the world. The Sino-South African relationship relies on strong state-to-state contacts to promote bilateralism and take this relationship forward. For that matter, the relationship is built on mutual respect and formal styles of negotiation and will old diplomacy not become outmoded as a form of contact. The state still holds office as the institution which oversees that diplomacy's principal functions are carried out by its principals and accredited agents in a foreign capacity abroad. The role of the state is central in deciding which form of diplomacy will best suit its interests. Sino-South African diplomacy is conducted in a manner, where both states oblige to mutually respect the negotiation and bargaining styles of the other state and understanding the development of diplomacy both at home and in missions abroad. Most international diplomacy is done bilaterally and comprises the political and cultural relations between two states. Examples of bilateral diplomacy include treaties between two countries, exchanges of ambassadors, and state visits. The governments of both countries lay down the principles of negotiation and what kind of issues are worth discussing. Despite China's high profile, disparities in power, resources, money, armament, and technology there is a sense of conducting negotiations in a flexible manner that should not place limitations on the results that need to flow from this compromise-driven relationship. South Africa should view this uneven power relationship as a positive aspect because negotiation can commence around more hardly-accessible resources with China not attempting to control the rules of the game. As a last word, new diplomacy is becoming more prominent in negotiating mutual points of interest than was the case before interaction between individuals of the two countries increased

REPRESENTATION

Morgenthau (1985:565-566) assigns two organized instruments of diplomacy: the foreign offices in the capitals of the respective nations and the diplomatic representatives sent by the foreign offices to the capitals of the foreign nations. The foreign office is the policy-forming agency, the brains of foreign policy where the impressions from the outside world are gathered and evaluated, where foreign policy is formulated, and where the impulses emanate which the diplomatic representatives transform into actual foreign policy. While the foreign office is the brains of foreign policy, the diplomatic representatives are its eyes, ears, and mouth, its fingertips, and, as it were, its itinerant incarnations. Magalhaes (1988: 101) defines representation as the set of acts of a diplomatic agent to affirm the presence or the commitment of the state he or she is acting on behalf. In Sino-South African negotiation, as in most bilateral relationships around the world, the foreign offices and the diplomats attached to the offices are still the important instruments of diplomacy. The foreign offices represent their countries and communicate information and values to recipients by means of the diplomats attached to the offices. Representation, according to Sharp (1999:50), is the basis of a diplomatic relationship between countries. If South Africa did not agree to accept the Chinese ambassador with its diplomatic personnel to the country, it would have been inappropriate for China to have a representational office. Likewise, the South African office in Beijing represents the interests of the country in China. Sharp (1999:51), who is the most explicit advocate of an understanding of diplomacy in terms of representation, argues that its 'practice and context should be seen as responses to a common problem of living separately and wanting to do so, while having to conduct relations with others'. He proffers the following hypotheses:

"The less obvious or natural the identities of the agents appear and the thinner the social context in which they operate, the more diplomacy is needed. Conversely, we would expect to see less diplomacy in the relations with a family, where identities appear self-evident, or within a religious or legal setting, where roles and rules are clearly marked and accepted" (Sharp, 1999:52).

In the period 1991 until 1994, representation had an unofficial character; the identities of agents were formed in a political-ideological social context. South Africans still lived under the yoke of apartheid and agents were influenced by political and cultural biases. Engaging in talks with the communists of China was a daring and oftentimes frustrating experience. South African diplomats were uncertain on the presentation style of the Chinese. This caused doubt and fear in the minds of negotiators. Stereotyping played a role in judging the character and negotiating skills of the other party, since the diversity in identities made "matchmaking" an erratic affair. The meaning assigned to the role and functions of agents shortly after diplomatic relations were established initially had a subjective value, since individuals imparted thought processes in a limited capacity to agents of the other country. This narrowed down the interplay of ideas and restricted the scope of the agents in formal state to state interaction. In effect it meant that the intersubjective sharing of ideas and the manifestation of creative thought were limited. Information was difficult to interpret in a manner which facilitated the smooth transmission of ideas, i.e. an objective perception of political, economic and cultural phenomenon by agents of both countries was absent. Agents suffered from a 'logic behind the logic' syndrome-an agent's rational for disclosing information to the receiving party in a clear and concise way. The representational function of diplomacy, henceforth, was not a real operational concept, but rather found expression in its theoretical application. Agents were well informed on the theoretical side of representation, since most of them received thorough instruction and were diplomats par excellence, but agents lacked "on the job" experience. And

a good diplomat is known by his or her negotiation skills. How to be a respectful and exemplary representative in a foreign country is certainly what every country has in mind, when appointing agents to serve in foreign offices. After a few years of transnational interaction, the social context was changing. Agents were not conducting negotiations in their own social vacuum with limited scope and restricted identities. Representation now meant that agents had more resources available to broaden their social points of interaction with agents of the other party. Diplomats from China to South Africa certainly have changed their preconceived ideas to the old political system and the disadvantages it held for representation as a symbolic gesture of acknowledgement and assumption. The transition to a new government in South Africa and establishing of bilateral relations with new friends and allies proved to be a very effectual exercise in giving meaning to representation. Never before in the diplomatic history of South Africa did so many governments agree to appoint representatives to the country. And this all happened, because of the country's international acceptance and government's desire to establish "friendly relations", with the new democratically elected government of South Africa.. With the first free and fair elections held in 1994, the representational element of diplomacy between the two sides, changed for the best. South Africa, previously isolated by most western and Asian nations, felt the commitment to pursue bilateral relations with China. The government of President Nelson Mandela aspired to attain its rightful place in international diplomatic circles. The unfair political system during the old regime had an unconscious, cultural-diverse influence on the perceptions of arriving diplomats. They adopted one-sided views on cross-cultural interaction and perceiving values. Assimilating to immediate environmental factors, for example ergonomics, interpersonal relationships with colleagues and establishing a work culture were some of the problems experienced.

CONCLUSION

One of the key and defining aspects of the Sino-South African diplomatic relationship is the transformation from old to new diplomacy. Many aspects of old diplomacy, such as secret negotiations, bilateral meeting and exchange of ambassadors and dignitaries are still relevant and will remain so in the foreseeable future. The existence of bilateral negotiations which involves state actors and non-state actors from both countries is one of the major innovations of the new diplomacy. But this innovation is the product of tendencies that was visible long before the establishing of formal diplomatic ties. New diplomacy between China and South Africa takes place through multilateral forums, research centres, business councils and individual contacts. This means that many parties are involved and the state now does not occupy the centre stage but becomes a marginal player. However, the growing changes in this relationship do not mean that the foundations of old diplomacy are undermined. Bilateral negotiations still forms the backbone and is critical in order to reach agreements. In principle, diplomacy is interaction between two or more people, states, organizations that seek to find a common ground of interest. In relation to this relationship, it is however more than just the hypocrite collaboration between actors of both countries. It does no longer concern negotiations between the Chinese and South African elites but has a much wider dimension since the new diplomacy is the diplomacy of the people. What we can say of China and South African negotiations is that people are becoming the representatives of their countries and make choices going for or against government decisions. This is where public diplomacy is starting to play an ever increasing role and that important decisions about the future of the two countries can no longer take place through bilateral or even multilateral diplomacy. The rise of the media allows the Chinese and South African populations to witness intergovernmental and transnational events taking place. Information is power and therefore the two governments no longer have the choice but to include the general population in the decision-making process.

Leaders and officials should seek to improve the image of their country in the eyes of the opposite audience. Mutual awareness of events is the key to a better understanding of each other's politics, culture and language. If the populations of China and South Africa are aware of the intentions of their own and foreign state, the resulting diplomatic relationship will be more secure.

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