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**THE DRAGON'S FOOTPRINT: A STUDY OF HOW
REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS RESPOND TO CHINESE
INFLUENCE**

by

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March 2021

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INSTITUTIONS RESPOND TO CHINESE INFLUENCE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the African Union (AU) and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have responded to China's attempts to enhance its regional influence in Africa and Southeast Asia. I conclude that the AU is a weak institution because it lacks financial resources and management capacity to enforce desired regional norms. The thesis also finds that because of these shortcomings, China exercises a greater degree of influence in the AU. Additionally, China has set up the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to operate as a competing framework for the region. In contrast, I determined that ASEAN is a strong institution because it maintains centrality to regional issues and encourages Chinese adherence to regional norms and values. Overall, I find that China is most successful in gaining influence when its interests align with regional goals for economic prosperity and integration, such as free trade agreements. This study discovers that when China can amplify institutional disunity, it strengthens its position relative to the existing institutions' positions. This thesis demonstrates that China is least successful in exerting influence over a regional institution when that institution has robust mechanisms to enforce regional norms. In addition, when institutional members view China as a regional threat, they are more willing to band together and speak out against unwanted Chinese aggression.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment's Bank
ACFTA	ASEAN China Free Trade Area
ACIRC	African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises
ADMM+8	ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus Eight
AfCTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
AFS	African Standby Force
AIHSRN	African integrated high-speed train network
APT	ASEAN Plus Three
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Nations
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCD	Community of Common Destiny
COC	Code of Conduct
EAS	East Asian Summit
EAEC	East Asian Economic Caucus
EU	European Union
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FTA	free trade agreement
GDP	gross domestic product
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MoU	memorandum of understanding
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
OAU	Organization of African Unity
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SCS	South China Sea

SDNT	Single Draft Negotiating Text
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEANWFZ	ASEAN's Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty
TAC	Treaty of Amity and Cooperation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
U.S.	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis examines how the African Union (AU) and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have responded to China's attempts to enhance its regional influence in Africa and Southeast Asia. I chose ASEAN and the AU for this study because they are the dominant regional institutions in Southeast Asia and Africa. Furthermore, both Southeast Asia's and Africa's responses to Chinese influence may have significant implications for U.S. foreign policy if China were able to carve out a sphere of influence.

I designed this study around three potential hypotheses. The first hypothesis predicted that strong regional institutions would maintain regional normative values and partner with China to benefit the region. Signs of a strong institution included creating binding agreements or enforcing adherence to established institutional norms. The second hypothesis predicted that weak regional institutions enable China to leverage influence by taking advantage of member states' disparate interests and exploiting existing cleavages. Signs of a weak institution included deep political or social divisions, financial difficulties, competing member state priorities, and domestic instability or corruption that impedes regional coordination. The third hypothesis predicted that perceived threats to regional interests cause members of regional institutions to band together against China, regardless of whether the regional institution is weak or strong.

To test these hypotheses, I first examined existing scholarship, financial reports, regional agreements, newspaper articles, and organizational self-assessments to determine the AU and ASEAN's overall strength and the ability to uphold desired regional norms. Next, I investigated how the AU and ASEAN react to China's influence by utilizing sources that describe specific interactions between the organizations and China. For the AU, these sources focused on China's financial aid, infrastructure development, trade agreements, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). For ASEAN, these sources concentrated on similar topics such as financial aid and trade agreements but also included regional security issues and ASEAN-led multilateral forums. Then, I evaluated if these strengths or weaknesses affect the AU's or ASEAN's ability to manage Chinese

influence. To do this, I analyzed whether ASEAN and the AU are able to utilize institutional strengths to ensure Chinese-led initiatives conform to regional norms. Likewise, I evaluated if Chinese-led initiatives are able to exploit identified institutional weaknesses to pursue China's interests. Finally, I explored if member states' responses differed when they recognize China as a regional threat.

This thesis concludes that the AU is a weak institution because it lacks financial resources and management capacity to enforce desired regional norms. The thesis also finds that, because of these shortcomings, China exercises a greater degree of influence in the AU. Additionally, China has set up FOCAC to operate as a competing framework for the region. In contrast, this thesis determined that ASEAN is a strong institution because it maintains centrality to regional issues and encourages Chinese adherence to regional norms and values. Overall, this thesis finds that China is most successful in gaining influence when its interests align with regional goals for economic prosperity and integration, such as free trade agreements. The thesis also observes that, when China can amplify institutional disunity, it strengthens its position relative to the existing institutions'. The thesis determined that China is least successful in exerting influence over a regional institution when that institution has robust mechanisms to enforce regional norms. In addition, when institutional members view China as a regional threat, they are more willing to band together and speak out against unwanted Chinese aggression.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 2008, China surprised the world with a breathtaking opening ceremony during the Beijing Olympics. Furthermore, Chinese athletes won more gold medals than any other nation that year.¹ To many, this was a visible demonstration of the world's changing perspective on China and its growing influence.² Today, China stands as the biggest energy consumer, the second-largest economy, and the world's largest population.³ *Foreign Affairs* recently announced that China had “surpassed the United States in the number of diplomatic posts around the world.”⁴ Not only has China's diplomatic network surged, but so has its presence in many important international institutions. In the last two decades, China has become an active partner of existing institutions such as the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) and the African Union (AU). At breakneck speed, China has evolved from an isolated nation to one of global integration. Forty years ago, this would not have been thought possible.

One can find exhaustive research about China's economic growth and domestic success, but far less empirical research measuring China's ability to convert these resources to international influence. My central research question is, how are regional institutions responding to China's attempts to increase influence? I have chosen ASEAN and the AU for this study because they are the dominant regional institutions in Southeast Asia and Africa. Additionally, both of these regions may become strategic battlegrounds for U.S.-China competition if China is able to shape institutional norms and values

¹ “2008 Summer Olympics Sports Medals,” ESPN, accessed May 7, 2020, <http://www.espn.com/olympics/summer08/medals>.

² Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 37–60; Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009) 83–126; David L. Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2013) 1–12; Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230554931>, 88–103.

³ Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, 156.

⁴ Bonnie Bley, “The New Geography of Global Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*. April 16, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-11-27/new-geography-global-diplomacy>.

successfully.⁵ For this study, I investigate three factors to determine how these regional institutions respond to China's attempts to increase influence. The first factor will be the overall strength of the institution, which is the result of an evaluation of the structural strengths and weaknesses of ASEAN and the AU. The second factor evaluates the relationship between the institution's overall strength and its response to Chinese influence. The third factor determines, regardless of overall institutional strength, whether regional actors' perception of China as a threat increases their propensity to band together and resist Chinese influence.

A. SIGNIFICANCE

1. Why Do International Institutions Matter?

Institutions facilitate routine meetings and summits that provide a legitimate avenue for members to meet and discuss security issues, trade practices, or whatever functional activity the institution was created to address.⁶ Furthermore, international institutions are a diplomatic channel for countries to signal intentions with increased credibility as a member of that institution.⁷ Liberal institutionalists argue that institutions play a pivotal role in reducing conflict because they clarify intentions while giving other members equal opportunity to voice opposition. In other words, institutions foster cooperation and conflict resolution.⁸ Constructivists believe that participating in an institution has the potential to shift one's perspective and identity over time.⁹ This shift in identity is reinforced by the positive benefits of collaboration within institutions and members' cooperative behavior.

⁵ Nadege Rolland, *China's Vision for a New World Order*, NBR Special Report 83, (Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020), <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order/>.

⁶ Robert O. Keohane, "The Value of Institutions and the Costs of Flexibility," in *After Hegemony, Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 244.

⁷ Keohane, "The Value of Institutions and the Costs of Flexibility," 244–246.

⁸ Keohane, 247–251.

⁹ Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23 no. 1 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539267>. 175–178.

Going against the accepted norms of these institutions would not only hurt the state's reputation but could also result in economic or diplomatic isolation. We can perceive how institutions function to modulate China's behavior through recent events. For example, China has tried to use military force or coercion to intimidate neighboring countries over disputed maritime borders in the South China Sea (SCS). Yet, China agreed to the Declaration on Conduct in the SCS in 2003 as a confidence-building measure for enhancing an ASEAN-plus-China relationship.¹⁰ This agreement is a poignant example of how institutions encouraged conflict resolution and harmony because China did not want to lose legitimacy or other benefits from ASEAN. In Sub-Saharan Africa, China has also faced some institutional constraints. For example, China's commercial and military investments in Sudan have been criticized as propping-up a violent regime that committed multiple human rights violations.¹¹ In this case, China lost diplomatic credibility because it deviated from standard practices promoted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which noticeably added to Sudan's destabilization. Furthermore, China continues to face accusations of exploiting resource-rich African countries with aid programs requiring no oversight and no preconditions. Understanding China's successes and difficulties in integrating with existing institutions may also illuminate the motivations behind new institutions China has initiated or supported.

2. Understanding China's Global Impact

As a rising economic giant, China could have the capacity to challenge the established institutional norms set by the U.S. and Western countries. China's current population and share of the global economy has the potential to give it a more significant voice in existing institutions such as the IMF and the UNSC. If China surpasses the U.S.

¹⁰ Sun, Xuefeng, "The Efficiency of China's Multilateral Policies in East Asia (1997–2007)," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 515–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcq011>.

¹¹ Luke Patey, *The New Kings of Crude: China, India, and the Global Struggle for Oil in Sudan and South Sudan* (London: C. Hurst and Company Limited, 2014): 101–102, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=1920740>.

as the world's largest economy, the world would see a non-Western and a non-democratic country with the resources to revolutionize the future of world politics.¹² Examining the methods and results of China's influence campaigns in Southeast Asia (SEA) and African institutions are essential indicators for understanding China's future attempts to reshape the global institutional order.

Chinese investments have often been associated with corruption, environmental concerns, and sustainability questions. In some cases, the opaqueness of Asian Infrastructure Investment's Bank (AIIB) practices has resulted in unfavorable outcomes in some countries' economies and political institutions.¹³ For instance, as a result of Chinese financing deals, Sri Lanka has assumed substantial debt burdens, which some speculate has amounted to it losing sovereignty over national resources.¹⁴ On the other hand, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) offers unique opportunities that many countries find attractive. For example, many scholars have noted that the Asian financial crisis and the 2008 global financial crisis highlighted weaknesses in the Washington Consensus, centered on liberal political and economic norms.¹⁵

Since China fared relatively better than states more integrated in the current institutional order, recent financial crises have given Chinese diplomats an opening to positively represent the FOCAC, and China's model of economic development as a viable alternative for developing countries.¹⁶ To China, their alternative model is a win-win strategy that brings economic prosperity through increased trade and developmental aid

¹² Kevin Rudd "Are China and the U.S. Doomed to Conflict?" April 1, 2015, TED, video, 2:50 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XQ1onjXJK0>.

¹³ David Shullman, "Protect the Party: China's Growing Influence in the Developing World," *The Brookings Institution*, January 22, 2019,. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/protect-the-party-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-developing-world/>.

¹⁴ "Lessons from Sri Lanka on China's 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy,'" ISS Africa, February 21, 2018, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/lessons-from-sri-lanka-on-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy>.

¹⁵ Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive.*; G. John Ikenberry, "Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive," *Ethics & International Affairs*; New York 32, no. 1 (2018): 17–29, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0892679418000072>.

¹⁶ John Ikenberry and Darren J Lim, "China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft," *The Brookings Institution*, April 2017, 7–11, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/chinas-emerging-institutional-statecraft/>

without interference in the state's sovereignty.¹⁷ Some believe China can use this influence to "remake the world."¹⁸ This research is vital to understanding how China's growing share of the global economy manifests as an influential power in world politics.

3. Great Power Competition

Currently, prevailing global norms are fundamentally rooted in Western ideals of liberalism, democratic pluralism, and human rights.¹⁹ As China rises in power, there are growing concerns that China seeks to reshape international institutions to serve its interests. What happens if China cannot effectively wield enough influence in regional institutions to satisfy its strategic interests? If the degree of China's dissatisfaction outweighs the current benefits it receives from institutions, gaining influence through force or coercion is possibly the next logical step.²⁰ As assuredly as China has grown in economic strength, so too has its military expenditure.²¹ China's current military expenditures have gone from 1.6% in 1989 to rank the second highest in the world; the U.S. is the most.²²

¹⁷ Olayiwola Abegunrin, *China's Power in Africa: A New Global Order.*, Politics and Development of Contemporary China Ser (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan U.S., 2019): 207–208, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21994-9>.

¹⁸ Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 8.

¹⁹ Nye, *Soft Power*, 32.

²⁰ Yves-Heng Lim, "How (Dis)Satisfied Is China? A Power Transition Theory Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 92 (March 4, 2015): 280–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.932160>.

²¹ Ikenberry and Lim. "China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft," 4.

²² Sun, Xuefeng, "The Efficiency of China's Multilateral Policies in East Asia (1997–2007)," 515–41; Peter E. Robertson and Adrian Sin, "Measuring Hard Power: China's Economic Growth and Military Capacity," *Defence and Peace Economics* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 91–111, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242694.2015.1033895>.

Furthermore, many experts warn that the capability gap between China and the United States is shrinking.²³

Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has become markedly more assertive in pursuing its national interests.²⁴ The consequence of this assertiveness is instability where U.S. and Chinese strategic interests clash.²⁵ China's rise and the fear of a declining U.S. evoke many references to the "Thucydides Trap." In the past 500 years, there have been sixteen cases of a rising power displacing the current great power.²⁶ Twelve of those sixteen cases ended in catastrophic war, yet most never intended to go to war.²⁷ The danger lies not only with the United States' response to China's rise but also in whether China sees the United States' preeminence as constraining to China's economic growth and global influence.²⁸ This zero-sum competition has real ramifications for the future because it significantly contributes to the likelihood of a calamitous war. Given this considerable risk, it is vital to study all forms of China's power and influence.

²³ Benjamin Schreer, "China's Development of a More Secure Nuclear Second-Strike Capability: Implications for Chinese Behavior and U.S. Extended Deterrence," *Asia Policy* 19, no. 1 (February 4, 2015): 14–20, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2015.0010>; Oriana Skylar Mastro, "China's Military Modernization Program," *American Enterprise Institute*, September 4, 2019, 16.; Department of Defense: <https://www.defense.gov>, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*, Article, Homeland Security Digital Library (United States. Department of Defense. Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2, 2019), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=>.

²⁴ Nick Bisley, "The South China Sea as Symptom of Asia's Dynamic Security Order," in *US-China Competition and the South China Sea Disputes*, ed. Huiyun Feng and Kai He, (New York, Routledge, 2018), 103; James Landale, "China's New Brand of Tough-Talking Diplomats," *BBC News*, May 13, 2020, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52562549>.

²⁵ Bisley, "The South China Sea as Symptom of Asia's Dynamic Security Order," 103.

²⁶ Graham Allison, "Destined for War: Can China and the United States Escape Thucydides's Trap?" *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>.

²⁷ Allison, "Destined for War: Can China and the United States Escape Thucydides's Trap?"

²⁸ Bisley, "The South China Sea as Symptom of Asia's Dynamic Security Order," 103.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents existing literature on China's attempts to increase its influence in regional institutions. This literature review begins by exploring what scholars have written about China's current attempts to increase influence in institutions. This section then reviews what scholars identify as obstacles to China's attempt at exerting influence within international institutions.

1. Chinese Influence on Existing Institutions

In international relations, one of the most contested debates regarding the rise of China evaluates China's use of economic resources and ability to shift power from a Western-led order to a Sinocentric order. These debates discuss the evidence (or the lack thereof) of China converting "soft power" resources into influential outcomes within institutions. Joseph Nye describes soft power as the ability to influence behaviors to achieve a certain desired outcome.²⁹ According to Nye, soft power resources can be cultural, economic, or political. Furthermore, Nye claims that the preferences of a country can be strongly influenced by the policies a government champions in international institutions. Institutions enhance a country's soft power when they promote a country's culture and ideals as the dominant prevailing global norm.³⁰ According to Goh, influence is the study of how one can use resources to affect policy outcomes.³¹ In this respect, soft power reduces the costs associated with the use of "sticks and carrots" to achieve policy outcomes.³² Meaning, institutions can be an extension of the state's power to reinforce desired global norms to meet the state's strategic objectives.

²⁹ Nye, *Soft Power*, 5.

³⁰ Nye, 32.

³¹ Evelyn Goh, *Rising China's Influence in Developing Asia* (Oxford: University Press, 2016), 1–5.

³² Nye, *Soft Power*, 5.

Many scholars have claimed that a rising China will inevitably influence the international system.³³ However, the level of influence China can exert on institutions is intensely debated. For instance, David Shambaugh's 2007 study came to the surprising conclusion that China lacks true global power because it is not yet shaping events to accomplish desired outcomes. For example, ASEAN member states benefit from the existing regional institutions and share a common interest in maintaining the status quo. ASEAN member states have been willing to support Chinese initiatives when they are seen as reinforcing multilateral cooperation or facilitating regional objectives.³⁴

Yet, other scholars claim that China's growing economic resources have already allowed it to reward desired behaviors.³⁵ China's material and economic incentives appeal to states with financial difficulties. Furthermore, financing without preconditions or immediate political demands appeals to states with concerns about regime legitimacy. Chinese and African interests align because African leaders need strategic partnerships to bolster regime stability while China needs access to Africa's markets and natural resources.³⁶ Alden notes that China recognizes African states in the aggregate offer a significant voting bloc benefit for China. In this case, Chinese influence has been successfully converted to voting alignment on issues such as blocking UN Human Rights issues and China's bid to host the 2008 Olympics.³⁷ Bartholomew supports this scholarship in her testimony on the *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*. In this testimony, she describes

³³ John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105, no. 690, (April 2006): 160–162 <https://doi.org/10.1525/curh.2006.105.690.160>; Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*.

³⁴ Sun, "The Efficiency of China's Multilateral Policies in East Asia" (1997–2007): 515–41

³⁵ Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 42.; Lindsey Maizland, "Is China Undermining Human Rights at the United Nations?," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/china-undermining-human-rights-united-nations>; Rana Siu Inboden and Titus C. Chen, "China's Response to International Normative Pressure: The Case of Human Rights," *The International Spectator* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 45–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2012.683277>; Bisley, "The South China Sea as Symptom of Asia's Dynamic Security Order," 104–112.

³⁶ Chris Alden, "China in Africa," *Survival* 47, no. 3 (October 1, 2005): 147–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330500248086>.

³⁷ Alden, "China in Africa," 153.

how China uses its influence in Africa to isolate Taiwan and garner support for China's territorial claims in the SCS.³⁸

Another strand of scholarship contends that China can work within existing institutions to indirectly increase its influence on other Chinese-led initiatives. For instance, China's increasing participation in UN peacekeeping operations has bolstered both China's global and regional influence in the AU. The peacekeeping operations reinforce the image of China as a responsible stakeholder. As a result, African leaders mutually benefit from the peacekeeping operations and China's increased international prestige.³⁹ Additionally, Chinese-led institutions can increase China's ability to pressure existing institutions for more favorable rules. Ikenberry and Lim note that "The AIIB can potentially increase China's influence and authority via at least two distinct pathways. The first is through leverage obtained from the threat of 'exit': offering an alternative to the existing Bretton Woods system of multilateral development lending."⁴⁰ In a weak regional institution, this pressure from alternative institutions may divide member states' commitments to upholding the regional norms.

2. Institutional Constraints on Chinese Influence

Other scholars conclude that China's pursuit of favorable institutional policies continues to be shaped by the structural constraints of existing institutions.⁴¹ In Southeast Asia, ASEAN is seen as the dominant organization governing regional institutional norms and strategic responses to challenges within the region.⁴² Andrew Yeo uses the historical institutionalism framework to link legacy ties of Asian states to the U.S. hub and spokes

³⁸ Yun Sun, "Chinese Campaigns for Political Influence in Africa," before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Stimson Center*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.stimson.org/2020/chinese-campaigns-for-political-influence-in-africa/>.

³⁹ Philippe D. Rogers, "China and United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in Africa," *Naval War College Review*; *Washington* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 73–93.

⁴⁰ Ikenberry and Lim, "China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft," 11.

⁴¹ Xuefeng Sun, "The Efficiency of China's Multilateral Policies in East Asia (1997–2007)," 515–41.

⁴² Alice D. Ba, "Asia's Regional Security Institutions," *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, October 1, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199916245.013.0034>.

system. Yeo claims that states compete for influence by creating new institutions or promoting support for existing institutions that reinforce the state's interests.⁴³ Yeo concludes that despite the emergence of new institutions such as the AIIB and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the foundations of SEA's regional architecture will remain largely unchanged because of entrenched norms and institutional momentum. Instead, he claims that these new institutions have a "layering" effect driven by ASEAN multilateralism.

Joseph Nye and Wang Jisi predict that it would be counterproductive for China to openly seek to manipulate international institutions to exclude the U.S.. In SEA, this has proved to be somewhat true. However, there is evidence that China is openly challenging the U.S.-led or U.S.-supported institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa with less blowback.⁴⁴ Why is there a difference between regional responses? Injoo Sohn observes that post-colonial fragmentation has caused African states to lack a "collective bargaining policy to engage China." This structural weakness has encouraged bilateral engagement with China in addition to FOCAC multilateralism.⁴⁵ Chris Alden also notes that the decline of Western aid and development caused African leaders to seek out new sources to fill the void. This political and economic vacuum gave an opening for Chinese diplomacy. According to some scholars, FOCAC has become a model for China's multilateral diplomacy in the developing world.⁴⁶

Additionally, payment for institutional membership often requires compromise. John Ikenberry and Darren Lim argue that "attempts by China to enshrine new rules, practices, or norms will require the cooperation of other states and thus compromise from

⁴³ Andrew Yeo, *Asia's Regional Architecture: Alliances and Institutions in the Pacific Century*, Studies in Asian Security (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019): 10.

⁴⁴ Joseph S. Nye and Wang Jisi, "Hard Decisions on Soft Power: Opportunities and Difficulties for Chinese Soft Power," *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 2 (2009): 18–22.

⁴⁵ Injoo Sohn, "After Renaissance: China's Multilateral Offensive in the Developing World," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066110392083>.

⁴⁶ Sohn, "After Renaissance: China's Multilateral Offensive in the Developing World," 80–81; Yun Sun, "Chinese Campaigns for Political Influence in Africa."

Beijing.”⁴⁷ In some cases, Ikenberry and Lim observe that China has conformed to dominant international norms to gain international recognition and legitimacy. Haggard also notes that “economic integration has a restraining effect on the foreign policy behavior of states.”⁴⁸ His logic is that China’s reliance on foreign markets for economic growth constrains the amount of coercive economic pressure it can use.⁴⁹ For example, the United Nations Security Council’s threat to curtail energy supplies may have forced China to modify its non-intervention foreign policy and cooperate with the AU to support peacekeeping operations in Sudan.⁵⁰ These authors have suggested that countries can use institutions to foster regional stability and improve economic growth. I will seek to build on existing scholarship and test if the strength of ASEAN and the AU impacts how these institutions handle Chinese influence.

Perceived threats to regional interests may impact regional institutions’ response to Chinese influence campaigns. This vein of scholarship is based on the balance of power theory. The balance of power theory predicts if one state becomes too strong, weaker states will unite to balance against the threat.⁵¹ For example, when China’s policies are perceived as competing for governance or threatening strategic interests, member states may be likely to turn against China in protest.⁵² Shambaugh asserts China’s regional “muscle-flexing” and military modernization in SEA diminishes its reputation and regional influence among ASEAN member states. Many scholars have argued that the perception of China as a

⁴⁷ Ikenberry and Lim, “China’s Emerging Institutional Statecraft,” 3.

⁴⁸ Stephan Haggard, “The Liberal View of the International Relations of Asia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, 2014: 16, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199916245.013.0003>.

⁴⁹ Haggard, “The Liberal View of the International Relations of Asia,” 16.

⁵⁰ Alden, “China in Africa,” 160.

⁵¹ Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

⁵² Kai He, “Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory: Economic Interdependence and Balance of Power Strategies in Southeast Asia,” *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 489–518, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108092310>.

security threat has caused institutional balancing within the ASEAN framework.⁵³ Furthermore, most scholars agree that regional actors in SEA are reluctant to follow policies that force them to choose China over the U.S..⁵⁴ Similarly, existing scholarship on SSA has indicated that there is some regional pushback due to economic concerns on growing indebtedness to China.⁵⁵ More recently, there has been some anger from the AU and individual member states as a result of China's position on granting debt relief during the pandemic and the ill-treatment of the African diaspora in mainland China.⁵⁶ This study will seek to determine if member states rally around regional institutions, regardless of the overall institutional strength, when China is perceived as a threat to regional interests.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This section identifies three possible answers to the thesis' research question, how are regional institutions responding to China's attempts to increase influence? For this research, influence in institutions is defined as the ability "to set the agenda and make or change norms to constrain others."⁵⁷

Hypothesis 1: *Strong regional institutions are able to collectively ensure Chinese influence is handled on the region's terms.*

⁵³ Pascal Abb and Georg Strüver, "Regional Linkages and Global Policy Alignment: The Case of China-Southeast Asia Relations," *Issues and Studies; Taipei* 51, no. 4 (December 2015): 33–83; He, "Institutional Balancing and International Relations Theory."; Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia : ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (Routledge, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203939239>.

⁵⁴ Michael A. Glosny, "Heading toward a Win–Win Future? Recent Developments in China's Policy toward Southeast Asia," *Asian Security* 2, no. 1 (May 1, 2006): 24–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799850600575199>.; Sun, Xuefeng, "The Efficiency of China's Multilateral Policies in East Asia (1997–2007)."; Roy Denny, "Southeast Asia and China: Balancing or Bandwagoning?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia; Singapore* 27, no. 2 (August 2005): 305–22, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1355/CS27-2G>.; Joseph S. Nye and Wang Jisi, "Hard Decisions on Soft Power: Opportunities and Difficulties for Chinese Soft Power," *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 2 (2009): 18–22; Yun Sun, "Chinese Campaigns for Political Influence in Africa."

⁵⁵ Yun Sun, "Chinese Campaigns for Political Influence in Africa."

⁵⁶ Simon Marks, "Coronavirus Ends China's Honeymoon in Africa," *Politico*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/16/coronavirus-china-africa-191444>.

⁵⁷ Goh, *Rising China's Influence in Developing Asia*, 14.

A strong institution should exhibit the ability to enforce economic and political rules established by the institution. When faced with an initiative challenging regional norms, a strong institution should be able to effectively reinforce institutional values and prioritize regional interests over undesirable influences. A strong institution will thus constrain China's ability to go against valued regional institutional norms by collectively pushing back against objectionable Chinese initiatives.

ASEAN and the AU are the dominant institutions in their regions. Evidence shows that the ASEAN-Way has promoted inclusion and cooperation among member states.⁵⁸ ASEAN has supported the East Asian Summit (EAS), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and other multilateral initiatives within the region. The AU was established as a mechanism to help realize Africa's potential for economic growth and development while promoting unity within the region.⁵⁹ If this hypothesis is true, I expect to see the institutions shaping Chinese influence by forcing China to adhere to regional norms through multilateralism based on these trends.

Hypothesis 2: *Weak regional institutions enable China to leverage influence by taking advantage of member states' disparate interests and exploiting existing cleavages.*

Weak institutions would not have a cohesive institutional architecture and may have multiple cleavages that weaken the institution's ability to establish or enforce regional norms. A weak institution would not have a history of achieving regional goals because of these cleavages. A weak institution would not be able to provide an effective platform for driving economic or political stability within the region. Existing scholarship shows that both ASEAN and the AU member states are politically, ethnically, and economically heterogeneous. Additionally, some member states have issues with corruption, underdeveloped economies, or domestic instability that causes competing priorities within the institution. If this hypothesis is true, I expect to see China successfully exploit these

⁵⁸ Haggard, "The Liberal View of the International Relations of Asia," 2–3.

⁵⁹ Innocent EW Chirisa, Artwell Mumba, and Simbarashe O. Dirwai, "A Review of the Evolution and Trajectory of the African Union as an Instrument of Regional Integration," *SpringerPlus* 3, no. 1 (February 19, 2014): 101, <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-3-101>.

weaknesses to pursue its own strategic interests because the institution cannot overcome divisions to prioritize regional interests.

Hypothesis 3: *Perceived threats to regional interests cause members of regional institutions to band together against China, regardless of whether the regional institution is weak or strong.*

Existing scholarship demonstrates that some ASEAN member states have viewed China as a threat. Fears that China is “returning to power” instead of pursuing peaceful development may account for some obstacles to Chinese influence campaigns in ASEAN. Existing scholarship suggests these memories have led to increased security cooperation with Japan, the U.S., and other regional actors. On the other hand, Africa does not have the same tumultuous history and associated wariness of China’s rise, but it does have a history of division caused by colonialization.⁶⁰ I expect that the AU is more willing to partner with China since it has no historical bias.

D. THESIS OVERVIEW

This study seeks to evaluate how regional institutions are responding to Chinese influence. I have chosen ASEAN and the AU because of their importance to their respective regions. Furthermore, I have chosen to investigate both Southeast Asia’s and Africa’s responses to Chinese influence because these regions have significant implications for U.S. foreign policy if China were able to carve out a sphere of influence. Lastly, China’s reputation has been relatively steady in these regions, despite declining in other areas of the world.⁶¹

This thesis will examine ASEAN’s and the AU’s response to China’s influence in four chapters. Chapter I explained the research question and why it is significant for understanding China’s global impact. Additionally, Chapter I provided a review of the

⁶⁰ His Excellency Paul Kagame, “Unleashing Africa’s Inner Strengths,” January 11, 2018, *The Brookings Institution* <https://www.brookings.edu/research/unleashing-africas-inner-strengths/>.

⁶¹ Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, 10.

existing literature on this topic, explained what my main hypotheses are going forward, and how I will evaluate them. Chapter II focuses on ASEAN. This chapter examines the strengths and weaknesses of ASEAN as a regional institution. The second half of the chapter then evaluates if these strengths or weaknesses affect ASEAN's ability to manage Chinese influence. This chapter also considers if member states balance against China when ASEAN views China as a security concern, regardless of ASEAN's overall strength. Chapter III conducts the same analysis as Chapter II but focuses on the AU. Chapter IV summarizes my findings and present likely future trends.

To test whether either ASEAN or the AU constrain China's influence, I determine the strength of the institutions. For this assessment, I establish how these institutions function to determine their strengths and weaknesses. First, I examine ASEAN and the AU's history to determine how these institutions function. Specifically, I investigate the established institutional values and regional agreements. This analysis establishes a baseline for determining the overall strength of the institution. Signs of a strong institution would include the ability to create binding agreements or enforce adherence to established institutional norms. A weak institution's signs would include deep political or social divisions, financial difficulties, competing member state priorities, or domestic instability or corruption that impedes regional coordination. I then examine if the institution's overall strength affects how Chinese-led initiatives are addressed. For this analysis, I examine whether ASEAN and the AU are able to utilize institutional strengths to ensure Chinese-led initiatives conform to regional norms. I equally examine if Chinese-led initiatives are able to exploit identified institutional weaknesses to pursue China's interests. I also explore if when member states recognize China as a regional threat, they collectively balance against the threat, irrespective of overall institutional strength.

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II. AFRICAN UNION

In 2012, the African Union (AU) unveiled its new headquarters. Worth \$200 million, the AU headquarters was entirely funded, designed, and built by China.⁶² To China, the African Union Conference was a grand gesture of its support for African integration and desire to strengthen pragmatic cooperation.⁶³ For some, the conference building represents a visible and symbolic milestone in Sino-African relations. However, to others, this image was marred by controversy amid reports that China bugged the entire building and spied on African leaders over the course of five years.⁶⁴ According to the explosive report by *Le Monde*, the AU leadership kept the knowledge of the Chinese surveillance secret for over a year after its discovery.⁶⁵ This secrecy demonstrates China's growing strategic significance to African leaders, but the optics also suggests an asymmetrical relationship. China's increasing involvement in Africa has been the topic of substantial media and scholarly attention since the early 2000s; yet, specific research into its exact relationship with the AU has been decidedly absent. This chapter aims to assess the AU's reception and response to Chinese efforts within the region to address a gap in China-Africa literature on the effectiveness of Chinese influence in the AU.

Unlike other regional institutions, the AU is newer, less established, and under-resourced. The AU's difficulties in achieving its core objectives have influenced its decisions to willingly receive vast funding and resources from China for infrastructure development, economic growth, and peacekeeping efforts. China's political and financial

⁶² Yara Bayoumy, "Glitzy New AU Headquarters a Symbol of China-Africa Ties," *Reuters*, January 29, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-africa-china-20120129-idAFJOE80S00K20120129>.

⁶³ "The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2013-2015)," accessed September 5, 2020, http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t954620.htm.

⁶⁴ Bayoumy, "Glitzy New AU Headquarters a Symbol of China-Africa Ties."; Bukola Adebayo and Schwarz, "China Denies Bugging African Union Headquarters in Ethiopia," *CNN*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/30/africa/china-denies-spying-au-building-intl/index.html>.

⁶⁵ Shannon Tiezzi, "If China Bugged the AU Headquarters, What African Countries Should Be Worried?," January 31, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/if-china-bugged-the-au-headquarters-what-african-countries-should-be-worried/>.

support for the AU's flagship projects allows the AU to accomplish key goals that help elevate its image, but simultaneously drives perceptions that the AU is losing control over its agenda through growing dependence on China. The existence of FOCAC (the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation), as a competing and more established regional institution, undermines the AU's ability to act as the preeminent recognized voice for the region. China's formidable resources entice AU member states to pursue bilateral arrangements, which limits the AU's ability to act as the representative voice of a unified Africa. Furthermore, the AU's participation in FOCAC, as a member, associates it with decisions that may compromise its organizational desires for democratic principles in the region.

A. AFRICAN UNION AND INSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESSES

The AU's shortcomings have influenced its decisions to seek resources and funding from China to maintain relevance and legitimacy as a regional institution. The AU's core objectives are to promote inclusive, sustainable development, economic prosperity, and mobilize continental integration based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism driven by its own citizens.⁶⁶ The AU was formally established as the premier Pan-African institution on 9 July 2002.⁶⁷ Currently, the AU consists of representatives from all countries on the continent for a total of 55 African member states. Structurally, the AU is divided into five geographic regions: Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Northern Africa, Southern African, and Western Africa. The AU replaced the former regional institution, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), during a surge of Pan-African optimism for the future development of a unified Africa. Created as a response to globalization and the changing post-Cold War environment, the AU was intended to strengthen economic unity between African countries and promote stability, peace, and security throughout the continent.⁶⁸ Over the last two

⁶⁶ Osy Ezechukwunyere Nwebo, "The African Union Agenda 2063 and the Imperative of Democratic Governance," *Law and Development Review; Berlin* 11, no. 2 (2018): 259–76, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1515/ldr-2018-0019>.

⁶⁷ John Akokpari, Angela Ndinga-Muvumba, and Tim Murithi, *African Union and Its Institutions* (Melville, United States: Jacana Media, 2009): 99, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=915979>.

⁶⁸ Samuel M. Makinda, F. Wafula Okumu, and F. Wafula Okumu, *The African Union : Challenges of Globalization, Security, and Governance* (Routledge, 2007): 28, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203940112>.

decades, the AU has sought to establish regional norms for economic integration, good governance, social justice, good health, democratic principles, poverty reduction, gender equality, and solidarity in its approach to African security and developmental challenges.⁶⁹

Previously, the OAU's efforts to promote solidarity and prosperity among African member states were hampered by member states' desires to safeguard state sovereignty with policies of non-interference, which led to inaction by the organization.⁷⁰ In comparison, the AU was given greater powers of intervention in member state's affairs and stronger administrative mechanisms, but some measures remain ineffective or under-resourced.⁷¹ For example, although the Constitutive Act of the AU (the primary framework for the AU's regional norms and rules) reaffirms non-intervention and domestic sovereignty principles from member states, it does not prevent the AU as an organization from intervention when "concerned with peace, security, and stability in the region."⁷² However, intervention requires a consensus decision by AU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which increases the risk of inaction because some member states fear organizational over-reach or disagree on acceptable conditions for intervention.⁷³ Additionally, the Constitutive Act gives the AU power to take action against unconstitutional changes of governments in African member states by "enabling it to prohibit essentially illegitimate governments from participating in further [AU] activities," yet it has rarely been exercised.⁷⁴ Many scholars have noted that the AU continues to struggle to promote unity and solidarity with African member states because it lacks the manpower and resources to

⁶⁹ Mark Paterson and Abebajo Adekeye, "The African Union at Ten: Aspirations and Reality," CCR Policy Brief (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2012), 1–6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05127>.

⁷⁰ Corinne A. A. Packer and Donald Rukare, "The New African Union and Its Constitutive Act," *The American Journal of International Law* 96, no. 2 (2002): 368, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2693932>.

⁷¹ Paterson and Adekeye, "The African Union at Ten," 1.

⁷² Packer and Rukare, "The New African Union and Its Constitutive Act." 372.

⁷³ Packer and Rukare. 373–374; Dawn Nagar and Fritz Nganje, "The African Union: Regional and Global Challenges" (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2016): 13, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05128>.

⁷⁴ Packer and Rukare, "The New African Union and Its Constitutive Act," 374.

enforce rules and national sovereignty remains a divisive issue.⁷⁵

This entrenched norm of non-interference, formed initially due to the collective memory of colonizers' historical exploitation, has become an institutionalized vehicle for African governments to pursue regime security over improving welfare and security for their citizens.⁷⁶ This is a major source of friction within the AU because member states remain divided on when, if ever, interference is justified. Consequently, the lack of a unified African voice leaves room for corruption, political instability, and predatory practices by both domestic and foreign actors.⁷⁷ Additionally, these deficiencies leave Africa without a collective voice on the global stage. In an effort to continue to address these shortcomings, the AU voted to transform a formerly ineffectual arm of the AU, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The reforms strengthened the NEPAD's capacity to improve the impact and efficiency of the AU's initiatives of democracy and political governance, regional integration, and human rights.⁷⁸ Now, the NEPAD spearheads the resource mobilization and implementation of the 15 flagship projects identified in the AU's Agenda 2063.

While the Constitutive Act of the AU and the NEPAD lay out ambitious frameworks for integration and growth on the African continent, neither explicitly defines a means for financing the AU.⁷⁹ African member states and foreign donors are the two

⁷⁵ Ilaria Carrozza, *China's African Union Diplomacy: Challenges and Prospects for the Future*, London School of Economics and Political Science Policy Brief, no 2 (2018): 2–6, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334459613_China's_African_Union_diplomacy_challenges_and_prospects_for_the_future; Aprimo; Adeniyi S Basiru and Olusesan A Osunkoya, "Between the Rock and a Hard Place: The Africa Union and Democracy Promotion in Africa" 16, no. 1 (2020): 20; André Mbata Mangu, "The African Union and the Promotion of Democracy and Good Political Governance under the African Peer-Review Mechanism: 10 Years On," *Africa Review* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 59–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09744053.2014.883757>.; Packer and Rukare, "The New African Union and Its Constitutive Act.," Nagar and Nganie, "The African Union: Regional and Global Challenges," 13.

⁷⁶ Carrozza, *China's African Union Diplomacy*, 2–6.

⁷⁷ James McGann, *2020 Africa Think Tank Summit*, TTCSP Global and Regional Think Tank Summit Reports, University of Pennsylvania, April 2020, https://repository.upenn.edu/ttcsp_summitreports/46.

⁷⁸ "Who We Are," African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, accessed September 8, 2020, https://www.nepad.org/who-we-are#about_us.

⁷⁹ Packer and Rukare, "The New African Union and Its Constitutive Act," 377.

main sources of funding for the AU.⁸⁰ Yet, lack of enforcement, competing member state interests, and overlapping regional organizations divide member state contributions.⁸¹ As a result, a majority of member states fail to pay their annual dues.⁸² Consequently, external donors disproportionately contribute to the AU's budget.⁸³ According to the 2015 AU financial statement, 61.7% of the financing came from outside donors.⁸⁴ Notably, China has been identified as the third top contributor to the overall AUC budget, following the EU and World Bank.⁸⁵ Because of the large number of outside donors, the AU's financial woes have led to questions of institutional effectiveness and autonomy.⁸⁶ In 2017, Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda and later Chair of the AU, proposed a series of reforms to reduce the AU's dependency on outside donors and realign institutional priorities.⁸⁷ According to the AU Assembly report, the proposed reforms recommended a legally binding mechanism for ensuring member states implement reforms with fines for delinquents. As of 2019, donors still contributed 59% of the AU's total budget. The

⁸⁰ Kesa Pharatlhathe and Jan Vanheukelom, *Financing the African Union on Mindsets and Money*, Discussion Paper No. 240, Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organizations in Africa (Political Economy Dynamics of Regional Organisations in Africa, February 2019), <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/DP240-Financing-the-African-Union-on-mindsets-and-money.pdf>.

⁸¹ David Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 48–55, 121–127.

⁸² Carrozza, *China's African Union Diplomacy*, 4.

⁸³ Carrozza, 4.

⁸⁴ African Union. *Financial Reports*, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://au.int/en/financial-reports>.

⁸⁵ Charles Ukeje and Yonas Tariku, "Beyond Symbolism: China and the African Union in African Peace and Security," in *China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Cooperation on the Continent*, ed. Chris Alden et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018): 308, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52893-9_15.

⁸⁶ Carrozza, *China's African Union Diplomacy*, 2–7.

⁸⁷ African Union. *AU Reform*, accessed August 23, 2020, <https://au.int/en/au-reform>.; Mariama Sow, "Figure of the Week: The African Union Introduces a New Funding Structure," *Brookings*, July 27, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/07/27/figure-of-the-week-the-african-union-introduces-a-new-funding-structure/>.2017 head

percentage has decreased slightly but remains a significant contribution to the AU's budget.⁸⁸

The AU's financial woes continue to demonstrate the institution's inability to enforce adherence to financial commitments. For example, the African Union Peace Fund has continually fallen short of budgetary goals due to low member state contribution.⁸⁹ This is significant because the African Union's Peace Fund was intended to be the principal tool for funding all peace and security operations on the continent, which are foundational to the AU's core objectives. More recently, talks between the UN Security Council and AU for using UN financing for the AU peace support operations stalled, demonstrating another instance of the AU's financial troubles.⁹⁰ As a result of failed negotiations and fewer member state contributions, the AU announced a delay in funding security operations from a new fund until 2023.⁹¹ These are significant challenges because the lack of financial resources impacts the AU's credibility as a genuine actor in Africa. Moreover, failed negotiations highlight the AU's inability to establish or execute its agenda because it continues to heavily rely on external funding.⁹² Many AU initiatives, such as the Peace Fund, have been delayed or floundered because of the lack of resources for implementation.⁹³

The unreliability of AU member state contributions and competing state interests has led to staffing challenges and wider management issues that affect the AU's ability to

⁸⁸ Zeenat Hansrod, "African Union Wants to Reduce Dependency on Foreign Donors," *RFI*, November 11, 2018. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20181119-african-union-wants-reduce-dependency-foreign-donors>.

⁸⁹ Dawn Nagar and Fritz Nganje, "The AU's Peace and Security Architecture," *The African Union: (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2016): 24*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05178.9>.

⁹⁰ "The Price of Peace: Securing UN Financing for AU Peace Operations," *Crisis Group*, January 31, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/286-price-peace-securing-un-financing-au-peace-operations>.

⁹¹ "African Union Delays Plan to Start Using Fund for Security Operations," *Reuters*, February 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africanunion-summit-idUSKBN2050D9>.

⁹² Dawn Nagar and Fritz Nganje, "The AU's Peace and Security Architecture," *The African Union: (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2016): 22–25*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05178.9>.

⁹³ Olatunbosun Adeniyi et al., "African Union and the Challenges of Development," *Journal of African Union Studies* 5, no. 2/3 (2016): 67–89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26893815>.

enforce adherence to desired regional norms. Additionally, varying degrees of economic development and diversity among AU member states make it difficult for the AU to reach a consensus on a consolidated approach for the continent. Without resources, the AU lacks the necessary “sticks and carrots” that could be leveraged to resolve internal conflicts.⁹⁴ Furthermore, high levels of donor support have led to mission creep, weakening African ownership for critical AU objectives.⁹⁵ Until the AU can finance itself, it cannot reliably plan for long-term budgets, nor can it achieve its goal for African driven development if its agenda is influenced by outside donors.⁹⁶ Subsequently, AU member states are increasingly looking to secure outwardly financed infrastructure projects and capacity training programs to spur individual economic growth.⁹⁷

B. CHINA AND THE AU: A CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS

China’s political and financial support for the AU’s flagship projects allows the AU to accomplish key goals that can help elevate its image, but simultaneously drives perceptions that the AU is losing control over its agenda through growing dependence on China. At the 2011 AU Peace and Security Council, African leaders recognized that the lack of significant improvements in economic development and political governance had caused persistent crises and conflicts on the continent.⁹⁸ Lack of capacity and resources remain obstacles for the AU’s ambitions regarding these challenges. These challenges

⁹⁴ Paul D Williams, “The African Union’s Conflict Management Capabilities,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 2011, 32.

⁹⁵ “Main Successes of the AU in Peace and Security, Challenges and Mitigation Measures in Place,” African Union, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20170127/main-successes-au-peace-and-security-challenges-and-mitigation-measures-place>.

⁹⁶ Acha Leke, “Reforming the African Union: The Vital Challenge of Implementation,” *Brookings Institute*, May 3, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2017/05/03/reforming-the-african-union-the-vital-challenge-of-implementation/>.

⁹⁷ Hannah Marais and Jean-Pierre Labuschagne, “China’s Role in African Infrastructure and Capital Projects,” *Deloitte Insights*, March 22, 2019, <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/china-investment-africa-infrastructure-development.html>.

⁹⁸ “Declaration of the Ministerial Meeting of the Peace and Security Council on the State of Peace and Security in Africa,” African Union, April 26, 2011, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pressreleases/24300-pr-press_statement_275_th_meeting_psc_ministerial_debate_26_april_2011_2_2_.pdf.

affect how China operates within AU member states. Currently, there are approximately one million Chinese citizens living and working in Africa.⁹⁹ Since China's interests have exponentially grown on the continent, protecting Chinese nationals and commercial assets has become a higher priority. Incidents like the evacuations of Chinese citizens in South Sudan, Libya, and Yemen, highlight the growing interconnectedness for Chinese companies and the need for peace and security in Africa.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, China and the AU's interests for a safe, stable, and prosperous African continent intersect.

As a permanent member of the UN security council and the second-largest donor contributor to the peacekeeping budget, China has primarily worked with the AU Peace and Security Council for peacekeeping efforts.¹⁰¹ Presently, China provides more peacekeeping personnel to Africa than any other permanent member of the UNSC.¹⁰² Although fewer overall troops than top contributors, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, the significant contribution is not lost on the AU and has been welcomed by AU member states.¹⁰³ Additionally, China routinely insists that the UNSC should engage with the AU's peace and security efforts, reiterating support for "Solving African Problems by Africans."¹⁰⁴ For example, experts note China's constructive role in changing the Sudanese government's initial rejection of UN-AU peacekeeping missions to consent for a deployment of UN-AU peacekeeping troops in Darfur and acceptance of the

⁹⁹ Yoon Park, "One Million Chinese in Africa," SAIS Perspectives, May 12, 2016, <http://www.saisperspectives.com/2016issue/2016/5/12/n947s9csa0ik6kmkm0bzb0hy584sfo>.

¹⁰⁰ Nagar and Nganje, "The AU's Peace and Security Architecture," 22.

¹⁰¹ Carrozza, *China's African Union Diplomacy*, 2.

¹⁰² Richard Gowan, "China's Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping," *Brookings*, September 14, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>.

¹⁰³ Michael Kovrig, "China Expands Its Peace and Security Footprint in Africa," International Crisis Group, October 24, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/china/china-expands-its-peace-and-security-footprint-africa>.

¹⁰⁴ Ian Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)* (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011): 88, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=668217>.

second phase of the Annan Plan.¹⁰⁵ These direct engagements with the AU for attaining peace and security on the continent has elevated its status as a regional organization.¹⁰⁶ For China, raising the AU's profile at forums such as the UNSC is a win-win strategy because it elevates its image as a representative for developing countries while giving a greater voice to those that share similar opinions to China on major international topics such as human rights and sovereignty issues.¹⁰⁷

In the last decade, China has pledged to contribute logistically and financially to the AU's peace and security programs almost every year. For example, China pledged \$100 million to strengthen the AU's Peace and Security capacity for initiatives like the African Standby Force (ASF) and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) in 2015.¹⁰⁸ In 2016, China donated \$1.2 million to peacekeeping efforts in Somalia through the AU Mission in Somalia.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, at the highly publicized 2018 FOCAC, President Xi announced a new China-Africa Peace and Security Fund, including 50 security assistance programs connected with the BRI.¹¹⁰ In return, over a dozen African countries, including Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, have reciprocated political support for China at the UN Human Rights Council on recent issues regarding China's Xinjiang policies.¹¹¹ Since the AU's Peace and Security programs have historically dealt with

¹⁰⁵ Axel Harneit-Sievers, Stephen Marks, and Sanusha Naidu, *Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Capetown: Pambazuka Press, Pambazuka, 2010): 187–188.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, 25–34.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, 25–34.

¹⁰⁸ Nagar and Nganje, "The AU's Peace and Security Architecture," 1–5.

¹⁰⁹ Abdur Shaban, "China Donates \$1.2m to AU Mission in Somalia," *Africanews*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.africanews.com/2016/11/28/china-donates-12m-to-au-mission-in-somalia/>.

¹¹⁰ Lina Benabdallah and Winslow Robertson, "Xi Jinping Pledged \$60 Billion for Africa. Where Will the Money Go?," *Washington Post*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/17/xi-jinping-pledged-60-billion-for-africa-where-will-the-money-go/>.

¹¹¹ Catherine Putz, "Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?," *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/>; Abdi Latif Dahir, "Why These African Countries Are Defending China's Mass Detention of Muslims," *Quartz Africa*, July 15, 2019, <https://qz.com/africa/1667141/african-leaders-defend-china-arrests-of-uyghur-muslims-in-xinjiang/>.

funding and capacity issues, China's engagement is a boon for accomplishing regional goals for stability. On the other hand, member state support for China's Xinjiang policies contradicts the AU's commitment to improving and protecting human rights.

As Africa's largest trading partner, China has also positioned itself as a strategic partner for AU member states and the AU's flagship economic initiatives.¹¹² According to Devonshire-Ellis, China used its economic and diplomatic clout to galvanize support for regional economic integration as a major broker in actualizing the AU's landmark African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) agreement.¹¹³ The AfCTA was launched at the 2019 Extraordinary Summit of the African Union as one of the flagship projects identified by the AU's Agenda 2063 and has since reached the operational phase of implementation.¹¹⁴ Surpassing the size of the WTO, the AfCTA is the world's largest free trade agreement and is projected to increase trade among African countries from 15 percent to approximately 52 percent and lift 68 million people out of poverty.¹¹⁵ Additionally, the AfCTA will boost Africa's capacity for manufacturing cheap goods, but in the short-term, some countries will likely suffer from the impact of increased competition with Chinese goods and loss of tariff revenue by removing tariff barriers.¹¹⁶ Despite potential drawbacks, 30 countries have ratified the AfCTA instruments and all AU member states, except Eritrea, have signed the agreement.¹¹⁷ This is a prime example of China's ability to

¹¹² Eric Heginbotham and Joshua Eisenman, eds., *China Steps Out*, 1 edition (New York ; London: Routledge, 2018):134.

¹¹³ Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "China Set to Cash in on New African Free Trade Agreement," China Briefing, May 27, 2019, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-set-cash-new-african-free-trade-agreement/>.

¹¹⁴ "Operational Phase Of The African Continental Free Trade Area Launched," African Union, accessed September 5, 2020, <https://au.int/en/articles/operational-phase-african-continental-free-trade-area-launched>.

¹¹⁵ Devonshire-Ellis, "China Set to Cash in on New African Free Trade Agreement."; Charles Okeke, "AfCFTA an Opportunity to Expand China-Africa Ties - Global Times," *Global Times*, September 11, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1164317.shtml>.; "The African Continental Free Trade Area," World Bank, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication/the-african-continental-free-trade-area>.

¹¹⁶ Devonshire-Ellis, "China Set to Cash in on New African Free Trade Agreement."

¹¹⁷ "Operational Phase Of The African Continental Free Trade Area Launched," African Union.

capitalize on shared preferences among AU member states for economic growth by promoting regional integration, which deepens economic interdependence. These actions are concrete reminders of how AU member states can mutually benefit from China's increased influence in the region.

The AU's Agenda 2063 flagship projects highlight the need for integrated infrastructure development to promote economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa. Recent findings by the African Development Bank (AfDB) estimated there is an infrastructure financing requirement gap of \$52-\$92 billion per year. These requirements were derived from the minimum infrastructure needs for countries to replace aging infrastructure and sustain economic, population, and income growth on the continent.¹¹⁸ Since poor infrastructure remains a hindrance for both African economies and exports to China, this is an area China has focused significant resources. The 2006 and the 2015 Africa Policy papers both emphasize infrastructure development as one of the key areas for economic collaboration as a way to help Africa overcome obstacles constraining development.¹¹⁹ Since 2005, the total value of Chinese infrastructure investments in Africa has reached almost \$2 trillion.¹²⁰ Markedly, China has pledged support for several highly publicized infrastructure projects identified by the AU's 2063 Agenda. For example, at the 2015 FOCAC, the AU signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China for the development of an African integrated high-speed train network (AIHSRN) as a flagship program in the Agenda 2063. Significantly, the project will connect the 16 landlocked African states to neighboring countries and major seaports.¹²¹ Highly complementary to

¹¹⁸ "Africa's Infrastructure Financing Reaches an All-Time High in 2018, Surpassing \$100 Billion," *African Development Bank Group*, November 12, 2019, <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/africas-infrastructure-financing-reaches-all-time-high-2018-surpassing-100-billion-ica-32728>.

¹¹⁹ Heginbotham and Eisenman, *China Steps Out*, 137–138, 365–366; Chris Alden and Cristina Alves, "History & Identity in the Construction of China's Africa Policy," *Review of African Political Economy* 35, no. 115 (March 1, 2008): 43–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056240802011436>.

¹²⁰ Elliot Smith, "The US-China Trade Rivalry Is Underway in Africa, and Washington Is Playing Catch-Up," *CNBC*, October 9, 2019, sec. Trade, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/09/the-us-china-trade-rivalry-is-underway-in-africa.html>.

¹²¹ Mwanja Ng'amjo, "Update on the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network by AUDA-NEPAD," African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, July 31, 2020, <https://nepad.org/content/update-african-integrated-high-speed-railway-network-auda-nepad>.

the AfCTA, the AIHSRN project is projected to boost African integration, economic growth, and intra-regional trade. Although yet to be built, the rail project represents a tangible commitment of Chinese support for African economic and political development.¹²²

China's influence in Africa through critical infrastructure development continues to increase. According to Deloitte, China is Africa's largest financier of infrastructure, constructing one out of three projects and financing one out of five on the continent.¹²³ The number of flagship programs and infrastructure projects funded by China demonstrates the AU's growing dependence on China to achieve regional goals. They also highlight a perception that China's growing presence enables it to influence the AU's agenda. China's successful push for regional integration backed by tangible infrastructure development solidifies its political and economic influence in the AU. These actions enhance China's credibility within the AU and the continent because they help validate China's claims for peaceful development through win-win cooperation, countering negative perceptions.¹²⁴ Yet, behind the discourse of equality, the China-Africa relationship is characterized by asymmetry and opacity. Furthermore, critical issues hindering the AU's engagement with China are the lack of a unified "China policy" and growing dependence on Chinese aid.¹²⁵

C. A COMPETING REGIONAL FRAMEWORK: FOCAC

Prior to China's engagement with the AU, China established its own forum for Sino-African relations: the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). FOCAC serves as the official forum where African and Chinese leaders pursue economic and cultural diplomacy. FOCAC was founded out of China's desire to strengthen "South-South" cooperation and solidarity with African countries.¹²⁶ Currently, all AU member states

¹²² Ng'amjo, "Update on the African Integrated High-Speed Railway Network by AUDA-NEPAD."

¹²³ Marais and Labuschagne, "China's Role in African Infrastructure and Capital Projects."

¹²⁴ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, 56.

¹²⁵ Taylor, 95.

¹²⁶ Taylor, 35.

except Eswatini, which is the only African state to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan, are members of FOCAC.¹²⁷ Since its inception in 2000, FOCAC meetings have taken place every three years, alternating between China and African countries.¹²⁸ The predictability of FOCAC has helped institutionalize relations between African countries and China.¹²⁹ After each summit, a comprehensive action plan to include China's pledges for export credits, grants, and new loans, is jointly announced for the following three years. This has enticed AU member states to pursue bilateral arrangements, which limits the AU's ability to act as the representative voice of a unified Africa.

China's symbolic effort to treat all African countries, regardless of size or GDP, with respect as diplomatic equals despite obvious power disparities is likely another reason for extensive AU member state participation.¹³⁰ The FOCAC framework also allows China to accord all Africa leaders, big and small, with highly publicized equal diplomatic status as a symbolic gesture. In return, China requires that participating countries held the "one-China policy" as a precondition to establishing diplomatic relationships.¹³¹ The FOCAC platform enables China to promote its vision of a "community with a shared future for mankind" and its position as a powerful representative of the developing world.¹³² FOCAC appeals to African leaders using South-South solidarity and anti-colonial affinities as a foundation for "working towards the establishment of a new international political and

¹²⁷ Ben Blanchard, "China Wins Back Burkina Faso, Urges Taiwan's Last African Ally to Follow," *Reuters*, May 26, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-burkina-idUSKCN1IR09W>; Shinn, *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, 6.

¹²⁸ David Shinn, *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, Hearing before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 8, 2020, 5, <https://www.uscc.gov/hearings/chinas-strategic-aims-africa>.

¹²⁹ Abegunrin, *China's Power in Africa*, 9–25.

¹³⁰ Kenneth Kalu, "'Respect' and 'Agency' as Driving Forces for China–Africa Relations," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, August 10, 2020, 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00178-z>.

¹³¹ Abhiruchi Ojha, "China and Africa: Building Peace and Security Cooperation on the Continent," *Africa Review* 11, no. 2 (July 3, 2019): 208–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09744053.2019.1634974>.

¹³² "Beijing Declaration-Toward an Even Stronger China-Africa Community with a Shared Future," accessed March 15, 2020, https://focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/hyqk_1/t1594324.htm.

economic order in the 21st century.”¹³³ FOCAC offers a unique opportunity for politically isolated African countries due to China’s diplomatic approach that stresses respect for each other’s sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs.¹³⁴

One indicator of the level of importance AU member states attach to the FOCAC summits can be seen by the near-universal attendance by African leaders. At the most recent FOCAC, the African Union Commission (AUC) and 51 out of 55 African leaders attended.¹³⁵ Remarkably, 48 of the African leaders were heads of state. In comparison, the 2020 UK-Africa summit was only attended by 15 being heads of state and the 2018 UN General Assembly less than half that of FOCAC.¹³⁶ Broadcasting these government-to-government relations is also vitally important to China’s ability to shape international perceptions. The financial enticements given through loans and pledges at FOCAC can largely be construed as a crucial motivator for AU member state participation.¹³⁷

The AU participates as a member in FOCAC, graduating from observer status to a full member in 2011. At that point, the AU agreed to strengthen the dialog and cooperation with China within the FOCAC framework. The AU’s addition to FOCAC also signifies an opportunity for African states to potentially put forth a unified voice for a more assertive role in the FOCAC agenda, trade negotiations, infrastructure and developmental investment deals, and environmental concerns. However, although the AU is now a full member of FOCAC, its status is only equal to individual AU member states. Therefore, FOCAC remains a Chinese initiative where the AU holds little influence over the agenda, budget, and level of engagement.

¹³³ Michal Meidan, “China’s Africa Policy: Business Now, Politics Later,” *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 4 (2006): 69–93.

¹³⁴ Folashadé Soulé, “‘Africa+1’ Summit Diplomacy and the ‘New Scramble’ Narrative: Recentring African Agency,” *African Affairs*, 12, accessed August 17, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adaa015>; Taylor, 35.

¹³⁵ Soulé, Folashadé Soulé, “‘Africa+1’ Summit Diplomacy and the ‘New Scramble’ Narrative: Recentring African Agency,” 4.

¹³⁶ Hannah Ryder, “What the UK Can Learn from China about Running an Africa Summit,” *Quartz Africa*, January 19, 2020, <https://qz.com/africa/1787779/what-the-uk-africa-summit-can-learn-from-china/>.

¹³⁷ Sun, *China’s Strategic Aims in Africa*, 2.

While FOCAC offers a clear plan for Chinese engagement in Africa, the AU has no official stance on China-African relations.¹³⁸ Furthermore, China has continued to stress financial and diplomatic coordination between China and both the AU and individual member states within the FOCAC framework. For instance, most of the MoUs and financial support for the AU have been negotiated and implemented within the FOCAC framework where China has a distinct advantage. This insistence limits the AU's effectiveness because FOCAC remains a Chinese initiative.¹³⁹ Moreover, the AU's dependence on Chinese financial generosity to accomplish flagship programs is becoming increasingly evident. As a result, African leaders continue to negotiate bilateral agreements most beneficial to their own countries at FOCAC, sidelining the AU as a mere participant in some cases. Given the enormous resource disparity between China and individual AU member states, African leaders are often left with little negotiating power. Critics argue that China reinforces African dependency rather than mutual cooperation.¹⁴⁰

1. China's Bilateral Agreements Undermine the AU's Goals for Peace and Security

While FOCAC exhibits many multilateral characteristics, aid and investment agreements continue to be rooted in bilateral arrangements between individual AU member states and China.¹⁴¹ A vast percentage of African infrastructure projects are financed by Chinese loans or built by Chinese companies.¹⁴² However, not all of these China's bilateral infrastructure projects fulfill the AU's regional objectives. In Ethiopia, Chinese companies primarily funded and built a \$365 million dam on the Tekeze River and 70 percent of Ethiopia's roads have been built by Chinese companies.¹⁴³ Additionally, Ethiopia awarded

¹³⁸ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, 95.

¹³⁹ Shinn, *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, 93.

¹⁴¹ Taylor, 56, 66–98.

¹⁴² Marais and Labuschagne, "China's Role in African Infrastructure and Capital Projects."

¹⁴³ David H. Shinn, "Ethiopia and China: Two Former Empires Connect in the 20th Century," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 8, no. 1 & 2 (2014): 153, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26554822>.

the China Road and Bridge Corporation a \$67 million contract to expand the Addis Ababa airport in 2010 and the China Railway Group a \$1.1 billion contract for the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway project in 2011.¹⁴⁴ China's infrastructure projects have faced criticism from environmental experts and added to Ethiopia's debt burden.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, some of China's infrastructure projects have destabilized the region, undermining the AU's goal for peace and stability. For example, although China is not the primary financier of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), China has provided significant financing for the turbines and electrical equipment for the hydroelectric plants through bilateral relations developed within the FOCAC framework.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, Chinese companies won the contract to build the power transmission lines connecting the GERD to Ethiopia's power grid infrastructure, which is vital to the GERD's operation.¹⁴⁷ Ethiopia attaches great national importance to the GERD because it has the potential to supercharge Ethiopia's economy, where 65 percent of the country is not currently connected to electricity.¹⁴⁸ Experts predict the GERD will more than double Ethiopia's energy output, making it a net energy exporter.¹⁴⁹ Since China is Ethiopia's largest trading partner, increased energy exports is likely a key motivator for China's involvement.¹⁵⁰ Yet, the GERD has created huge diplomatic tensions between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt.

China's financial and material support for the construction of the GERD gives Ethiopia considerable control over the flow of the Nile river, amplifying regional tensions

¹⁴⁴ Shinn, 153–154.

¹⁴⁵ Shinn, 153–154.

¹⁴⁶ John Mukum Mbaku, "The Controversy over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam," *Brookings Institute*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/08/05/the-controversy-over-the-grand-ethiopian-renaissance-dam/>.

¹⁴⁷ Shinn, "Ethiopia and China," 153.

¹⁴⁸ "Nile Dam Dispute: Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan Agree to Resume Talks," July 23, 2020, *BBC News*, video, 6:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GzxtpHSFI>.; "Why Can't Egypt and Ethiopia End the Nile Dam Dispute?" July 16, 2020, *DW News*, video, 10:10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tEtKqWRlt0&feature=youtu.be>.

¹⁴⁹ DW News, "Why Can't Egypt and Ethiopia End the Nile Dam Dispute?"

¹⁵⁰ Shinn, "Ethiopia and China," 156.

since 90 percent of Egypt's population relies on the Nile for water.¹⁵¹ Both Egypt and Sudan have emphasized the need for a binding agreement to regulate the filling and operation of the GERD. Ethiopia has rejected the need for a binding agreement, leading to fear that Ethiopia will leave too much water in the reservoir during droughts causing vulnerable downstream countries harm. Conspicuously, China has distanced itself from the negotiations despite the fact that Chinese companies have been heavily involved in the construction of the dam. For example, in March 2020, the China Gezhouba Group and Voith Hydro Shanghai were awarded \$40.1 million and \$113 million in contracts to accelerate the pace of the dam construction despite increasing tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt.¹⁵² At the same time, the Egyptian Foreign Minister called unilateral action taken by Ethiopia to fill the dam “a threat of potentially existential proportions.”¹⁵³ Negotiations have gone on for years, but recent mediation led by the AU and the U.S. ended with both Ethiopia and Egypt threatening military action over the GERD.¹⁵⁴ China's involvement is indirectly fueling this regional conflict with little sign that it will assist the AU calm tensions.

2. Shaping a Future Generation of Leaders

FOCAC goes beyond economic and security agreements to include training programs intended to shape political norms in the region and global perceptions on Chinese policies. Education is a key pillar of bilateral engagements at the FOCAC summit because it also enables China to directly engage with heads of state, local elites, and other government officials on a wide range of capacity building programs. Since the 2006 FOCAC summit, China has announced scholarship targets to aid African students studying

¹⁵¹ DW News, “Why Can't Egypt and Ethiopia End the Nile Dam Dispute?”

¹⁵² “Ethiopia Agrees with Chinese Firms to Accelerate GERD Construction,” *Daily News Egypt*, March 3, 2019, <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2019/03/03/ethiopia-agrees-with-chinese-firms-to-accelerate-gerd-construction/>.

¹⁵³ Amjad Tadros, “Ethiopia Filling Mega-Dam That Egypt Calls an ‘Existential’ Threat,” *CBS News*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ethiopia-nile-dam-filling-reservoir-egypt-calls-existential-threat-in-3-way-dispute-sudan/>.

¹⁵⁴ DW News, “Why Can't Egypt and Ethiopia End the Nile Dam Dispute?”

in China, pledging financial and political support. In 2014, China passed the UK and the U.S. as a top destination for African students.¹⁵⁵ At the most recent FOCAC summit in 2018, China pledged to provide Africa with a “tailor-made program to train 1,000 high-caliber Africans,” 50,000 government-funded scholarships, and 50,000 training opportunities for skills development workshops.¹⁵⁶ In past FOCAC summits, China has also pledged to boost educational and vocational scholarships through increased funding towards teachers and Chinese language programs.¹⁵⁷ For example, workshops on political capacity teach China’s model of government to officials, including topics on how to build a party, manage public opinion, and alleviate poverty.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, China has also sought to shape Africa’s media practices through educational exchanges. For instance, training workshops given to media professionals include topics on media management on China’s politics, Chinese culture, and Sino-African relations.¹⁵⁹

Significantly, China’s capacity training programs and scholarship opportunities are typically held in China. Scholarships and delegations funded by China provide future and current African leaders with firsthand experiences of China’s successful economic development. These experiences deepen relations between China and AU member states and bolster China’s soft power because the participants are journalists, government officials, and African youth that will shape the future of African relations with China. Furthermore, China has utilized the FOCAC framework to install more than 50 Confucius Institutes on the continent as part of its commitment to expand educational and cultural

¹⁵⁵ Victoria Breeze and Nathan Moore, “China Has Overtaken the U.S. and UK as the Top Destination for Anglophone African Students,” *Quartz Africa*, June 30, 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/1017926/china-has-overtaken-the-us-and-uk-as-the-top-destination-for-anglophone-african-students/>.

¹⁵⁶ “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021),” accessed September 5, 2020, http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, 90.

¹⁵⁸ Lily Kuo, “China Is Training Africa’s next Generation of Transport and Aviation Experts,” *Quartz Africa*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://qz.com/africa/1030978/china-is-training-africas-next-generation-of-aviation-and-transport-officials/>.

¹⁵⁹ “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/grand-strategy-and-chinas-soft-power-push-in-africa/>.

exchanges. These exchanges have increased the popularity of learning the Chinese language, suggesting some of Africa's youth is receptive to benefiting from China's growing influence in Africa.¹⁶⁰ This is a significant development because soft power influence relies on shared values that can be developed through these cultural and educational exchanges.¹⁶¹ These exchanges act as a powerful bridge between the two continents, creating lasting relationships between China and key individuals that may become future leaders in the AU.¹⁶² Commitments at FOCAC summits give China the opportunity to utilize China's significant resources as a tool for cultural diplomacy to win the hearts and minds of AU member states.¹⁶³

Furthermore, extensively, friendly news coverage enables China to reach a broader audience for FOCAC summits that focuses on positive images of China's generosity and constructive engagements.¹⁶⁴ For instance, more than 2,600 journalists registered to attend the 2018 FOCAC summit, which likely included many who have benefitted or will benefit from China's vocational scholarships.¹⁶⁵ According to Joseph Nye, wielding soft power in the information age may be ultimately determined by those who control the narrative.¹⁶⁶ Notably, these vocational training programs, as well as Confucius Institutes, are

¹⁶⁰ Ismail Einashe, "How Mandarin Is Conquering Africa via Confucius Institutes and Giving China a Soft-Power Advantage," *South China Morning Post*, May 16, 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/article/2146368/how-mandarin-conquering-africa-confucius-institutes-and-giving-china-soft>.

¹⁶¹ Nye, *Soft Power*, 60–62.

¹⁶² Sun, *China's Strategic Aims in Africa*, 2–8.; Nye, *Soft Power*, 109.

¹⁶³ Falk Hartig, "Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China," *Journal of Chinese Political Science; Dordrecht* 17, no. 1 (March 2012): 53–76, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1007/s11366-011-9178-7>.

¹⁶⁴ Eleanor Albert, "China's Big Bet on Soft Power," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-big-bet-soft-power>.

¹⁶⁵ "More than 2,600 Journalists Register to Cover FOCAC Summit," Xinhuan news, accessed September 24, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/03/c_137441625.htm.

¹⁶⁶ Nye, *Soft Power*, 107.

government-funded with specific intentions to “tell China’s story well” as a means to shape African perceptions.¹⁶⁷

However, critics believe these programs are designed to train professionals to advance China’s propaganda machine by encouraging censorship, amplifying positive Chinese stories, and influencing public opinion.¹⁶⁸ Ultimately, Chinese-trained reporters have the potential to sway African leaders into making policy decisions that will benefit the Chinese government but go against the interests of the AU. According to one former Xinhua employee, the goals of these programs “were loud and clear, to push a distinctly Chinese agenda.”¹⁶⁹ These workshops are supported by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and systematically provide pro-regime content meant to increase not only China’s “discourse power,” but its ideological influence in the region.¹⁷⁰ With these programs, China could be enabling non-democratic principles by handing African leaders authoritarian tools that go against AU ideals.

In addition to increasing regional tensions, the FOCAC framework may undermine the AU’s promotion of human rights and democratic principles. The AU’s participation in FOCAC, as a member, associates it with decisions that may compromise its organizational aspirations for democratic principles for the region. Although China is not overtly attempting to convert democratic African governments into authoritarian nations, these capacity training programs provide the foundation for those looking to emulate the Chinese Communist Party methods, which contradicts the AU’s core objectives for democracy

¹⁶⁷ Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, “Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign,” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>.

¹⁶⁸ “US Labels Confucius Institute ‘Foreign Mission,’” *BBC News*, August 14, 2020, sec. U.S. & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53773776>.

¹⁶⁹ Lim and Bergin, “Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign.”

¹⁷⁰ International Federation of Journalists. *The China Story: Reshaping the World’s Media*, June 23, 2020, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/reports/detail/ifj-report-the-china-story-reshaping-the-worlds-media/category/publications.html>; Yuan Zhou and Zhang Zhihao, “China Boosts Soft Power by Training Foreign Journalists,” *China Daily*, October 17, 2016, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-10/17/content_27077588.htm.

promotion and good governance.¹⁷¹ According to Yun Sun, the Stimson Center’s East Asia Program co-director, there are noticeable changes to several AU member states’ government styles as a result of deepening engagements through FOCAC initiatives.¹⁷² For example, Angola and Ethiopia, among others, have explicitly taken actions to emulate China’s development model, taking inspiration from its “emphasis on strong export-led growth, heavy state involvement in the economy, and the development of labor-intensive industries.”¹⁷³ According to a new Afrobarometer report, China now ranks second (after the U.S.) as a development model to emulate, and 63% of all countries surveyed held a favorable view of China’s influence in Africa.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, China’s engagement in Africa may be creating a “safe space” for non-democratic forms of government. The 2020 *Freedom in the World* report documented that a total of 22 African suffered a decline in their scores.¹⁷⁵ China cannot be entirely attributed to this decline, but it is providing the training and tools for these governments to act in a way contrary to the AU’s principles.

D. SUMMARY

The AU’s main objectives are to promote inclusive, sustainable development, economic prosperity, and advance regional integration based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism driven by its own citizens.¹⁷⁶ This chapter examined the AU’s struggle to achieve its objectives of sustainable development, economic prosperity, democratic principles, and continental integration and unity. Financial deficiencies, staffing challenges, and wider management issues have hindered the AU’s ability to realize flagship

¹⁷¹ Sun, *China’s Strategic Aims in Africa*, 3–8.

¹⁷² Sun, 3–8.

¹⁷³ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa.”

¹⁷⁴ *Afrobarometer #VoicesAfrica Webinar on China-Africa Relations*, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/Afrobarometer/videos/afrobarometer-voicesafrica-webinar-on-china-africa-relations/318348352581311/>.

¹⁷⁵ “Democratic Trends in Africa in Four Charts,” Freedom House, accessed September 22, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/democratic-trends-africa-four-charts>.

¹⁷⁶ Nwebo, “The African Union Agenda 2063 and the Imperative of Democratic Governance,” 259–76.

initiatives and enforce adherence to desired regional norms. These shortcomings have also forced the AU to rely on foreign donors, such as China, to address critical gaps in infrastructure development and peacekeeping efforts. Since China has targeted support for AU's flagship projects and peacekeeping efforts, the AU has welcomed China's engagement within the region.

By committing to help accomplish key flagship initiatives and developing security ties with the AU, China has helped the AU achieve some of its core objectives while elevating the AU's global image. With these actions, however, China is cultivating a potentially commanding base of diplomatic support since AU member states amount to more than a quarter of the UN General Assembly. This approach appears to be paying political dividends for China because it has gained political support from African countries in international institutions, such as the UN. Although not unanimous, this support has enabled China to block UN resolutions on human rights abuses and could be construed as distinct instances of reciprocating political support by African leaders with a keen interest in maintaining China's infrastructure financing.¹⁷⁷ Yet, this support to block a resolution on China's human rights violations goes against the AU's commitment to protect human rights and instill regional norms of social justice and good governance.

This chapter detailed why the lack of resources and AU member state unity hampers the AU's ability to establish a unified approach to counteract negative aspects of China's influence. Additionally, the chapter demonstrated why FOCAC works as a mechanism to bypass the AU because it encourages AU member states to pursue lucrative bilateral arrangements, which further restricts the AU's limited ability to act as the representative voice of a unified Africa. Lastly, this chapter identified how China's impact on the AU goes beyond infrastructure and economic development. Chinese capacity training programs, particularly the media and political variety, directly impact the AU's objectives to establish regional norms of good governance and democratic principles. Because FOCAC summits are highly publicized and widely attended, it serves as a vital platform to

¹⁷⁷ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*, 98.

reconsolidate China's message and reinject confidence that China offers support for AU member states that the AU has not been able to achieve.

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III. ASEAN

In the last several decades, Southeast Asia has emerged as a vitally important region for global trade, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the key regional institution. Since its implementation, ASEAN has taken a comprehensive approach for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. ASEAN's core strength lies in the unique sense of community it has cultivated, despite the incredible diversity among its members. ASEAN balances internal divisions by adopting policies that promote inclusivity and economic prosperity without compromising its core interests or centrality in the region.¹⁷⁸ Relative to the African Union, ASEAN is a stronger regional institution because it maintains a strong sense of centrality regarding regional affairs.¹⁷⁹

China presents two distinct issues for ASEAN: challenges to regional security and challenges to institutional effectiveness. Because South China Sea (SCS) maritime disputes amplify internal divisions within ASEAN, competing claims over the SCS showcase ASEAN's vulnerabilities. Additionally, China's political and financial support for individual ASEAN member states amplifies existing cleavages and competing priorities between its members, but does not break ASEAN's institutional efficacy. A case study of Cambodia demonstrates how both of these issues test, but do not destroy, ASEAN's consensus-based governance style, which relies on institutional unity. The chapter also shows how ASEAN is responding to China's influence in the region using tools of institutional enmeshment and diplomatic hedging. Furthermore, using collective negotiation, ASEAN has reached free trade agreements (FTAs) with China that benefit both parties, despite the varying levels of economic development and competing priorities of ASEAN member states.

¹⁷⁸ Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny and ASEAN's Ambivalent Response," 240–243.

¹⁷⁹ Kishore Mahbubani and Jeffery Sng, "ASEAN: Strengths and Weaknesses," in *The ASEAN Miracle, A Catalyst for Peace* (NUS Press, 2017): 180, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1xz0m3.11>.

A. THE FOUNDATIONS OF ASEAN

ASEAN was established as a forum for diverse member states to meet to identify common issues facing the region in an era when Southeast Asia was riddled with intra-regional conflicts.¹⁸⁰ In 1967, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines signed the ASEAN Declaration that established the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as a formal regional institution.¹⁸¹ At the time, territorial disputes such as those over Sabah between Malaysia and the Philippines were the primary source of tension among original ASEAN member states.¹⁸² Initially, ASEAN disavowed a formal security alliance because member states believed economic security led to greater integration and stability in the region.¹⁸³ As a result, ASEAN's initial objectives were limited to promoting peace and stability, accelerating economic growth, and fostering cultural development and social progress towards a regional identity.¹⁸⁴

Due to their distinct cultures, histories, and priorities, ASEAN members implemented consultation and consensus principles as the foundation of ASEAN's operating framework.¹⁸⁵ ASEAN's core values of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual respect for state sovereignty, "the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion," the rejection of the use of force and preference for settling disputes by peaceful means, and an emphasis on intra-regional cooperation reflect the internal diplomacy required to engage and unify a diverse

¹⁸⁰ Alison Broinowski, ed., *Understanding ASEAN* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982): 11, 37.

¹⁸¹ Ian Mustafa Storey Izzuddin, ed., "Roundtable: ASEAN at Fifty and Beyond," *Contemporary Southeast Asia; Singapore* 39, no. 2 (August 2017): 229–31, <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1355/cs39-2a>.

¹⁸² Amitav Acharya, *The Making of Southeast Asia: International Relations of a Region* (Ithaca, UNITED STATES: Cornell University Press, 2013): 165, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=3138449>.

¹⁸³ Acharya, 159-170.

¹⁸⁴ Acharya, 156.

¹⁸⁵ Le Hong Heip, "Can ASEAN Overcome the 'Consensus Dilemma' over the South China Sea?," no. 2016 (2016): 2

group of member states.¹⁸⁶ Since many ASEAN members are concerned about interference in their domestic affairs, ASEAN's consensus-based governance was born out of the desire to promote trust among members by ensuring equality, since requiring consensus for significant decisions prevents the marginalization of any member.¹⁸⁷ Consensus decision-making "gives every member state a veto," which enables any member to object to an idea or proposal.¹⁸⁸ Unlike more formal institutions such as the European Union, the informal format of consensus decision-making and consultation has been vital to ASEAN's success.¹⁸⁹

Today, ASEAN has expanded to ten member states: Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999.¹⁹⁰ The membership expansion from the ASEAN-5 members to the current ten member states has further stressed these tensions. ASEAN's membership expansion has tested its internal cohesion and capacity for consensus-based decision-making.¹⁹¹ Cambodia and Laos, ASEAN's newest and least developed members, add complexity to ASEAN members' political and economic divisions. The larger membership has increased the difficulty of reaching a common denominator between members because their national interests often diverge.¹⁹² Political, ethnic, and developmental divisions have been viewed as ASEAN's greatest vulnerability because they open the door to intra-regional rivalries

¹⁸⁶ Acharya, *The Making of Southeast Asia*, 168.

¹⁸⁷ Heip, "Can ASEAN Overcome the 'Consensus Dilemma' over the South China Sea?" 2.

¹⁸⁸ Walter Woon, *The ASEAN Charter: A Commentary*, Reprint edition (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2015).

¹⁸⁹ Heip, "Can ASEAN Overcome the 'Consensus Dilemma' over the South China Sea?" 2.

¹⁹⁰ Izzuddin, "Roundtable," 230.

¹⁹¹ Amitav Acharya, "Doomed by Dialogue: Will ASEAN Survive Great Power Rivalry in Asia?," in *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier: ASEAN, Australia, and India*, ed. Gilbert Rozman and Joseph Chinyong Liow, Asan-Palgrave Macmillan Series (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 77–91, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3171-7_6.

¹⁹² Heip, "Can ASEAN Overcome the 'Consensus Dilemma' over the South China Sea?" 3.

and leave the potential for an extra-regional power to manipulate one member against another.¹⁹³

Critics often note ASEAN's willingness to "talk shop" through informal settings, making process but not progress.¹⁹⁴ For example, some claim ASEAN lacked the capacity to facilitate a coordinated regional response to the Asian financial crisis in the early 1990s, despite numerous meetings and declarations.¹⁹⁵ In 2007, ASEAN took a significant step towards strengthening its institutional mechanisms by establishing the ASEAN Charter.¹⁹⁶ The new charter not only attempted to integrate ASEAN's core principles into a coherent framework, but it also pushed for the adoption of democratic values and respect for human rights.¹⁹⁷ Additionally, the charter outlined a formal institutional structure and legal framework for ASEAN.¹⁹⁸

Because the charter aspires to transform ASEAN into a rules-based community, it was a marked departure from ASEAN members' historical reluctance to establishing strong institutions.¹⁹⁹ However, critics observed that the charter still adheres to ASEAN's traditional principles of consensus-based decision-making and non-interference.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, critics note that the charter lacks provisions to enforce sanctions or other mechanisms to punish member states that do not follow the charter because member state adherence is voluntary. Although the charter possesses some weaknesses, it is still

¹⁹³ Alice D. Ba, "China and Asean: Renavigating Relations for a 21st-Century Asia," *Asian Survey* 43, no. 4 (August 1, 2003): 624, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2003.43.4.622>.

¹⁹⁴ David Martin Jones and Michael L. R. Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress: ASEAN and the Evolving East Asian Regional Order," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 148–84.; Broinowski, *Understanding ASEAN*, 37.

¹⁹⁵ Jones and Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress," 160–1.

¹⁹⁶ Mely Caballero-Anthony, "The ASEAN Charter: An Opportunity Missed or One That Cannot Be Missed?," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2008 (2008): 71–85.

¹⁹⁷ Caballero-Anthony, 74.

¹⁹⁸ Caballero-Anthony, 74.

¹⁹⁹ Mahbubani and Sng, "ASEAN," 181.

²⁰⁰ Walter Woon, "The ASEAN Charter Ten Years On," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, no. 2 (2017): 157–8.

considered significant progress towards uniting members around a clearly defined regional identity.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the charter demonstrates ASEAN's commitment to strengthening the institution to cope with evolving regional dynamics. Evidence of ASEAN's success as an institution is shown by its continued relevance and existence where others have failed.

1. The Significance of ASEAN Regional Centrality

Since its establishment, ASEAN policies have been consciously geared toward preserving autonomy and avoiding interference from extra-regional powers.²⁰² The concept of ASEAN centrality refers to ASEAN's desire to maintain autonomy by ensuring it remains the driving force or "institutional hub" for managing regional affairs.²⁰³ As an organization, ASEAN often experiences tensions between pro-China and pro-U.S. member states.²⁰⁴ Both China and the United States account for a significant portion of ASEAN members' economies through trade and investment; therefore, this poses a challenge to ASEAN because of its desire to maintain stability and pursue regional prosperity.²⁰⁵ ASEAN centrality supports the institution's strategic interests in the region by ensuring its relevance with extra-regional powers seeking to influence the region.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Minggu Lhasa, "Eminent Persons Group Chief 'Proud' of ASEAN Charter - Malaysian Agency," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, November 21, 2007, https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/460874177?rfr_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprimo.

²⁰² Carlyle A. Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2013): 75.

²⁰³ H. Nishimura, M. Ambashi, and F. Iwasaki, "Strengthened ASEAN Centrality and East Asia Collective Leadership: Role of Japan-ASEAN Cooperation as Development of Heart-to-Heart Diplomacy," ed. Simon Tay et al., *Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) II*, no. Collective Leadership, ASEAN Centrality, and Strengthening the ASEAN Institutional Ecosystem (May 2019): 138; Amitav Acharya, "The Myth of ASEAN Centrality?," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39, no. 2 (2017): 273.

²⁰⁴ Shaofeng Chen, "Regional Responses to China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 111 (2018): 359, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1410960>.

²⁰⁵ Zhixin Zhang, "China's International Strategy and Its Implications for Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2016, 55–66.

²⁰⁶ Acharya, "The Myth of ASEAN Centrality?" 275.

ASEAN and ASEAN member states are experiencing increasing pressure to take sides in the great power competition between China and the United States in the region.²⁰⁷ ASEAN's centrality could be undermined by the escalating tensions and increased competition between China and the United States.²⁰⁸ For example, China prefers to frame the SCS disputes between itself and individual claimants, leaving ASEAN a limited role in managing the conflict.²⁰⁹ This stance resonates with some ASEAN members because of regional preferences for non-interference, but others fear a return to a Sino-centric regional order. ASEAN has cautiously pushed back on China's vision for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny (CCD) because of the perception that it would compromise ASEAN's commitment to an "open and inclusive regional order."²¹⁰ Several ASEAN members have pursued defense cooperation with the United States to balance escalating tensions and Chinese aggression in the SCS.²¹¹ On the other hand, ASEAN also sees the United States' foreign policy approach of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) as a means to exclude or isolate China.²¹²

ASEAN's commitment to an inclusive and open Indo-Pacific signifies it intends to work with both the United States and China to achieve regional goals.²¹³ ASEAN

²⁰⁷ Daniel Kliman, *Addressing China's Influence in Southeast Asia: America's Approach and the Role of Congress*, Center for a New American Security (CNAS), accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/congressional-testimony/addressing-chinas-influence-in-southeast-asia-americas-approach-and-the-role-of-congress>; Jones and Smith, "Making Process, Not Progress." Cheng-Chwee Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior towards China," *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 100 (July 3, 2016): 500–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2015.1132714>.

²⁰⁸ Ralf Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding; Seoul* 2, no. 1 (May 2014): 61–77.

²⁰⁹ Ian Storey, "Assessing the ASEAN-China Framework for the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea," *Yusuf Ishak Institute*, no. 62 (August 9, 2017): 6.

²¹⁰ Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny and ASEAN's Ambivalent Response," 241–8.

²¹¹ Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 509.

²¹² "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific," ASEAN, June 23, 2019, <https://asean.org/asean-outlook-indo-pacific/>.

²¹³ Amitav Acharya, "Why ASEAN's Indo-Pacific Outlook Matters," *East Asia Forum*, August 11, 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/08/11/why-aseans-indo-pacific-outlook-matters/>.

centrality also points to a normative approach to regional diplomacy.²¹⁴ The “ASEAN Way” is deliberately non-binding and inclusive to promote a shared identity that builds confidence and induces “strategic restraint” among members.²¹⁵ The key to ASEAN’s success depends on its strategic ability to build trust between disparate Southeast Asian countries of Southeast Asia, while both “insulating the region from Great Power politics and promoting a people-centered outlook.”²¹⁶ Meaning, ASEAN indirectly pushes against both the United States’ and China’s desire for exclusive partnerships without directly antagonizing either country or losing centrality of regional issues to either country.

2. Competing Claims over the South China Sea Highlight ASEAN’s Vulnerabilities

China’s rise as a global and regional power is the core challenge to ASEAN. ASEAN member states’ geographic proximity and relative size (both population and economy) to China make them vulnerable to the uncertainty caused by China’s growing influence in the region. Currently, China claims more than 80 percent of the SCS, which conflicts with rival claims from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam.²¹⁷ Maritime disputes and the militarization of artificial islands in the SCS have ignited intense debate on China’s ambitions for carving out a sphere of influence in Southeast Asia. A rising China that projects growing wealth and increasing military capabilities challenges regional stability in Southeast Asia because it garners mixed responses from ASEAN member states. Consequently, ASEAN has struggled with

²¹⁴ Acharya, “The Myth of ASEAN Centrality?” 275–76.

²¹⁵ Acharya, 276.

²¹⁶ Izzuddin, “Roundtable,” 230?

²¹⁷ Peter Zsombor, “New US-ASEAN Naval Drills a ‘Balancing Act’ with Beijing | Voice of America - English,” *VOA News*, August 28, 2019, sec. East Asia Pacific, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/new-us-asean-naval-drills-balancing-act-beijing>.

establishing a common stance regarding maritime territorial disputes with its members and China in the SCS.²¹⁸

Varied threat perceptions regarding China's aggression in the SCS threatens to divide ASEAN member state unity because it amplifies internal divisions within ASEAN. For some, China's growing engagement in the region brings both diplomatic and economic opportunities; however, for others, it creates tensions and concerns over China's ambitions as a regional hegemon.²¹⁹ For example, because Cambodia's economic development depends on China as a trading partner and financial investor, Cambodia has often opposed more aggressive measures proposed to ASEAN regarding the SCS.²²⁰ Like Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos have significant economic incentives to remain less vocal and avoid internationalizing South China Sea disputes.²²¹ As non-claimant states, all three countries have held an ambivalent stance towards the SCS disputes.²²²

However, not all non-claimant ASEAN members exhibit the same disinterest in resolving the SCS disputes. For example, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore have demonstrated an active interest in finding a regional solution to preserve freedom of navigation and regional stability.²²³ Additionally, ASEAN members with overlapping territorial claims in the SCS have reacted to Chinese aggression with varying degrees of force. Some ASEAN members fear China is attempting to return to a Sino-centric hierarchal system for the region.²²⁴ For example, the Philippines and Vietnam have raised

²¹⁸ Evelyn Goh, "ASEAN-Led Multilateralism and Regional Order: The Great Power Bargain Deficit," in *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier: ASEAN, Australia, and India*, ed. Gilbert Rozman and Joseph Chinyong Liow, Asan-Palgrave Macmillan Series (Singapore: Springer, 2018): 46, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3171-7_4.

²¹⁹ Zhang, "China's International Strategy and Its Implications for Southeast Asia."

²²⁰ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 67.

²²¹ Emmers. "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 72.

²²² Emmers, 71.

²²³ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 71–72.

²²⁴ Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny and ASEAN's Ambivalent Response."

their concerns at international forums and demonstrated the desire to legalize the SCS disputes.²²⁵ On the other hand, Brunei and Malaysia have demonstrated reluctance to legalize or internationalize SCS disputes, favoring less antagonistic diplomacy.²²⁶ As a result, ASEAN has struggled to acknowledge China as a regional threat regarding maritime territorial disputes in the SCS.²²⁷

Furthermore, member states have overlapping SCS claims with each other. This intra-member rivalry remains another obstacle preventing ASEAN from reaching a unified stance on how to approach Chinese aggression in the SCS.²²⁸ For example, Malaysia and Vietnam have been embroiled in numerous disputes over fishing rights in the SCS.²²⁹ According to Reuters, the most recent disagreement ended in violence. These critical differences between claimant states further complicate ASEAN's response to the SCS disputes.

B. CHINA'S TEST AND THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC LEVERAGE: A CASE STUDY OF CAMBODIA

Although China officially supports ASEAN, China's vast economic resources have been able to weaken ASEAN's unity by dividing member states' priorities through economic inducements. ASEAN's least developed members, Laos and Cambodia, have often been criticized for their reluctance to condemn China's aggression in the South China Sea. Both countries receive significant financial assistance from China. Cambodia's economic development is closely tied to Chinese aid and investment.²³⁰ Additionally,

²²⁵ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 71.

²²⁶ Emmers, 70.

²²⁷ Goh, "ASEAN-Led Multilateralism and Regional Order," 46.; Michael Clarke, Mark Frazier, and Michael Wills, "Rountable: Non-Claimant Perspectives on the South China Sea Disputes," *The National Bureau of Asian Research* 21 (January 21, 2016): 48–49.

²²⁸ Phar Kim Beng, "ASEAN Is Failing On The South China Sea Issue," *The Diplomat*, October 26, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/asean-is-failing-on-the-south-china-sea-issue/>.

²²⁹ Joseph Sipalan and Khanh Vu, "Malaysia Says Vietnamese Fisherman Killed in Clash with Coast Guard," *Reuters*, August 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-vietnam-shooting-idUSKCN25D0R6>.

²³⁰ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 67.

China stands as Cambodia's closest political ally and a key defense partner as Cambodia's largest military aid donor.²³¹ For instance, after reportedly signing a secret agreement to allow China access to Ream Naval Base, Cambodia has refused U.S. funding for repairs and demolished a U.S.-built facility at the Ream.²³²

Cambodia has substantial incentives to stay out of SCS conflicts because of its dependence on China. Furthermore, as a non-claimant state, Cambodia has more interest in achieving economic and developmental goals than SCS maritime disputes.²³³ In other words, the loss of China's financial support would be more detrimental to Cambodia. As a result, Cambodia has unilaterally opposed more aggressive measures proposed to ASEAN regarding the SCS.²³⁴ For example, when Cambodia held the position as ASEAN's chair in 2012, it distinctly sought to downplay SCS concerns and campaigned to include China in ASEAN discussions, despite growing tensions like the Scarborough Shoal's incident.²³⁵ Cambodia's refusal to compromise presented a serious challenge to ASEAN's unity.²³⁶ Due to a lack of consensus among ASEAN members surrounding the issue, ASEAN failed to release a joint communique in 2012, which was "unprecedented in ASEAN's forty-five year history."²³⁷ Many saw Cambodia's actions as an attempt to appease China and pivotal

²³¹ Sopheng Cheang, "US State Department Expresses Concern over China Link to Cambodian Naval Base," *Navy Times*, October 7, 2020, <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2020/10/07/us-state-department-expresses-concern-over-china-link-to-cambodian-naval-base/>; Prashanth Parameswaran, "Cambodia Wants China Warships: Navy Commander," *The Diplomat*, accessed November 30, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/cambodia-wants-china-warships-navy-commander/>.

²³² "Update: Another U.S.-Built Facility at Ream Bites the Dust," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, November 9, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/changes-underway-at-cambodias-ream-naval-base/>.

²³³ Clarke, Frazier, and Wills, "Rountable: Non-Claimant Perspectives on the South China Sea Disputes," 49.

²³⁴ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 67.

²³⁵ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 67; Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," 78.

²³⁶ Jürgen Haacke, "The ASEAN Regional Forum: From Dialogue to Practical Security Cooperation?," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22, no. 3 (September 2009): 427–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570903104057>.

²³⁷ Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," 78.

to ASEAN's failure in 2012.²³⁸ In fact, Cambodia and the Philippines openly feuded over their differences in 2012.²³⁹ Furthermore, at the time, China used ASEAN's disunity over the SCS to suspend negotiations on the Code of Conduct.²⁴⁰

Cambodia's role has therefore been seen as a "spoiler" to ASEAN negotiations on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea.²⁴¹ As a non-claimant, Cambodia has insisted that the SCS territorial disputes between China and ASEAN members should be handled at the bilateral level, not in a multilateral format.²⁴² Leading scholar Amitav Acharya believes Cambodia used its position as the ASEAN chair to challenge the position of more established ASEAN member states, such as Singapore and the Philippines, to please China.²⁴³ In 2016, for example, Cambodia played a key role in blocking a joint ASEAN Communique that included a "strongly worded statement" following China's dismissal of the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling in favor of the Philippines in contradiction of China's claims in the South China Sea.²⁴⁴ Cambodia's stance directly contradicted the Philippines' and Vietnam's request to include a statement regarding the incident in the joint communiqué.²⁴⁵ In return, Cambodia received praise from China for its "neutrality" in the SCS dispute and China promised \$600 million in aid.²⁴⁶ A former Chinese ambassador to Cambodia also lauded Cambodia's actions in

²³⁸ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 67; Thayer, 78; Clarke, Frazier, and Wills, "Rountable: Non-Claimant Perspectives on the South China Sea Disputes," 48.

²³⁹ Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," 78.

²⁴⁰ Thayer, 82.

²⁴¹ Thayer, 82.

²⁴² Thayer, 78.

²⁴³ Acharya, "Doomed by Dialogue," 87–89.

²⁴⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Assessing ASEAN's South China Sea Position in Its Post-Ruling Statement," *The Diplomat*, July 25, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/assessing-aseans-south-china-sea-position-in-its-post-ruling-statement/>; Heip Hong Le, "Can ASEAN Overcome the 'Consensus Dilemma' over the South China Sea?," no. 2016 (2016): 3.

²⁴⁵ Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," 78.

²⁴⁶ David Hutt, "How China Came to Dominate Cambodia," *The Diplomat*, September 1, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/how-china-came-to-dominate-cambodia/>.

2012, stating, “not only the governments of China but also millions of our people appreciated Prime Minister Hun Sen’s stance.”²⁴⁷ Consequently, Cambodia has earned a reputation as a Chinese ally. Cambodia’s actions present a significant challenge to ASEAN because its strength lies in its inclusive and consensus-based governance style.

C. ENMESHING CHINA IN REGIONAL SECURITY NORMS

Despite the challenges of Cambodia to ASEAN, there are several areas in which ASEAN has been successful in getting China to conform to regional norms. ASEAN’s preference for regional cooperation and inclusivity formed the basis of its multilateral efforts to integrate China into the regional order.²⁴⁸ ASEAN’s ongoing response to China’s growing influence has been a “complex engagement” strategy intended to improve Sino-ASEAN cooperation and persuade China to accept ASEAN norms.²⁴⁹ This method assumes that repeated social, political, and economic interactions between ASEAN and China will emphasize mutual benefits and modify China’s behavior through enmeshment, thus reducing the risk of Chinese dominance in the region.²⁵⁰

ASEAN-led multilateral forums act as normative instruments, providing a direct avenue for ASEAN to build relationships with extra-regional powers and a centralized platform to socialize expected behaviors that shape the region’s security agenda.²⁵¹ For example, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is an ASEAN-led political and security

²⁴⁷ Hutt, “How China Came to Dominate Cambodia.”

²⁴⁸ Amitav Acharya, “Ideas, Identity, and Institution-building: From the ‘ASEAN Way’ to the ‘Asia-Pacific Way’?,” *The Pacific Review* 10, no. 3 (January 1, 1997): 320–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512749708719226>.

²⁴⁹ Alice D. Ba, “Who’s Socializing Whom? Complex Engagement in Sino-ASEAN Relations,” *The Pacific Review* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512740500473163>.

²⁵⁰ Ba, 158.

²⁵¹ Kuik, “How Do Weaker States Hedge?” 508; David Capie, “Structures, Shocks and Norm Change: Explaining the Late Rise of Asia’s Defence Diplomacy,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, no. 1 (2013): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs35-1a>.

dialogue that includes all ASEAN member states and 17 Asia-Pacific partners.²⁵² Despite China's initial reservations, ASEAN's prominent role alleviated suspicions that the ARF would be a Western-dominated security organization.²⁵³ Notably, admittance into the ARF requires a prior commitment to respect the ARF's decisions and provide resources towards peace and security in the region.²⁵⁴ Like ASEAN, the ARF uses consensus-based governance and consultative mechanisms to foster a constructive dialogue for peace and security in the Asia-Pacific.

China's participation in ARF required acknowledgment of ASEAN's regional security expectations, and through this process, its actions have become marginally constrained in the region.²⁵⁵ For instance, at the 2010 ARF summit, five ASEAN claimants and the United States demonstrated how the ARF had become an acceptable venue to discuss overlapping maritime claims to push back against Chinese aggression in the SCS.²⁵⁶ As a result of diplomatic pressure, China agreed to Guidelines for Implementation of the Declaration of the Conduct of Parties in the SCS.²⁵⁷ The ARF demonstrates ASEAN's ability to encourage regional integration through non-military, de-escalatory mechanisms.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, ASEAN can use the ARF as an established venue to keep the focus on existing regional norms and pursue the finalization of the COC.²⁵⁹

²⁵² "ASEAN Regional Forum," ASEAN, accessed December 16, 2020, <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/about-arf/>.

²⁵³ Rosemary Foot, "China in the ASEAN Regional Forum: Organizational Processes and Domestic Modes of Thought," *Asian Survey* 38, no. 5 (1998): 426–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645501>.

²⁵⁴ ASEAN, "ASEAN Regional Forum."

²⁵⁵ Foot, "China in the ASEAN Regional Forum," 431.

²⁵⁶ Koichi Sato, "The Rise of China's Impact on ASEAN Conference Diplomacy: A Study of Conflict in the South China Sea," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 2, no. 2 (January 2013): 103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2013.11869064>.

²⁵⁷ Sato, "The Rise of China's Impact on ASEAN Conference Diplomacy," 104.

²⁵⁸ Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 509–510.

²⁵⁹ Clarke, Frazier, and Wills, "Rountable: Non-Claimant Perspectives on the South China Sea Disputes," 48.

China's continued involvement in ASEAN-led forums also reinforces the importance of ASEAN as the regional institution, further enhancing ASEAN's credibility as a regional and global actor. For instance, China's willingness to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), a cornerstone of ASEAN's regional diplomacy, and ASEAN's Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ) indicates success in ASEAN's complex engagement strategy.²⁶⁰ Significantly, China was the first non-ASEAN signatory of the TAC and the first nuclear power to sign the SEANWFZ.²⁶¹ Both treaties help foster an ASEAN-centric regional security order. Moreover, ASEAN has made gradual progress towards reaching a conclusion to the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea (COC).²⁶² Although ASEAN and China have not yet come to a resolution of the COC, both parties agreed to a framework for the COC in 2017 and a Single Draft Negotiating Text (SDNT) in 2018.²⁶³ Additionally, at the 2020 ASEAN-China summit, China reaffirmed its support for peace and stability in the SCS and committed further to strengthen security and defense cooperation through existing ASEAN-led mechanisms.²⁶⁴ China's continued participation in COC negotiations implies a sustained effort to become a "responsible power" within the region.²⁶⁵

ASEAN's diplomatic hedging is another pragmatic approach to China's rise in the region. ASEAN member states have cultivated economic and diplomatic ties with China while concurrently seeking political and military support from extra-regional powers such as the United States, Japan, and India to off-set risks.²⁶⁶ Traditionally, the United States'

²⁶⁰ Ba, "Who's Socializing Whom?" 172.

²⁶¹ Ba, 172.

²⁶² Clarke, Frazier, and Wills, "Rountable: Non-Claimant Perspectives on the South China Sea Disputes," 48–50.

²⁶³ Storey, "Assessing the ASEAN-China Framework for the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea."; Hoang Thi Ha, "Pitfalls for ASEAN in Negotiating a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," no. 57 (2019): 2.

²⁶⁴ Vietnam, "Chairman's Statement of the 23rd ASEAN-CHINA Summit," November 12, 2020. 6–7.

²⁶⁵ Jusuf Wanandi, "ASEAN's China Strategy: Towards Deeper Engagement," *Survival* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 1996): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339608442867>.

²⁶⁶ Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 507.

presence in the region signifies financial and military support against Chinese aggression. Furthermore, America's presence gives ASEAN members more potential leverage with China due to great power competition.²⁶⁷ For example, Vietnam and Singapore have both demonstrated willingness to pursue military assurances but stopped short of developing a security alliance with the United States.²⁶⁸ Both explicitly stress their actions are not directed against a specific country.²⁶⁹ This hedging provides ASEAN members flexibility to maximize individual benefits while reducing the risk of openly antagonizing China or inflaming internal disagreements. ASEAN's hedging behavior stems from its conflict avoidance preferences and desire to maintain regional autonomy. However, opportunities for political hedging have changed over time due to uncertainty regarding the U.S.'s commitment to the region.²⁷⁰

ASEAN's effort to encourage active participation from powers outside of SEA is a notable departure from its original stance on regionalism, which was to keep the region free from external interference or subversion. However, it highlights a complex regional architecture that centers on managing regional security issues while maintaining ASEAN centrality among geopolitical rivalries.²⁷¹ ASEAN's insistence on including India, Australia, and New Zealand in the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2005 and the initiation of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus Eight (ADMM+8) in 2010 demonstrates ASEAN's commitment to regional inclusivity as a means to mitigate China's growing influence in the region.²⁷² The creation of multilateral organizations such as the ADMM+8, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), the EAS, and the TAC demonstrate the incremental evolution of ASEAN's evolving stance on regional security and multilateral defense

²⁶⁷ Chen, 356.

²⁶⁸ Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 511–2.

²⁶⁹ Kuik, 511.

²⁷⁰ Kuik, 506.

²⁷¹ Acharya, "The Myth of ASEAN Centrality?" 273–276.

²⁷² Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 511.

diplomacy.²⁷³ These alternative political-security frameworks were designed to address the perceived uncertainties stemming from a regional imbalance of power.²⁷⁴ Since these initiatives are ASEAN-led mechanisms, they enhance ASEAN's consensus-building, normative approach to regional diplomacy while reducing the risk marginalization by great powers because it enhances the notion of ASEAN's centrality and strategic relevance to regional operations. This shift in diplomacy enables ASEAN to leverage extra-regional partners' experiences and resources to build-up regional capabilities without becoming sidelined.

D. BENEFITTING FROM ECONOMIC TIES DESPITES INTERNAL DIVISIONS

Measured as a group, ASEAN members possess the world's fifth-largest economy, with a total gross domestic product (GDP) of approximately \$3 trillion; however, the standard of living, the level of development, and the distribution of natural resources vary significantly between individual ASEAN members.²⁷⁵ Despite substantial regional progress towards poverty reduction, there are still considerable developmental gaps between ASEAN member states.²⁷⁶ For that reason, ASEAN member states' views on China's growing economic influence have been equally diverse. For example, Cambodia and Laos have prioritized economic development, viewing China as a key partner to realize goals to reduce poverty and improve infrastructure development.²⁷⁷ Conversely, Vietnam and the Philippines have stressed the need to balance China's growing economic influence due to security concerns in the SCS. Furthermore, noticeable divisions between ASEAN

²⁷³ David Capie, "Structures, Shocks and Norm Change: Explaining the Late Rise of Asia's Defence Diplomacy," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, no. 1 (2013): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs35-1a>.

²⁷⁴ Ba, "China and Asean," 627.

²⁷⁵ Ashish Lall, *Facets Of Competitiveness: Narratives From Asean* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2011), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=840608>; ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Integration Report 2019*, (2019): xiv.

²⁷⁶ Tanyatorn Tongwaranan, "Inequality a Growing Challenge for Rising Asean," *Bangkok Post*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1455114/inequality-a-growing-challenge-for-rising-asean>.

²⁷⁷ Chen, "Regional Responses to China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative in Southeast Asia," 356.

member states have appeared regarding how to pursue better political and economic integration.²⁷⁸ Malaysia, for instance, attempted to establish a protectionist free-trade bloc, called the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC), that excluded regional neighbors and the United States.

Despite the diverging views of ASEAN member states, economic inducements have motivated all ASEAN member states to pursue closer ties with China. In the last two decades, trade between ASEAN and China has grown dramatically as ASEAN members take advantage of China's power resources. Starting in the 1990s, ASEAN engaged in economic pragmatism and binding engagement principles with China.²⁷⁹ Yet, these alignment decisions have required some ASEAN member states to make pragmatic decisions to liberalize trade relations with China despite the potential that cheap Chinese goods could increasingly compete with goods from their country.²⁸⁰ However, pursuing closer economic ties with China alleviated some concerns that China's rapid growth would impede ASEAN members as a "growth spoiler."²⁸¹ Therefore, ASEAN acknowledged China as an economic competitor but considered the potential benefits of closer economic relations worth the risk. ASEAN has embraced China as an opportunity for economic growth but remained wary of unmitigated Chinese influence.

ASEAN's deliberate engagement towards economic interdependence with China is a key feature of Sino-ASEAN relations.²⁸² Although China still holds a significant trade surplus with ASEAN states, ASEAN has been able to collectively negotiate favorable concessions in FTAs with China.²⁸³ The ASEAN China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) was a

²⁷⁸ Christopher B. Roberts, *ASEAN Regionalism: Cooperation, Values and Institutionalisation* (Abingdon, Oxon, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011): 60, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=958552>.

²⁷⁹ Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 505.

²⁸⁰ Evelyn Goh, "Modes of China's Influence: Cases from Southeast Asia," *Asian Survey* 54, no. 5 (2014): 835–836, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2014.54.5.825>.

²⁸¹ Ba, "China and Asean," 647.

²⁸² Goh, "Cases from Southeast Asia," 832.

²⁸³ Goh, 832.

milestone in Sino-ASEAN relations because ASEAN members negotiated as a unified collective.²⁸⁴ ASEAN believed AFCTA would enable it to become a “priority market” for Chinese investors; thus, it was mutually beneficial for all parties involved.²⁸⁵ Although China had a heavy hand in structuring the AFCTA, China’s concessions proved ASEAN had significant influence in the negotiations. Furthermore, ASEAN’s collective negotiations garnered Chinese concessions that offered benefits for both new and old ASEAN members, which addresses underlying concerns of growing disparities between developed and underdeveloped members.²⁸⁶ For example, the ACFTA gave ASEAN early access to Chinese markets, with reduced tariffs, before China extended the offer to all WTO members.²⁸⁷ Additionally, ASEAN leaders obtained critical concessions from the Chinese government that expanded “import quotas for agricultural goods and a generous ‘early harvest provision.’”²⁸⁸ With this deal, ASEAN was finally able to advance regional goals of economic integration and cooperation. Additionally, the AFCTA signifies China’s growing acceptance of ASEAN’s value as a regional organization.²⁸⁹ This recognition further strengthened ASEAN’s centrality and helped boost other extra-regional powers’ interest in ASEAN.²⁹⁰

ASEAN’s selective acceptance of Chinese driven policies is another example of its hedging strategy. ASEAN believes that a complex web of interdependence will eventually persuade China to accept ASEAN’s regional norms and “think differently and less confrontationally about regional security and its relations with the ASEAN states.”²⁹¹ For instance, ASEAN has adopted some Chinese initiatives such as the Regional

²⁸⁴ Ba, “China and Asean,” 642.

²⁸⁵ Ba, “China and Asean,” 638.

²⁸⁶ Ba, 642.

²⁸⁷ Ba, 638.

²⁸⁸ Sato, “The Rise of China’s Impact on ASEAN Conference Diplomacy,” 99.

²⁸⁹ Ba, “China and Asean,” 642.

²⁹⁰ Ba, 642.

²⁹¹ Ba, “Who’s Socializing Whom?” 160–161.

Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) because they offer financial and practical benefits that are not perceived to negatively impact regional interests.²⁹² ASEAN's most recent success at promoting economic integration is the completion of the RCEP, signed at the 2020 ASEAN Summit. RCEP is now the world's largest free-trade agreement and first-ever trade agreement between China, Japan, and South Korea.²⁹³ Although some critics label RCEP as a "China-led" initiative, this trade agreement is still a triumph of ASEAN's diplomacy and a testament to its desire to remain central to regional issues.²⁹⁴ After eight years of negotiations, RCEP was signed by 15 countries in the Asia Pacific, largely due to an "ASEAN-brokered deal" that resolved a stalemate that had persisted since 2012.²⁹⁵ RCEP is a historic achievement for ASEAN that demonstrates its leading role in negotiating multilateral FTA critical to the region's economic prosperity.

ASEAN's drive for economic integration and community-building efforts enhances ASEAN's diplomatic voice and influence in the region.²⁹⁶ For example, ASEAN member states have been able to leverage China's positive economic engagement in the region, such as the AFCTA, to diversify their economic interests.²⁹⁷ Instead of merely increasing economic interdependence with China, ASEAN member states have also developed FTAs and stronger ties with other "economic powerhouses" such as the U.S. and Japan.²⁹⁸ Additionally, these FTAs reinforce a constructive relationship between ASEAN and extra-

²⁹² Zhang, "China's International Strategy and Its Implications for Southeast Asia," 62–64.

²⁹³ Khanh Vu Nguyen Phuong, "Asia Forms World's Biggest Trade Bloc, a China-Backed Group Excluding U.S.," *Reuters*, November 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/asean-trade-summit-rcep-signing-idUSKBN27V03K>.

²⁹⁴ Peter A. Petri and Michael Plummer, "RCEP: A New Trade Agreement That Will Shape Global Economics and Politics," *Brookings*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/16/rcep-a-new-trade-agreement-that-will-shape-global-economics-and-politics/>.

²⁹⁵ Plummer, "RCEP: A New Trade Agreement That Will Shape Global Economics and Politics."

²⁹⁶ "Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)," U.S. Department of State, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/regional/asean//index.htm>.

²⁹⁷ Goh, "Cases from Southeast Asia," 837.

²⁹⁸ Goh, 837.

regional powers.²⁹⁹ Meaning, the dialogue established in FTAs anchors ASEAN's regional centrality.³⁰⁰

E. SUMMARY

ASEAN's main objectives are to promote peace and security, economic prosperity, and maintain regional autonomy.³⁰¹ ASEAN and its member states are uniquely vulnerable to challenges presented by China's growing influence due to geographic proximity and economic interdependence.³⁰² Varied threat perceptions regarding China's aggression in the SCS threatens to divide ASEAN unity because it amplifies the internal divisions and competing SCS claims within ASEAN. Consequently, ASEAN has struggled to establish a common stance regarding maritime territorial disputes in the SCS.³⁰³ The case study of Cambodia demonstrates how China used competing economic and security priorities among ASEAN members to prevent a unified response condemning Chinese aggression in the SCS. Through Cambodia, China undermines ASEAN by creating disunity among members, hampering the organization's ability to function through consensus-based governance. However, while ASEAN's preference for informal, consensual agreements has become strained by disparate state interests and rising tensions in the SCS, it has not broken.

ASEAN has encouraged institutional enmeshment to integrate China into regional norms. ASEAN has attempted to balance internal divisions by adopting complex

²⁹⁹ Yoong Yoong Lee and Catherine Lim, *Asean Matters! Reflecting On The Association Of Southeast Asian Nations* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2011): 89, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=840723>

³⁰⁰ Nishimura, Ambashi, and Iwasaki, "Strengthened ASEAN Centrality and East Asia Collective Leadership: Role of Japan-ASEAN Cooperation as Development of Heart-to-Heart Diplomacy." Pg 139–9.; Lee and Lim, *Asean Matters! Reflecting On The Association Of Southeast Asian Nations*, 89.

³⁰¹ Acharya, "The Myth of ASEAN Centrality?"; ASEAN Secretariat, "Fact-Sheet of ASEAN Political Ssecurity Community," December 2019, <https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/40.-December-2019-Fact-Sheet-of-APSC.pdf>.

³⁰² Zhang Zhixin, "China's International Strategy and Its Implications for Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2016, no. 1 (August 3, 2016): 55.

³⁰³ Goh, "ASEAN-Led Multilateralism and Regional Order," 46.

engagement policies that do not compromise ASEAN's core interests or centrality in the region.³⁰⁴ Despite competing priorities of ASEAN member states and varying levels of economic development, ASEAN has been able to reach trade agreements with China that benefit both parties using collective negotiation. Moreover, ASEAN has leveraged FTAs, such as the RCEP and ACFTA, to facilitate economic growth and anchor its centrality in the region.

Overall, ASEAN has successfully encouraged China's active participation in ASEAN-led forums. ASEAN has shown a capability to evolve as an organization to meet current challenges and maintain relevance and centrality in the region. So far, ASEAN has avoided both a serious conflict with China and unrecoverable institutional fracturing over differing threat perceptions. Yet, China continues to challenge ASEAN members' sovereignty in the SCS. ASEAN has achieved some success in asserting centrality, especially in the economic sphere, but a resolution to the SCS disputes remains a critical test to ASEAN's ability to manage regional security affairs.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Ha, "Understanding China's Proposal for an ASEAN-China Community of Common Destiny and ASEAN's Ambivalent Response," 243.

³⁰⁵ Thayer, "ASEAN, China and the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea," 76.

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IV. CONCLUSION

Regional institutions, like the African Union (AU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), can be critical to the stability and economic development of a region; however, this depends on institution's capacity to uphold their central aims. The AU's core objectives, for example, are to establish regional standards for economic integration, good governance, democratic principles, and unity for African security and developmental challenges.³⁰⁶ Similarly, ASEAN's core objectives are to promote peace and security, economic prosperity, and maintain regional autonomy.³⁰⁷ Over the last 40 years, China has left its isolation for global integration and influence. As a result, China's participation in many critical international institutions has become increasingly prominent. China's rapid economic growth and increasing presence in regional institutions have increased concerns that it seeks to reshape the international order, especially those with similar values to the United States. This thesis found that China's success has not been uniform, nor its approach a one-size-fits-all. Therefore, both ASEAN and the AU may become strategic battlegrounds for shaping regional norms and values.³⁰⁸ Examining responses to China's influence campaigns in ASEAN and the AU are essential indicators for understanding China's global impact.

This thesis sought to answer the following research question: How are the AU and ASEAN responding to China's attempts to increase influence. This thesis investigated how the AU and ASEAN react to China's influence by assessing their overall strength and the ability to uphold their desired regional norms. The first hypothesis predicted that strong regional institutions would maintain regional normative values and partner with China on terms beneficial for the region. Signs of a strong institution included creating binding agreements or enforcing adherence to established institutional norms. The second

³⁰⁶ Mark Paterson and Abebajo Adekeye, "The African Union at Ten: Aspirations and Reality," CCR Policy Brief (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2012), 1–6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05127>.

³⁰⁷ Acharya, "The Myth of ASEAN Centrality?"; ASEAN Secretariat, "Fact-Sheet of ASEAN Political Security Community."

³⁰⁸ Rolland, *China's Vision for a New World Order*.

hypothesis predicted China would be able to exploit weak institutions to shape regional norms to serve its own interests. Signs of a weak institution included deep political or social divisions, financial difficulties, competing member state priorities, and domestic instability or corruption that impedes regional coordination. The third hypothesis predicted that institutional responses differed where member states perceived China as a regional threat irrespective of institutional strength. In the next section, I will lay out the thesis' main findings.

A. EVALUATING THE AFRICAN UNION'S RESPONSE TO CHINA

The AU's core objectives aim for economic prosperity through regional integration, democratic ideals, and stability within the region.³⁰⁹ This research concludes that the AU is a weak institution because of the lack of financial resources, management capacity, and its inability to enforce these normative values. For example, competing member state interests and reverence for national sovereignty allows African governments to pursue regime security over their citizens' or the region's welfare, weakening the AU's institutional unity.³¹⁰ Significantly, most of the AU's funding comes from external donors like China because the AU cannot enforce adherence to annual dues.³¹¹

In contrast to ASEAN's security challenge in the South China Sea, China and the AU's interests for a stable and prosperous African continent often intersect due to extensive Chinese business interests like infrastructure development.³¹² China's financial and political support for the AU's flagship projects has helped the AU progress towards accomplishing key regional goals such as infrastructure development. Because China is seen mainly as a financial backer and key donor for infrastructure development and peacekeeping forces, the research did not find clear instances where member states

³⁰⁹ Mark Paterson and Abebajo Adekeye, "The African Union at Ten: Aspirations and Reality," CCR Policy Brief (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 2012), 1–6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05127>.

³¹⁰ Carrozza, *China's African Union Diplomacy*, 2–6.

³¹¹ Carrozza, 2.

³¹² Marais and Labuschagne, "China's Role in African Infrastructure and Capital Projects."

perceived China as a regional threat. Therefore, there is no conclusive evidence to support the third hypothesis.

China's financial and political support has led to the AU's growing dependence on China, increasing China's influence over regional initiatives. These actions enhance China's credibility within the AU and the continent because they help validate China's claims for peaceful development, countering negative perceptions.³¹³ Yet, China's formidable resources entice AU member states to pursue bilateral arrangements, which limits the AU's ability to act as the representative voice of a unified Africa. Additionally, this research found some of China's bilateral infrastructure projects, such as the GERD, have destabilized the region, undermining the AU's goal for peace and stability. This is a major source of friction within the AU because member states remain beholden to China's financial support. Furthermore, China's avid support for non-interference principles has further cemented the concept, limiting the likelihood that the AU could hold China accountable for China's part in destabilizing the region.

This thesis found the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is a platform used to subvert the AU's desire to promote good governance, democratic ideals, and sustainable development that is driven by its own citizens. The research found that the AU's institutional deficiencies hampered the AU's ability to present a collective voice on the global stage. For example, the AU has no official stance on China-African relations.³¹⁴ The lack of a unified African voice leaves room for corruption, political instability, and predatory practices by both domestic and foreign actors.³¹⁵ FOCAC, as a competing and more established regional institution, undermines the AU's ability to act as the preeminent recognized voice for the region. Furthermore, these deficiencies hampered the AU's ability to present a collective voice at FOCAC. Without the strength of a unified collective, the AU participates in FOCAC as a member equal to individual member states, not as a leader, holding little influence over the agenda, budget, and level of engagement. FOCAC

³¹³ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*: 56.

³¹⁴ Taylor, *The Forum on China- Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)*: 95.

³¹⁵ McGann, "2020 Africa Think Tank Summit."

demonstrates how a Chinese-led initiative can exploit institutional weaknesses, such as the AU's lack of funding and resources, to pursue China's strategic interests.

B. EVALUATING ASEAN'S RESPONSE TO CHINA

ASEAN's key regional goals are to uphold regional centrality, foster peace and security, and accelerate economic prosperity.³¹⁶ This thesis found that ASEAN is responding to China's influence in the region using tools of institutional enmeshment and diplomatic hedging to advance its core objectives. This thesis, moreover, determined that ASEAN was able to more effectively achieve this goal because it is a strong institution that has continued to maintain centrality to regional issues and has gradually encouraged Chinese adherence to regional norms and values. Overall, this thesis found that ASEAN has successfully inspired China's active participation in ASEAN-led forums. In contrast to the AU, ASEAN has shown a capability to evolve as an organization to meet current challenges and maintain relevance and centrality in the region. Using collective negotiation, ASEAN has reached free trade agreements with China that benefit both parties, despite the varying levels of economic development and competing priorities of ASEAN member states. The concessions ASEAN secured in its FTA demonstrated that an institutions' strength could affect the outcome of these agreements. Moreover, China's continued participation in ASEAN-led initiatives reinforces ASEAN's status as the regional leader, further strengthen its ability to shape regional norms. As China's enmeshment in ASEAN governed institutions deepens, so too do the costs of not adhering to these desired norms.

In comparison to the AU's relatively straightforward findings, this thesis found that ASEAN's response to China is not clear cut. Despite its strengths, ASEAN also demonstrates some signs of a weak institution because competing member state priorities have led to political and social divisions that impede regional coordination. Cambodia's case study illustrates how China uses competing economic priorities among ASEAN members to prevent a unified response condemning Chinese aggression in the SCS. As a

³¹⁶ ASEAN Secretariat, "Fact-Sheet of ASEAN Political Ssecurity Community."

non-claimant state, Cambodia's priority is financial security; therefore, Cambodia's reliance on China as an economic partner creates significant incentives to oppose aggressive measures proposed by ASEAN members regarding the SCS.³¹⁷ Subsequently, ASEAN has struggled to establish a unified stance regarding maritime territorial disputes in the SCS.³¹⁸ This thesis shows how China's political and financial support for individual ASEAN member states exacerbates existing cleavages and competing priorities between its members but has not broken ASEAN's institutional efficacy.

This thesis identified how ASEAN and its member states are susceptible to challenges presented by China's growing military and political influence due to geographic proximity.³¹⁹ An examination of ASEAN highlighted how varied threat perceptions of China's actions in the SCS affected alignment choices. For example, when member states such as Vietnam and the Philippines recognized China as a security threat in the SCS, they were more willing to speak out against Chinese actions.³²⁰ In contrast, Cambodia highlights how varied threat perceptions regarding China's actions in the SCS threatens to divide ASEAN member state unity. Cambodia exemplifies how China can exploit ASEAN's consensus-based governance style, using economic inducements to amplify member states' disparate interests. This thesis establishes that ASEAN's mixed security prioritization in the SCS weakens ASEAN's unity because it amplifies the internal divisions and competing maritime claims within ASEAN. With Cambodia's partnership, China undermines ASEAN by amplifying disunity among members, hampering the organization's ability to function through consensus-based governance.

³¹⁷ Emmers, "ASEAN's Search for Neutrality in the South China Sea," 67.

³¹⁸ Goh, "ASEAN-Led Multilateralism and Regional Order," 46.

³¹⁹ Zhang Zhexin, "China's International Strategy and Its Implications for Southeast Asia," *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2016, no. 1 (August 3, 2016): 55.

³²⁰ Kuik, "How Do Weaker States Hedge?" 511–2.

C. LIKELY FUTURE TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research revealed the common trends between ASEAN and the AU are China's use of financial resources and free-trade agreements to increase regional influence and enhance its reputation as a responsible partner. Although the AU and ASEAN's FTA with China differ on many levels, both demonstrate China's willingness to help orchestrate economic development and both benefit both China and the regions. In these instances, China used its economic and diplomatic clout to galvanize support for regional economic integration. These FTAs provide evidence that China is most successful in gaining influence when its interests align with institutional goals such as economic prosperity and regional integration. Because the institution stands to benefit from these arrangements mutually, these common interests make it more likely for institutions to accept China's presence because they reduce security concerns. China's prominent role in negotiating both FTAs represents its ability to capitalize on shared preferences to bolster its image as a reliable partner and responsible actor. If the AU and ASEAN's current status quo remains the same, one can expect to see more of the trends identified above.

However, the future of China's relationship with ASEAN and the AU remains uncertain. Neither institutions are impervious to the potential that China amasses a greater level of influence. For example, ASEAN's normative power could diminish if it continues to be divided by individual interests over the region's collective well-being. Meaning, if China succeeds in dividing more ASEAN members, similar to Cambodia's case, ASEAN's effectiveness would suffer. Furthermore, institutional infighting would weaken ASEAN's ability to push back against actors who break regional norms because it would not reach a consensus on regional issues. Additionally, FOCAC could continue expanding and solidifying bilateral arrangements, furthering China's model of development and authoritarian ideals. By cementing its status as the preferred regional institution, China could further weaken the AU's unity and status as a representative voice of Africa.

Escalating security issues could also change the trajectories of ASEAN's and the AU's response to China. ASEAN member states are currently divided over SCS security concerns; however, a major incident involving China in the SCS could prove a catalyst for ASEAN members to unite against Chinese aggression. Likewise, although the AU does

not currently hold a foreign policy stance on China's influence, this approach to China could rapidly change if debt sustainability becomes a boiling point for the region. If large numbers of African leaders start interpreting China's offers as debt traps, they may become more risk-averse or look West for lending and infrastructure development. Since financial support accounts for a significant source of China's influence in Africa, this could weaken China's presence. In other words, the influence China has gained in the AU and ASEAN could diminish if either institution begins perceiving China as a credible regional threat.

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