Africa and the Ascendancy of Modern China in International System since 1971: A Historical Appraisal

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Abstract

Changes in the 21st century global distribution of economic and political powers clearly suggest that the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC or China) can no longer be ignored, having emerged as a superpower of substantial significance. Attempts to understand this phenomenon have produced several literatures most of which have often relegated Africa to the margins in spite of the continent's key contributions to China's contemporary international profile. This paper historicizes Africa's socio-cultural and diplomatic capitals as indispensable factors in understanding the phenomenal rise of China within the international system. Based on the research findings, the paper holds that but for the strategic support of many African countries, the rise of China in the international system may have been delayed or frustrated by the West in its attempt to preserve its hegemony in the hitherto prevailing world order.

Keywords: Africa, modern China, international system, diplomacy

1. Introduction

Admittedly, the phenomenal growth, development and rise of modern China in the international system are largely a function of its determination to take its destiny into its hands. Led by Mao and other patriotic leaders, the young republic was established in 1949 after its tumultuous years of revolutions and warfare. From 1979, the country underwent strategic economic reforms and opening up policies under the able leadership of Deng Xiao Ping leading to its towering status, in 2010, as the World's largest economy after the United States (McCurry & Kollewe 2011). Much as the internal agents of change were at work in the process of this profound transformation, external forces particularly Africa remains pivotal in understanding this phenomenon. Today, for its socio-economic and diplomatic resources, Africa remains the coveted continent both to the West and the East, feeding the third wave of the scramble, after the ages of slave trade and colonialism. For China, its interest in Africa is of two components: economic and diplomatic (Jedrzej & Manuel 2007). Economically, Beijing's rapid economic boom depends largely on Africa's energy resources, raw materials, investment opportunities and a market for its industrial products. While this has received considerable studies, Africa's diplomatic importance to China, on which its international profile partly hinges, has been consigned to passing comments.

In the following discourses, the paper examines how Africa has diplomatically contributed in the architecture of China's ascendancy in the international system, with immense implications for restructuring of global power distribution. It contextualizes Africa as China's viable support constituency both in the United Nation (UN) and in its reunification project, especially as it concerns eroding Taiwan's sovereignty. Furthermore, the paper analyses Africa's support for one-China policy as fitting into the pattern of South-South cooperation against Western neo-imperial attempts to undermine the sovereignty of the global South. Although rarely recognized, the paper deploys empirical issues to argue that Africa functions as China's access to the world. Given the robust dimensions of Sino-Africa ties, Africa's political and diplomatic capitals will, perhaps, continue to remain an incontrovertible value upon which China will depend to sustain its emergence and recognition abroad, unity and sovereignty at home and importantly project its power and visibility globally.

2.   Dominant perspectives on Sino-Africa relationships: an overview

Since the commencement of the Cold War, literatures on the development of Sino-Africa relationships have been largely characterized by debates that reflect sharply divided perspectives. From the contending views, dominant perspectives can be roughly grouped into three schools; the *China threat*, the *win-win* and the *mixed impact* schools.

During much of the cold war, ideology politics played a dominant role in shaping international politics, international relations and even perceptions of the historical evolution of the time. These also reflect in the interpretation of Sino-Africa relations. In effect, many literatures by Western scholars on Sino-African relation are characterized by a preponderant focus on the negative forms of China's engagement in the continent as constituting a *threat* to African development (Large 2008, Mohan 2008). Leading debates include, but not limited to, Lessing (1962), Scalapino (1964), Legum (1965), while subsequent interpretations in this school have also emphasized how China's strategy in Africa reverses Western attempts at building up the basic structures on which sustainable developments in Africa can firmly take roots. In their views, China is intensely criticized for its Africa policies that advance exploitation, imperialism and self-serving agenda. They hold that China's Africa policies clearly embolden authoritarian regimes in Africa as well as discourage transparency and accountability. Also, China has been under seemingly coordinated attacks from this school for what has been termed support for the violations of the environment, human rights, democracy and exacerbation of Africa's dependency status as exporter of primary products, etc. (Lake & Whiteman 2006) (Navarro 2011), etc. Although some of the criticisms of this school seem well thought out, they appear to be paranoid just as they give the impression that China-Africa engagements must strictly adhere with Western values and standards. As noted by Mohan (2008) and Large (2008), plenty of *anecdotal evidence* and paucity of *systematic data* seem to have created room for speculations, paranoia and exaggerated extrapolation in which a case of China's less positive engagement with a few African countries is projected as representative of the entire China-Africa relationship. Perhaps, this approach sustains the notion that it allows little room for the understanding of China's unique approach and the philosophies driving its activities in Africa. Engaging China on those (less positive) issues more constructively holds the potentials of improving on those areas of concern, hence paving the way for developments that benefit all.

While the China threat school is primarily concerned with the negatives, the win-win school has maintained the opposite stance. They insist that Sino-Africa relation is a viable form of partnership for development. From the neo-liberal ideological standpoint and based on the philosophy of South-South cooperation, the school maintains that the relationship is poised to encourage positive development, rather than imperialism, not just in China and Africa, but across the third world (Han-Chen 1965). Over the years, various Chinese leaderships are well known to have espoused the philosophy of the win-win cooperation strategy. Reiterating this in 2006, President Hu Jintao told Nigeria's federal Legislature that *China's development will not bring a threat to anyone, instead, will bring more opportunities and space for development to the world* (French 2006). This statement has a wider significance. It was a well calculated message not only meant for his immediate audience but as a response to those that subscribe to the idea of China threat. Although with a note of caution, Robert (2008) contends that *...China's current thrust into sub-Saharan Africa promises to do more for economic growth and poverty alleviation there than anything attempted by Western colonialism or the massive initiatives of the international lending agencies and other donors*. The central message of this school of thought is that China is neither altruistic nor is it playing a zero-sum game in its relations with Africa. They argue that the transformatory power of China's relations with Africa will draws from the comparative advantages of both sides, in which each side balances its deficits with surplus values accessible from the other partner, hence encouraging healthy developments for both sides.   In effect China and Africa seek to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship devoid of exploitation, inequality, disrespect and violation of sovereignty. Admittedly, the win-win theory and its associated guiding principles are often used as the catch-phrase, nevertheless, it is discernible that most Chinese and some other writers that hold this view are keen to study how China aids Africa, (put differently, how the continent benefits from China), without devoting a corresponding measure of studies on how China also benefits from Africa

as well as the challenges arising from their engagements. This imbalance that runs through their works presents unique problems in appreciating the bigger picture that actually characterize the ties. This is because rather than sustain the win-win ideology through emphasizing a trend of interdependent relationship, this style of writing *unintentionally* reflects dependency, feeds the rising criticisms against the relationship and presents the win-win initiative as mere rhetoric.

The third school in this debate is of the view that the impacts of China in Africa are mixed. That is, much as it has very positive influences in the continent, some of Chinese strategies are less positive with varying degrees of consequences on Africa's sustainable development. Therefore it is neither gloomy nor glorious as the earlier schools mostly contend. Published in 2007, a report on China in Africa concludes thus; *The study found that China's economic profile in Africa has produced a 'mixed bag' of effects and responses among all groups of stakeholders* (Africapractice 2007). Also, Tull (2006) agrees that Beijing's economic impact on Africa is perhaps *a mixed blessing,* but he describes the political impact as ultimately *deleterious*. Further, this school seems to suggest that the intensification of strategies that produce the positive impacts should be encouraged while those that culminate in negative consequences must be addressed through a review of the rules and processes of engagement.

Be that as it may, it would appear that the evolving international geopolitics of the post-cold war era, as well as domestic issues affecting China (and to a large extent Africa) accounts as main influences that factor the perspectives (Large 2008). In general, the central theses that run through the existing literatures on this subject matter can be roughly conceptualized in three dimensions. The first is that Africa is interpreted as the endangered *prey* of China. Secondly*,* that the continent benefits more from China which is sometimes characterized as *benign*. The third perspective has focused on a more objective theme of interdependence emphasizing mutual benefits and costs, although some writers in this fold have marginalized Africa's reciprocity, perhaps inadvertently. Agreeably, these approaches have clearly focused on intellectually important aspects of the subject, but the unannounced philosophy driving these debates seem to intrinsically correspond with the competition between the West and China for Africa's resources, for which most of China's critics are understandably helpless and concerned. While some of the criticisms are well founded on facts, several as demonstrated by Brautigam (2009) are either exaggerated, unfounded, unrepresentative or even similar to practices for which Western countries are also culpable. Be it for the positive, negative or a combination of both factors, the role of China in the development of Sino-Africa relations, as most existing literature reflect, is often imposingly central, while that of Africa is mostly consigned to the periphery, thereby conveying a sense of less important participant in the making of Sino-Africa ties. This is an unfair element against which existing literatures have not been vocal. It is this false sense of history that this paper addresses through historicizing the place of Africa in its relations with China, particularly as it concerns its rise to prominence in the global system.

3.   Africa and China's ascendancy in the United Nations

Before October 25th 1971, China's seat in the UN and membership of the UN Security Council had been occupied by the Republic of China (ROC, or Taiwan). However, information available at online Wikipedia has it that, as from that day, following the adoption of No.2758 UN resolution by the general assembly, Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) was formally admitted to its seat in UN and membership of the Security Council. Significantly, this withdrew international recognition from ROC, and transferred same to PRC. Hence, PRC became the sole legitimate government of China, internationally recognized by the UN. Although the United States (US) did not spare efforts to frustrate PRC in its quest to reclaim its position in the floor of the UN, PRC was supported by much of the third world, of which African states constituted a significant part. A Chinese scholar, Gao (1984), posits that *they (African nations) made the greatest contribution to the recovery of China's legitimate seat in the United Nations Organization.* Also, some other nations, particularly Asians played very crucial roles in the actualization of this feat. The statistics show that, of the 128 countries that were present at the UN meeting, 76 states voted in favor of PRC, 35 opposed, while 17 abstained (Gao 1984). Though some African countries opposed China's bid, among the 76 that voted in favor were 26 African states, constituting one-third of the total votes cast in favor of PRC (Tareq

1971). Africa's vote in this regard has been recorded in history as a very important contribution towards raising the PRC's international profile. This is because, of the tripod that supported the actualization of the PRC's objective and ascendancy in the UN, Africa's block vote constituted a whole part without which the other two would have collapsed in defeat. According to UN conventions, two third of the votes cast must be in support of the motion to ensure victory. The significance of this was captured by *The Christian Science Monitor* which reported that the African delegates *were in a frenzy of delight –their arms swooping above their heads and jumping up and down in their seats as wild applause engulfed the circular chamber* (Tareq 1971). Overwhelmed with this show of solidarity, Chairman Mao Zedong once said that *it is African brothers who literally carried us to the UN* (Wang 2009). As a consequence of this overwhelming support, PRC's international image received a big boost, signaling the arrival of the PRC in the mainstream international politics. According to Taylor,

> *China postures an image of itself as an image of the developing world, if not its effective leader through the possession of a permanent seat on the Security Council. This position enables Beijing to project China onto the global stage as a major player in its own right. But if this image is to be sustained and carried off, Beijing feels compelled to maintain an active and visible interest in areas such as Africa which act as a support constituency to add political and numerical back-up to China's claims* (Taylor 1998).

Besides, there are clear prospects for continued Africa's support for China in the future. Africa is vital to China in its efforts to balance the powers of the hegemonic West, as it resolves never to allow a repeat of past humiliation by outsiders under any guise. In the matrix of the ever evolving complex international system, China will most likely continue to rely on Africa, as well as other developing nations in the pursuit of its economic and political objectives. In apparent confirmation of this perspective, a Chinese news magazine clearly reveals that (*the) vast number of third world countries (will) surely unite with and stand behind China like numerous "ants" keeping the "elephant" from harm's way* (Taylor 1998). China's past, present and foreseeable reliance on Africa, in pursuance of its international objectives, establishes the latter's geo-strategic importance in the framework of the former's foreign policy objective.

4. Africa and China's reunification project; the case of Taiwan

Africa's relevance in the construction of China's ascendancy in the UN is closely related to the issue of its reunification project. Here Africa has also shown a good amount of support through its roles and commitments to the PRC's one China policy. It must be noted that at certain points in history, particularly in the 1990s, some African states had strained relationship with PRC, and consequently gravitated towards Taiwan as it adopted the *dollar diplomacy* (Taylor 1998, Hongwu 2009 b). However, the trend has changed considerably, following PRC's renewed friendly disposition towards African nations desirous of economic growth and development (Hongwu 2009 b). In return for Beijing's goodwill, vast majority of African nations continued to offer pragmatic alliance with PRC, strengthening its international profile, while Beijing vigorously pursued its reunification program. The idea of One China had found profound expression with the transfer of Hong Kong and Macau to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and 1999 respectively (Taylor 1998). As Beijing continues to stress that Taiwan is part of PRC in its one China policy, it then implies that Taiwan is the third unfinished project in the reunification process. Fundamentally, this explains why PRC emphasizes non-recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty as part of its foreign policy objectives in its international relations. Be that as it may, what is important here is that most African nations stood along with PRC in this regard. Pragmatically, Central African Republic and South Africa resumed diplomatic recognition with PRC in January 1998, while Lesotho, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Liberia also severed ties with Taipei (Taylor 1998, Hongwu 2009 b). In a related development, Taiwan had made attempts to rejoin the UN, but PRC (with the support of African nations) had firmly opposed its entry under any moniker. That Taiwan no longer actively asserts sovereignty over all of China, that it re-applied for full UN membership in September 18th 2007, that Taiwan receives backing from US and many members

of the European Parliament, and that it sponsored two referenda in 2008, all did not add up to much progress for Taiwan. *In fact,* online Wikipedia reports*, UN subcommittee on September, 17th 2008 had again ruled that it would not allow the General Assembly consider Taiwan's request for permission to join the UN…In 2009, for the first time in 17 years, Taiwan did not submit a bid to join the UN.* Although not officially stated by any party, this apparently is another setback for the Taiwan state project.   However, as a number of issues remain uncertain, it is hard to confirm if Taiwan has conceded defeat in this case. It suffices to note that the objective of PRC's one China policy is also indirectly being pursued by other nations sympathetic to this cause. As part of these, African countries have played important roles in this construction, both at the UN and at bilateral levels.

5.   Africa and China's International identity

As far as the West is concerned, China is one of the *worst violators of human right* in recent history. This is an issue for which China has come under sever criticisms from the US and some European institutions and states. Some of China's policies and its relations with individuals and groups within China, the Taiwan, and even with some African states had been contextualized as infractions on the fundamental right of such persons, groups, or nations. However, it is helpful to note that what China critics perceive as *human right* is not exactly the same with Chinese idea of it. China promotes a cultural relativist notion of *human right* with emphasis on the collective rights, while the West emphasizes individuals' human right (Taylor 2008, Taylor 1998). Therefore differing perception of human right even makes the issue more complex, fluid and nebulous. More interesting is the claim by Taylor (1998) that before 4th of June 1989, *human right abuses in China (contrasting with the West's Cold War critique of Soviet abuses) had been quietly ignored* by the West. The Tiananmen incident therefore signified a watershed in the history of Sino-Western (*human rights*) relations. Not only was China isolated and sanctioned by the West, its international image was severely damaged. In the mist of that isolation and international identity crisis, it was some African states that rose to the occasion contributing to rebuilding China's battered international esteem. While Angola's foreign minister for example expressed 'support for the resolute action to quell the counter revolutionary rebellion', Namibia sent a congratulatory telegram to Chinese army (Taylor 1998). It was also an African head of state; Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso that became the first foreign leader to pay solidarity visit to Beijing, in the post-Tiananmen period. Besides Zimbabwe and Zambia, some other African nations openly rallied around China. In recognition of this fact, Hongwu (2009 b) wrote that

> *Later on, the first head of state, the first head of government, and the first foreign minister to visit China after the Tiananmen incident all came from African countries. In 1989, heads of state from Burundi, Uganda, Togo, Mali, Burkina Faso, visited China. In 1990, heads of state from Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, Chad and Sudan, visited China.*

In fact, many African leaders saw the Western approach to the issue as the developed world's smokescreen for halting the rapidly developing China. The developing nation's solidarity and rejection of what they perceived as western neo-imperialism, violation on their nations sovereignty and all forms of West's conspiracy against the third world, largely explain why those African nations rallied around China's cause. The views held by Snow (1995) and reechoed by Taylor (1998) in this regard is more revealing; *Both China and many Africa leaders believed themselves to have experienced and continues to face common enemies, namely, imperialism and neo-imperialism from the developed world.* Incontrovertibly, this show of solidarity increased China's confidence in dealing with not just the image issue, but in reviewing its foreign policy objectives. Consequently, cushioned by Africa's support and solidarity, China reviewed its foreign policy mainstreaming Africa as part of its centerpiece. This was practically demonstrated in the (His Excellency Qian Qichen) Chinese foreign minister's tour of 14 African countries between June 1989 and June 1992. China's invitation of numerous African dignitaries to visit China as well as increased aid diplomacy towards Africa further exemplifies this Taylor 1998)

In spite of the sweeping effect of the Western idea of human rights in Africa through the agency of Civil Societies and Non-Governmental Organizations, the issue of human right appears to have galvanized both China and some African governments at international fora, as both sides sometimes project a common front. Human rights such as *economic rights* and *rights of subsistence* are perhaps the main priority of developing nations, and these conceptions of human rights take precedence over individual rights as conceptualized in the West. With inestimable support coming from Africa, China was able to successfully defeat the West sponsored anti-China human right bills in the UN year after year (Hongwu 2009 b). At Geneva, April 1996, this feat was repeated with the support of 14 African votes out of 26 (Taylor 1998). Again, following China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the intense Western opprobrium against its *dumping* practices, a good number of African states again demonstrated willingness to protect the national interest of China, leading to its recognition as a market economy (Tull 2006). The impacts of these have had powerful effects on the concomitant ties across the Indian Ocean, as it consistently impacted on the rise of Beijing's international status. Indeed, Sino-Africa relation is a pivot in the structure of China's relations with the outside world, playing an irreplaceable role in improving contemporary China's diplomatic environment and boosting its international standing (Hongwu 2009 b).

It is important to acknowledge that following the opening up of China, the Western conception of human right reforms have been taking place in the country although gradually. Over the course of three decades, two factors have played vital roles in that regard, namely; the Chinese government and foreign direct investments. The introductions of National Compensation Law (NCL), Prison Reform Laws (PRL), the Labor Laws, and Labor Arbitration Commission by the government of PRC are all important steps towards human rights reform. These were hitherto non-existent. Similarly, the emergence of rights-based labor practices by some foreign investments in collaboration with Chinese firms has been transforming the *human rights* situation among workers in China. Guthrie (2006) describes these changes as *gradual* and *radical*, transforming the society in fundamental ways. This is because, for example NCL *allows Chinese citizens to sue the government for past wrongs* just as PRL *has fundamentally altered the treatment of prisoners* (Guthrie 2006). Human right reforms are very pertinent and deserve to be more pragmatically encouraged in China.

6.   Africa as China's access to the world

Although often ignored or deemphasized, one very remarkable contribution of Africa to the development of modern China over the years has been the provision of valued access for China's entry into the international scene. In other words, China's ties with Africa afford it the opportunity to connect with the wider world in ways that benefit China's international reckoning. This is not only demonstrated through the offer of increasing market space to China, but also in the context of improved socio-cultural awareness of Africa itself.

By the end of the 1980s, Africa has provided a valuable platform to many Chinese companies, to launch into the international market. It is on record that on the eve of 1990, over 2000 construction and labor contracts were awarded to Chinese companies and enterprises by African states. This amounted to a large share of Africa's infrastructure construction industry (Hongwu 2009 b). Also, it has been estimated that between 2001 and 2006, Africa has offered about 41 large scale construction jobs, and high level scientific and technological projects. Examples of these include the railway modernization project in Nigeria, and several kilometers eastern-to-western Algeria express way project. *Contracts and labor cooperation agreements signed between Chinese enterprises and their African partners in 2006 reached $28.97 billion, accounting for 31% of China's contract value in foreign countries* (Hongwu 2009 b). Although Africa benefit from these massive infrastructural deals, their value and significance for the development of China is no less beneficial. Indeed, their importance is evident in a number of ways. First, Africa's increased provision of enabling business opportunities to China, through bilateral or multilateral agreements, contracts and concessions, is such a value that the Chinese treasure. Secondly, the implementation of the business agreements and contracts more importantly provide China the opportunity to demonstrate in

practical terms its engineering capacity in the international arena. Through its prestige projects that announce Chinese presence in most of African states, the Middle Kingdom makes bold and confident announcements to the world that its emergence in the international system is solid and for good. Clearly, this represents an eloquent testimony to how Africa provides a platform on which China accesses the international market and indeed the world. Besides its engineering impact in Africa, China also does this at home. For instance, the *planting* of high rising public, commercial and residential buildings in China's major cities, the infrastructures used to host the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the 2010 Shanghai World Expo and the 2010 Guangzhou All Asian Games, speak volumes. Their records in science, technology, medicine, information technology, etc. compel even its critics to admit that China has made tremendous progress within a relatively short period.

On the other hand, within the framework of increased socio-cultural education of the Chinese about Africa, Africa has equally played an important part. Since 1980s, some Chinese students and visiting scholars were admitted in African universities to study humanities and African languages such as Swahili, Hausa, etc. The essence is to expand the frontiers of Chinese knowledge of Africa as a means towards substantially increasing its access to the continent where the raw materials necessary to secure China's future is naturally abundant. To underscore the importance of this, the consciousness of African studies has been growing in China at a very unprecedented rate in the nation's history. Historiographies of Africa, written from the Chinese perspectives are also very impressive (Ansha 2005). Also, in his piece titled *African Studies and "New Frontier" of China's Academic Domain,* Hongwu (2009 a) captures the significance of the knowledge of Africa to the development of China. In addition to various school of Foreign and or International studies, there are a number of Institutes, Centers, Schools, Colleges, etc. that are specifically established to conduct studies, researches and teachings on themes that focus primarily on Africa. Some of these Institutions include; the Institute of African Studies, Zhejiang Normal University, Zhejiang, the Center for African Studies, Yunnan University, Yunnan, the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the School of Asian and African Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, the Center for African Law and Society, Xiangtan University, Xiangtan. These consolidate the efforts at the establishment of the Institute of Asian and African Studies in 1961 in the wake of Chairman Mao's remark that *'We don't have a clear understanding of African history, geography and the present situation'* (Large 2008). China It must be noted that the Chinese government's investments in these are certainly well calculated, because the knowledge of Africa in their thinking, perhaps, represent the knowledge of a gateway to their future.

Furthermore, in another area of cultural exchange, China is also benefiting from Africa. Although Africa and China are geographically far apart, yet African cultures continue to find their way into Chinese societies in ways that excite the Chinese. Not only does the richness of African cultures enrich the Chinese ways of life, the oriental society and its cultures have experienced greater diversity following this trend. Recently, invaluable elements of African culture, its diversity and beauty conspicuously took center stage in the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, to the admiration of the world, particularly the host nation. Today, several Africans live, study, work and do business in China, thereby contributing to making the nation a melting pot of several cultures living in harmony. For instance, although many Africans are found in many of China's cities such as Beijing, Shenzhen, Shanghai, Wuhan, Yiwu, etc. the case of Guangzhou in Guangdong Province stands out. For decades now, areas in and around Guangzhou city plays host to many people of African descent. In these areas, many Africans (despite some challenges) have successfully integrated into the host communities through, blissful intermarriages, legitimate business transactions, tenured or contract-based jobs, pursuit of formal education and enjoyment of good life in China. Due to this unique development, Guangzhou city has been popularly known as the *chocolate city* of China. Therefore, the role of Africans and their culture in enhancing the Middle Kingdom's cultural diversity, beauty, and deeper appreciation of foreign culture cannot be overemphasized. Clearly, the Chinese recognize this, as it is evident in the writings of a Chinese scholar who holds that,

> *Chinese people have started appreciating and enjoying African music, dances, woodcarvings, stone sculptures, masks, costumes, coffee and handicrafts from different African nations and ethnic groups, as well as books, movies, and audio-visual products about this continent, and counted these as part of their lives. Traveling to Africa has also become a fashion among ordinary Chinese.*
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> *Such changes and progresses in China-Africa relationship have extended beyond economic and political scopes and influenced the cultural life and ideology of contemporary Chinese. Over the past five decades, cultural exchange and cooperation with African countries have brought foreign cultural elements and nutrients from a distant land into China, thus inspiring the cultural imagination and creation of Chinese nation, and enhancing its cultural tolerance and diversity. All these are of particular importance for the development of the modern Chinese culture.* (Hongwu 2009 a)

It is therefore clear that the presence of Africans in parts of China, the concomitant penetration and acceptance of valuable material and non-material elements of African culture, have positive impacts there. This indeed has promoted a degree of *Cultural Revolution* in China, vis-à-vis the transformation of Chinese people's perception, ideology and cultural life. This is very significant, especially when viewed in the context of a nation that remained closed until about three decades ago. In the words of the Chinese scholar quoted above, African inspired cultural miscegenation, *imagination*, *tolerance*, and *diversity* in China are all of particular importance for the development of the modern Chinese culture.

7. Conclusion

Within the contemporary international system, China is clearly a force that cannot be shoved aside any more. This trend has a direct bearing with the impressive amount of growth and development that it has recorded since 1979. In 2010, the nation's economic growth stood at 10.3%, ranking as the world's second largest economy and a political power of global reckoning. The historical relationship between this trend and African countries has been the main focus of this paper. While it acknowledges the role of China towards African development, the paper concludes that African countries have also contributed tangibly towards the development of China and more importantly towards its visibility in the international scene in a number of very significant ways. Both China and Africa acknowledges the value of their relationship, and strives hard to grow it for the benefit of both sides. The emergence of Forum for China-Africa Cooperation in year 2000 and the conduct of their triennial summits is an elegant testimony to this.

As their increasingly complex engagements deepen and broaden, the socio-economic and political values that accrue, just like for Africa, are also in favor of China. Opening up the vast continent granted substantial benefits to the Middle Kingdom in its modernization process. In fact, Africa's valuable energy resources, inestimable raw materials and vast markets are intricately linked to China's energy security, industrial power and investment returns respectively. Having focused mainly on the diplomatic rather than the economic, the paper concludes that *turning East* policies of most African countries have also given vent to the demonstration of Chinese engineering capacity and international prestige among the comity of nations. Substantially, Africa's political and diplomatic support for China in the international system remains key in understanding China's ascendancy globally, in the United Nations and overall success in some vital areas of its national interest, particularly as it concerns its highly prized national sovereignty. These are very important unsung values that the continent adds to China's profile.

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