

## China and Africa: Rebranding the People to People Relations

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### Introduction

Over five decades ago, late Premier Zhou embarks on a tenation Africa tour setting a milestone for the development of relations between China and Africa. In 2013, President Xi Jinping's continue the Chinese government tradition of making the African continent the first overseas nation visits of the year, followed by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's four-nation Africa tour, and Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, five-nation African tour both in 2014. This shows how China has not only unswervingly developed a friendship of cooperation with African nations, but also continued to inject fresh contents and vitality into bilateral relations. As the Chinese Foreign Minister was in Kenya, he defended Mainland's role in the continent by declaring, China will not follow the old path of the Western colonists, as well as will not sacrifice the African continent's ecological and long-term interests. The Chinese minister's statement alluding to the idea of a "neo-colonial Mainland" in Africa is proof that China is becoming increasingly conscious of Africans who question Beijing's role in the region, as well as whether Mainland investments really benefit the African people.

The Chinese government has made it a top political and economic priority, to make better nation to nation relations with several African nations in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2009, China became Africa's number one trading partner. From 2009 to 2011, the scale of Sino-African trade expanded rapidly. According to the 2013 State Council policy document, China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation, the total volume of China-African trade in 2012 reached \$198.49bn, an increase of 19.3 percent from 2011. Of this, \$85.32bn consisted of China's exports to Africa, up 16.7 percent from the previous year, while China's imports from Africa accounted for \$113.17 billion, up 21.4 percent. Natural resources accounted for the lion's share of Africa's exports to China, and huge Chinese demand has raised the price of these products, increasing overall GDP growth in Africa. China has been a major source of development financing for African countries in recent times. \$9 billion in 2000 to US\$222 billion in 2014, making China Africa's largest trade partner [1]. However the developing tale of increase in trade between China and Africa changed in 2015; from January to October 2015 the trade between both parties' decrease to \$147.6 billion [2]. The trade volume decrease by 18 per cent year-on-year, but the amount of exports from China to Africa displayed a contrarian soar, climbing to US\$89.9 billion, with an increase of 5 percent, 7 percent points higher than the general growth of the export in the same period. The electrical and mechanical merchandises turned out to be a significant driving force of China's exports to Africa. Meanwhile, the products mineral energy resources and the distinctive agricultural products imported from Africa did not decrease in quantitative terms and certain goods even augmented

It is estimated that between 2009 and 2012, China provided African countries with about \$10 billion in concessional loans. It is anticipated that by 2025, China will have provided African countries with about \$1 trillion in development financing including direct investment, soft and concessional loans. Also, the "China-Africa Development Fund" is a viable mechanism for development assistance, which invested over \$1.8 billion in no less than 53 projects in Africa by 2012.

During a 2014 speech at the World Economic Forum in Nigeria,

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang talk about his dream of one-day linking Africa's major cities by Mainland built high speed railways "with no string attached." Consistent praise have been showered from academicians and analysts on China's improved relations with African continent, while the Obama Regime's 2014 United States/Africa Leader's Summit was widely seen as a response to the inroads that China has been making in the region. Beijing engagement in funding infrastructure projects, debt forgiveness, as well as scholarships for Africans students to study in Mainland universities has attributed to a next positive image of Beijing among several African nations in a 2013 Pew Research Global Attitudes Report, nevertheless, there remains room for improvement. Several nations from Africa have expressed gratitude as well as optimism for the economic partner that China has displayed it could be, by permitting these nations to abandon or mitigate their at times rigid economic partnership with the West. Still, Mainland must continue to convince African continent and more importantly, the people of Africa, that its interest in the region is authentic. By rebranding and improving the people to people relationships, mutual respect, as well as cultural consciousness in an association that several Africans feel reeks of European colonial stereotypes, Mainland and Africa can continue to strengthen one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's most dynamic strategic and economic corporations.

### Plight of Africans in China

Large numbers of migrants from several Africa nations first started immigrating to China in the late 1990s as well as in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first sets of Africans to migrate in the mid-1980s were students, funded by government scholarship to Chinese universities, as well as encouraged to study Mandarin and upsurge their knowledge of Chinese culture. As the economy of China started approaching a double digit growth in the late 1990s, numerous migrant from Africa in search of the Chinese dream began to travel to the country. Nowadays, there are numerous Africans in China whom are traders as well as small business owners with the purpose of acting as intermediaries between the small businesses across the African continent as well as the manufacturing centers in southern China. Historically, Mainland has been a net exporter of immigrants to the western world. A projected one million Chinese citizen have travelled to Africa continent so as to start small businesses, restaurants, as well as even begin a traditional Chinese medicine clinic to achieve their dreams of a better life. Based on the open door policy, this saw the Chinese economy and society continue to open up to the outside world, migrants from Africa, as

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well as increasingly Europe and the United States view China as a place where their dreams can be a reality.

According to Al Jazeera report in 2014 on African migrants in Guangzhou, journalist Jennifer Marsh highpoint the problems of Africans migrants seeking to attain their personal Chinese dream on one of Chinese mainland's most populated southern cities, Guangzhou. Unofficial projection propose that in the Yuexiu and Baiyun central districts of Guangzhou, recognized in the Chinese media as "Chocolate City" as well as "Little Africa," between 60,000 and 300,000 Africans call China home, while another 60,000 Africans are projected to be spread all over China. According to the journalist, she said "while the central regime openly welcomes the migrants, current draconian visa legislation has sent a strong signal: Africans in China — even highly prosperous, educated economic contributors — are not welcome." Journalist Jennifer Marsh story highpoints the story of Cellou Toure a Malian migrant whose small business suffered for the reason that he is unable to obtain a Chinese visa despite the fact that this Malian is being married to a Chinese woman and having three Malian-Chinese kids. Numerous Africans see circumstances like Toure's as the hypocrisy of the Chinese regime's benevolence towards Africa as African migrants witness firsthand the business success of Westerners who marry Chinese women and are permitted to flourish legally in small as well as medium sized enterprises under the protection of the law.

If you search the internet under the keywords, "Chinese prejudice against Africans in China" to find out a list of search outcomes of blogs as well as articles on the experiences of young African migrants, travelers as well as students, most of them are proficient in Mandarin, as they narrate their experiences in China. According to an article titled "In A Minority in the Middle Kingdom: My experience Being Black in China". The former African-American expat, Marketus Presswood observed the racially charged atmosphere in his Chinese school as well as classroom as he found it more and more problematic to hold on to his teaching jobs as an inflow of westerners flooded the Chinese education market in the early 2000s. The author recall overhearing one of his students saying, "I don't want to look at his black face all night."

A brilliant young medical student from Guinea Bissau who studied Mandarin as well as Medicine in the coastal city of Nanjing reported to a local Chinese hospital to do her residency and training. She was fluent in Chinese, while she was there numerous Chinese patients would not permit her to touch them or treat them for the reason that she was African.

These stories as well as several others highpoint the barriers as well as racial stereotypes that numerous Chinese people harbor against people from African. Much of the problem has to do with mainland Chinese people's unfamiliarity of Africa, African history and culture as most Chinese individuals' judge Africans based on the era of European colonialism as well as the stereotypical portrayal of Africans in the media. The other part of the problem is China's Han chauvinism as well as its long centuries old "white skin" beauty standards that act as a physical as well as psychological barrier that sees darker skinned persons as less civilized. One of the most common racial stereotypes about people in China concerning African people is that they all like to eat watermelon and chicken. This specific stereotype comes from the American south during the post-enslavement era, and has nothing to do with other Africans in the African diaspora highlighting Chinese people's lack of understanding of Africa people. Re-branding the Relationship Chinese people frequently debate that Asia modernity cannot be judged via Western institutions as well as a western narrative of history for the reason that Asian culture is distinctly dissimilar. Since this is

the way the Chinese think, then, there is a question that must be asked, why does China deserve such deference when it views the African world from the European viewpoint, and how can China be the leader of developing and underdeveloped nations that it know little about? If the Chinese regime wants to upsurge its economic and political allies on the continent of Africa as well as amongst the people of Africa, then, the next step in the Africa-China relationship must seriously address the rebranding of people to people relations.

Currently effort by the Chinese regime have displayed that Beijing is trying to take steps in the correct direction. China hopes to minimize social tensions by bridging the information gap. Xinhua, China's state-run news agency has increased its bureaus in Africa to over twenty. In 2008 the China Africa News service was launched, to report "China-Africa news stories from African, Chinese and Western sources." In addition, in 2012, China's state broadcaster (CCTV) launched Africa based in Nairobi, Kenya. The purpose was to create a mix of news, social and business commentary, CCTV Africa airs nightly on Chinese televisions so as to foster cultural consciousness as well as better understanding of the continent of Africa from domestic African reporters. Shao Qiwei, the head of China's National Tourism Administration vowed in 2013 to foster tourism to Africa, and in 2014, a China Daily news article highpoint a net upsurge in Chinese tourists to east Africa. In spite of the regime's efforts, China's leadership should upsurge its focus on initiatives and policies that address particular problems of Africans in China and initiating local campaigns to upsurge consciousness of racism in the country.

Furthermore, the Chinese regime could begin by fostering tax breaks for Chinese enterprises as well as state owned companies in Africa that hire 20-30 percent of their workforce domestically. African politicians and communities have ridiculed Chinese enterprise working in Africa who relocates their workers from China, rather than hiring domestically. Companies from China argue that language and culture dissimilarities function as a barrier to hiring locals, while critics debate that companies from China import everyone from managers to low level trash collectors to work in Africa. An alteration in hiring practices would stimulate domestic economies as well as stifle complaints of racial hiring procedure amongst Chinese enterprises who complain of lazy domestic Africans.

China could as well create a path to residency for small and medium sized African business proprietors in China, who have married Chinese citizens, contribute to their domestic economies, and who have not been in trouble with the law. Most significantly, while the education system centers heavily on the suffering of the Chinese people at the hands of Western imperialism, the education system could as well centers on a more in-depth understanding of imperialism's damage to other countries in the African Diaspora, Latin America and India.

In as much as we cannot change the past but we can design and build our own future. This mindset has to change and should be replaced by an "AFRI-CHN DO" attitude. China and Africa need to place countries mindset and reputation at the core of their developmental goals. Internal and external credibility are fundamental, country branding and a population aligned behind the brand cannot be ignored in the current global economy. "Country Branding" should first and foremost involve national mindset building around unity, performance and solidarity in order to i) ensure that the image/brand projected outside is reflected inside, and ii) that the citizens of both regions are sufficiently geared up mentally and psychologically to achieve the vision and meet the challenges ahead. In practice, this can be done via a combined top-down and bottom-up approach. It is about establishing

independent structures or departments responsible for various aspects of brand strategy, population endorsement, reputation management and competitive identity. As the world searches for new space and opportunity, China and Africa have to believe that they are ready and poised to harness the opportunity. The strategy and approach to Rebranding China-Africa relations has to be a collective effort between China and Africa, built on collective focus and reputation building.

Former Chinese President Hu Jintao at the 2006 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing opened the ceremony with a speech in which he reminded African dignitaries as well as guests of the century's old trading relationship between Africa and China, as well as the ancient civilizations that Africa and China held claim to. If the past is any indication of the future, then Sino-Africa relations will continue to grow as China's Maritime Silk Road will go via the main

east African port in Kenya on its way to Europe. Africa demographic forecasts display a speedily urbanizing populace as well as one of the world's largest working age populations by 2035. Despite the fact that the birthrates of multiple Asian nations will be in decline in the next twenty years, the Chinese regime is depending on augmented consumption from Africa's emerging economies as a robust element of Beijing future growth. As African turn out to be increasingly conscious of the significance of their economies as markets for China's consumer merchandises, the Sino-Africa relationship must be balanced on a basis of understanding and mutual respect.

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