

Retrospect and Prospect of Sino-Africa Cultural Exchange in the 21st century

You Yonghong

Confucius of Institute, University of Malawi, Malawi

University of International Business and Economics, China

youyonghong@uibe.edu.cn

Abstract

This article combs through the history of Sino-Africa cultural exchanges since the founding of the People's Republic of China by summarising and discussing the characteristics of Sino-Africa cultural exchanges in the first 20 years of this century. These characteristics include language, academic and think tank, literary and artistic groups and non-governmental cultural businesses. This paper prospects and proposes ideas to promote cultural exchanges between China and Africa. Among these proposals, Sino-Africa cultural exchanges should focus on balanced development between regions, strengthen non-governmental exchanges, promote cooperation and exchanges between universities and think tanks of both sides and promote the development of industrialisation and marketisation. Cultural exchanges have essential strategic significance for Sino-Africa cooperation and are a long-term measure to enhance the overall Sino-Africa cooperation and safeguard the interests of the development of both parties.

Keywords:

Sino-Africa,
Cultural exchange,
China,
Malawi.

© 2022 The Author.

This work is licensed
under the Creative
Commons Attribution
4.0 International License

Introduction

Since the first forum on China-Africa Cooperation was held in Beijing in October 2000, the sino-Africa cooperation has achieved fruitful results. Some of these landmark achievements include summits of leaders of China and African countries and ministerial meetings, a virtual platform and mechanism for China-Africa cooperation and dialogue. In addition, economic, trade and personnel exchanges between China and Africa have made this cultural exchange and cooperation successful in promoting expected growth and development. This

article reviews the history of cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa since the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially the first 20 years of this century. It also sorts out the ways and characteristics of Sino-Africa cultural exchanges and cooperation and puts forward some views on further promoting this cultural exchange.

In the past two decades, marked by the establishment of the Sino-Africa Cooperation Forum, Sino-Africa relations have opened a new chapter. Both sides have benefited from the continuous development process. In particular, the development of China provides some new development approaches for African countries. African countries have paid attention to two aspects of China's development experience. First, from the perspective of New Structural Economics (NSE), which is a framework proposed by Justin Yifu Lin (2012), the best way to achieve dynamic, inclusive and sustainable growth in a country is for the government to develop its industries according to the comparative advantage determined by its endowments in a market economy. Developing countries can make full use of their endowments to achieve rapid development, and China is one of the role models.

Regarding Sino-Africa relations in the new century, scholars from China and Africa have discussed papers that mainly focus on economics and politics (Tembe & Xu, 2013; Michael & Omoruyi, 2018; Zhang & Tao, 2020; Yu & Zhang, 2021). However, there is little attention to cultural exchanges between China and Africa. Chinese scholars analysed Egyptian English media news on China-Africa relations. They found that these reports were mainly concentrated in the political and economic fields, while reports in the cultural and educational areas were minimal (Kong & Qin, 2019). This is not commensurate with China's tremendous efforts in this regard. Some studies have also pointed out that the Sino-African partnership is also facing discordant factors in the process of continuous development, and these factors have harmed the construction of the Sino-African block (Guan, 2020; Li, 2021).

In recent years, some scholars in China have begun to turn their attention to non-economic aspects between China and Africa (Tang, 2017; Wang & Wang, 2020; Zhang, 2021). By taking the soft power approach, a joint study illuminates the salience of attractiveness in international politics, interrogates sources of China's beauty in the continent and compares China's actions with traditional actors for broader empirical coverage and methodological rigour. The paper argues that while economic drivers are essential, Chinese scholars also emphasise people-to-people exchanges. The essence of people-to-people exchanges between China and Africa is not propaganda-style public diplomacy but cultural gifts, mutual cultural learning, and cultural integration. The purpose of people-to-people exchanges is two-way: to understand each other's culture and to lay the foundation for building a good relationship (Li, 2015). In terms of value orientation, due to the influence of Western civilisation, Africans have long used the dual cognitive structure of Africa and Europe, Africa and the west, or African civilisation and Western civilisation to understand their relationship with the outside world. To a certain extent, the Sino-Africa relationship has been affected by the dichotomy. From this dichotomy perspective, some reports on African media describe the Sino-Africa relationship as a new colonial relationship, which can easily lead to a misunderstanding that affects the different exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa (Zhou, 2016).

By searching in China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), its most essential paper databases, seldom do one find papers that have that In developing Sino-Africa relations, cultural exchange is the best way to promote sustainable development relations and eliminate mutual misunderstandings. Through reviewing and analysing the current sketch of Sino-African cultural exchanges in this century, discovering some existing problems and proposing improvements are the purposes of this article.

Sino-Africa cultural exchange after the founding of the People's Republic of China in the 20th century

In May 1956, China and Egypt issued a joint statement, officially announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations. As a result, Egypt became the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with China. In October of the same year, China and Guinea formally established diplomatic ties, and Guinea became the first sub-Saharan African country to establish diplomatic relations with China.

From December 1963 to February 1964, the then Chinese prime minister Enlai Zhou led a delegation to visit ten African countries and put forward the five principles guiding China's relations with African countries as follows: (1) China supports the African and Arab people in their struggle to oppose imperialism and old and new colonialism and to win and safeguard national independence; (2) it further supports the pursuance of a policy of peace, neutrality and non-alignment by the governments of African and Arab countries; (3) it also supports the desire of the African and Arab people to achieve unity and solidarity in the way they choose; (4) it supports African and Arab countries in their efforts to settle disputes through peaceful consultations, and it holds that the sovereignty of African and Arabic countries should be respected by all other countries and encroachment and interference from any quarter should be opposed (Lu, 2015). When China restored all its legal rights in the United Nations in 1971, twenty-six African countries voted in its favour, and this became an indicator of the friendship between China and African countries.

During the founding years of the People's Republic of China, generally speaking, all industrial sectors were waiting to be rejuvenated. Then the level of economic development was deficient, and China-Africa relations were primarily emotional, and the mutual attraction was because the two continents had been curbed by west hegemonic power. Due to domestic and foreign factors, the ideological colour of Sino-Africa relations was apparent. The United States and the Soviet Union dominated international relations, and Sino-Africa relations were

also affected by the ideology of the superpowers. However, China has always pursued an independent diplomatic policy adopted a positive and friendly attitude towards African countries.

China government gave the Egyptian government 20 million Swiss francs in cash to support its reclamation of the sovereignty of the Suez Canal in November 1956. China government helped Guinea build a match and a cigarette factory in 1960. From 1961 to 1962, China sent seven agricultural expert teams to Mali and helped Mali produce sugar and tea (Ubi, 2014). China sent the technical team to Africa to evaluate the feasibility of building the Tanzania-Zambia Railway in 1965, and the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, supported by China, was completed in 1976. China has thus won the support of the majority of African countries. China and Africa have forged a strong traditional friendship, which has helped China restore the deserved seat in the United Nations in 1971. China won seventy-six countries during the voting process, including twenty-six African countries (Xu, 2020). In the background of the Cold War, the choices and scales of aid targets to Africa were strongly influenced by political characters. At this stage, China and Africa also have had economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, but both economic and cultural exchanges were subordinate to political association.

After entering the 1980s, the situation of China and Africa had undergone significant changes. China's policy shifted to focus on economic development and vigorously promoted reform and opening-up policies. African countries also strived for national independence to develop national economies and industrialisation. As a result, sino-African relations made significant progress in this decade. Since ideological affiliations were downplayed and China began to set up diplomatic ties with African countries, most of these had been pro-US or pro-Soviet. Such countries include Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, Madagascar, Angola, Lesotho and the Ivory Coast. By the end of the 1980s, Sino-African relations reached a historical high, with 47 of the 51 African countries have established diplomatic ties with China (Liu & Yang, 2009, p.33).

With the establishment of diplomatic relations, cultural exchanges have become more frequent. For example, in the 1980s, more than 80 African cultural and arts delegations visited China and over 10 African ensembles performed in China. On the other hand, more than 20 Chinese arts delegations and ensembles visited and performed in African countries. In addition, more than 2,300 African students studied in China, and over 100 Chinese experts and teachers were sent to teach in African universities and high schools. Some Chinese students and visiting scholars also went to Africa to study African languages and humanities. In addition, China dispatched dozens of medical teams to over 20 African countries (Liu & Yang, 2009, p. 34).

However, Sino-African relations also faced some challenges in the 1990s. Firstly, due to China's development strategy changes, the scale of aid to African countries was reduced. Secondly, Taiwan took the Dollar Diplomacy in the 1990s. Finally, the recession of African economies and the decrease of mainland China's Africa aid allowed Taiwan to expand diplomatic space in Africa (Taylor, 2002, p.125). Due to these reasons, Liberia, Lesotho, Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic, Niger, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Senegal, Chad and Sao Tome and Principe set up diplomatic relations with Taiwan from 1988 to 1997.

China had only adjusted its development focus within the framework of the socialist system and had not abandoned the traditional friendship with African countries. Denis Sassou Nguesso, the Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) president, visited China 14 times. In the 1980s, an influential politician of the Congo-Brazzaville, Sassou Nguesso, visited Beijing, and the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping told him: "Although our country is impoverished today, 30 years later, our country will not become the world's number one power and may not be a second or third one but the fourth at least" (Zhao, 2018, p.464). Deng Xiaoping also emphasised: "China now has limited capability to help African friends much because China is on the path of modernisation. If China developed one day, we could offer more help to the African friends" (Zhao, 2018, p.464). History has more than proved Deng Xiaoping's vision. Today, China has developed into the

world's second-largest economy and the most important industrial country, and China is promoting the industrialisation and modernisation of Africa through assistance and cooperation.

The 1980s to the 2000s is considered a transitional period of Sino-Africa relations. Western countries continuously looked down on Africa's prospects and frequently withdrew investment during this period because of Africa's political turmoil and economic depression. Despite challenges and setbacks in China-Africa relations in this period, China further strengthened economic and trade cooperation with Africa through broadening the channels for aid to Africa with the development of China's reform and opening up and the economic take-off. China's government emphasised mutually beneficial cooperation and the operability and ability scales regarding financial assistance. As a result, the assistance of China was diversified. In addition to providing free assistance to Africa, China also expanded various forms of project contracting, labour service cooperation, technical services, cooperation in setting up factories, and joint ventures. With this course of close collaboration, the cultural exchange was slowly developing.

New developments in Sino-Africa relations in the 21st century

Around 2000, Sino-Africa cooperation shifted from being politically and economically dominated to all-around pragmatic and rational collaboration in politics, economy, society, and culture. As a result, the improvement of Sino-Africa relations had entered the fast lane, and the development of Sino-Africa cooperative relations was institutionalised. In particular, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) established in 2000 had built an effective institutional platform for the long-term development of Sino-Africa relations. A vast number of African countries positively responded to it. The first ministerial conference of FOCAC turned out to be a big success that many heads of state and more than 80 ministers from China and 44 African countries were invited to the conference. This brand-new strategic platform had opened a new era of contemporary Sino-Africa cooperative relations and great strategic significance for enhancing the overall development of Sino-Africa relations. Under the new cooperation mechanism,

the overall improvement of Sino-Africa relations has been reflected in the political and diplomatic levels. However, economic and trade cooperation has become the core driving force for developing Sino-Africa relations in the new century. The partnership between China and Africa in traditional fields such as infrastructure construction, culture, health and education has continuously achieved new results. Fresh, bright spots have also emerged in practical cooperation in new areas such as science and technology, finance, tourism, aviation and environmental protection.

In January 2006, the Chinese government issued the China Policy Document on Africa for the first time, proposing to establish and develop a new strategic partnership with Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic cooperation and mutual benefit, and cultural exchanges and mutual learning. Furthermore, in November of the same year, the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Third session Ministerial Conference were successfully held. As a result, the two sides formally established a new strategic partnership between China and Africa.

Chinese leaders attach great importance to developing cooperative relations with African countries. Chinese President Jinping Xi delivered a speech titled Trustworthy Friends and Sincere Partners Forever at the Julius Nyerere International Convention Center in Tanzania on March 25, 2013. He proposed the four-point principle of sincerity, actual results, affinity and good faith for China's relations with Africa and called for a balanced approach to interests and principles (Xi, 2013, p. 337). He said,

First, in treating African friends, we stress the importance of sincerity. Second, in conducting cooperation with Africa, we stress the importance of actual results. Third, in strengthening the China-Africa friendship, we stress the importance of affinity. Fourth, in resolving problems that may crop up in cooperation, we stress the importance of good faith.

The core idea of the balanced approach to interests and principles proposed by the Chinese President Xi Jinping is that when cooperating with Africa, China should always respect and safeguard the interests of African countries and African

people and put them first. It should uphold justice for Africa politically and help it speed up development and renewal economically. It will neither follow the old path of Western colonialists nor sacrifice the ecological environment and long-term interests of African countries but will seek mutual benefits on a reciprocal basis.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang proposed six cooperation programmes with Africa during his visit to African countries in 2014. The programmes are related to the industry, finance, poverty alleviation, ecological improvement and environmental protection, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and peace and security. Li also proposed China-Africa cooperation on the high-speed railway, expressway and regional aviation networks (China's Africa Policy, 2015). In early 2015, China and the Africa Union signed a memorandum of understanding on promoting the three transportation networks and industrialisation in Africa.

So far, except for Swaziland, China has established diplomatic relations with all sovereign African countries. On December 4, 2015, the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation upgraded the Sino-Africa' new strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership. It focuses on the implementation of the ten significant cooperation plans, namely, to deepen humanities exchanges and cooperation; to expand cultural and sports exchanges and cooperation; to upgrade tourism cooperation, news, radio, film and television cooperation; to encourage academic and think tank exchanges; to increase non-governmental exchanges; to expand cooperation in education and human resources development; and to strengthen scientific and technological collaboration and knowledge sharing.

The new session of the Chinese leader's visit to Africa and the first visit to Africa by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs after the new year for 31 consecutive years highlights China's satisfaction with the achievements of Sino-Africa traditional friendship and cooperation. Cultural exchanges and cooperation have become more prominent with the further development of Sino-Africa diplomacy and economic and trade cooperation. Humanistic exchanges are of fundamental strategic significance to Sino-Africa cooperation and are long-term

investment and risk prevention and control measures to enhance the overall situation of Sino-Africa cooperation and safeguard the interests of Sino-Africa joint development. For Sino-Africa cooperation to develop sustainably, it is necessary to build a community of developers, a community of interests, and a community of shared destiny.

China fully respects the rights of African countries to be included and speak in relevant cooperation matters and does not gesticulate the development path chosen by Africa's partner countries. In the process of cultural exchanges, when it comes to exchanging national governance and development experience, China neither pushes the development path with Chinese characteristics to African countries nor does it advocate that African countries copy China's development experience. As early as 1960, when Chairman Mao Zedong met with representatives of sub-Saharan African countries, he clearly stated, "China has China's historical conditions, you have your historical conditions, and China's experience can only be your reference" (Yang, 2020, p.34). So, one of the critical aspects is that the two sides need to work together to gradually build a common development goal, mutual respect and equal treatment. We can define the new cooperation model as a humanistic partnership for knowledge sharing and exchanging ideas, providing a broader and more solid spiritual support platform for Sino-Africa cooperation in politics, economy, security, diplomacy, and other aspects. The increasingly close economic and trade ties and the development of diversified collaboration between China and Africa have laid the foundation for developing Sino-Africa cultural exchanges.

The primary forms and characteristics of Sino-Africa cultural exchanges and cooperation in the 21st century

As early as 1956, China and Egypt formally signed a cultural cooperation agreement, the first cultural agreement between the People's Republic of China and an African country. In 1992, the National Grand Theater in Ghana was put into use with the aid of China. The theatre became an iconic building in Ghana and was printed on the local banknotes. In 2009, the 4th Ministerial Forum on China-Africa

Cooperation was held. The Chinese government announced that it would assist 100 rural schools and train 15,000 talents in Africa within three years. By 2012, China fulfilled its commitments and assisted 126 schools in African countries. The Malawi-China Friendship Primary School located in Lilongwe results from this summit. There are many other projects like this. Through the construction of theatres, stadiums and schools, China has promoted the development of local culture and education in Africa through investment in infrastructure construction. For instance, the Malawi University of Science and Technology, built with a concessional loan provided by the Chinese government, was opened in 2013. It was also printed on the 2000 Kwacha banknote, the largest denomination of the Malawian currency currently. In 2017, China-aided construction of the Bingu National Stadium in Malawi was delivered, and China's Guangdong R&F Football Team and the Malawi National Football Team held a friendly match at the delivery ceremony.

The cultural exchanges between China and Africa that began in the mid-1950s and the long-term traditional friendship and the diverse cultural exchanges are the core motive for the Chinese language to be incorporated into the many African countries general education system. In recent years, the content of Sino-Africa cultural exchanges has been continuously enriched, and the path has constantly been expanded. The establishment of Confucius Institutes in Africa marked the establishment of an effective communication mechanism between China and Africa in universities, culture, education, science and technology, tourism and other fields. In particular, some unique Confucius Institutes such as traditional Chinese medicine and vocational education in African countries have had better development in line with local, national conditions. The earliest Confucius Institute in Africa was established at the University of Nairobi in Kenya in December 2005. Since then, the Confucius Institute, jointly established by two universities in China and Africa, has become one of the primary cultural exchanges between China and Africa. As of 2019, China has established 59 Confucius Institutes and 41 Confucius Classrooms in 44 African countries, becoming an essential platform for African students to learn Chinese and know China's culture. The Confucius

Institute adopts a model jointly established by Chinese and foreign universities and conducts its work under the guidance of a board of directors jointly established by Chinese and African universities. Since launching the Confucius Institute, China has sent more than 400 Chinese teachers and more volunteers to African countries every year to offer various Chinese courses for free. In particular, 'Chinese + vocational education has generally welcomed African people.

Tunisia had incorporated the Chinese language into its national educational system as the first African country in 2004 before the advent of Confucius Institutes in Africa. Since then, with the increasing demand for the Chinese language in African countries and the vigorous advancement of Confucius Institutes, many African universities have newly established Chinese majors or have incorporated the Chinese language into the university credit course system. Take Malawi as an example; through the efforts of the Confucius Institute at the University of Malawi, the Malawi University of Science and Technology has incorporated 8 Chinese courses into the credit course system, and 22 students are attending the classes. The University of Malawi will also finish the review procedure and approve the Chinese language as credit courses in 2021. It is reported that 12 countries in Africa, including Egypt, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, South Africa, Kenya, Gabon, Nigeria, Cameroon, Tanzania, Zambia, Cape Verde, Uganda, have successively incorporated the Chinese language into their national education systems. The growing enthusiasm among African people for learning Chinese is a natural attraction for promoting the widespread incorporation of Chinese. In the several cultural exchanges and dialogue activities between China and Africa that the author has participated in, more and more African scholars can speak or communicate at the conference in proficient Chinese. The language of some international conferences also has the default English to English or Chinese optional mode.

On the China side, Beijing Foreign Studies Institute (now Beijing Foreign Studies University) began to teach Swahili and Hausa languages as early as 1961 and 1964, respectively. Later, the Beijing Broadcasting Institute (now Communication University of China) opened the above two majors. When Chinese Premier Zhou

Enlai visited Tanzania in 1965, he used Swahili translation on all public occasions. Entering the 21st century, more and more attention has been given to African language teaching. Tianjin Foreign Studies University, the PLA Foreign Languages Institute and others universities also established the Swahili major, Zulu major and other core languages of Africa. As a result, African language teaching and research have seen an unprecedented upsurge.

After entering the 21st century, academic and think tank exchanges between China and Africa are very frequent. Many exchange mechanisms and projects include the China-Africa Think Tank 10+10 Partnership Program, the China-Africa University 20+20 Cooperation Program, the China-Africa Joint Research Exchange Program, the African Talent Program, and the African Human Resources Development Fund (Yang, 2020, p.34). Implementing these projects has effectively promoted academic exchanges, subject research and publications between China and Africa.

The China-South Africa high-level cultural exchange mechanism was established on April 24, 2017. The first high-level inter-governmental humanities exchange mechanism established by China and one of the countries of Africa has had a significant and far-reaching impact on strengthening China-South Africa relations. The new tool has been deepening China-Africa cooperation and promoting South-South cooperation. At the same time, China has also established Africa research centres at Zhejiang Normal University and Yunnan University to inject academic vitality into the mechanism and provide academic support. In particular, the Sino-Africa Think Tank Forum has become a dialogue platform with extensive international influence. Since its establishment in 2011, the forum has held seven sessions in Hangzhou, Addis Ababa, and other places to “people-oriented, government participation, frank dialogue, and consensus-building (Dong, 2011). The results have greatly enhanced Sino-Africa understanding and expanded mutual consensus. Through the above-mentioned academic and think tanks and other humanities exchange mechanisms, China and African countries have set up topics around national governance, development models, industrial

cooperation and cultural and legal differences and conducted an honest discussion on the promotion of peace and development in Africa and China-Africa relations. Through equal and in-depth dialogue, exchanges and research cooperation will strengthen China and Africa's understanding and mutual trust.

China and Africa have also conducted fruitful cooperation and exchanges in other areas of cultural exchanges. Recently, activities such as China-Africa Cultural Focus, China-Africa Cultural Exchange Program, and China-Africa Cultural Cooperation Partnership Program have been carried out. In addition, the first documentary series, 'I come from Africa', jointly produced by Chinese and African directors, tells the story of Africans living in China, which records six dimensions: education, marriage, business, public welfare, food, and art. These cultural collaborations and integrations of non-governmental exchanges with China and Africa have promoted mutual understanding between the people of China and Africa.

Different civilisations of the world need to exchange and learn from each other. One of the core pillars of China culture is "H", which means harmony. Like a very famous sociologist, Fei Xiaotong, said: "every form of beauty has its uniqueness, and we should seek to appreciate other forms of beauty with openness. If beauty represents itself with diversity and integrity, the world will be blessed with harmony and unit" (Fei, 2005). In addition to establishing Confucius Institutes in African countries, China has also established Chinese cultural centres in five African countries, including Mauritius, Benin, Egypt, Nigeria and Tanzania. As a result, more Africans will get better information about China through various cultural exchange activities and eliminate misunderstanding and estrangement.

As early as July 1988, China established Africa's first Chinese cultural centre in Mauritius, and the new centre was completed and opened with more complete facilities in 2008. The Chinese Cultural Center in Mauritius often holds various exhibitions, introduces Chinese Peking Opera knowledge to local schools, and organises a series of activities such as Chinese Film Week. In Benin, the Cultural Center often arranges exhibitions, lectures, seminars and other activities in different

cities. To introduce the Chinese film industry to the people of Benin, the Center has established the Chinese Movie Fan Club to take movie-watching as a window to make Beninese audiences have a deeper understanding of China. The dragon & lion dance team of the Cultural Center is also quite famous locally and is often invited to perform at various large-scale local festivals. Based on regional cultural characteristics, the Egyptian Cultural Center and Nigerian Cultural Center often hold multiple exhibitions, such as the Contemporary Chinese Architecture and Picture Exhibition, and the Chinese Cultural and Creative Products Exhibition Week. They also co-organise activities with local parties to celebrate local festivals. The Chinese Cultural Center in Tanzania held activities to showcase the cultural characteristics and Buddhist art of Qinghai Province and teaching activities related to Chinese Acupuncture and Tai Chi.

In addition to the activities organised by the China Cultural Centers, the Chinese New Year art troupes have entered African countries to perform in the past ten years. This has become a mark for exchanges in the art field between China and Africa. The Chinese New Year art troupes are jointly organised by the Chinese embassy in the country where it is located and the Ministry of Culture in China. The Chinese provincial art troupes are invited to African countries to hold cultural performances every year before the Chinese New Year and perform together with African artists to have a close view of China's various artistic styles. For example, in Malawi, the Chinese New Year art troupe has visited Malawi every year for 1-2 performances since 2011, held in different cities, communities and universities. Chinese and Malawian artists jointly sang or danced on stage. Malawi's traditional folk dance and local music are indispensable in these performances. Each performance is packed with seats and becomes a grand gathering of artistic exchanges.

As Sino-Africa economic and trade relations become closer, more and more Chinese companies and individuals are investing and doing business in African countries. Companies and individuals in African countries have also used the China ImportExpo and other platforms to promote African products such as coffee, red

wine, wood carvings, and paintings sold in China. The number of African people doing business and studying in China is also gradually increasing, promoting non-governmental cultural exchanges between China and Africa. In August 2019, Botswana established the China-Africa Non-governmental Exchange and Cooperation Promotion Association to encourage the participation of Chinese and African non-governmental organisations in the exchange and promotion activities of China-Africa non-governmental organisations. A Chinese business couple, Li Songshan and Han Rong, are proficient in the Swahili language. After years of hard work in Tanzania, they have become well-known Chinese entrepreneurs and famous art scholars and collectors. The couple established African Woodcarving Art Museums in Tanzania and Changchun, China. The couple also founded the Tanzania National Makonde Art Association to support African artists. Their collections have participated in many international exhibitions and got wide acclaim.

China and Africa have also established the China-Africa Non-Governmental Forum to promote exchanges in various non-governmental fields such as culture and art. In 2010, African students established the Young African Experts and Student Association in China to introduce African culture to China and help African youths start their businesses in China. In 2014, Chinese youth founded the China House in Kenya, a platform for promoting the sustainable development of Chinese investment in Africa. In July 2016, the first China-Africa Art Festival hosted by the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism opened in Cairo. The above cases of non-governmental exchanges show that China and Africa have been promoting friendly ties between the two continents with an open, frank, and mutual understanding.

Problems and countermeasures in China-Africa cultural exchanges and cooperation

Africa has a vast territory and many countries. The level of economic development of different countries varies significantly. There is a better financial condition in countries such as Morocco, whose economic growth has been influenced by Europe. There are also underdeveloped countries such as South

Sudan in sub-Saharan Africa. The ethnicities, history, religions, customs and habits of different countries vary. This is manifested in the cultural differences in the colourful styles. Therefore, in the process of cultural exchanges between China and Africa, it is necessary to know about the shared cultural features of Africa as a whole region and consider internal differences. Just as there are 56 ethnic groups in China, Chinese culture is diverse. At the same time, the size of the country and the level of economic development should balance equality, and inclusive development to promote cultural exchanges with economically underdeveloped countries. For example, China should encourage and support some qualified countries to set up cultural centres in China, improving the effectiveness of cultural exchanges and promoting mutual understanding and friendship between China and Africa.

China has established stable mechanisms at the official level of cultural exchanges and achieved good results. However, cultural exchanges require more non-governmental agencies and individuals to participate spontaneously. So far, non-governmental cultural exchanges are still in the initial stage of development. For instance, many folk art groups in China and Africa are still unfamiliar with each other's art forms and artistic aesthetics. China and Africa should utilise official mechanisms such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) to issue good policies to coordinate and promote spontaneous non-governmental exchanges in various fields and advocate the exchanges of various non-governmental organisations such as the China-Africa Art Association and the Film Association. Private enterprises and non-governmental organisations must be encouraged to jointly carry out cultural and artistic activities, such as joint exhibitions and film productions. The China-Africa People-to-People Friendship Action, China-Africa People-to-People Friendship Partnership Program and other activities have achieved results in promoting further non-governmental exchanges. Many Chinese companies have also played an essential role in fostering non-governmental exchanges between China and Africa. In July 2017, Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba Group, announced four exciting and good things at the Rwanda Africa Youth Summit, including funding 200 young African entrepreneurs to study in Hangzhou, cooperating with African universities and governments to train

students, and the establishment of a US\$10 million African Young Entrepreneurs Fund have greatly inspired African youth who have entrepreneurial enthusiasm and pursue their aims. In addition, young people from China and Africa have joined hands to develop, innovate and start businesses in activities such as Chinese Bridge, which have enhanced the vitality of China-Africa non-governmental exchanges.

In recent years, Chinese universities and think tanks have increased their attention to Africa, and some Chinese universities have established African Research Institutes or African Research Centers. The most outstanding of these is the African Research Institute of Zhejiang Normal University, which has played an essential supporting role in promoting exchanges between China and Africa in various fields. In April 2019, under the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation initiative, China established the African Research Institute at a national level in Beijing to further enhance research and cooperation with African countries. But, on the whole, China's research on Africa is still in its infancy. In addition to more academic exchanges and cooperation with African countries such as Egypt and South Africa, there is still relatively little cooperation with universities and think tanks in most economically underdeveloped countries. The researches of many fields are still in the early stage. Taking Malawi as an example, searching for relevant academic research papers in China's most crucial thesis database, there are few valuable research papers, and even information on various aspects of Malawi is lacking. Most African countries have cooperated with China to set up Confucius Institutes, an essential platform for China-Africa humanities exchanges and a bridgehead for China's African regional country studies. For example, the Chinese partner university Jiangxi Normal University established the Madagascar Research Centre based on the Confucius Institute at the Tanana Navarre University of Madagascar. The Chinese partner university Chongqing Jiaotong University established the Benin Research Centre based on the Confucius Institute at Abomey Callaway University.

In addition, with the further advancement of Sino-African education cooperation, many African universities are strengthening studying in China, and

many scholars have obtained PhDs in China Universities. Even some African universities have established Chinese studies or Sinology research institutions. For instance, Nigeria has a China Studies Center, the University of Johannesburg and Nanjing University of Technology jointly established the Africa-China Studies Center (CACS), and the University of Nouakchott, Mauritania recently established Contemporary China and Mauritania Research Center.

As a subsidiary of local universities, Confucius Institutes need to further know about the stage of Chinese research in cooperating universities by setting up Chinese research topics, conducting research in cooperation with the Chinese or language departments of foreign universities or various related colleges, and organising academic lectures, forums, and conferences and other forums to cultivate and support Chinese studies in local universities, and help regional partners to understand China. Take the Sino-Malawi (Africa) Culture and Language Forum organised by the Confucius Institute at the University of Malawi as an example; It has been held for two sessions and attracted a group of Malawi scholars who study in China. In the future, the form of the forum will be further innovated, and the content will expand from language and culture to economy and trade.

The prosperity and development of culture need the promotion of capital. Similarly, Sino-Africa cultural exchanges and cooperation also require the concept of industrialisation and marketisation. Combining cultural exchanges with industrial development and strengthening personnel training and cultural industry cooperation can promote cultural institutions and personnel exchanges between the two sides. We can say that the market mechanism can ensure a long-term cultural exchange mechanism. The economic momentum and interests can promote the sustainable development of cultural exchanges by promoting market-oriented cooperation in museums, expositions, exhibitions, concerts, and film and television industry fields.

First of all, Sino-Africa cultural exchanges should further broaden financing channels. As the enthusiasm for participation in Sino-African cultural exchanges among Chinese and African NGO organisations, enterprises and various groups

is soaring, it is necessary to make some policies to guide the trend. In addition to fundraising from the society agency, it is essential to exert market mechanisms to raise funds. For example, China and African countries can hold commercial, cultural tours. In addition, some theatres and art groups in China can invite art groups from African countries to perform commercial performances in China, and the proceeds can support the joint art creation of both parties.

Furthermore, African countries should take advantage of the original natural features and unique ethnic customs. Many African natural and cultural scenes have appeared in some popular documentaries and TV dramas in China, attracting many Chinese tourists to visit these locations. For example, the Maasai Mara savannah in Kenya is known by the Chinese people because it often appears in documentaries on animal migration. As a result, the Maasai Mara has also become one of the Chinese's most popular tourist destinations in Africa.

Secondly, African countries can rely on their rich and unique tourism resources to jointly develop and protect these fantastic beauties on earth with Chinese companies. This cooperation should prioritise protection and focus on character development in various forms to display these unique, beautiful sceneries. Malawi, for example, has many national forest parks such as Liwonde National Park and Nyika National Park. Lake Malawi has the wealthiest freshwater fish species in the world. However, due to the reception capacity and traffic constraints, the considerable value of its tourism resources has not yet played out. If the authorities promote some essential developments and further publicities, they will attract more international tourists. China should work with African countries to further optimise the facilitation of visas and other services for citizens to travel to African countries support each other to organise tourism promotion activities in their own countries and regions. At the same time, the authorities of both sides should encourage airlines to set more direct routes and expand the scale and convenience of personnel exchanges. Africa countries with enormous tourism resources can become ideal holiday and recuperation destinations for international tourists.

Conclusion

As an emerging power, China is facing a complex international situation. Especially entering the third decade of the 21st Century, China's diplomacy has encountered unprecedented and severe challenges on multiple levels. China needs a favourable international environment to promote its peaceful development strategy. It is in the development interests of China and Africa to unswervingly promote the evolution of the world structure in the direction of multipolarity. As a vital international force emerging in the 21st Century, Africa plays a fundamental supporting role in China's diplomacy. The importance of relations between major powers and neighbouring diplomacy is self-evident, but the traditional advantages of China's diplomacy lie in developing countries. So China must significantly strengthen its solidarity and cooperation with Africa.

Additionally, 54 countries in Africa are essential in promoting multilateral diplomacy. Not only do China and Africa have the same or similar expectations for the evolution of the world structure, but they also believe that China and Africa's respective development and prosperity are in line with each other's common interests. The two sides of Sino-Africa have mutual needs in terms of politics and economy, and both have the desire to strengthen cooperation. Moreover, African countries are a relatively stable global force in the international multilateral stage game that China can trust and rely on. Therefore, China needs support from African countries in international affairs.

China attaches great importance to the development of relations with Africa. Although Sino-Africa relations have experienced ups and downs, they have been moving forward in this historical period. With the continuous development of China's economy, Chinese companies are playing an essential role in the development process of African countries. Chinese companies and individuals have contributed to promoting local employment, employee training, and technology transfer. In addition, a lot has been invested in philanthropy. However, Chinese companies and individuals do not pay more attention to publicising these deeds, and the general public does not know the contributions of the Chinese people.

Instead, some occasional bad examples have been exaggerated and magnified, thus putting the label of neocolonialism on China. The latest survey report of the afro Barometer released on November 17, 2020, shows that in a sample survey on which country's development model they prefer, 32% of African respondents chose the United States whilst only 23% chose China (Appiah, Sanny & Selormey, 2020).

In Sino-Africa relations, it is normal to have disputes or different opinions. More extensive and in-depth cultural exchanges will help both sides have a deeper understanding of each other. For example, the similarities between Chinese and African cultures are mainly manifested in the emphasis on family values and collectivism, attention to the harmonious coexistence of man and nature, respect for the old and love for the young, self-esteem and tolerance. However, the differences between Chinese and African cultures are more prominent. Chinese are implicit and introverted, while Africans are enthusiastic and unrestrained. The similarities in the Chinese and African cultures provide better communication and exchanges between Chinese and Africans. However, the differences in cultural aspects between China and Africa may become obstacles to exchanges. Therefore, it is imperative to promote cultural exchanges between China and Africa. We should actively use cultural similarities to narrow the distance between exchanges. In this process, we must make good use of the commonalities between Chinese and African cultures and understand and respect each other's personalities. Abandoning arrogance and prejudice and upholding equality and respect are the proper attitudes for cultural exchanges between China and Africa.

In 2021, the opening performance of the traditional Chinese New Year celebration had African dances. The Chinese people have loved more and more African cultural elements. In Chinese universities, the languages of Swahili and other central African countries have also been established. African art forms such as woodcarving and painting have also entered Chinese museums and exhibition halls. Around the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), a series of rich, effective cultural exchange and cooperation mechanisms have been, and are, being

created and developed. China advocates the initiative of a community with a shared future for humanity. It safeguards and develops diverse cultures, which African countries have also welcomed and supported. With the vigorous development of Sino-Africa economic and trade cooperation, cultural exchanges will also enter a period of robust development. With the continuous development of the industrialisation of African countries, African culture has been exhibiting more unique cultural values, which will be understood and loved by people worldwide.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this article was a conference presentation for The Second Sino-Malawi Language and Culture Exchange Forum organised by the Confucius Institute at the University of Malawi. Dr D. Mfunne, the Malawian director of Confucius Institute, went through the paper and gave many valuable comments. In addition, the insightful comments of two anonymous reviewers improved the article. The article could not be developed from a conference presentation to a journal article without their guidance.

References

- Appiah, J. Sanny, N & Selormey, E. (2020). African Regard China's Influence as Significant and Positive, but Slipping, *Afrobarometer Dispatches*, No.407.
- China government. (2015). *China's Africa Policy*. Gov.cn. http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-12/05/content_5020197.htm.
- Dong, Y. (2011, October 28). The Sino-Africa Think Tank Forum opens in Hangzhou. *Zhejiang Daily*, p.2.
- Efem, N. (2014). Foreign Aid and Development in Sino-African Relations, *Journal of Developing Societies*, Vol. 30, 243-272.
- Fei, X. (2005). *Fei Xiaotong on Culture and Cultural Self-consciousness*. Beijing: Qunyan Press,217.

- Guan, X. (2020). The Development and Influence of Sino-African Partnership in the 21st Century, *Economic Research Guide*, 20(05),163-166.
- He, W. (2017). China's Experience and Africa's Development: Examples, Integration and Innovation, *West Asia and Africa*, 17(04),68.
- Kong, L. & Qin, H. (2019). Construction of Media Discourse: Analysis of "China-Africa Relations" Reports in Egyptian Media, *Modern communication*, 19(12),78.
- Liu, H. & Yang, J. (2009). *Fifty Years of Sino-African Cooperation: Background, Progress & Significance*. Kunming: Yunnan University Press,33-34.
- Li, H. (2021). Construction of China's National Image in Africa: Challenges and Strategies, *International Communications*,21(03),27-31.
- Li, A. (2015). The foundation of Sino-Africa cooperation: the history, achievements and characteristics of people-to-people exchanges, *West Asia and Africa*, 15(03),51-73.
- Lin, J. Y. (2012). *New Structural Economics: A Framework for Rethinking Development and Policy*, Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Lu, M. (2015). Zhou Enlai visited ten African countries, *Hundred Year Tide*,15(02),15-21.
- Michael, E & Omoruyi, M. (2018). China's Three Decades of Economic Reforms and the Transformation of China's Policy towards Africa, *Journal of Poverty, Investment and Development*, Vol.44,82-102.
- Nyaburi, N.I. Billy, A & Otieno, KM (2021). China–Africa relations: do non-economic drivers matter? *Africa Review*, Vol.13, Issue 2. 175-198.
- Tang, X. (2017). Research on Characteristics and Strategies of Language and Culture Exchange between China and West Africa, *Theory and Practice of Contemporary Education*, Vol.9,106-110.

- Taylor I. (2002). Taiwan's foreign policy and Africa: the limitation of dollar diplomacy, *Journal of Contemporary, China*, Vol.11, 125-140.
- Tembe, P. E. & Xu, K. (2013). China-Africa Economic Cooperation: Chinese Companies Contributions to African Development -The Cases of Mozambique and Angola, *Research in World Economy*, Vol.4,61.
- Wang, H. & Wang, L. (2020). A Theoretical Construction of Sino-Africa People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges from the Perspective of A Community of Shared Future, *Journal of Zhejiang Normal University*, 20(06),10-17.
- Xi, J. (2013). *The governance of China I*, Foreign Languages Press,337.
- Xu, G. (2020). A Review of China's Aid to Africa, *Academic Journal of Jinyang*, 20(01),71-83.
- Yang, B. (2020). China-Africa cultural exchanges under the Belt and Road Initiative, *West Asia and Africa*, 20(02),34-35.
- Yu, T.& Zhang, H. (2021). Research on Sino-Africa Community of Shared Future under the Context of Global Governance, *Journal of Henan Normal University*, Vol.48,38-45.
- Zhao, Y. (2018). *China and Africa in the twenty-first century*. Beijing: ZhongXin Press.464.
- Zhang, Y. (2021). Into Africa: The spread of the Chinese Films in the 17-year Period in Africa, *Contemporary Cinema*, 21(08), 82-87.
- Zhang, Z. & Tao, T. (2020). Twenty Years of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Review and Outlook, *West Asia and Africa*, 20(06), 53-77.
- Zhang, C. (2018). Africa countries can learn from China's experience in governance, *Contemporary international relations*, 18(08), 4-7.
- Zhou, Y. (2016). To build the main bridge for Sino-Africa cooperation and development with cultural exchanges. *Guangdong Economy*, 16(10), 11-14.