

NES COMMENTARY No.50



Title: Is China a Threat or Benefit to Africa?

Inspiring Quotes!

“With our historical background and our natural and human resources, it should be easier for us than it was for Japan to rise to the place of a first class Power by a partial adaptation of Western civilisation. We ought to be ten times stronger than Japan because our country is more

than ten times bigger and richer than Japan. China is potentially equal to ten Powers.”¹

“.. If China follows at the heels of the imperialistic and militaristic nations, China’s ascendancy to power would not only be useless, but harmful to humanity. The only glorious and honourable path for us to pursue is to maintain in full force the old policy of “helping the weak and curbing the strong”²

“When the days of our prosperity come, we must not forget the pain and misery which we are now suffering from the pressure of economic and political forces of the Powers. When our country becomes powerful, we should assume responsibility of delivering those nations, which suffer in the same way as we do now. This is what ‘Ta Hseuch’ means by ‘securing tranquillity.’³

***“China’s investment in Africa comes with no political strings”
President Xi Jinping***

“China does not interfere in Africa’s internal affairs and does not impose its own will on Africa.” President Xi Jinping

1. Introduction

¹ Sun Yassin, National Morale and World Tranquillity, in Lewis Copeland, Lawrence W. Lamm & Stephen J. McKenna (eds.), *The World Great Speeches*, Dover Publications, Mineola, New York, 1999, Pp. 399- 401

² Ibid., p.401

³ Ibid.

The Forum on China-Africa cooperation has been held in Beijing. There has been lots of media coverage reporting that China is taking Africa's resources to cover the debt the African states owe China. The case that has been featured globally is what Zambia is said to be in not being able to pay the debt from China. Zambia is said to be ready to relinquish its own international Kenneth Kaunda airport, ZESCO the Zambian state electricity company and the Zambian broadcasting company to meet its debt obligations to China. If this is true, it goes very much, against what China is said to have done in Africa. What China is said to prefer to do is to cancel debts rather than go colonial and demand that the indebted African states relinquish their assets to cover their debts from China. It also goes very much, against what President Xi and even the earlier leaders of China have advocated to create a China that will relate with the entire former colonized world by applying the principle of mutual benefit and not applying neo-colonial threats.

If China has violated the principle of mutual benefits in relating with Africa and is going to repeat the colonial history Africa went through, it makes me wonder how we can ever understand politics at all. I find politics to be harder than physics. I believe with physics one can try to research and comprehend the mysteries of the physical universe from its lowest quantum mechanistic sub-atomic entities to the grander cosmos and the universe. I realise that with the way politics is being played in contemporary times, it is infinitely hard to predict the future. To be frank, with politics there are elements of interest, will, deception, immorality, cheating, double standard, chasm between rhetoric and reality, and promise and delivery, policy and action, and a general lack of integrity and massive dishonesty built into the way the various players try to manipulate and control the dilemmas of the relationship of the domestic and international, the

internal and the external, the political and the economic affairs, problems and challenges confronting their own nations as well as the world whether one welcomes it or opposes it. Albert Einstein said there are two infinities; the universe and human stupidity. He said he is not sure about the universe. I draw from his reflection that the greatest human stupidity is politics especially the politics in Africa that is poor in the much needed provision of public service to the people and Africa while continuing and remaining rich in serving the very corrupt power-and money seeking politicians.

Had Africa united, none of the issues we all worry about now will be on the media and debate. We should now try to learn from China and how to achieve Africa's full freedom finally without relying aid, loan, debt and borrowing when much Africa's wealth continues to be robbed.:

2. What Can Africa Learn from China?

There is a lot Africa can learn from China. What has been truly extraordinary today is that China has gone through the long history of the difficult journey and now finally has attained a development status that has to be recognized and appreciated. Millions of Chinese have now come out of poverty. Unemployment is decreasing and inequality will decrease in the course of time by managing it with appropriate policy. What Africa should learn is how China achieved this status and managed how to deal with and respond to the global economy. There was a period when China was not open to the global economy and now it has achieved the infrastructure to remain open and deal with the global economy

successfully. The best gift China can give to Africa is to share frankly and honestly how the Chinese managed the difficult journey and achieved such as the currently globally acknowledged renowned success.

The other important lesson from China is to relate with Africa entirely driven by the principle of mutual benefit. The gains and losses in the relationship have to be fully transparent, open, tangible, explicit, measurable and fully known. The reason is very clear. Africa is said to lose more than 60 billion dollars every year through the prevailing donorpreneurship, rent seeking -preneurship, tender-preneurship, illicit financial flows and corruption, the existing division amongst the colonially inherited 55 states, the persistence of the colonial legacy and illicit financial flows. Six times more resources are said to flow out of Africa than what comes in. Africa is a donator and it is not donated. Africans still do not own Africa. If Africans own Africa, they all can become very rich, as the continent is endowed with vast resources for not only Africa but that can truly help the world. The DRC Congo alone is said to own resources from Colton, uranium, gold, diamond, Titanium, Tina and all kinds of other minerals that are estimated to over 24 trillion. The South African mining sector alone is said to be over 1.3 trillion. South Africa is very rich owning 16 minerals. But the mining sectors are not owned by Africans. Given all these wealth and resources, why does Africa become a destination point for foreign aid, loan, foreign direct investment and debt? If Africa had owned its rich resources, it should have been Africa that should be investing the \$ 60 billion to China that China is offering. The main lesson to draw from this African malaise is for China to help Africans to learn to unite and drive on the road map of independence that China has fully achieved. What Africa needs is not to get China to keep offering more and more aid and trade as the main outcome of every

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) gathering. What China can do is to find a way to bring all the African leaders to learn how China has created a continental nation that has become fully successful. How and what can Africans learn from the Chinese experience to draw lessons to own Africa and prevent the rich illicit financial flows to manage the global value chain in this time of the 4th Industrial Revolution. President Xi Jinping is spot on when he said: "China-Africa cooperation must give Chinese and African people tangible benefits and successes that can be seen, that can be felt" He also added "China's cooperation with Africa is clearly targeted at the major bottlenecks to development. Resources for our cooperation are not to be spent on any vanity projects but in places where they count the most." What is clearly stated by the President Xi Jinping is that the China-Africa relations has to be anchored on the principle of clearly articulated mutual benefit without any corruption never to be tolerated at all.. What each side gains should be public, open and transparent to avoid all speculations and distractions.

China has gone through colonialism as Africa has gone through without end. What is clearly a great exemplary lesson we can draw now is that China has been able to be fully de-colonized. Africa is still dominated by the colonial mind set as Africa is continuing being divided as Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and Levantine phone. Africa is still a colonized phone! It is treated and described with the colonized adjectives. What China can try to do is assist Africans to engage in an economic and political marathon race to be fully de-colonized now. The assistance that Africa has from China by promoting the win-win mutually beneficial relationship should be a role model and an example to remove the former colonial powers continuing gaining and Africa continuing losing game that has not stopped. Africa is indebted to the former colonial powers whilst still losing huge amount of resources annually without end. The

fourteen Francophone countries have over 65 % of their reserves in French Banks and when they try to use their own money, they pay interest to the French banks. African rulers are corrupt. They gain to their own pocket the money at the loss of the people and country. The same is true to all the mines; the corrupt locals gain some and the foreign mining corporations continue to plunder Africa. What can China do to assist Africans to unite, be free and own Africa's rich wealth?

3.Go for the Principle of Mutual Benefit to Revitalize the Africa-China Relations

The FOCAC initiative that started from 2006 and has been done every three years needs to generate working groups from the organic and public intellectuals from both Africa and China to develop workable and tangible recommendations to sustain the collaboration founded on the principle of mutual benefit. New ways to discover on how the China-Africa relationship based on the principle of mutual benefit can challenge all the corruptive activities that have been undermining Africa's quest for sustainable development.

Once the principle for mutual benefit guides the Africa-China relationship, the \$ 60 billion assistance from China can be added to create a smart, digital, innovative, transformative, networked and unified African sustainable development by removing the carbon heavy diet path of industrialization that the Western countries achieved their industrial status with. Both China and Africa need to support each other by removing "the Lose-Lose, Lose-Gain, and Gain-Lose" pattern of carbon heavy industrial path to enable them in creating the Win – Win climate friendly and pro- people well-being by combing the physical and virtual industrial path in this time of the global knowledge

and digital economy. The one belt and one road initiative can be part of the foundation to lay the African- green and digital novel carbon diet free industrial development path. China sees”Africa as a business opportunity and partner, not as a charity case as has been seen with western economic deals.”⁴

The official China’s view is that what they do in Africa is to “assist African countries to seek economic independence...”⁵ Increasingly it looks China is trying to make Africa an integral part of its own economic development, prepared to write off or cancel debts, training people from the various professions, opening a development fund and pledging to increase its concessional loans.⁶ (See the Special Issue in New Africa: China-Africa: Why the West is Worried, issue no.471 March 2008)

4. Concluding Remarks

There is no doubt, as the Chinese modern nationalist leader Sun-Yat-Sen said that China must not do what others did when they achieve power and prosperity, i.e., being imperialistic and militaristic. He also said that China should share its prosperity with those that went through historical humiliation like itself before.

It seems President Xi says what the Chinese leader Sun-Yat-Sen has recommended to embark China to relate with the world by applying the principle of mutual benefits. China must never violate what the first nationalist leader admonished overall. President Xi has to address what the advocates of China threat theory see China is doing to Africa. Moreover, let China reevaluate, monitor and change its relations with

⁴ Regina Jere-Malanda, in her How China is Speaking in Figures in New African, no.471, March 2008

⁵ Bo Xilai, Commerce Minister quoted in New African, ibid, p.22

⁶ See HeWenping, All-Weather Friend: The Evolution of China’s Africa Policy, in Kwasi Kwaa Prah (ed.), Afro-Chinese Relations: Past, Present & Future, Casas Books, 2007, p.43

Africa and other parts of the global South. The Africa-China relationship should become a challenge to all the former colonial relations with Africa, and not join that colonial history. This is not fair to China and not just to those that become re-colonized... China is accused of stacking up debt in Africa. There is a need to do serious research to bring out the positive and negative side with both the strength and weakness analytically in the relationship and not rely on media to distract us to know what we must know. We just did research on Africa –China collaboration on scientific publications and patents. It was remarkable what data we were able to discover of the growth in the china-Africa collaboration. There is a lot we should do on all other areas of the Africa-China collaborations. Finally, let FOCAC continue and promote the principle and practice of the win-win mutual benefit between Africa and China. Mutual benefit must win and any relationship that brings loss to Africa and win for others must stop. This can be done easily if Africa had united yesterday. United Africa can remove all colonialism from coming from any part of the world. There can be no future without African unity with Ethiopianism, Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance now, not tomorrow!

By Mammo Muchie, DSI/NRF Rated SARChI Research Chair, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment and Department of Industrial Engineering Tshwane University of Technology, <https://nesglobal.org/adwa124/> & www.sarchi.org