

AFRICA'S PERCEPTION OF CHINA: A DESCRIPTIVE DISCOURSE ON ITS DETERMINANTS

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Abstract

Perception is critical to understanding the type of relationship existing between individuals, groups or states. This element, moulded by different factors, is in a continual flux, since how A perceives B today is liable to change tomorrow. This paper is primarily about the two of the factors that have moulded Africa's perception of China in the past seven decades, namely history and soft power. The discussion of these two determinants exposes the perceptual shift that has occurred since the end of the Cold War. Africa's perception of China has tangibly changed since the end of that credible nuclear threat-backed ideological rivalry. During that war Africa regarded China as a friend and ally. After all, China had supported its independence politically, morally and with arms. However, since the three decades when it ended, Africa has regarded China differently---both as a competitor and as a neocolonialist predator. This paper, sourced with secondary data, discusses China's use of history and soft power in an effort to build a positive image for itself in Africa.

Keywords: Perception, history, soft power.

Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, perception is not reality. In fact, perception and reality are immiscible. If perception was reality, an elephant would become an anthill if the person looking at it perceived it to be an anthill, and not the elephant that it actually is. Perception influences relationship at all levels. At the supranational level where behavior is regulated less by honour system than by deterrence (the conviction that the other actor can inflict violence) or coercion, a perception of threat can create security dilemma. This is due to the immanent tendency among nations to feel threatened by any act of aggrandizement of military power by neighbours, rivals and even allies, even if the motive is defence-based. (Such fear could even be triggered by a large-scale modernization of critical infrastructure). Such fear of attack is one of the reasons why, for example, Iran and Saudi Arabia are on a perennial war footing and even why allies (for example, NATO members) sometimes spy on one another like the US was doing on NATO alliance leaders such as Angela Merkel. Perception is influenced by factors such as history, supremacism, ethnocentrism, affinities and the media. Its role in this age of globalization that is dominated by information and migration cannot be overemphasized. With regard to information, supranational actors (both State and non-State) compete to control information channels in the scramble to shape perception. With regard to migration, perception is shaping attitude towards immigrants. For

example, one of the factors feeding security concerns about Muslim immigrants in the West is the perception that associates Islam with terrorism. This perception is being mainstreamed, despite the fact that Christianity in the West has bloodstains of the wars fought between Catholics and Protestants during the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Africa's relationship with China is one of the issues that dominate China's engagement with the world since the end of the Cold War. In the early years of the twenty-first century the surge in Chinese presence on that continent drew considerable attention (Yu, 2009). Conferences, seminars, workshops as well as publications have engaged this relationship, yet it remains recondite and inaccessible to most watchers (conference organizers, writers, policy makers, etc.). This scramble to understand China through conferences, seminars, workshops and publications is due to perception. Yet, despite its criticality in international relations, perception is yet to receive most of the attention it deserves in the Africa-and-China discourse. This paper is a remedial effort to integrate this critical element into the discourse.

The Determinants

African perception of China is, for the most part, moulded by these two factors: history and soft power. History is one of the factors that influence relationship between countries. For example, because colonial rule is constitutive of national history, most colonized people in the world tend to regard their ex-colonizers with a distasteful mixture of suspicion and resentment. In other cases, history is the major reason for friendship between countries. For example, Britain's traditional alliance with the United States is substantially due to the historical phenomenon of British immigration to the United States after 1776. As for soft power, this phenomenon, one of whose characteristic is that "it seeks to enlist the power of the society as opposed to that of the state" (Shubo & Ronning, 2013, p.1), became a dominant lever of power after the Cold War, especially after Joseph Nye published a book on it in 1993. But because it is "not a cheap enterprise" (Gagliardone et al., 2010), many developing countries cannot afford it. History, a constituent of which is experience, influences perception. One of the consequences of colonial rule is the siege mentality it created in those who have been previously colonized. Most colonized peoples live in constant fear of being subtly recolonized through a systemic cramping of their capacity to run their own affairs. For example, the Opium Wars by which China was partially colonized has predisposed the Chinese to an inveterate distrust of foreigners. (In some countries, colonial experience has created a psychological barrier to nation building). Likewise, colonialism and neocolonialism (its mutant) have predisposed Africa to a suspicion of world powers, particularly those Western powers that once colonized it.

Africa's relationship with the West, which evolved from slave trade and colonial rule, has been implicated as the exogenous factor in the continent's protracted development infancy by Africanist scholars like Rodney (1972). (The extent to which this imputation is still tenable has been a subject of considerable debate since the second decade of African independence, when the continent began to spawn malevolent dictators like Mobutu, Eyadema and Bongo). For China, however, this suspicion has been assuaged by the cordiality of its relationship with the continent during the Mao era and the fact that it never tried to impose itself across the world through

colonialisation. Imperial China had all the makings of a colonial power during Admiral Zheng's multiple visits to East Africa in the fifteenth century. Yet it did not colonize even one square metre of the continent (Elochukwu, 2020). Zheng was a Muslim; so the Yongle Emperor (Zhu Di) must have thoughtfully chosen him to head those diplomatic missions he sent to that part of the continent. Of course, there was a small population of black Africans in Imperial China, most of whom were slaves procured for the Chinese by Arab merchants involved in the trans-Saharan trade and/or in the trade across the Indian Ocean (Rashidi, 1985; Li, 2020). Mao virtuously referenced history during a meeting with the Youth Delegation of Black Africa on 12 July 1958 thus:

Western imperialists consider themselves to be civilized and call the oppressed barbarous. However, we have not occupied other people's territory, nor has Africa occupied Europe. It is Europe that has occupied Africa. Can this be called civilized? Europe is inferior to Africa; it occupies other people's territory. Isn't this rather barbarous? Imperialists occupied China, and this was very barbarous. China has never in the past or at present occupied other countries, nor will it in the future occupy the United States or Britain or Germany. (*Mao on diplomacy*, 1998, p.248-249).

During the Cold War, the Soviets accused the Chinese of exploiting "the historical process of the decay of colonial rule in the world and of the political and economic emancipation of the Third World nations in order to create for itself a special position and to take advantage of the national liberation movements so as to be able to pursue its own selfish interests..." (*China and the developing countries*, 1976, p. 16).

While Africa's relationship with the West evolved from slave trade and colonial rule, that with China evolved from its support for African independence. Regarding the continent as a strategic frontier of support in the Cold War, Mao Zedong adroitly cultivated the continent's founding leaders, such as Julius Nyerere and Ahmed Sekou Toure. Mao considered African independence movements to be extensions of China's own revolution (Eisenman, 2018) . Because their relationship with the Chinese did not evolve from colonial conquest, Africans are still inclined to be less suspicious of the Chinese than they are of Westerners who colonized them after commodifying them for about two centuries. Africa's relationship with China has passed through three stages.

The first stage preceded colonial rule and was dominated by trade with the Arabs of the Swahili coast of East Africa, who included African slaves in their merchandise. With that trade came the exchange of diplomatic missions between that region and China. But because that part of the continent was under Omani rule at the time, China's contact with the continent was mostly with the Arab traders and chiefs. The remaining parts of the continent remained largely unfamiliar to the Chinese until the twentieth century. It is obvious in the foregoing that it was the Arabs that introduced Africans and the Chinese to each other.

The second stage, also initiated by the Chinese (Ogunsawo, 1974), began in the 1950s/early 1960s (Yu, 2009) and was dominated by what is described as

“revolutionary diplomacy” (Clubb, 1978) . Mao regarded African independence movements as “extensions of China’s own revolution” (Eisenman, 2018) .

The third/current stage, also initiated by the Chinese, began after the Cold War and is dominated by China’s self-interest. China’s Africa policy has served two objectives---then, ideology and now, economy. (In a manner that yet remains imperceptible to many watchers, the continent is also helping to relieve population pressure for China, by being a migration destination for millions of the Chinese people). The historicity of Africa’s relationship with China is one of the casualties of the end of the Cold War. In fact, it cannot be gainsaid that history has lost most of its importance in the relationship since the War ended three decades ago. So much is the loss that, for example, many Zambians might be unaware that the Tanzam Railway built with a Chinese loan and by China Construction and Civil Engineering Company (CCCEC) reduced their landlocked country’s economic reliance on South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), both of which were ruled by white-minority governments at the time. Likewise, many South Africans might be unaware how that railway contributed to the struggle against apartheid in their country. This ahistorical disposition is because most Africans born after the Cold War are barely aware of China’s support for their continent’s independence. For this generation of Africans who have a jaundiced view of foreign powers, the old frame of reference has been submerged under the transactional foreign policy of the post-Mao era, that emphasizes quid pro quo and cost-benefit analysis in China’s dealings with the rest of the world.

Soft power, the second factor shaping African perception of China, consists of the media and benefaction (an assortment of humanitarian gestures). The Chinese media “is an important component of China’s soft power agenda” (Gagliardone et al., 2010). China’s media penetration of the continent is part of its effort “to reshape the global information environment (Lim & Bergim, 2018) . But manipulating the media by developing countries [and developed ones] in order to mould perception is not peculiar to China (Yu-Shan, 2012; Thussu, 2016; Madrid-Morale, 2017). (In fact, if manipulating the media was a crime, it would be a crime every country would be happy to commit). The Chinese media has been active on the continent since the 1950s (Gagliardone et al., 2010). What is different now “is that the recent expansion is seen widely as being linked to broader Chinese economic activities [there] and its changing international relations policy” (Wasserman, 2018). Mary Harper has described the media expansion as a “natural progression” (Schwarzbeck, 2013) .

The Chinese and Western media are in a scramble for Africa’s attention, for while the Chinese media is projecting a positive image of China (Yanqiu & Matingwina, 2016), the Western media, behaving like a band of self-appointed watchmen, is warning Africans about the consequences of doing business with China. One such consequence is a fate similar to Sri Lanka’s technical loss of its Hambantota Port to China due to the default on the Chinese loan that financed it (Gopaldas, n.d). In 1961 China Radio International (CRI) commenced Swahili programme (Zheng, 2011). In 1967, the *People’s Daily* established a bureau in Guinea (Eisenman, 2018). In the 1980s the continent’s first Xinhua bureaus were established, namely the Middle East Regional

Bureau in Cairo, which was established in 1985 (China Embassy, 2005) and the Africa Bureau in

Nairobi, which was established in 1986 (Shinn & Eisenmannet, 2008). Xinhua now has over 20 bureaus on the continent, 18 of which are located in sub-Saharan Africa (Gagliardone et al., 2010). Xinhua's Nairobi headquarters' monthly dispatch of 1800 pieces of news in English, 2000 in French, 2200 pictures and 150 pieces of video clips outnumber those by Associated Press (AP), *Reuters* and *Agence France Presse* (AFP) (Gagliardone et al., 2010); and by giving media exposure to African leaders and ministers, Xinhua "cultivates contacts within African governments and NGOs, which at the same time can help not only the sales of their content to local media, but also establishing their status back home as the most credible agency in bringing African news to China" (Gagliardone et al., 2010). Until 1976 when Mao died, the media focused on denouncing Taiwan, the West and the Soviets in an effort to win African friendship for China. It has been less confrontational since the 1980s when Deng Xiaoping became leader. Unlike Mao, "who viewed the struggle in Africa as one of crucial importance for the world revolutionary movement" (Gibson, 1972, p.9), Deng sought rapprochement with the West, which was why he did not try to export revolution to other countries, like Mao before him did. A more pragmatic leader, he focused on an economic revolution that would be driven by the same zeal and determination that had driven Mao's own proletarian revolution. In order to realize the goals of its economic revolution, China moderated its foreign policy and, as it committed itself at the 1955 Bandung Conference, engaged in an essential measure of peaceful coexistence and economic cooperation (Clubb, 1978). A more inward-looking strongman, Deng was more concerned with preparing his country for the challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War era than with maintaining those ideology-based relationships his predecessor had built during the Cold War. As he steered the country's foreign policy away from ideological belligerency, the country "started emphasizing the development of normal relations with other states irrespective of their social systems or ideological beliefs" (Xiaohong, 2017, pp.412-413).

The Chinese media in Africa has changed in two remarkable ways since the end of the Cold War. Firstly, it has been mostly defensive, warding off criticisms of Chinese presence on the continent by presenting "an alternative to the "Western" news agenda in coverage of the African continent" (Fei et al., 2016). This means that it is not being used to openly denounce rivals, which radically differs from its adversarial usage during the Cold War. Secondly, it has become more aggressive in widening its footprint on the continent (Wasserman, 2018). The different strategies for achieving this second objective are as follows:

Firstly, the China Radio International now targets grass-roots listeners on the FM airwaves. In February 2006 it established its first overseas FM station in Nairobi, namely, CRI 91.1 FM ("CRI launches first", 2006). The station "provides 19 hours of programming a day in English, KiSwahili and Chinese to about two million listeners in the capital of the East African nation" (*China Daily*, 2006), covers mostly China's economic, social and cultural development (Chinese Government, 2006) and intersperse their programmes with tutorials on the Chinese language and culture, which increases awareness of China among the masses.

Secondly, China Central Television (CCTV) in 2012 launched its first overseas station in Nairobi, namely CCTV-Africa (renamed CGTN Africa in 2016). China Global Television Network (formerly CCTV-9) was part of China's response to the criticisms that preceded the 2008 Olympics as well as the \$6.6 billion announced in 2009 to strengthen China's "global media presence" (Lim & Bergin, 2018). Based in Nairobi, CGTN Africa has an all-black news crew; and, unlike the Western media behemoths--BBC, CNN, etc. ---, it, in compliance with China's foreign policy of non-interference, avoids emotive issues like politics and human rights. 2012 witnessed other expansion projects such as the launch of twenty new bureaus and African edition by Xinhua and the launch of the *China Daily Africa* newspaper and *ChinaAfrica* magazine. With that outburst of expansionism in 2012, China's media penetration of the continent entered a new phase.

Thirdly, China is innovatively digitizing television access in rural Africa. Enabling television access for rural dwellers is one area where it has broken away from the pack. As Marsh (2019) noted, by digitizing television access for rural Africa, China is de-elitising digital television access on the continent. This effort to help "[African] villages switch from analog to digital television" (Marsh, 2019), which is being championed by StarTimes, a subsidiary of China Development Bank's China-Africa Development Fund, has been adjudged to be "a stroke of soft power genius that would raise China's profile among Africans" (Marsh, 2019). This grand effort by China to digitize television access in rural Africa will be fully appreciated if it is not forgotten that the rural area is where the vast majority of Africans on the continent reside. StarTimes, described by the CNN as "the primary vehicle for the expansion of Chinese soft power in Africa" is the major implementer of the solar-powered "10,000 villages" project announced by President Xi Jinping at the 2015 FOCAC in Johannesburg, that will bring digital TV services to twenty-five African countries.

The fourth strategy is four-pronged and targets the local media. The first prong is to buy into the local media. For example, companies linked to China have a twenty percent stake in Independent Media, South Africa's second-largest media group, that includes twenty prominent newspapers" (Hruby, 2019). The second prong is to collaborate with the local media for news dissemination. For example, "In Kenya, articles from Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, fill English-language newspapers without citation" (Hruby, 2019). (Xinhua transferred its regional office from Paris to Nairobi in 2006). The third prong is to donate national radio or television stations or to assist media houses with equipment. For example, in 2006 it donated FM transmitters worth \$8m to Zambia as well as built the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (Gagliardone et al., 2010). (Such assistance is part of its turnkey diplomacy on the continent). Under the fourth prong, journalists receive scholarships to study in China or invitations to attend workshops, seminars, short training in the country. There are at least five different reasons for the expansion of the Chinese media in Africa. The first is awareness, Chinese media are trying to break the Western media's monopoly on the continent in order "to make the rest of the world aware of China's role in Africa" (Deng, 2012). "China's robust media expansion efforts can be viewed in the context of Chinese dissatisfaction with the monopoly of Western media outlets. Beijing has long perceived bias in their reporting, negatively affecting Sino-African relations" (Hanauer & Morris, 2014, p.74). The second is the phenomenon of "the global rise of developing

media, who are challenging traditional media” (Yu-Shan, 2012). The third is perception. China wants to refute the “bad press from the West” and to portray itself in “a way that’s different from mainly Western-dominated media influences” on the continent (Schwarzbeck, 2013). Western perceptions of China have been formed within a framework of self-perpetuating misperceptions and prejudices that “stems from over a century of misleading reporting” (Braham, 2001) . The fourth is the need to build a favourable public opinion needed to safeguard Chinese investments on the continent (Farah & Mosher, 2010) . Lastly, the Chinese media is merely responding to *zou chuqu* (走出去; i.e. “China’s Go Global” project) as well as President Xi’s directive that they should tell Chinese stories to the world (An, 2018). Benefaction, the second component of soft power, has found its strongest expression in scholarship awards, donation of turnkey projects, support for disease control and peacebuilding on the continent. China believes that it has an obligation to support the efforts to help Africa overcome its numerous challenges. Scholarships which have been prominent in China’s engagement with Africa since the Mao era are being used to: (1) Build a positive image among Africans (Allison, 2013); (2) Prepare African youth “for a world in which Africa’s orientation will inevitably shift eastward” (That is to say that China is also using its scholarships to invest in the continent’s political future by creating a generation of future pro-Chinese leaders on the continent); (3) Drive China’s economic engagement with the continent; (4) Cultivate the local elite. As regards the third reason, hundreds of Africans who have studied the Chinese language in China or in Africa at Chinese language and culture centres such as the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University are working in their countries as translators, interpreters, store managers, etc. for Chinese-owned firms or local firms with Chinese staff. But they receive far less what their employers would have paid native speakers imported from China. Additionally, this local manpower handles public relations and business negotiations for their employers. As for the fourth reason, it should be noted that some of the scholarships (Let us call them ‘diplomacy scholarships’), especially those ones offered by the Chinese central government, are routed through the Chinese embassies to be used to cultivate the local political and business elites, hence the little wonder that most of their awardees have blood or other close ties with top government officials (ministers, governors, commissioners, permanent secretaries, etc.) and business moguls. In addition to creating a prejudice towards the Chinese among the local elites, such scholarships could disencumber contract negotiations with both individuals and the government for Chinese bidders. (The Confucius Institute scholarships are less amenable to the vagaries of politics and diplomacy because of their language proficiency requirements). China is also using turnkey projects and humanitarian aid to cultivate a positive image with Africans. Under its turnkey diplomacy, it has, for example, donated a \$200m-conference hall to the African Union as well as gave the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) a \$31.6 million grant for the completion of its new headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. Gifts to the continent, such as these ones, are used to mould perception there, gifts are used to build or cement relationships or as a gesture solidarity (van Baal, 1976; Sherry, 1983) .

In its medical-aid diplomacy (driven by its so-called “medical ambassadors”), it has, for example, assisted in fighting not only the two recent pandemics (Ebola and Covid-

19) but other diseases as well. During the Ebola crisis, it dispatched hundreds of medical workers, in addition to donating tonnes of medicines and medical equipment, to the continent. Also it is assisting the fight against Covid-19 on the continent unilaterally with medical workers, Sinovax, personal protective equipment, laboratories, etc. and multilaterally with its participation in Covax---the global initiative (led by the WHO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations) to distribute two billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines around the world by the end of 2021. With regard to peacebuilding on the continent, China supports UN peacekeeping operations (for example, UNAMSIL) with both troops and materials and the African Union's regional PKOs (for example, AMISOL) with materials such as helmets and medicines. It currently uses various mechanisms under FOCAC to promote the 'security-development' nexus in Africa (Grieger, 2019). The different forms of its support for peacebuilding on the continent are good for its public relations. Those who will not absolve the West of responsibility for the continent's disturbingly high rate of political instability since independence praise China for helping to resolve conflicts started by others. Chinese blue helmets mostly engage in ancillary peacebuilding activities. For example, they offer free medical services, reconstruct damaged infrastructure (bridges, schools, hospitals, etc.), reactivate moribund wells or dig new ones, in addition to imparting vocational skills to the populace.

Africa's Response

Africa's perception of China is mixed (Shinn & Eisemann, 2008; Sautmann & Yan, 2009; Hanauer, & Morris, 2014; Hangwei & Musiitwa, 2020). Africa's political leadership has a more favourable opinion of China than the populace (Hanauer & Morris, 2014) . Unlike the West, China makes every effort to not mix economics with politics in its foreign policy. Its low rating among the populace is due to diverse factors. One such factor is the indigenous businessmen's resentment against the deepening engagement of Chinese expatriates in retail trade. There is also a deep resentment among Africans residing in China. For example, sixty per cent of Nigerian migrants surveyed during a fieldwork in Guangzhou in 2017 said "Yes" to the question: "Do you think that the Chinese are racially biased against Africans?" (Their negative rating was, arguably, informed by the residency challenges such as visa overstay and working without work permit). Arguably, such resentment is one of the factors feeding xenophobia against the Chinese on the continent. (Chinese nationals have been kidnapped, robbed, extorted or even murdered across the continent. For example, on 24 May 2020 three Chinese were burnt to death in Lusaka, Zambia (Marsh & Sinyangwe, 2020). Interestingly, some of these crimes are planned and executed by Chinese criminal gangs operating on the continent. (For example, in 2012 thirteen Chinese gangsters who "allegedly targeted other Chinese, kidnapping businessmen for ransom and sometimes burying victims alive" in Angola were repatriated to China (BBC, 2012).

As the following Pew Research favourability ratings (during the past six years) indicate, Africa's perception of China is generally positive:

Table 1: 2013 (general)

Country/region	Favourable	Unfavourable
Canada	43	45
USA	37	52
Asia	58	35
Europe	43	47
Latin America	58	22
Africa	72	15
Middle East	45	52

Table 2: 2014 (general)

Country/region	Favourable	Unfavourable
Nigeria	70	14
Kenya	74	16
South Africa	45	40
France	47	53
Germany	28	64
Spain	39	55
Japan	7	91
South Korea	56	42
Vietnam	16	76

Table 3: 2015 (human rights)

Country/region	Favourable	Unfavourable
European Union	8	86
Latin America	32	51
Asia/Pacific	34	45
Middle East	47	41
Africa	60	19

***2016 and 2020 (not available)**

Table 4: 2017 (global popularity test)

Country	Russia	USA	China
Spain	27	31	43
UK	26	50	45
Australia	37	48	64
Japan	26	57	13
Jordan	5	15	35
Tanzania	45	57	63
Nigeria	45	69	72
South Africa	28	53	45
Ghana	33	59	49

Mexico	32	30	43
Colombia	32	51	43

Table 5: 2018 (Confidence in Xi)

Country	Confidence	No confidence	Don't know
Tunisia	53	26	20
Nigeria	53	25	23
Kenya	53	27	19
South Africa	44	33	23

Table 6: 2019 a. (Attitude towards China)

Country	Favourable	Unfavourable
USA	60	26
Nigeria	70	17
Kenya	58	25
South Africa	46	35

Table 7: 2019 b. Strengthening Chinese economy is a boon

Country	Good	Bad
USA	50	41
Japan	55	34
Turkey	31	51
Tunisia	66	20
Nigeria	83	12
Kenya	68	28
South Africa	64	30

Source: Researchers' computation with dataset from Pew Research Center (2020).

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying that China has an image problem in Africa. The problem can be encapsulated in this assertion;

In Africa, China has an image problem. You've read the headlines: China is flooding our markets with cheap fakes; it is callously poaching our rhinos; it is building stadiums and roads that don't last a decade; it is undercutting our labour; it is stealing our diamonds; it is coming to colonise us all over again (Allison, 2013).

China's image in Africa during the past six decades has had its vicissitudes; for having lost the perception that it was a friend, it has been battling with the perception that it has become a competitor-cum-neocolonialist predator. As Hangwei and Musiitwa (2020) noted, "China has had a longstanding relationship with Africa. China supported countries during their liberation struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, and helped build much-needed regional infrastructure and technical capacity. However, over the past 50 years, the perception of China's engagement in Africa became increasingly polarised,

with the image of China as an investor and partner on the one hand, and a neo-colonial power on the other.” This shift in perception is mostly due to its emergence as a world power. Today most Africans have no interest in history, despite its clamorous/vociferous touting by the Chinese at every opportunity.

In the media space, the Western media still have clear-cut advantages over the Chinese media. For example, CNN, BBC and Aljazeera remain far more popular than CGTN, despite the fact that CGTN is still free-to-air. In fact, CGTN is less popular than African Magic. In Africa, Made-in-China television sets like Hisense and Haier are used to watch CNN, BBC, Aljazeera more than CGTN. Also, Startimes is struggling against South Africa’s DStv and GOtv; and, despite the effort to increase influence and coverage on the continent, using the more than twenty bureaus it has there, Xinhua has not been able to significantly change the news consumption patterns of its target audiences (Gagliardone et al., 2010).

Is China sufficiently aware that, due to issues like the effeteness of history resulting from the passing of Mao’s contemporaries, what Sheriff and Sheriff (1950) called “asymmetries in power”. The ubiquity of Chinese faces on the continent, the non-interventionist foreign policy which the masses view as tacit support for corrupt leaders, and nationalism which is fueling Sinophobia at the sub-elite stratum of society, unacceptable labour practices and xenophobia in Guangzhou and other Chinese cities, Africans are beginning to see the Chinese differently. Maybe not as friends but as an invading army, as competitors, as co-conspirators in the neocolonialist predation of their continent? It is safe to think that it is sufficiently aware of the tectonic shift in perception. Otherwise, it would not be doing what it is doing to shore up its image on the continent. In Africa, China has an image problem (Allison, 2013) . You've read the headlines: China is flooding our markets with cheap fakes; it is callously poaching our rhinos; it is building stadiums and roads that don't last a decade; it is undercutting our labour; it is stealing our diamonds; it is coming to colonise us all over again.

Suspicion is encumbering China’s efforts to represent its relationship with Africa as a win-win situation. Africa and China had started their relationship on an almost equal footing six decades ago; but today while China has become a world power, Africa is still groping for direction. Of course, the vast differences in their levels of development are bound to predispose.

Africa to a horrible suspicion of China, with the result that Africa no longer perceives China as a friend but as a threat. It has been argued that, “in international politics, the accumulation of economic and military power may be perceived as threatening by others, even if that is not its principal purpose” (Course Hero, n.d). China’s relationship with the continent is now mostly structured around that psychological phenomenon called “the ubiquity of fear”; and fear in international politics can result from what Sheriff and Sheriff (1950) called “asymmetries in power”. China is also aware of the need to cultivate the ordinary citizens who think they are subsidizing corrupt dictators with their policy of non-interference.

Recommendations

One of the things that China should do to stem its loss of acceptance/acceptability in Africa is to abandon the elitism and aloofness of its diplomacy. Its foreign policy which

is disproportionately focused on the upper echelons of government excludes non-State actors, especially the masses, from its dealings with other countries. Unlike the West, it does not operate a multi-tiered public diplomacy. Shaped by its own domestic politics, its public diplomacy is strait-jacketed and single-tiered, focusing on government-to-government contact. Without a strong informal/public diplomacy executed through NGOs and other non-governmental agencies through which it could reach the grassroots with minimal interference by the elite, it would be difficult for it to cultivate the masses.

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