

DISTANT AFRICA: CHINESE CULTURAL JUXTAPOSITIONS OF AN AFRICAN CULTURE

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Abstract

Culture awareness, consciousness, representations and discernments have been fundamental themes different cultural groups adopt in the assessment of each other. When different cultures interact with each other, we often find them subjected to cultural paranoia, degradation, strengths and phobias as exhibits that are often transmitted in these assessments. The Chinese have made bold attempts to assess what constitutes an African culture through their own lens and their cultural focal view of microscopic instruments. Evidently, they have assumed that African culture is barbaric, uncivilized, archaic and cannibalistic in nature. Such bold assessment of this cultural group reveals the dilemma of most groups in their evaluation of each other. Culture generalizations and cultural strengths have been dynamic factors that come into play in dissecting the cultures of the other. In analyzing what constitutes an African culture, the Chinese adopted the notions of race, colonization, slavery and western literatures to make their judgments of what they termed as an African culture. This work is descriptive in nature because it examines past events and draws references from them.

Keywords: Consciousness, representations, culture, and race

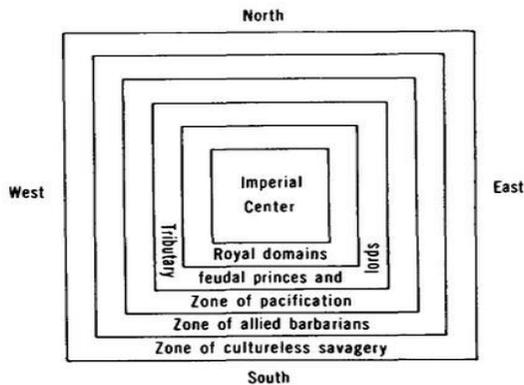
Introduction

What is culture and how do we view the culture of others? From the anthropological field, culture has different concepts but a unique universal terminology. A culture of a group can be seen from a philosophical dimension which emanates from a combination of reaction and feelings which are attained and conveyed by symbols that are unique to a particular set of human groups. Their essential values and ideas could be embedded in historical arts and historical traditions that bind them together as a group (Lerner & Lasswell, 1951). Kroeber and Parsons (1958) definition of culture evokes a cross-disciplinary

dimension into the concept of culture. They perceive human behavior as being influenced through a continuous transmission of principles, ideas, and symbolic objects (Kroeber & Parsons, 1958). Triandis (1972) studies culture from the “subjective” and “objective” phenomenon, he sees our culture interpretation and analysis as stemming out from the subjective mind of the perceiver (Hofstede, 2001). Sociologists have assessed how other people perceive the cultures around them and they discovered that people often adopt their own culture as a benchmark for which social actions are evaluated and measured; terminology scholars refer to as ethnocentrism (Kendall, 2012). These definitions are the basis for this research work since the Chinese have used their own culture as a yardstick for evaluating the behaviours, traditions, values, principles and ideas of other groups.

How do the Chinese view their culture? The Chinese view their culture from a point of superiority. The preeminent of Chinese culture can be traced back to ancient times and this is the foundation on which Chinese history is built. The concept of race superiority and its theories are not new in world history since humans had been categorized into different races based on their colors (black, white, yellow and red). With the categorization of races came the discrimination and the radicalization of certain beliefs about different races of the world. Similarly, the Chinese also developed a strong concept of themselves against other races since the most primitive advancement of time and space. They saw themselves as a unique race, one that was way supreme and stood at the center of the world. At the center of the world, they perceived themselves as existing under heaven (Tian xia 天下) or at center and source of the world (Zhongyuan 中原), or within the four seas (Zai si hai zhi nei 在四海之内). The Chinese knowledge of the world revealed that the only sea in the world only exists in the east, thus they presumed their country was surrounded or they lived within the four seas. Presumably, another Chinese perception of themselves also came from religious cosmography of Buddhism. The Kunlun Mountains are located in the center of the circular cosmic plains; they hold the world’s axial plains. The productive terrains of China follow next and this is evident by practical physical facts that are located in China today such as the Great Wall, the peninsula of Korea and the Japanese Island.

Invariably, we can say that traditional imperial China had always perceived China to be the center of the world and they established the “Royal Domains”. This domain according to the Chinese holds the culture and the civilization of the world and all other zones (countries) should pay tributes or adopt the culture of this “Royal Domain”. Those who have adopted and have conceded to paying tributes become the feudal princes and lords in the next zone of the rectangular domain in which the Chinese believe the world exists. The world domain is followed by the pacification zone, allied barbarians zone, and the culture-less savagery zone. This representation of world culture and world civilization was the central knowledge of Chinese about other races and cultures (Tuan, 2013). The diagram below illustrates the domains of the world according to the Chinese:



Source: *Topophilia: A study of environmental perceptions, attitudes, and values*

Chinese traditional assumption was that all other worlds outside its domain are inferior, barbaric, savages and uncivilized, however they had the right to pay homage to the Imperial Court of China. The Chinese Emperor was inclined to rule virtuously but also to gracefully bestow mercy on the other zones which were seen as the Zones of Savage Barbarians (Siyi 四夷). Chinese tradition grouped them into the following: Eastern Barbarians (Dongyi 東夷), Southern Barbarians (Nanman 南蠻), Western Barbarians (Xirong 西戎) and Northern

Barbarians (Beidi 北狄). These zones were compelled to travel to the Imperial Court to receive transformations, they were to come with gifts and they had to show their deferential status to the Chinese Emperor. In return for their visits, homage (kowtow), compliance and recognition of the supremacy of the Chinese courts they would receive the compassionate paternalism of the Emperor by allowing some form of trade with the Empire and military protection. Thus, the superiority of Chinese culture and race has been a prominent phenomenon that has influenced China's interaction with the world and races (Mungello, 2012).

Objective of Research

At this age of an intensified Sino-African relationship, this research work is very crucial to understanding the elements that have influenced Chinese engagement with Africa. The objective of this research is in three dimensions. Firstly, this work intends to describe Chinese view of Africa based on their numerous databases that is available to their public. These national documents offer the public crude data that has been used to make vivid judgments about Africa since ancient times. Secondly, this work also intends to evaluate Chinese opinions of Africa within the framework of culture. Lastly, this research work aims to discern the fact that no culture can be termed barbaric or uncivilized by another culture. Its argument lies in the fact that culture is seen as the way in which a particular group exhibits its values and customs. This research work attempts to draw out the derogatory terms, the disparaging, unsympathetic, disapproving and judgmental perceptions of the African culture by the Chinese. This is mainly due to the fact that Chinese evaluation of an African culture comes through the art of using personal judgments, sentimental feelings of superiority and personal opinions which is highly questionable.

Research Methodology

This research work adopts qualitative research methods to examine Chinese perception of Africa. The inherent need to adopt this research method is because it offers a platform to understand the reasons, opinions and motivations into the problem of the research. The use of qualitative methods would also facilitate a deeper understanding of why the Chinese categorize Africa as barbaric, uncivilised, crude and

distant. It would examine the core influences of Chinese thoughts and their own standpoint which gives them a world view perspective. This research method would examine why we cannot generalise culture or neither can we offer stereotypes of cultures without proper knowledge and exposure to that culture.

Literature Discourses

Literatures in this category can be classified into different groups; one can be historical documents and the other modern ones. One intrinsic fact here is that historical documents have forged and largely influenced Chinese consciousness about Africa. The first historical document used in what the Chinese see as constituting an African culture came from the twelfth century historical document. These official papers from the court were expressed in the Pingzhou's *Topics for Conversation* (Pingzhou Ketan 萍州可談, 1119 A.D.) by Zhu Yu. He gave an ample description of the African blacks which the privileged Chinese class kept as slaves in Canton. They were professed as “devil’s slaves” *Guinu* with black dark ink skin, white teeth and red lips, curly and yellow hair. The document reveals:

‘They are inhabitants of the mountains that feed on raw food or raw meat, they despised cooked food and their system could not cope with such. When they are fed with cooked food they get diarrhea or they get ill thus they become very dispensable tools that their masters do not want to keep. They have no ability to learn a language or speech, they are retarded human beings often murmuring or making sounds like wild animals’

Tang dynasty texts also affirmed the documentations of the texts above, it referred to blacks’ aesthetic looks and habitat of the blacks as that of barbarians residing in the mountains or the jungles. The Song dynasty made particular reference to Madagascar which it referred to *Kunluncengqi*. It also reiterated existing identities that were already constructed for blacks by previous archival documents of China. It stated that *Kunluncengqi* was an Island that had black savages with curly hair (Dikötter, 1992).

Another historical document that discussed the identity of blacks came from the literatures of Xu Jiyu (徐繼畬, 1795-1873). He was the author of the *Brief Record of the Ocean Circuit* (Yinghuan zhilue 及其, 瀛環志略). He introduced World Geography to the Chinese audience and systematically presented Africa as a barbaric race that lived in a muddled continent. The *Yinghuan zhilue* thus became a reference point for many academic scholars in their description of Africa. Tang Caichang (唐才常, 1867-1900) likewise adopted these data in his description of Africa. His work incorporated Yan Fu's treatise in the '*Study of the races of the world*' (Tang, 1898). The Chinese perceived Africans as cannibals (食人族) because it was reported that they feasted on the human flesh. However, there are multiple reports about the authenticity of these reports. They drew connotations from the reports that emanated in the press, one event where a student reported what he had witnessed or encountered. There are cannibals in Belgian Congo where a student, named Harula, from the department of the theology of Boston University, had been born and brought up. He claimed cannibalism had been gradually gotten rid of in African and the reasons for his assertions were as follows:

'People believed natives' cannibalism might be attributed to religious rituals yet it is fictitious. According to the Chinese, cannibalism evolved in Africa because they were hungry and incapacitated with their harsh climatic conditions. Africans also engaged in tribal wars and conflicts, they ate up their enemies and feasted on them. Rituals are a norm in Africa, some tribes conduct rituals by feasting on humans, especially when fetish rituals were the accepted norms of traditional African societies (Xinminbao, 1940)'.

Chinese consciousness of cannibalism in Africa was influenced by a mirage of events, such as the western press, narratives, religious rituals, conflicts, environmental conditions and the survival of the human race. However, the stigma of a barbaric African race was strongly influenced by the colonialism dilemma Africa encountered at a particular time of history.

Modern literature came from the influence from the Western academic sources and data in the Chinese adopted to construct an identity for the African race. Multitudes of Western works were translated by Yan Fu (嚴復, 1853-1921) who initiated a discourse of the races of the world in China. In the *Zhibao* 直報 which was published in Tianjin, he introduced Darwin and Spencer to the Chinese audience in 1895 and he tried to diffuse the existing phenomenon of a civilized center and a barbarian periphery. He dispelled and detached humankind from the ancient imperial cosmology to a modern phenomenon of a world divided and based on different races. From this he identified the hierarchical structure of the races of the world. In his hierarchy he revealed that the black slaves that live in Africa are at the lowest cadre of the world race, the brown race resides in India, Luzon, and Vietnam. The Yellow races are from South China extending as far as Siberia, the Pacific and the Kunlun Mountains in the West. The Yellow races have a straight hair, long eyes, and shallow nose and have an obvious cheekbone. The White race have curly hair with an obvious forehead, they have blue eyes and deep eye sockets. They live in the Daqin (Rome) conquered territories to the West salty lakes of the Urals (Dikötter, 1992).

In addition, Kang Youwei (康有為, 1858-1927) also used the work of Charles Darwin to investigate the notion of races, race egalitarianism and race discrimination. His argument stemmed out from the fact that humankind should be equal and there should be no form of race egalitarianism. He proposed the world of “Great Equality” and “Highest Peace” which should be a universal standard guiding the world. He examined the obvious fact of the presence of race discrimination in our world today and most especially among the black African race. This racial characteristic of humans was perhaps due to the differences in abilities, looks, enlightenment and characteristics. He further elaborated the efforts of Abraham Lincoln in bringing equality of races among the White and the Black race “Negroes” as a noble effort to ensure “Great Equality”. However, Kang Youwei sees Lincoln’s efforts as futile because most Americans are still racist against the “Negroes” in many ways; they face discrimination in the restaurants, hotels, trains and ships (Bauer, 1976).

Correspondingly Liang Qichao (梁啟超, 1897-1929) conjointly referred and adopted Western texts in his construction of races in China. He purposely instructed his students to study Robert Mackenzie's *The Nineteenth Century: A History* (1909). This book was published by T. Nelson and it was a historical reference source of data for the Chinese reformers and the new elites (Qichao, 1953). Mackenzie's work was very vulgar in nature in the sense that it subjectively disclosed his own assessment of factors hindering the progress and civilization of African societies. His work disclosed the state of barbarism, ignorance, savagery, slavery and uncivilized nature of African societies. In reference to the Sandwich Islands prior to the contacts with the West and Missionaries, he exclaimed that this society had sunk into the most degrading form of humanity. Africans according to Mackenzie were heathens feeding on raw fish and flesh of dogs. They were licentiousness in their nature, they killed and exhibited a sporadic state of madness at rampant and will. He also stated the relentless work of the Christian missionaries in bringing civilization and the gospel to these African race. Mackenzie's emphasis on the impact of Christianity on the African race intended to display the fact that it brought some form of civilization and transformation of the people's life into civilized, well behaved, well mannered, well cultured and adequately hardworking race. To him, Christianity eliminated the savagery acts from the African race and set their paths on progress and evolution (Mackenzie, 1889).

Obviously, such connotations had a profound influence on how the Chinese recognize Africans. In modern times, the Chinese have constructed a new terminology used in the description of Africa. The Chinese have claimed that the inability of Africans to progress emanates from their disorderly, uncultivated, ill-mannered and uncivilized nature. These weaknesses have embroidered Africa with disparaging identities and terminologies from the Chinese perspective (Lanteigne & Hirono, 2013). The Chinese have used the term *Yuanshi* (原始) to describe Africa; this word when used at different point in time infers different undertones. *Yuanshi* (原始) is a word that has deep-rooted connotations at a different point in time to reflect the negativity and the backwardness of African societies. *Yuanshi* in the first instance is used to signify Africa's lack of control of its environments such as

plants and animals. Another illustration of *Yuanshi* adopts the Darwin principle in a unique way by stating the Africans are closely related to the monkey species and have physical and social characteristics like monkeys. The third illustration of *Yuanshi* reveals that Africa is a disease plagued continent, a place where the evolution of chronic ailments developed from and metamorphoses on a large scale without any form of control. Other connotations of *Yuanshi* state the primitive or crude nature of African societies which has made it prone to colonialism and imperialism from great powers of the world (Hood, 2011).

The Chinese use the concept of *Yuanshi* to perceive the notion of the environment in the concept of “advance” *xianjin* (先进) and “develop” *fazhan* (发展). They state that these two variables are lacking in Africa and the people of this continent lack the aptitude to develop such. Rhetoric’s such like this are also obvious in the western media and scholarly materials. For instance, Peter Brookesmith (1997) in his *Future Plagues, Biohazard, Disease and Pestilence: Mankind's Battle for Survival* published in Blanford, London presented Africa in the absence of any form of modernity, development or civilization. Gao Hongcun’s *Backlight: Features and Spirit of African Culture* publicized among others the unique characteristics of the culture of Sub-Saharan Africa. He saw the citizens of these countries as living compulsorily in the forests at puberty age to receive teachings and guidance from their village elders and chiefs.

Yang Wenyi’s references to natural elements and phenomenon such as the earth, water, oases, and icebergs links Africa to *Yuanshi* in the sense of ‘natural origins’. Africa is described as being at the mercy of its *Yuanshi* element. To him, Africa is like a boat that has been battered to pieces by a huge wave; it is therefore struggling and trying to gasp for breath in the middle of the storm. He further asserts that Africans lack of control over nature is responsible for the continental downfall in the “battle” against diseases. In African Anecdotes, many of the people Wang describes are positioned close to natural elements. In one example, he describes a group of Bororo herders who he sees as depending directly on nature for (clothing, food, housing and transport) because they migrate across the land. He sees the Bororo migration

patterns to be determined by their perception of seasonal change. According to him the Bororo's dependence on nature makes them timeless and unchanging. Ever since the evolution of Africa, these groups have always relied on herding to live. In various Chinese diaries, Africa is perceived in different ways yet consistently adopting the terminology of Yuanshi to describe Africa. Zhu Wei in his diaries talks of Africa's natural environment as being unexploited and unadulterated and yet having a dangerous atmosphere because of lack of segregation of people and wildlife within the 'domestic' spaces in Africa. Zhu emphasizes the differences and distance between China and Africa, which he described this as "dark and distance", Wang also expresses similar ideas of the Bororo herders, to him Africans are seen as the wild living amongst us even though we are distant apart (Hood, 2011).

Other modern sources emanated from the Republican sources that reported with enthusiasm the strange culture of Africa. Numerous Republican documents Africans as having an eccentric way of life, outlandish attitude of mind and alien laws. Therefore, one can argue that literatures exist as formidable materials to construct and deconstruct identities. The literatures adopted by the Chinese were used to incite a subjective irrationalism that enacted a bizarre configuration of what they see as the culture of Africa. Scholars have revealed that it's a common phenomenon for translators to often present other cultures as distant, often a place so strange that is very incomprehensible to the target audience while forgetting to illustrate and emphasize an empathy with their translation (Inggs & Meintjes, 2009). Every society is unique in its culture and its civilization, the conceptualization of what can be termed as barbaric or uncivilized can be arguable and contested within the framework and terminologies of culture. Schiller (2016) in his book *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in 1795* published by Penguin, UK argued that even in this age of when knowledge has been founded and made public why are we still barbarians? His document can be regarded as a "Modern Theory of Modernity". He proposed that human beings can be described in two distinct ways: either as a wild beast when his feelings dominate his principles or as a barbarian when his principles destroy his feelings". Schiller (2016) viewed this two views "the Wild Beast and Barbarian" as a historical sequence and also as a result of his time. To him the

“Wild Beast” is represented by the “lower and manifold classes”, the barbaric has used the “civilized classes” to define the “lower and manifold classes” which is led by the aristocracy. Barbarism is a fundamental feature of a culture consisting of nothing more than the dominance of principles and valid norms (Früchtl, 2007).

Evidently, it is arguable that the term barbarian is subjected to the human feelings and human actions; it’s also a result of the age and time in which humans exist. For the Chinese to classify Africans as barbarians, they invoked the race construction analysis that has been in existence in the global community. They also adopted their initial engagement with the blacks, as slaves they were neither in a position to demonstrate their culture but where oppressed and confined within cultural chains and pillars of rules.

Discussion

The historical and modern literatures reveal that the Chinese have developed three kind of consciousness about Africa. These perceptions are based on slavery, race and their perceived African culture. These themes would be discussed below.

Slavery Consciousness

Before slavery, it is arguable that the Chinese had a different perception of Africans, although this continent was distant, its perception was one of a predominantly rural environment engulfed with a multitude of wild animal species. However, with the institution of slavery which was imposed on Africans, their image, identity and categorizations changed dramatically. The imposition of slavery on the African race embellished them with a new profound figure and uniqueness. The Chinese depicted how Africans lost their homeland and their sovereignty; they also evaluated how their independent rights were eroded. Thus, Chinese scholars have often used the notion of oppression to characterize Africa; the notion of “enslavement” *nu' yi* (奴役), “slavishness” *nu' xin' de* (奴性的), partitioning *guafen* (瓜分) and the threat of colonization *zhi' min' di' hua* (殖民地化) was premeditated as a result of lack of African awareness or alertness to the changes that was unfolding around them. This intrinsic nature of human consciousness distinguishes the people from the slaves, the civilized

from the uncivilized and the historical from the unhistorical (Karl, 2002).

Historical facts and data reveal that before the advent of slavery, medieval societies constructed identities of Africa based on their inherent living conditions and their abilities. They were seen as “inhabitants of hazy but imposing lands” by the early Europeans while Tang dynasty China (618-906) saw them as “brave and ingenious” (勇敢又聰明) which was based on their physical abilities and vigor. However, with the advent of slavery on the African continent, their image became scorned and filled with disdain (Snow 1988). With the contact of a lot of black slaves in Canton during the Sung dynasty (960-1126), Africans became vilified and were seen as “savages, devils and barbaric slave race” (野蠻, 邪惡又凶猛的奴隸) (Weiner, 2004). These experiences made the configuration of the African race in China synonymous with the notion of inferiority and weakness. In essence, the Chinese also invoked the categorization of race to comprehend the black race.

Race Consciousness

The Great Dictionary of Zoology (Dongwuxue da cidian 動物學大辭典) edited by Du Yaquan 杜亞泉等 published in Shanghai made an attempt to dissect the black race. This dictionary argued that the “black race are a mediocre race with a shallow mind while they are characterized by an oblong head, low forehead and an obtrude teeth”. It further contended that the “black race have nothing to offer or to impact on history, they are constrained by their inherent weakness” (Yaquan, 1927). In another attempt to evaluate the “black race”, a Chinese scholar Gu Shoubai revealed that “black people had an offensive odor which made them easily recognizable and distinct”. They were also characterized as “having broad lips and a constricted forehead”. Likewise, he classified the blacks into three categories, he saw them as the ‘black slave race’ (黑奴种族), a ‘little black slave race’ (小黑奴种族) and ‘standard black race’ (准黑奴种族) (Shoubai, 1924).

Another Chinese Scholar Gong Tingzhang reinforced that “blacks had a unique unpleasant odor that can ward off other people”. He also

produced a comical image of a black man in a formal suit and tie and he captioned it “Black Slave from Africa”. In addition, he likened the “Black Slave race” as attaining the same crude evolution of the peasants (愚弄) of China (Tingzhang, 1926). Chen Jianshan, an evolutionist scholar, traced and classified the “black slave” with chimpanzees and gorillas, he contended that the “black race” were the of same evolution lineage as these animals (Jianshan, 1924). An additional scholarly material called *Animals and Life* (Dongwu yu rensheng 动物与人生) propounded again that “black slave race” as historically an inferior race and was classified with the “Gorilla lineage” (Darong, 1928).

With the new Chinese Republic in 1911, the analysis of race identities saturated all realms of educational discourse in China. On the dialogue of “Human races,” a classification was made and it exposed that the world race consists of the superior and inferior culture, the strong and the weak societies, the white and the black colored people. It further expounded that “the white and the yellow races were strong witted and smart” while other races were “weak and foolish”. Their inherent shortcoming which is based on their abilities made them easily annihilated by the White race. The Yellow race comes from China and they are the only race capable of competing with the White race, thus the White and the Yellow races are the superior races (Hutchinson & Smith, 2000).

Wilson (1992) asserted that the concept of race and Chinese notion of the Yellow race is very vibrant. An old famous theory of the evolution of races goes thus: “A divine potter was a molder of the human race; they argued that he forgot his clay in the kiln over a long period of time and the result was black and burned clay” which he threw away to Africa. His second mould was brought out rather too soon and the outcome was “white clay” which he tossed to Europe. His third mould was done with proper conscientiousness and the product was a “Yellow race” well formed and perfect among the races of the world. This “Yellow race” belongs to Asia and the Chinese are the descendant of the race. Dikotter (1992) revealed the distaste the Chinese have for the blacks in their various descriptions of them; they saw them as “repulsive, repelling and looking like devilish animals”. Their

overwhelming disgust for the blacks were even witnessed in literary works such as poems that state “The wise race are the Yellow and the White race while the stupid race are the Red and the Black race” (Sani, 2013). In essence, one can see that the Chinese adopted the notion of culture superiority, generalisations and cultural phobia to view Africa. Likewise, apart from the race discourse that was adopted, the Chinese also adopted numerous literatures to analyse their connotations of a barbaric and uncivilised Africa.

Chinese consciousness of African culture was therefore founded on the data and information sourced from the conceptualization of races, slavery and both historical and modern literary works. From these sources, Africa was seen as a distant strange culture that evaded their notion of what they termed as accepted forms and traditions in a culture. This systematic technique of describing a culture as “strange” is what anthropologists call “Ethnocentrism”. They see humans as risking a projection of a behavioral pattern from their own culture into the one being studied (Ottenheimer, 2008). This conceptualization of strangeness in culture as reflected in ethnocentric patterns were obviously reflected in the Chinese discernment of the African race basically because their pattern of behaviors was incomprehensible and was subjected to a scrutiny under the Chinese lens.

African Culture Perspectives

Numerous Chinese literature states emphatically and consistently that Africa is made of wild and uneducated people. The people are barbaric and uncivilized and they fight and maim each other. This is a common trend in Africa. Theories about the carnage nature of Africa draws inferences from the slave trade dilemma Africa was overwhelmed in as one reason for this, another proponent infers that it’s an act of survival skill among the different ethnic groups that existed among the locals (Cuibao, 1897). Apart from the carnage nature of Africans, the Chinese perceived Africans as illiterates. The Chinese asserts that Africa is the most uneducated among the five continents. The people here are illiterate and have slow memory. Countries could plunder Africa because they lacked the wits and the intellect to administer their continent by themselves (Zhongxi, 1904). Countries that looted Africa discovered that the continent was a place of filled with eccentric culture and traditions. The National Geographic Magazine was translated by

the Chinese to assess African culture. It asserts that there seems to be an extraordinary number of strange customs in Africa. However, the strangest custom came from the middle of Africa. There is a group named “Banbala 班霸拉” that lives near the Kwilu River which is a branch of the Congo River in the south. This ethnic group is outlandish in culture, cannibals in nature and is governed by a Chief who has unique privileges.

The weirdness of African culture was also assessed from the cultural beautification and traditions of the Muri tribe of Congo. The difference between Muri and other people is that they wear an iron hoop and use textile to cover round their head. They have a bizarre custom of funeral rights and tradition. Their justice system is based on a fetish ritual of using poison to prove innocence. To prove innocence one is expected to take poison which is the made from ‘Erythrophloeum Guineense’ mixed with thick mastic. If he survives it, he is celebrated but if he dies, his body is feasted upon (Fang, 1920).

African aesthetics as projected from the people of North Africa became a reference angle to analyze the continent by the Chinese. The Chinese believed that the women in the north part of Africa were very obnoxious while the women in the south are small, slim and very beautiful.

‘The locals of Central Africa wear robes which they wrap around their body and use the same pattern cloth as a belt. They use a decoration of grass ball which they dye in the color of red. The women here like to hang the beads on their cloth and men wear fur dresses made from the fur of animals. There isn’t much difference in the dressing style of men and women. People here are encouraged to wear their hair long and only shave a small part for putting cream mixed with certain oil and soft coal. The hair looks like a hat when it grows to a certain extent. When people get old and have white hair, they would wrap a red cloth around the hair (Fang, 1920)’.

The Chinese strongly believe that Africans have outlandish eating habits and customs. Their report about Africa goes as follows:

‘The common food for the local is a thick mixture of tapioca powder and water. The people also eat leaves mixed with certain oils and pepper. Apart from the domestic animals and birds, they eat insect and even eat humans as well. However, the women here are forbidden from eating human flesh, especially female bandits. They are not only forbidden from eating human flesh but also lamb, hawks, snakes, birds, and animals which are been hunted by tools. However, they can eat monkeys and rats. It is very normal to see people eat food mixed with blood or even white ants from trees. They also use three different kinds of pepper flavorings, oil from certain fruits and the most important one is salt made from waterweeds. Most people in Africa use foreign salt-cube to cook their food; they string the salt cube and soak it for a while then take it out for later use. It is a basic need for them to always carry the salt cubes them for the purpose of refreshing water to replace tea. When they suffer from diarrhea they eat sand to relieve the diarrhea symptoms. It is not necessary for them to wait for meal time to eat meat anywhere with their bare hands (Fang, 1920).’

Another African country was assessed by the Chinese. They reported the culture of the Sudanese. In their literature it states that the locals of Sudan wear a big scar on their on their face and body. The scar on some of the women is incredibly terrible sometimes reveal they are undergoing cruel punishments. But in fact, those scars are made by themselves. It can represent their ethnic group; it is the symbolization of their family or religious group (Huaqiao daobao, 1941).

Colonized Africa Perspectives

With Colonization and Slavery overwhelming Africa, the Chinese perceived Africa as a place filled dehumanized character and splendor. Africans were exploited by their colonial masters requesting them to work longer hours with meager pay. They were subjugated by the barrels of the western guns and demoralized in their homeland (Boahen, 1985). African Colonialism therefore can be categorized as an era of exploitation, oppression, demoralization and despotism. Oppressed Africa was further reinforced by the stories of Chinese workers that encountered Africa through the British transportation of

Chinese coolies to Africa to work. Despite Africa has an abundant of resources, they are exploited and controlled by the West. The West has developed Africa and has eroded the rights of the locals. Africa is underdeveloped and that was why the West referred to it as the called the Dark Continent. The Chinese believed that the barbaric way of life in Africa reflects why Africa is termed as the Dark Continent.

The Chinese further examined the geographical features, resources, temperature and infrastructure of Africa to buttress the claim of this assertion. Africa is the Dark Continent with a three-quarter area of Asia and it's the second largest continent in the World. The Sahara desert lies in the North part of Africa with the dry climate and high temperature during the day time. Despite this dry climate, the French have occupied a large portion of African land for irrigation; they have made significant achievements in agriculture based on their irrigation capabilities and the availability of wells in this area. Most of the African continents are plateaus and have straight coastal lands along many mountains. The transportation network is underdeveloped despite the presence of few rivers. In central Africa, there is speedy waterfall and this has a major shortcoming of sailing and irrigation with the exception of the Nile River which has the advantage of fixed tides. It is difficult to edify the masses in Africa; therefore, it is called the Dark Continent (Tujie, 1935).

Conclusion

The Chinese have portrayed Africa as 'Distant', not only based on its conceptual meaning or geographical location but it infers a continent having a culture far away from the civilization they know and believe in. One erroneous belief of the Chinese is to assume there is an African culture. There is nothing like an African culture and for them to emphasize vehemently over and over in their history books shows they lack a true geographical implication and location of Africa. This dysfunctional assumption of the Chinese of an African culture led to generalizations and stereotypes. They perhaps had knowledge of few African countries or gathered documentations about certain countries in Africa and adopted their culture to categorize the whole of Africa. Hurn & Tomalin (2013) asserts that human race often adopt this terminology out of their historical prejudice of a particular culture or a certain race. They are statements which are considered to describe a whole country

and its people. Schneider (2005) reveals that stereotypes or generalizations account for errors and biases in our conception of the world. The constant rhetoric in Chinese literature of African culture as barbaric and uncivilized exposes the dangers of stereotypes and generalizations in which was evident among the Chinese.

The Chinese also adopted a position of cultural strength over Africa; Chinese historical sources provided the knowledge for their audience to judge Africa from an ethnocentric point of view through their systematic documentation of mostly negative phenomenon. Africa was not assessed as a cultural group but it was overwhelmingly assessed through the focal lens of the Chinese culture. Anthropologists have viewed this notion as ethnocentrism. This is the process of evaluating another culture using the standards of one's own culture. Ethnocentrism is derived from two Greek words, ethno or nation, and kentron or center. When combined, the meaning reveals itself "the nation at the center". Ethnocentrism is a belief in the superiority of one's culture. Myron Lustig and Jolene Koester claimed that cultures train their members to use the categories of their own cultural experiences when judging the experiences of people from other cultures (West & Turner, 2010). A Sino-centric view of the world advances the superiority of the Chinese race above all races, thus bridging stereotypes, generalizations, crude conceptualizations and radical interpretation of cultures. These undertones are highly embedded in some of the perceptions divulged above because the source of the information remains highly questionable. The adoption of oral history as a fundamental authoritative source discloses how inconsistencies can emanate through the authors' interpretation, biases, prejudices, and sentiments can alter data.

Another inherent observation from Chinese categorization of a 'Distant Africa' comes from the adoption of western literatures and sources of information. Theories emanating from the west have a strong sense of cultural superiority as well. A concept scholar has described as of Western-centrism. Western-centrism is clearly obvious from the theories of the West which are bounded in the culture of the west which emanates a disheveled culture of Africa embellished with imperialism. We notice that Scholars often tend to be bounded with such cultural constructions and dispel them radically as sinologists or as historians.

Such cultural theories are emphasized with constructed representations which lack objective evidence but revolve around representations. The lack of objectivity or evidence in such theories makes factual evidence to be fabricated evidence enclosed with a high degree of representation that reflects a historian cultural orientation (Huang, 1998). For the Chinese to adopt such theories of the West in their assessment of Africa is crude and offers no objectivity of perception but radiates pigeon hole perspectives clouded in the view of a judge of other cultures.

Lastly, can we agree with the Chinese that this continent is ‘Distant Africa’? Succinctly, from the geographical perspective, China and Africa are separated by mountains, hills, rivers, oceans and a large number of countries. However, is their culture distant? Distant in Chinese literature emanates the notion of a culture unknown and uncivilised based on their own cultural knowledge. The culture of different countries in Africa is unique and this gives them an identity, before the advent of colonialism Africa had its own way of life and its own set of acceptable behaviours. No two cultures can be same, thus culture generalisation and culture evaluation within ones cultural tenets is a subjective phenomenon that leads to culture paranoia that dispels nothing but fabricated statements coated in misguided notions of a certain group of people.

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