

The Relevance of Emmanuel Hevi: China in Contemporary Sino-African Relations

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Abstract

This work argues that writer Emmanuel John Hevi's works, written half a century ago about China's likely influence in Africa are still relevant today. Using relevant qualitative data and a constructivist analysis this paper argues that although Hevi was wary of China's influence because of the specific context in which he was writing, Africa would do well to keep his argument in mind and adopt from China only that which can aid the continent's development and spurn that which cannot. Constructivism has been used here to help explain the intersection of Chinese and African identities and interests as the main unifying factor in a growing China-Africa relationship. Hence, it is suggested that the West does not share such depth of identities and interests with China which has hugely influenced Western suspicions of China's growth and incursions in Africa.

Key words: Africa, China, constructivism, Hevi, identity, interest.

Introduction

China is 'predicted by many to become the most important world country of the twenty-first century – as the USA was for the twentieth, and the UK was in the nineteenth' (Macionis and Plummer 2008:93). However, China's rise has raised concerns, especially in the West, because of its controversial human rights record, economics and political ideology, and conversely, Africa has been sanguine about China's rise.

It sees China as a kindred spirit of the global South and a survivor of Western domination. China does not use human rights records, economic ideology and democracy as qualifications for economic relations with Africa, as do Western powers. This makes China's overtures almost irresistible to Africa. Furthermore, the growth model that China has latterly employed has been met with approbation from leaders of the Third World (Halper, 2010).

Amid such African optimism, the works of Emmanuel Hevi, a Ghanaian who lived and studied in China, and the insights he gave about that country, deserve attention. As is the case today, decades ago Hevi wrote that '[f]ew subjects are as complicated as China's Africa policy and the motives behind it' (1967). Later in the book, though, he reveals his position by concluding that in the withdrawal of Western imperialists, Africa was confronted with another possibility of subjugation as '[t]he Eastern imperialists... decided in their turn to do a carve up' of the continent (Hevi 1967:65). This sentiment is in tandem with Campbell's (2007:120) that stated that China had followed Otto Von Bismarck's remark that a country that has lordship over Africa will have lordship over the world; an indirect implication that China intends to control the world.

Hevi was critical of China's autocratic politics and the extent to which communism had cowed ordinary Chinese into pitiful submission (Hevi, 1963). China, at the time Hevi was writing his books, was more concerned with converting Africa ideologically rather than relating to it economically (Ayenabo et al, 2012:6421). However, post-Mao China has undergone marked political and ideological changes, leading some writers to aver that China under Deng Xiaoping was transformed 'into a quasi-capitalist state' (Gittings 2005:251).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to give an even-handed justification of Hevi's relevance in current Sino-African relations. Without dismissing China's impressive growth, this work cautions Africa against naïveté as it adores and emulates China. China's notion of governance and human rights needs to be objectively scrutinized. The paper uses constructivism to argue that Africa's almost unqualified acceptance of China stems from the identities and interests that it shares with China. Thus, this exercise relies almost entirely on secondary data gathered by prior literature. From the sample data, it will be made, hopefully, manifestly clear that by and large, Western literature and sentiment has been largely negative or paranoid about China's rise while the general African sentiment has been optimistic, thereby accentuating the uniqueness of Hevi's work.

The first part of this work gives the historical background of China-Africa relations; the second part will be a brief but, hopefully, clear explanation of constructivism in its international relations garbs. The third part delves into the main arguments of Emmanuel Hevi's on the People's Republic of China (henceforth China or PRC); following an understanding of how Hevi's argument applies to current Sino-African relations, and the fifth part applies constructivist arguments to illustrate why China has been readily welcomed in Africa but has not enjoyed similar attitudes from the West, and last, the conclusion.

Background of Sino-African Relations

The relations that Africa currently shares with China could be traced centuries ago¹ but they certainly became more pronounced during the Cold War. The momentous event that cemented Afro-Chinese relations was the Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in 1955 (Masud, Ahmmed, Mostafa and Choudhury, 2013). The main rationale for the conference was to solidify the bonds among global players that had been relegated to insignificance by the tussle for superiority between the capitalist West and the Soviet Union. China and India were undoubtedly the biggest players at the conference and this is borne out by the fact that the vows that were signed at the conference were almost similar to the diplomatic principles of coexistence that the two countries had signed prior to Bandung (Hevi, 1967). It was thus expected that African states would settle for the fact that China and India would be the de facto leaders of the players present at the Bandung Conference.

Apart from solidarity against the Cold War belligerents, what made Afro-Chinese ties increase in depth was Africa's twentieth century struggle against European colonialism. At the time the Bandung conference was convened, most of Africa was under colonial control. China contributed visibly towards Africa's struggle for self-rule and endeared itself to Africa by this gesture (O' Brien, 2008: 77). At the time the People's Republic of China was initiated, it was a poor nation (Kendall and Louw, 1989) but it still wanted to play its part in ending Africa's political travails. Apart from its modest material support, ideology played a major part in solidifying Sino-African ties (Anshan, 2007). Generally speaking, Africa looked askance at capitalism partly because colonizers were mainly capitalist and also because much of Africa south of the Sahara was instinctually inclined towards communal modes of economics. This made it easy for Africa to identify with China, a self-proclaimed communist state. However, it is important to note that China was not invariably praised in Africa. One of the episodes that jeopardized China's fortunes in some African countries and among certain political movements was its conflict with the Soviet Union, a fellow communist power (Martin and Johnson, 1985). Hitherto, China had accepted the Soviet Union as a leader of the communist bloc, calling it 'teacher of socialism' (Schrecker 2004:213; Shirk, 1996). With time, however, China accused the Soviet Union of revisionism because the latter was selling the idea that contrary to doctrinaire communism, capitalism can be defeated through non-revolutionary i.e. nonviolent means (Hunter and Sexton 1999:183). The same label (revisionist) was given to African political movements that enjoyed Soviet largesse.

By sticking to what the Soviet Union perceived as an outmoded adherence to communist ideology, China was exposed as a somewhat rigid power, mired in ways that were not in tandem with the increasingly civilized world (MacFarquhar 1983:8). Furthermore, China was seen as a warmonger, a label that it deserved when one reads Mao's thought (Kasrils 2004:69). China was poised to reserve no measure, however extreme, to defeat capitalism and institute socialism in the whole world. Mao expressed his callous disregard for human life when, in discussions with Jawaharlal Nehru of India, intimated that still if a war were to break out and claim half of humanity, it would be worthwhile if it obliterated capitalism and brought about a socialist world order. His defense for this controversial stance was that half of humanity can be replaced in a century (see Hevi 1967:36).

Generally speaking, however, compared to the West, China was a more favored power in Africa. This was because China presented itself as an identical nation with Africa. The history of Western domination that China shares with Africa has often been cited as one of the main reasons for the formidable bonds that the two parties share (Mao, 145). After the death of Mao, China underwent a number of changes and manifested a willingness to shift from doctrinaire Marxism to a more open political and economic practice. The necessity of building the national economy supplanted the obsession with maintaining ideological and revolutionary purity, and according to Hutchings, in post-Mao China ‘national interests [became] more important than... revolutionary interests’ (Hutchings 2001:143). Changes of leadership in both the Soviet Union and China, coupled with less emphasis on ideological animosities brought about the gradual wane of Sino-Soviet discord.

The world was somewhat more optimistic of the China under the influence of Deng Xiaoping, probably the second most influential Chinese after Mao in the twentieth century because he was willing to interact with other global players irrespective of their ideological leanings (Goodman 1994:1). It has to be said, though, that Mao was still regarded with reverence even if China after his death sought to drift from his ideological fanaticism (McDonald, 2011). The economic interests that China had after Mao had an impact on China’s relations with Africa as China desired to improve its economy, and for this to be achieved, it needed to connect with countries that had economic promise. For this reason, China and the United States developed some semblance of friendship to an extent that ‘human rights were considered a suitable subject for high-level American diplomacy with the Soviet Union, but not with China’ (Mann 2000:103). Africa was obviously not viable enough. Thus, China’s minimal role in aiding Africa during the 1980s could be explained by the thesis that it was hesitant to spend its much needed resources on Africa.

The Tiananmen Square unrest of 1989 was a boon to the weakened Sino- African relations (Taylor, 1998). The unrest was mainly led by students who rued the lack of democracy and political progressiveness in China. The Chinese government used disproportionate force to end the protest and engendered many casualties.

The recourse to hardline suppression of political protests was redolent of the Mao era and tarnished the improving reputation that China was building after 1976. The ‘massacre’ elicited condemnation from Western powers, and thus, China incurred economic sanctions and arms embargoes (Hutchings 2001:426).

The Tiananmen Square crisis was of importance to Sino-African relations because China sought the support of Africa after forfeiting the goodwill of the West. China would argue that by being sanctioned after the protests, the West was attempting to interfere with the internal affairs of other non-Western states, an allusion to Western colonial tendencies. In Africa, the Chinese government’s response to the Tiananmen crisis was regarded with more favor (Taylor, 1998), and once again, Africa proved to be of strategic importance to China.

The Tiananmen Square incident happened in the same year as the destruction of the Berlin Wall, a moment that signaled the dying phase of the Cold War. From the end of the Cold War, the world is increasingly becoming decentered. The international political system is no longer a fiefdom of two major powers i.e. the United States and the Soviet Union. New global players have emerged and China is the most obvious example of these.² Africa has also showed clear ambitions to lessen its dependency on Western powers by exploring the East (*Business Report*, 28 February, 2014³; see also Naidu, 2007). Africa has often accused the West and Western-bred institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund of having imperialist propensities towards Africa. The conditions that Western states and organizations demand before they can trade, relate with and aid Africa have been greeted with consternation in Africa. Thus, China's relations, that are nominally non-conditional, are a safer option for controversial African governments (MacDonald, 2010).

The bond that China has maintained and increased with Africa has raised a lot of concerns especially from the West. There are speculations that China might export its controversial worldview to Africa. Furthermore, if Africa can still enjoy economic and political ties without any corrective measures, they could ignore the calls for democracy and the improvement of human rights that the West emphasizes. Another concern, which has lingered for decades, is that China has imperialist intentions for Africa. However, there is less concern about China spreading communism in Africa because China is only nominally communist in its current economic practices.

Though much of the criticism of China's influence in Africa has been predominantly Western and has grown in recent years, there has also been criticism that stemmed from Africa. Hevi (1963 & 1967) gave arguments against China's influence in Africa that were seldom from an African especially at the time when China seemed to offer a more benign form of relations with Africa. It is also important to note that Hevi's works were controversial as they would, prima facie, suggest that it is better for Africa to maintain close ties with its erstwhile colonial masters than go for the Eastern option.

Constructivism

Constructivism is an international relations theory whose main thesis is that relations among nations are basically influenced by identities among these players and the subsequent interests that proceed from these identities. Nations have many identities, subject to the type of player they are relating with. Constructivism also looks at international relations as being a general manifestation of human interaction. It goes further to argue that, unlike the claims of realism, human relations are shaped by 'by ideational factors, not simply material ones' (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001:391, see also Kratochwil, 2001). Among nations that consider each other as allies, for example, relations among them are presumably different from those of nations that consider each other as foes or rivals. These identities influence national interests as allies would be more willing to foster mutual interests and development but rivals are likely to compete, sometimes aggressively, with each other.

According to constructivism, national identities and interests are constructed through social interaction (Adler, 1997). In other words, national interest is endogenously and not exogenously created through social learning or international relations (Wendt, 1999). Realism, on the other hand, is premised on the theory that national interests are a general manifestation of unchangeable and irredeemable human selfishness and the pursuit of power (Morgenthau, 1973).

The concept of anarchy is another matter that pits constructivism against realism. According to realism, anarchy is a natural occurrence in an international system characterized by robust competition among countries that are invariably self-interested (Basu, 2012). Thus, the structure of the world is anarchic. This structure is presented as being immune to change and that social processes cannot transform it. Constructivism, on the other hand, argues that anarchy is 'what states make of it' (Wendt 1992:395). Constructivism does not dismiss the possibility and existence of self-interest in the international system. It argues, simply, that 'if today we find ourselves in a self-help world; this is due to process, not structure' (Wendt 1992:394). It is through the process of social interaction that identities and interests are developed and changed.

Constructivism becomes more illuminating if a few examples are given to justify its arguments. The United States has generally considered Britain an ally. Their shared subscription to democracy, capitalism, a Western oriented understanding of human rights and their antipathy to communism solidify the bonds between the United States and Britain. This mutual identification shapes the type of interests that the countries share. They are expected to seek mutual benefits in their interaction and support in various international contexts (Wendt 1995:73).

However, relations between these players and others that subscribe to a different political and economic worldview are not always easy. Thus, China, a country that claims to be communist cannot enjoy American friendship and trust to the extent that Britain does. It is thus logical that America is more likely to be suspicious if China, in lieu of Britain, were to grow in its economic and military status and augment its influence in global politics. Thus, in its relations with China, it would not be surprising if America was inclined to contain China. The dissonance that exists between America's and China's economic ideology, political system and understating of human rights makes it hard for the two powers to interact cordially, shorn of mutual suspicion. This is an illustration of how identities and interests are constructed through social learning or process. Thus, it is not surprising that while Africa has generally been optimistic about China's growth and its increasing presence on the continent, the West has observed this development with mounting alarm.

Hevi's Arguments on China

Emmanuel John Hevi was awarded a scholarship to study medicine in China. He went to China at the time when revolutionary fervor was in vogue and his first book was an 'argument against communism in Africa' (1963:9). He charges from the onset of his argument that he knew 'the Chinese communists for the inveterate liars that they are [and as such they would not] cease trying to persuade [African people] that China is a paradise and that communism is the one and only possible road to such a paradise' (1963:9). China was unashamedly a self-proclaimed communist state (Mao 1961). However, contrary to the general African view of China at the time, Hevi had a different perspective on China's political and social system. One of the aspects of China's politics that he found counterproductive and shocking was the prioritization of aiding communist rebels in foreign lands while ordinary Chinese were living in inhuman conditions. His argument was that the Chinese government had the wherewithal to remedy the poverty of its citizenry. However, communist indoctrination was regarded as more important than social development.

Apart from lacking beneficial priorities, Hevi also decried the dogmatic nature that characterized China's education system at the time in contrast to ordinary disciplines studied elsewhere wherein China emphasized the importance of political studies which according to Hevi were a distorted and biased discipline.

This education started at a young age and was mainly based on Marx, Engels, Lenin and the teachings of Mao Zedong. The bias with which political studies were conducted indicates that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) expected all citizens to pledge unquestioned fealty to the Party. Hevi claims that at the time, 'the most important criterion for admission into universities and higher institutions [was] not merit, but the level of "socialist consciousness"' (1963:35).

Hevi's somewhat alarmist position might offer a wealth of experience about China that many in Africa are not privy to. China is a closed country in terms of its policies and political behavior and it is precisely because of this that statisticians find it hard to gauge the real growth rate of China's economy and observers find it difficult to ascertain the level of corruption and so on. Hevi lived in China and observed how the Chinese government under Mao had deprived its people of certain political privileges. Despite this, it is also important to note the time Hevi was writing his books and the events that characterized that particular time. Indubitably, the Cold War was one of the biggest influences on global politics at the time.

In Africa, the fight against colonization was more fervid during the 1960s. Hevi supports non-alignment. Africa was also part of the non-aligned nations and nominally so was China. Hevi's claim that the Chinese communists are mendacious is understandable if one realizes that China practiced what could be termed as 'aligned non-alignment' (1967:1).

Hence, before the onset of the Sino-Soviet split and after China operated openly a communist state and was an overt supporter of the Soviet Union, at least initially. For this reason, China seemed to have been playing a patronizing role in Africa and other non-aligned regions. This fence-sitting could also be understood as China wanting to control the weaker states of the international system, having conceded that at the time, the Soviet Union and the United States were too powerful and advanced for its competition.

From believing this line of thought, Hevi arrives at the conclusion that China's 'intentions in Africa cannot possibly be in the best interests of Africans' (1967:4). He describes China as 'an unfamiliar imperialist nation' that aimed at colonizing Africa after the dissolution of European colonization. On the question of colonization, Hevi gives some instructive insights about Africa's zeal to shake itself from colonial servitude and unreasonably embrace countries that had hitherto never colonized Africa. In their quest to snap the bonds of colonialism, Africa seemed to have thrown caution to the wind. Independence fighters seemed to have been in haste to change Africa and this, to them, meant doing away with whatever could be interpreted as a vestige of the colonial order. This partly explains post-colonial Africa's antipathy to capitalism and reluctance to practice democracy as understood in Western societies.

The consequence of this attitude towards the West was that Africa became more politically intimate with China, a country that does not have the colonial badge in Africa, has no real evidence of democracy and had proclaimed itself a communist state. Amid all these credentials, however, Hevi inveighs against 'the general African attitude which assumes that imperialism is exclusively the vice of certain nations and political systems' (1967:1). It is, of course, erroneous for African people to consider capitalism and imperialism as immanently intertwined. A communist country could easily be imperialist. China has often manifested imperialist tendencies (Hevi, 1967). Hevi cited Nkrumah as evidence of how African leaders would be inclined towards imperialism. The crux of his caution, though, was that China also has imperialist tendencies towards Africa. Hevi was convinced of communist China's imperialist tendencies when, after the Chinese Communist Party came to power and started referring to Tibet as a region of China. Tibet had, in practice, been an independent region. It was actually more influenced by the British than Chinese. Another piece of evidence that Hevi gives of China's imperialist streak was China's treachery against India, a country with which it signed the five principles of peaceful coexistence in 1954. The principles stated clearly that the two countries would respect each other's territory and sovereignty and would desist from aggression; would honor each other's internal affairs; would foster mutual interests and finally exist as peaceful neighbors.

These are the principles that formed part of the Bandung principles in 1955. Less than a decade after the five principles were signed, China was making clear its intent to wrest a territory that was geographically a part of India. After years of covert intimidation, China launched an open invasion of India in 1962. Hevi avers that this invasion could have been motivated by at least two factors. The first possible explanation is that China wanted to expose India as a weak country that cannot possibly be considered for leadership in the Afro-Asian community.

This episode also partly exposed China's "expansionist" propensities. This could partly be explicable because at the Bandung Conference it was clear that China and India were unofficial leaders of the Afro-Asian countries. Another possible reason that Hevi submits for China's invasion of India is that China wanted to disrupt India's economic growth by forcing the country to divert a substantial portion of its resources to military defense. By proposing these two explanations, Hevi attempts to expose China's imperialist bent and its insecurity against countries whose economic growth could challenge its own. India was evidently sincere in its commitment to honor the principles of peaceful existence, but China presented itself as a duplicitous party. Hevi's question is 'on what grounds does Africa expect better treatment from China than India got?' (1967:26).

Yet, if unlike India, Africa shares no geographical contiguity with China, Hevi argues that the most vital reality is that there are a variety of ways that China can use to betray Africa. The Sino-Indian dispute revealed to some observers that no undue importance should be attached to China's fine words about international friendship and peaceful existence. Following this line of reasoning would lead one to look at the undertakings that China has inscribed in its policies with Africa. Hevi was concerned with the amount of influence that China exercised on Africa, not less in his native Ghana where he thought Nkrumah's animosity towards religion and his ambiguous Pan-Africanist tendencies were vivid manifestations of communist adoption. Furthermore, Felix Houphouët-Boigny (1905-1993), the first President of Côte d'Ivoire was purported to have said that 'in Nanking, China, Africans [were] being taught to assassinate those whose eyes are open to the Chinese danger, in order to replace them with servile men who will open the gates of Africa to China' (Van Ness, 1971). Emulating communist China was a sore topic for Hevi because despite having enjoyed centuries-long ties with China, Africa has been influenced more by Western lifestyles, and moreover, Africa's ethical codes, language and religions have been deeply Westernized.

Hevi and Current Sino-African Relations

The growth that China enjoys today is a far cry from the state it was in at the time Hevi wrote his books. China has become more influential in international affairs and has more prospects of influencing African politics to a level higher than Hevi feared half a century ago. In 2008 Andrew Malone, a British journalist, wrote an article about China's recent incursions into Africa which, according to him, are more determined and on a larger and faster scale than the British ones prior to colonialism.⁴ Malone's argument could easily be taken as a later version of Hevi's arguments. Malone is convinced that China is taking over Africa and that the rest of the world ought to be concerned about this reality. He deplores the substandard and readymade Chinese wares that are exported to Africa while Africa still remains, by and large, an exporter of raw materials to China. People who are inclined to think in ways that Hevi and Malone do, and interpret China's international behavior in generalized and negative ways have been branded "Sino pessimists" who accept the basic premise of political realism about international relations and international political economy that the interaction between China and African states is a zero-sum game in which the stronger party gains at the expense of the weaker. But, they also concede, this is a fact of international life and should be accepted as such. Neither reform nor revolution could change this structure (Adem 2010:336).

The dominance of realism in international relations has greatly influenced Sino-pessimism. However, there is merit in some of the arguments that Hevi makes. The African attitude that imperialism is the exclusive province of Western and capitalist societies is at best an expression of political naiveté. China's attitude towards Tibet and Taiwan is evidence enough that the country has ambitions that could easily be interpreted as imperialist and expansionist. In addition, communism is not mutually exclusive with imperialism.

Another point that merits attention from Hevi's arguments is the adoption of ideology based on emotion rather than worth. Although much of Africa was historically inclined towards a communal manner of existence, post-colonial socialism in Africa was prompted by the fact that erstwhile imperialists were capitalist. This was a counterproductive thing to do because African people did not consider their specific contexts as determinants of economic ideology. Post-Mao China, for example, transformed itself from being a Marxist zealot to a pragmatic player that was ready to tone down some of its Marxist rhetoric in favor of economic growth and strategic partnerships (Yap and Man 1996:421). Socialist ideologies in Africa have not produced needed results, as touted by immediate post-colonial leaders. On the contrary, a number of African countries morphed into one party states mainly because of socialist influence. Currently, China's economic system shows no real evidence of being socialist, let alone communist. Africa can thus learn to move with time and to support ideologies that can improve its lot, regardless of the origin of the ideologies in question.

Arguably the biggest problem that Africa has is bad, dictatorial, and myopic governance. Despite all the rhetoric Africa might have against Western institutions and nations that use human rights records and good governance as the lynch pins for trade and economic support, Africa has political problems that should be rectified. Interpreting Western conditions as being evidence of colonial tendencies exposes Africa's defensiveness and impulsive refusal to see any merit in Western suggestions, however justifiable these suggestions might be. The dearth of good leadership and benign politics that saw Sudan divided into two cannot be gainsaid. The suppression of the political opposition and the profligacy that has come to characterize Zimbabwean politics is too vivid to deny. Many more examples can be given from the continent. Corruption and misappropriation of public funds is the habit that has driven many African countries to the precipice. Amid all this counterproductive mode of governance, should the West keep mum simply because it will be branded as imperialist if it points at the truth of what is going wrong in Africa? Ordinary people in Africa remain deplorably poor while African leaders live luxuriously. For this reason, certain conditions that are attached to relations of Western origin are irrefutably justifiable by any concerned African.

The fact that China makes no such conditions bodes ill for Africa. In fact, there has to be a limit to how the principle of "non-interference" is adhered to. If China will not be proactive in contributing to the creation of positive change in politically unstable African states under the guise of non-interference, then this principle will be sufficiently promoting complicity in Africa's political woes.

It is for this reason that amid calls for political rectitude from Western powers, Mugabe can safely say ‘as long as we have the Chinese we will never walk alone’, a sinister allusion that if the West is punitive and prescriptive in its relations with Zimbabwe, however defensible its (the Western) motive, Mugabe will look to the Chinese for support (Rogers, 2007). This is hardly surprising because China has historically denied its people full political rights and a believable multiparty system. China is slow to adopt or promote Western ethical codes, principles of transparent governance, good labour conditions and good governance in general (Halper, 2010). This type of rule has been detrimental in African countries where it was entrenched and is not in the spirit of political progressiveness that should be in tandem with contemporary politics. Hevi was all too aware of how this attitude panned out in Ghana when Nkrumah seemed to have bought into the fallacy that China formed the best political and economic template for Africa.

The principle of non-interference (Naidu, 2007) forms the core of China’s “no strings” attached foreign policy. This principle has been extant for more than sixty years but China’s adherence to it is hard to ascertain. In 2006 China threatened to cut diplomatic ties with Zambia if Michael Chilufya Sata would emerge winner in the general election. The main reason for this was that Sata was critical of China and more receptive of Taiwan. This is an example of interference in internal affairs though China uses the defense that players that support Taiwan are the ones interfering in the PRC’s internal affairs. China was also subtly interfering in the internal affairs of its African counterparts in the 1960s when it was – in deeds – trying to export Maoism to Africa.⁵ During the Sino-Soviet split, it called African countries that maintained close ties with the Soviet Union “revisionists”, the same epithet that it hurled at the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Away from this scenario, it is difficult to imagine that China would not interfere or add its voice to a nation whose internal political changes would appear inimical to China’s interests. Ofodile (2008:510) calls for ‘guarded optimism regarding the deepening relationship between Africa and China.’ This sort of optimism would prevent Africa from being blind in its relations with China. An unreasonable belief that China will always follow its foreign policy principles with Africa to the letter is an exercise in self-delusion. Hevi aptly gave examples of how the Chinese backpedalled on their promises to both their people and their international partners. This could still happen, which ultimately depends on the dynamics of the international system.

Hevi was determined to expose the treachery and mendacity of China’s communists as he empirically experienced it. At the time he was writing his books he must have been branded an alarmist by both African politicians that were enamored by socialism and countries of the East. However, his writings are justifiable if placed in a context in which he was writing. China was and to some extent still is a divisive power in the international political system. In its acts it has occasionally recanted its claims to good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other powers. Today China is more economically developed and politically powerful than it was when Hevi was submitting his arguments.

Since 1971 China has been a member of the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council with help from Africa. This shows that in the tussle for the real representation of who and what China is between the People's Republic of China (mainland China) and the Republic of China (Taiwan) it is clear that the general view is that mainland China is the representative of Chinese people; whether or not with its growing influence it will become more bellicose and imperialist is now a matter of speculation. In any case, Hevi's arguments still hold relevance in Sino-African relations.

Also, one of the concerns expressed in Hevi's arguments was that China was obsessed with exporting revolution and in the process paid little attention to the improvement of its citizens' lives. In the current status quo, the zeal to export revolutions or communism has subsided. The concern that has latterly been expressed about China is its impact especially on the manufacturing potential of its trade partners. With more than 1.5 billion people China has a lot of human labor at its disposal. Thus, it is hardly surprising that there is an influx of readymade goods from China flooding international markets. The downside of this trade equation, especially on Africa is that it is redolent of the Afro-Western trade equation that Africa sought to abandon in its courting of China. Africa still remains a net exporter of raw materials and a consumer of readymade wares. This is bad for the manufacturing industry in Africa. Added to this is the quality of Chinese products that has been deemed inferior. This practice has elicited condemnation from some African trade unions that are averse to the Chinese impact on African labor and manufacturing.

Apart from exporting its wares to Africa, China has been instrumental in infrastructural development on the continent. This trend is time-honored; the Tanzania-Zambia Railway was built under China's auspices (Taylor, 2006). With the passage of time, stadia, hospitals and more roads have emerged in different parts of Africa under the aegis of China. Inasmuch as Africa is in desperate need to augment its infrastructure, China has occasionally sponsored projects that could not stand natural rigors. In Zambia, for example, a stretch of the Chinese-built road from Lusaka to Chirundu and Siavonga was swept away by rains cutting off the two crucial border towns from Lusaka, the capital city. This road was crucial as it connected Zambia to its southern African neighbors. Though the government of Zambia reiterated that the damage was not due to poor construction,⁶ the coincidental damage to Angola's General Hospital, also built by the Chinese suggests that Chinese contractors are culpable.

What should be more disconcerting is not whether or not China will build Africa's basic infrastructure that is sorely needed; what should be of concern is the extent to which Africa will emulate the Chinese model of development. It would be unforgivable for Africa to improve its infrastructure at the expense of human basic civil liberties. The Chinese understanding of civil liberties seems to be more inclined towards infrastructural and economic development. However, it should not be acceptable to improve infrastructure and to prop up the national economy but at the same time deny people their basic political, religious and other social rights. Africa should tactfully sift through what the Chinese are dangling in its face. It should adopt traits that can help Africa and spurn those that cannot.

Sino-African Relations: The Other Viewpoint

Amid fears that a developing China is a bad omen for global politics, an even-handed assessment of China's behavior has to take stock of what has happened in the last decades of China's growth. Apart from realist predictions and speculations, China has to be judged according to how it has comported itself so far and the context of current global politics. Furthermore, the theory of constructivism instructs that nations relate to each other according to certain identities and their consequent interests. These identities and interests are often products of specific historic, social, political and other factors that the countries concerned share (Nau, 2012). For this reason, while China's rise might be bad for those that consider it a nemesis, it could be beneficial for those whom China considers authentic allies and vice versa.

China has become such a player of consequence that no player in the international system can ignore it. This means that China's influence is more potent than it was at the time when Hevi was inveighing against it. In its relations with Africa, however, China has undergone a lot of ideological and economic changes. While it was more open to criticize capitalism as an ideology of imperialists that should be violently replaced with socialism, China today seems to have adopted an economic system that bears a striking resemblance with capitalism. The term state capitalism has become synonymous with China's economic system. China has benefited from the current international system, especially after the Cold War when the USSR was dissolved and capitalism seemed to have emerged victorious from the Cold War. That China would want to convert Africa to communism might have held true at the time when Africa was not independent, but it is a farfetched possibility in current times. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's relations with Africa changed the emphasis from ideology to pragmatism and diversification (Anshan, 2007). Furthermore, if China harbors imperialist intentions over Africa, it might do so in a subtle way and not in the manner that European nations did. However, with the increasing influence of other powers like transnational organizations and multinational corporations, a full scale invasion of Africa by any other country is likely to encounter formidable opposition.

Apart from China being kept in check by other players in the international system, the country itself has displayed a willingness to exercise restraint (Shiping 2008). China is all too aware of how important Africa has been since its inception. The overwhelming support that it got to claim the United Nations Security Council seat is a significant matter in Sino-African relations (Masud et al, 2013; Anshan, 2007). Furthermore, China is in desperate need to cater for its incomparable population. It is thus driven to search for energy and other materials that are needed to sate its people. Africa has proven to be a dependable partner in this regard. This dependency could be used by astute African nations as a bargaining chip against China. Segal once predicted that Africa's importance to China would wane as the latter continues to grow (Segal, 1992). The zeal with which China is ready to court Africa to this day vividly rebuts Segal's forecasts.

Apart from being partly dependent on African resources, China is likely to be more restrained towards Africa because of its identification as an emerging power. China has historically navigated between the global North and the global South. The South comprises Africa and other regions that are less developed than the West-North axis characterized by the United States and much of Europe. In its overtures to Africa, China presents itself as a member of the South. This attitude heckles back to the Bandung Conference of 1955 when China effectively postured itself as part of what would later be called the Non-Aligned Movement. According to the main argument of constructivism, it could be precisely because of this correlation of identities that Africa is eager to embrace China. The correlation of identities consequently results in the development of related interests. Africa, by and large, wants to show that the age of colonial dominion is gone and that (Hevi, 1967) countries of the South can now chart their fate and destiny. China consistently comes out to support this interest and makes public undertakings to help restructure transnational organizations like the United Nations Security Council. This message resonates with Africa but Africa should not be lulled into a false sense of comfort and undue belief in China's motives.

Constructivism argues too that nations are embedded in different institutions with each institution exerting certain identities and interests on a nation. To put this in simpler terms, China is a member of the United Nations Security Council (Smith, 2011); it is also the biggest economy in Asia; it is a member of BRICS an association of five major emerging economies consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Frank, 2013); and – in name if not anything else – still refers to itself as a communist nation (Yee and Storey, 2002). All these factors exert influence on China's identity and its interests. Some of these identities and interests might be deleterious for Africa, and hence, could be rejected.

Conclusion

It is understandable and expected that China's rise would divide opinion among observers. Hevi is clearly a Sino-pessimist who saw China's involvement in Africa as a bad omen. To date, there are analysts who follow this logic. Hevi was concerned about China's ideology, which it sought to promote in Africa, and its imperialist tendencies. Mao had a notorious predilection for violence and a pathological hankering for a socialist world order. China's rhetoric during Mao was mainly concerned with how capitalism could be defeated and socialism initiated the world over. China's obsession with war and the eventual triumph of socialism deserved to be denounced by Hevi. The country was clearly misplaced in its priorities, and Africa was well counseled not to emulate such a leadership system. Chinese citizens did not really enjoy the promises that the communists made during their struggle for power. China was also a threat to its neighbors.

However, China has changed greatly from a foreign policy that subsumed the economy under ideology to one that inverted the two and gave priority to the economy (Zhong and Xu, 2008). Hevi's argument on China's ideology is understandable because it was very apparent at the time he was writing. Despite some of his arguments and concerns being obsolete in current Sino-African relations, Hevi offers cautions that are still relevant to current Afro-Chinese relations.

His plea that Africa should not precipitately sever its connections with Europe is well founded. Despite having a regrettable history with Europe, Africa can still emulate European modes of governance that seem to be more benign than China's Orwellian manner of rule. Africa should also be alive to the fact that its trade ties with China are still ties between unequal partners and that China, regardless of its rhetoric – is likely to benefit more (Naidu, 2007). Despite the foreboding that occasionally accompanies China's African incursions, there are some examples from China that Africa can replicate to improve its state.

China developed its economy by making use of its human capital and by changing with the tides of time. Africa is today mired in poverty because of a lack of good leadership and an inclination to blame other nations for its woes. China was a communist power that did not enjoy the confidence of more economically developed powers of the West, and after some time, the friendship of its fellow communist power - the Soviet Union. Under such inauspicious circumstances, China still managed to develop better by relying mostly on local resources. Today, Africa is still suffering from a chronic dependency on foreign aid. Inasmuch as the continent could tout China as a better option than Western powers, a significant percentage of aid to Africa comes from the West and institutions that hail from there. Furthermore, African leaders are mistakenly impulsive in rejecting the Western call for good governance and trade conditionality. Evidence of bad governance in Africa is legion and the continent should take responsibility rather than run off to China as a solution for perpetual bad behavior.

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Notes

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