

[Special Contributions]

Editor's Notes:

The Symposium on Foreign Language and Literature from the Multidisciplinary Perspective and Interdisciplinary Research in Humanities and Social Sciences is successfully held between 26 and 28 November, 2021 in Shaoxing University, Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province, China. The symposium has been supported and sponsored by *Asia-Pacific Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Peking University Press, and Nanjing University Press. Two keynote addresses made by Gert J. Grobler and Yoro Diallo are selected in this issue of the journal. Gert J. Grobler served as a senior diplomat in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), South Africa's ambassador to Spain, Japan and Madagascar. Yoro Diallo once served as chairman of the Mali Committee of the International Council of Museums, the first counsellor of the Malian Embassy to China, and he is now director of the research center of French-speaking countries in Africa and curator of the African Museum. The two contributors are currently attached as senior research fellows to the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University in Jinhua, Zhejiang Province, China.

A New Chapter for Promotion of China-Africa Diplomatic Relations

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Dear Programme Director, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to reputable Shaoxing University and the hosts, and the co-organizers the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* among others, for the honor of addressing you on this auspicious occasion at this reputable institution in the historical and beautiful city of Shaoxing.

As an African, I am also particularly happy and proud to be able to be present at the "Unveiling Ceremony for the Centre for South Africa and Southern Africa Studies of Shaoxing University." I wish to commend and congratulate the University for this significant gesture and important step towards closer China and Africa cooperation and wish the Centre well.

Let me briefly at the outset say something about China. All China's friends and partners and the World, know that China is firmly on the track to realize its dream of China's great national rejuvenation and to achieve its second centenary goal by transforming China into a modern socialist country. The international community and also our continent Africa heartily congratulated President Xi Jinping and the CPC on the historic and momentous outcome of the Sixth Plenary Session, passing the "Third Historic Resolution" to cement the achievements of the CPC with President Xi Jinping at its core.

These phenomenal people-centered achievements of China unequaled in human history over the last number of decades have justifiably led to an immense pride among the Chinese people and one senses an increased feeling of unity, resilience, and confidence, which continues to earn China growing respect and admiration from the international community. Whatever challenges may arise, China may be entering its greatest historical era ever.

A further important aspect of China's phenomenal progress was lifted out by Prof. Liu Hongwu, my mentor at IAZNU, a few years ago and what is now, in fact, happening in practice is the constructive and unfolding pattern that China's knowledge and experiences, with Chinese characteristics, are now enriching the conduct of broad global diplomacy, international cooperation, and multilateralism. Exciting new concepts of international relations are flowing from President Xi Jinping's "Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era in the diplomatic field." It has produced a series of major new concepts, perspectives and innovations in both theory and practice in Chinese diplomacy that continues to make China "a voice of reason" in the uncertain world we are living in. Excellent examples are President Xi Jinping's Global Development Initiative and the building of a Community of a Shared Future of Mankind.

Africa is also in the process of "realizing its dream" by implementing its strategic vision of the African Union's Agenda 2063 which is both a vision and a plan to build a more prosperous Africa. In fact, it is also closely linked with making progress towards the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on the continent. Agenda 2063 is Africa's strategic framework that aims to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development and is a concrete manifestation of the Pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity.

The origin of Agenda 2063 was the realization by African leaders to prioritize inclusive social and economic development, modernization, continental and regional integration, improved governance, and peace and security aimed at repositioning Africa to becoming a dominant player in the global arena.

Although Africa, a continent that has enormous potential and which has been described by President Xi Jinping as a "continent of hope," continues to make progress, underdevelopment and poverty remain major challenges, aggravated by the pandemic. Poverty is generally declining globally, except in Africa. So much so that Africa generally is set to miss the targets of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Africa and China have a longstanding, deep and fraternal friendship and bonds that are destined to continue to expand, diversify and become increasingly more strategic. Africa is aware of and appreciates China's strong commitment to not only close the divide between developed and developing countries and jointly bring growth and prosperity for all, but also work with Africa to achieve its dream, Agenda 2063.

African leaders increasingly agree that Africa needs fundamental transition and progress in fields like demographics, good governance, trade integration, industrialization, energy and green economy, infrastructure, agriculture, education and training, technology, particularly digital economy towards the 4th Industrial

Revolution, health, and then security and conflict challenges. The challenges are formidable and resources are often limited.

But it is comforting for Africa to know that China, a country that is ideally equipped, based on its own experiences as a developing country and its own successful development model, is committed to working jointly with Africa in addressing modernization, development and growth on the African continent. In fact, China's growth model and achievements continue to inspire Africa and many developing countries around the world. China's vision for a shared future has also become increasingly relevant as this implies striving for a common and mutually beneficial future in which Africa can meaningfully benefit and participate as an equal partner.

Shaoxing University's involvement in Africa is therefore welcomed. Director Liu Hongwu has also consistently described Africa as a "growing frontier" of China's academic landscape and expressed the hope that Chinese scholars would increasingly engage in Africa studies to "discover the continent's academic treasures and create Africology in the process." To facilitate this cooperation, professor Liu has consistently suggested that it should be vital to make continued progress with people-to-people, cultural and academic exchanges.

In order to facilitate such increased cooperation, it will, on the one hand, require a growing understanding of Africa by Chinese people because Africa is a very diverse continent. The Chinese people need to probe deeper into Africa and learn more about its people, its culture, its languages, its social structures, political systems, economies, etc. On the other hand, we as Africans will equally have to study and research China, its people, its culture, its history, languages, etc.

It is therefore very important for Chinese and African people to increasingly launch multilevel and multi-sector people-to-people exchanges and deepen mutual knowledge about Chinese and African civilizations through innovative ways of exchange and cooperation. I am happy to see that significant progress has been made over the last few decades which has indeed brought far-reaching and fundamental changes into the structure and substance of China and Africa relations. Africa is increasingly no longer a faraway continent to many Chinese people which augers well for future solidarity and cooperation.

People-to-people and cultural exchange programs create opportunities for participants to learn, to prosper and to work with others to solve shared problems and ensure a secure future. People-to-people exchanges create future leaders who instinctively appreciate the value of international collaboration, understanding, and empathy.

People-to-people and cultural exchanges involve think tanks, educational institutions, the media, etc., as well as have strong focus on the youth. In my diplomatic career, I have learnt that young people have a special energy that gives them hope for the future. It is true that the youth possess the ability to view challenges of the world with both innocence and imagination. It has been proven that the youth are able to present solutions when others only see difficulties. It is against this background that the youth are indeed the leaders of tomorrow and, in fact, the custodians of future China and Africa cooperation.

Today's event is all about dialogue, communication and people-to-people exchanges and it reminded me of the wise words of President Xi Jinping when he said, "we should build and increase inter-civilization exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness and respect for differences."

President Xi Jinping went on to say: "Different civilizations and cultures should engage in dialogue and exchanges. The history of humanity is a process of exchanges and integration among civilizations and nations. We should respect each other and draw inspiration from each other to boost a better world."

People-to-people exchanges through think tanks, academic institutions, civil society, cultural organizations, and media are imperative as these institutions serve as the brain trust in countries around the world. These people-to-people exchanges could contribute to the provision of advice on a diverse range of policy issues through the use of specialized knowledge and the activation of networks.

It is, however, important that people-to-people and cultural exchanges take place on:

1. the basis of equality and mutual respect and trust. Obviously, there will also be differences of opinion due to diverging national, historic and cultural backgrounds, but as long as there is mutual respect and equality, it will create a solid foundation for promoting dialogue seeking common ground while shelving differences.

2. people-to-people cooperation through think tanks, academic institutions, etc. can serve as valuable and important catalysts for ideas and action. The insights and experience of these institutions “on the ground,” often overlooked by government officials and diplomats, can play an increasing supplementary and complementary role, together with governments, in identifying and suggesting solutions to challenges facing the enhanced functioning of China and Africa cooperation.

So China and Africa, drawing on the insights of multiple disciplines such as political science, international relations, cultural studies, anthropology, development studies, environmental studies, history, rural development and media studies, among others, can increasingly enhance mutual understanding and cooperation, which will enable the two sides to constructively address the important issues related to future China and Africa cooperation, by posing questions and developing answers that transcend disciplinary divides.

Interdisciplinary studies in the humanities, which create solutions by thinking across boundaries, provide a sound foundation for the advanced study of Africa and for teaching and research in many fields, including governance, communication, economics, education, health, media and social sciences. In fact, interdisciplinary study allows for a “synthesis of ideas and the synthesis of characteristics” from many disciplines and opens up broad fields of study within the humanities and social sciences. That would bring new approaches or innovative perspectives towards the further strengthening of China and Africa cooperation. In fact, I believe that intellectual, economic, social, and practical problems require interdisciplinary approaches.

With the world becoming increasingly globalized, foreign language study is also of importance because it entails learning how to truly communicate and connect with others which is an important life skill. It is my own experience in diplomacy that the study of foreign language teaches and encourages respect for other peoples and expands one’s view of the world as it fosters an understanding of the interrelation of language and human nature.

From my experience as a diplomat and based on my insights gained in China, I am furthermore of the view that stepped up global intercultural exchanges between West and East, with China, in particular, revealing that there are profound elements of convergence between different cultures and traditions which run contrary to the senseless predictions *inter alia* in the West that the world is bound to experience a clash of civilizations.

It is against this background that joint China and Africa interdisciplinary research and approach, which draw on the strengths of multiple disciplines, can also create a dynamic community and environment for scholars and students in the humanities at large in the process of achieving the following objectives:

1. to undertake joint Pan-African interdisciplinary research and exchange;
2. to contribute to social commentary and debate that accurately reflect the true story of China and Africa cooperation. This is

necessary because there is stereotype thinking in some parts of the western media on China, based on ignorance and prejudice. Due to the lack of objectivity, they do not understand Chinese culture, politics, social systems, etc. It is, therefore, necessary for China and Africa to tell “its own story” and “jointly write its own narrative” about the true nature of China-Africa cooperation.

3. to building scholarship, research, collaboration, international partnerships and to nurture the next generation of scholars and intellectuals on both sides.

4. to ultimately contribute to strengthening China and Africa mutual understanding and friendship.

In conclusion, many of the challenges facing China and Africa today will be constructively addressed at the next FOCAC meeting in Senegal over the next few days which comes at a critically important juncture for China and Africa and represents the next important building block in the increasingly vital strategic partnership.

In fact, based on the constructive and comprehensive *White Paper on China and Africa Cooperation* released by the Chinese government yesterday, I believe that Africa and China will find themselves on the threshold of a new and exciting era of a strengthened friendship, with many new areas and opportunities on offer for future collaboration. It is in this regard that Shaoxing University’s constructive growing contribution towards strengthening China and Africa cooperation is most encouraging and commendable.

Thank you!

(Editor: Bonnie Wang)