



THE POLITICS OF BEIJING CONSENSUS IN AFRICA

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to examine the Politics of Beijing Consensus in Africa. When the wind of change blew across Africa in the 1960s, it heralded the epoch of political independence. This was after many decades of colonial- imperialist exploitation and disarticulation of pre-capitalist social institutions. It was believed that with the unrivalled endowment of the continent in human and material resources, the new political reality will unmistakably usher in an era of sustainable development. Unfortunately, five decades after independence, the continent is yet to rise beyond its inhibiting crises. The aftermath is that by the twenty-first century, Africa has become a development failure. This reality necessitated the need and clamour for the Beijing Consensus as a paradigm for development, and the rejection of the Washington consensus. In carrying out this qualitative research, our sources of data collection included the primary and secondary sources. These include interviews, literature review, official government reports, and newspapers. It was discovered that most African leaders are addicted to the Beijing Consensus because of its non-stringent conditions for loans, and ready to carry out development projects without ideological discrimination. We, therefore, recommend that in accepting the Beijing Consensus, African leaders must ensure that the partnership would ensure a development-oriented policy that would reduce the social frustrations of the people, reduce social inequality, eliminate the incidence of graft and protect human rights.

Keywords: Washington consensus, Beijing consensus, colonialism, political independence, sustainable development

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1. Introduction

Africa is an indispensable region in the global community. It is laden with precious mineral resources and a vibrant population. With 30,313 million km² in area which is nearly one-fourth of the world's land surface (Ochola, 1975:3), and natural endowment that has attracted other countries to the continent. Their avowed aim is strictly to have an unhindered access to these resources for their technological growth and development. This contact has struck awe, confusion and systematically consolidated a process of de-industrialization and externalization of Africa's political economy. Scholars like Rodney (2009), Ake (1981), Frank (1975), Fanon (1980) and Davidson (1980) have carefully presented this process in their works. The unbridled exploitation of African resources and racial prejudice ignited the Pan African congress and later movement for self-identity and autonomy. The nascent bourgeois class unreservedly condemned colonial imperialism, and the perception of Africa as a magnificent cake to be shared among competing imperial powers. They demanded that Africa should be allowed to manage its affairs.

Predictably, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, most African countries became independent. Maathai (2009:44) stated that the new nation-states were given a name, a flag and a national anthem, and then handed over to a select group of western-educated elites most of them were sympathetic to the colonial administration. Regrettably, by the 21st century, Africa was precipitously worse off than in the 1960s. While the 1980s was adjudged to be a lost decade for Africa, the 1990s was described by the 2003 Human Development report as the decade of despair. This can be attributed to the orgies of bloodletting, leadership complacency, and trapped by primordial logic. Since 2000 alone, wars have cost the continent well over \$700 billion in damages (Williams, 2012:1). The aftermath is that millions of Africans now live below the breadline level with increasing external dependence and crises of monumental proportion. This is the paradox of our time. This paper seeks to examine how the Beijing Consensus (BC) can place Africa on the trajectory of paradigmatic transformation.

2. Conceptual Clarification

A comprehension of this paper will definitely require an explanation of the major concepts inherent. This will enhance its appreciation and objectivity. These are Politics and B.C. Human beings are daily involved in a political struggle for social survival, have dominion over others and engage in the consumption of scarce resources. This never-ending struggle of humans prompted Aristotle to aver that man is a political animal (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999:1). The process in which people emerge to make

decisions, policies, execute them and make sure that they are obeyed, constitute the essence of Politics. It is the struggle for power, a power to make policies and allocate values in a seemingly authoritative manner. It is a process that ultimately maximizes and defines social capabilities and aid society to attain the highest form of social cohesion and efficacy. It is an inevitable phenomenon in the transformation and development of a society. The utility inherent in the art of Politics made Nnoli (2003) to define it as the art of the possible, the governing of men, who gets what, when and how, and the emergence, consolidation and use of State power. Therefore,

"...it is a set of social relationship with a central body of varying legitimacy, whose function is to make and implement overriding decisions for the whole population in the interest of the latter."

(Nnoli, 2003:5).

While Politics is the exercise and control of power but all power is not Politics. Political power is directly associated with the State and its power. In other words, Politics is about the processes associated with the use, control and consolidation of State power. Max Weber noted that it is concerned with the operation of the State and its institutions. It means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power among individuals and groups within a State (Anifowose and Enemuo, 1999:2). With political power, you can impose your will on others, and influence their actions and activities. It is the process of affecting the policies of others with the help (actual or threatened) severe deprivations for non-conformity with the policies indeed (Anifowose and Enemuo, 1999:109). From the above definitions, we can deduce the following variables:

- Authority;
- Influence;
- Decision making;
- Conflict;
- Ideology.

The above variables loom large in the control and exercise of State power. They can be said to be the building blocks of political practice. Dukor (2003:28) pointed out that:

"The struggle for power (that is politics) is itself basically ideologically inspired and determined. In other words, politics as the struggle for power is not carried out within an ideological vacuum."

Indeed, Politics is not value free, but practiced and carried out within an ideological context. It is therefore, not strange that some States strive assiduously to impose their ideological value on others. In this process, ideology becomes the determining factor in the assessment and evaluation of the historical mission of a State. The B.C. is a brand of development paradigm used to describe the Chinese model of economic transformation. It is premised on what is referred to as the Socialist market economy and strictly guided by the principles of pragmatic flexibility, gradual reform rather than a quick fix solution to development process, a strong and pro-development state. B.C. was popularized by Joshua Cooper Rano in 2004 when he published “The Beijing Consensus: Notes on the New Physics of Chinese Power’ in the Foreign Policy Center, based in the United Kingdom. Kennedy (2010) noted that Rano was a former editor of Time Magazine and Managing Partner (MP) in the office of Golman Sachs, Chairman John Thorton and a Professor at the Tsinghua University.

Rano’s (2004) attempt is to celebrate the success of the Chinese model that has accelerated the development of China by lifting more than 400 million people out of the miasma of poverty within a short time, and placed the country on an enviable axis in the global economic order. Most important is that B.C has become the long-awaited alternative to the western-based Washington Consensus (W.C.). Apostles of W.C. pontificates that there is only one way of being modern, namely by adopting western-style institutions, values, customs and beliefs, such as the rule of law, the free market and democratic norms (Jacques, 2012:13). China is committed to innovation, constant experiment and the desire to protect its core cultural values born out of its historical specificity. It has not forgotten the century of humiliation where the country became a pawn in the hands of imperialist invaders. Taylor (2009:136-7) pointed out that:

“Chinese historical textbooks continue to teach Chinese people that in the 100 years between 1840 (and 1949) at most every imperialist state... invaded China and bullied Chinese people. And the Chinese believe that those countries would... do the same (today) if china did not stand strongly against such intention(s). This is the meaning when Chinese leaders repeatedly say that national sovereignty and independence are more valued to developing countries like China.”

B.C. became a vision that is primarily geared towards the development of China without subjecting itself to external dictation. But it is free to economically relate with any country on the basis of mutual economic interest. It is this philosophy that has defined and distinguished what Rano (2004) referred to as the B.C.

“China is making a path for other nations around the world who are trying to figure out not simply how to develop their countries, but also how to fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be truly independent to protect their way of life and potential choices in a world with a single massively powerful center of gravity. I call this new center and physics of power and development the Beijing Consensus.

(Rebol, 2010:6)

Rano (2004) noted that some of the fundamentals that propped the B.C. include: innovation-based development, economic success not measured on per capita GDP, growth but by sustainability and level of equality, self-determination, globalization on their terms. This represents a sharp contrast to W.C. It is interesting to state that between 1949 and 1978, Chinese relation with other countries, particularly Africa was within an ideological context. But from 1978 when Deng Xiaoping assumed leadership to the 21st century, Chinese relation has been dictated by economic interest. This sudden change could be attributed to the rising trend of population estimated to be 1.375 billion by 2015, and the global economic restructuring arising from the collapse of Soviet Union. The need to access the resources to feed the population and sustain the country’s technological ascendancy made internal readjustment and re-alignment inevitable. Nevertheless, in accomplishing this mission, its core socialist value was not vitiated. This is the whole essence of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In fact, the five principles of Peaceful Coexistence in 1964 which is akin to the ten Principles of the Bandung conference of 1955 in Indonesia unarguably is the torch light of Chinese external relations. These include:

- Mutual dependence;
- Mutual non-aggression for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- Equality of cooperation for mutual benefit;
- Peaceful coexistence;
- Mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs.

These Principles serve as the touchstone of Chinese foreign policy. It is geared towards relating with any country whose interest is not repugnant with the overall aspirations of the Chinese State. This lies the pragmatic utility of the Chinese model. Huang (2009) stated that China adopted what he referred to as directional liberation in the 1980s. This was the introduction of the Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). This privately and collectively owned TVEs were financially supported by the Ministry of Agriculture through the Rural Credit Foundations (RCFs) and Rural Credit Cooperatives (RCCs). It was observed that within this period, rural employment was boosted, household income increased to 12% between 1979 and 1988. Huang (2009:36) noted that:

In the 1980s, the private TVEs played a critical role in this labour reallocation of farm labour and that private TVEs developed faster in the poorest provinces suggests that private entrepreneurship contributed substantially to China's poverty reduction. This insight turns the Beijing Consensus on its head by showing that not only did China have a vibrant and growing private sector but that it is the private sector development that contributed to the country's most stellar economic success reducing poverty.

Huang (2009) went on to say that out of the ten essentials of W.C., China had implemented eight in its directional liberalism. Kennedy (2010:470) also averred that:

China closely abided by the W.C. in terms of fiscal discipline, liberalizing trade, and liberalizing foreign direct investment. It has made gradual progress on four others: reordering spending away from non-merit subsidies toward public goods, expanding the tax base, easing barriers to market entry, and strengthening property rights. It has moved the least on liberalizing interest rates and privatization, but even on the latter, a substantial portion of SOES have been privatized since the late 1990s.

The political and economic reforms of the 1980s abruptly came to an end largely because of the Tiananmen square incident. Ayodele and Sotola (2014:3) pointed out that the relationship with the West was cut-short when China was hit by economic sanctions and political isolation over the crackdown of students' protest in Tiananmen Square in 1989. China must have learnt a useful lesson because of the imposed sanctions. In this instance, to rely on western countries for Foreign Direct Investment would be totally disastrous. Today, China's historic economic success has become a model for developing countries. It has become a possible alternative to neo-liberal development strategy.

"In 2011, China became the world's largest manufacturing country in terms of output, bringing to an end a period of 100 years during which the United States had occupied that position. The country has borne witness to the greatest poverty-reduction programme ever seen, with the number of people living in poverty falling from 250 million at the start of the reform in 1978 to 80 million by the end of 1993, 29.27 million in 2001 and 20 million in 2007, thereby accounting for three-quarters of global poverty reduction during the period."

(Jacques, 2012:186)

The phenomenal breakthrough of China cannot be divorced from its ardent commitment to development dictated by internal needs, values, circumstances and not

subjected to doctrinal or ideological constrain. Of course, this presupposes a leadership that is imbued with passion and vision to mobilize the followership towards the goal of the State. This was the policy direction of the 13th Party Congress held in Beijing in 1987. It noted that:

“The congress defined the basic line of the party for building socialism with distinctive Chinese characteristics. Lead and unite the people of all nationalities to build china into a prosperous, strong, democratic culturally and modern socialist country by focusing efforts on economic development.”

(Akani, 2015:5).

It is this unflagging commitment to build a strong and prosperous socialist country within the global capitalist orbit, without following the liberal orthodox guideline that constitutes the core of the B.C. Thus:

“The Beijing consensus is ideologically neutral and flexible in contrast to the doctrinal rigidity of the Washington Consensus. It is committed to experimentation and innovation on the basis of existing conditions. This eclectic and pragmatic approach has served China extremely well over the past three decades. The country has grown rapidly and significantly reduced poverty.

(Huang, 2010:31)

In view of the rising profile of China in the global political economy, and the deepening economic crises of Africa, can the B.C. be the long-awaited alternative for the continent’s socio-economic transformation?

3. Which way for Africa?

It is no doubt that the astonishing accomplishment of China has uniquely distinguished it as the champion of the global South, and the precursor of a progressive international order. Its phalanx of skilled manpower, robust trade surplus of about \$200 to \$300 billion per year (Mckinnon, 2010:4) and technological knowhow has placed the country on an enviably economic zenith. Yue (2015:1) pointed out that: China has propelled itself to become the second largest economy in the world with nominal GDP stood at \$8.2 trillion in 2012 (US \$16.2 trillion, Japan \$8.2 trillion) for the same year, it ranked first in export at \$2.0 trillion (Germany \$1.3 trillion, US \$2.4 trillion), it posed the highest foreign reserve in the world at \$3.2 trillion, almost three times that of the second largest country, Japan at \$1.2 trillion. This has undoubtedly made it the workshop of the world

and a reference point in sustainable economic development. In 2003, the country became the world's largest recipient of foreign direct investment, overtaking the United States (Jacques, 2012:182). All these prodigious breakthroughs have necessitated a radical re-thinking on the appropriate development strategy for Africa. In fact, the appropriateness of the W.C. to accelerate African development is now and the unassailability of its capabilities is seriously doubted. Most intriguing is its unconditional forage into African economics. Obviously, this has opened a wide window of opportunities, and a relief from the one-size-fits all and consensus inspired reforms (Naim, 1999:4).

China's emergence as a major axis of global power is welcomed by many African intellectuals who hope that it may herald a return to a global plurality in which milieu Africa and the developing countries will have a greater role on the global stage than they currently do (Rebol, 2010:2).

Ayodele and Sotola (2014:5) pointed out four reasons why Africa is attracted to the B.C. These include:

- Loan not characterized by stringent conditionality.
- Not threatened by internal or external demand for political liberalization and democratization.
- Likely to benefit from debt cancellation, economic control as in 2000 when 31 African countries debt totaling \$1.3 billion were cancelled.
- Assist in the diversification of trading partners through Chinese export credit.

It has been argued that the sustenance of the Sino-African economic relationship has the inherent capacity to establish the subjective conditions for accelerated economic development. Sun (2014:1) noted that China's economic investment in Africa grew from \$210 million in 2010 to \$3.17 billion in 2011, and since 1956, China has provided aids projects to African countries including assistance, supporting textile factories, hydro power stations and schools. The anti-hegemonic policy, interest-prone and economic pragmatism of china has endeared it to Africa. On the other hand, African leaders have come to see China as a trusted and reliable economic partner at all times. Expressing the sentiment of African leaders, Chiluba Frederick, former President of the Republic of Zambia stated that:

Developed countries are not prepared to discuss the issues of justice and fair play concerning the international trade and commercial sector, which impose considerable suffering and privation on developing countries, the developing world continues to subsidize consumption of the developed world, through an iniquitous trade system. The existing structure is designed to consign us to perpetual poverty and underdevelopment.

It is unrealistic to export support, relief or respite from those who benefit from the status quo.

(Rebol, 2010:15)

As China continue to spread its economic tentacles in more than 35 African countries, by 2012 its volume of trade with the continent was \$198.5 billion, with 60% of its exports to six countries, viz: South Africa (21%), Egypt (12%), Nigeria (10%), Algeria 7%) and Benin (5%). (Ayodele and Sotola, 2014:11-12). Most interesting of Chinese fray into Africa is the forum on China. Africa cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing Africa from November 4-5 2006. FOCAC commenced from 2000. With the slogan Friendship, Peace and Cooperation and Development, it was agreed that there would be a new type of strategy. Partnership would involve aid and assistance. In the 2006 FOCAC meeting, China agreed:

- to export \$3 billion preferential loan and \$2 billion in export credit to Africa in 3 years.
- to create a \$5 billion China-Africa Development Fund to encourage China's involvement in Africa.
- to build 100 rural schools and award of scholarships to African students. This would be done through the Africa Talent Programme.

By 2009, China had financed more than 884 projects in Africa including 142 agricultural projects, 71 schools, 154 hospitals, 53 sports complexes and 62 conference centers. From 2000 to 2010, this social infrastructure had improved social conditions and raised the annual GDP growth in Sub-Saharan Africa averaging 5.5% per annum (Yue, 2016:6). The ease with which Africans access China's loans and aids is gradually making W.C. irrelevant in the perception of African leaders. Jacques (2012:422) noted that in the three year period, 2005-7, it has been estimated that the World Bank committed \$17.4 billion to Africa in the way of grants and loans, while China Exim bank gave close to \$16 billion.

"In 2004, China provided \$2 billion loan and aid to Angola that allowed the country to reject a hugely unpopular IMF package that involved opening up the market and abolishing local trade unions. In Sudan between 1997 and 2007, China had granted the country over \$550 million interest-free loans; in 2003, China provided \$930 million for the construction of the Merover Dam to help improve the local irrigation and provided hydro-electricity. In 2009, China provided the bulk of the \$650 million required to build Djiloho Hydropower project in Equatorial Guinea (Yue, 2016:6)."

The magnificent African Union (AU) headquarters at Addis Ababa built by China at a cost of \$200 million (£127 million) can be seen as the height of China's mutual economic interaction with Africa. The headquarter seen as a gift from China has 2,500 seats conference hall, 650 seats medium conference hall and 15 press conference rooms. China has also shown significant presence in Africa's extractive industry as in Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan and Angola, with a growing workforce in Africa from 137,000 in 2001 to 400,000 in 2007 and more than 2,000 Chinese companies (Jacques, 2012:420). While it cannot be doubted that Africa has gained immensely from its economic partnership with the leader of the BRICS, but this has come under some withering criticisms. Most scholars and trade unions are convinced that contrary to vaunted official euphoria about Chinese activities in the continent, this has the propensity to generate some deleterious consequences such as social insecurity and proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs). It is no more a debated fact that African markets have been flooded with substandard Chinese goods. Official statistics indicate that African imports from China massively increased to 712 percent from \$895million in 1996 to \$7.3 billion in 2005. This trade pattern is almost assuming a colonial character with African countries exporting raw materials to China and importing finished products (Taylor, 2010:63).

Sylvanus (2007:1) surmised the suffocation of indigenous entrepreneurs and the deepening process of de-industrialization in this manner:

Togo remains central... as a trade for illegal Chinese imports reproduced African prints. Official trade statistics of China-Togo trade indicate a 27 percent growth rate in 2005 with \$508 million of trade value. This indication poorly reflects its actual trade volume and most importantly, its re-exportation (role [notably via] smuggling networks)... in the vibrant trans-border trade with West Africa's largest consumers of African prints. Nigeria and Ghana – namely those countries textile industries have been so severely affected by the export of Chinese-produced African prints.

A visit to a local market in Ghana will see the country's national jersey with all its fine colours and black stars, but printed, packaged in China and sold in Ghana. This sad scenario has made textile companies in Ghana such as the Akosombo Textile Ltd (ATC), Printtext and Ghana Textile Prints (GTP) to continuously experience business lull, or selling cheap Chinese wax prints to keep afloat. It has been observed that China does not exercise any moral decorum and ethics when it comes to economic transactions. Recently, it was revealed that Chinese business men have a snake factory where they are skinned and canned as beef and sent to Africa. The same for dead chicken, sometimes with the feathers in an unhygienic environment. This is not only

wicked and criminal, but reflects the perception China has about African dignity. Apart from the above cruelty, China's activities in the continent has emboldened the anti-democratic flair, and glorified the neo-patrimonialism of African rulers. It is, therefore, not surprising that apostles of neo-liberalism are wary and uncomfortable about China's authoritarian capitalism in Africa (Akani, 2015:5). They are threatened that with China's growing economic architecture in Africa, they may be sidelined, displaced and deprived of global financial hegemony. With China in firm control of African political economy, the West is denied a veritable source of raw materials. During the three nation tour of the African continent in June 2011, the former Secretary of State, Mrs. Hillary Clinton described China's activities in Africa as creeping 'new colonialism' (Yue, 2016:13). In no uncertain terms, the US Council of Foreign Relations declared that,

China's rise in Africa poses challenges to the United States and its western partners. [One] is China's protection of 'rogue' states like Sudan and Zimbabwe in the face of egregious human rights violations. [Another] is China's effort on patterns of western influence: negative pressures such as withholding aid or placing limitations on investments to improve an African country's human rights or governing practices provide less leverage if China is prepared to counterbalance that influence

(Taylor, 2010:89)

Considering the two economic development strategy, both have their potentials in accelerating Africa's development. At this juncture, which strategy would best suit African needs? Here lies the Politics of B.C. To align with B.C. will definitely enhance the global profile of China and boost its capacity to control and influence global events. It is this political clout that is at the root of western objection to China's forage in Africa. On the other hand, African rulers are wary of W.C. because of its intent to tighten their neo-colonial vulnerability, erode their sovereignty and solidify their dependent nexus. They also rejected the imposition of SAP in the continent with attendant human insecurity. More worrisome is the fact that it set the stage for the new scramble for Africa by opening up what had often been relatively closed economies, and reintegrate Africa into the global economy (Carmody, 2011:20).

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the forces that precipitated the sudden rise of China. Rano (2004) was fascinated with this rise that he called it the Beijing Consensus. More important is the country's robust involvement in Africa. This has tremendously grown from the 1950s to the 21st century. Guarded by its Principle of Peaceful Co-existence, it

has been able to economically associate with almost all African States through the FOCAC. The trade relations and mutual reciprocity with China has made Africa see the former as a friend, trusted and dependable ally. The ultra-modern AU conference hall in Addis Ababa is a testimony to this friendship. After all, it was

"...our Africans who stood by us and extended a helping hand in difficult times following the political turmoil in Beijing, when Western countries imposed sanctions on China."

(Jacques, 2012:13)

Although, China has been accused of ripping off Africa, flooding the market with cheap and questionable wares, brazenly exercising anti-labour practices and flagrant human violations, widening unemployment gap and suffocating local initiative, but this may not be possible without the active connivance of the State. Jacques (2012:79) averred that it is these facilitators of crime, as well as the few rogue Chinese who perpetuate it, should be held accountable, not the whole Chinese nation. It is this unfair economic practice that has attracted the unrestrained condemnation of China by apostles of neo-liberalism. Nevertheless, the B.C. seems to be appropriate to African development in view of its freedom to make choices without any straitjacket and bereft of imperialist undertone. This was the theme of the FOCAC 2000 which declared that countries that vary from one another in social system, stages of development, historical and cultural background, and values, have the right to choose their approaches and models in promoting and protecting human rights in their countries (Jacques, 2012:17).

In conclusion, therefore, African leaders must demonstrate unreserved political will in directing the development strategy of the continent. Since the hallmark of development is to raise the quality of life, boost human capacity, protect and promote human freedoms, any external transactions that are injurious to these ideals should be abandoned and desecrated. They should not hesitate to evoke the participation of the people in the development process in line with the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the Arusha Declaration. There should be no religious adherence to the values of the B.C. or W.C., but a pragmatic attitude that would attract the best from the two paradigms. This will set the stage for African development takeoff.

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