

---

## **In the Eye of the Storm? Implications of China in the Corridors of Global Power**

---

**Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr., Ph.D.,<sup>1</sup>** Benue State University (Nigeria)

### **1. Introduction**

Three years after the demise of the Union of Soviet Socialist States (USSR), Nixon (1994:45), a former United States of America President, warned his fellow citizens in the following unequivocal terms:

China has emerged as the world's third strongest military and economic power.... We should not underestimate China's ability to disrupt our interests around the world if our relationship became belligerent rather than cooperative.

Whether or not Nixon's observation is true is no longer an issue for debate and should not detain us here. What is important and should be noted is the fact of China's steady and sustained rise into global prominence since the exit of the USSR and the emergence of what is now variously christened the "New World Order" (NWO) or "Uni-polar World". Indeed, since the early 1990s but more forcefully at the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China's emergence and growing influence as a world power is not in doubt. Several indicators point to this fact. In 1994, for example, President Bill Clinton rescinded his campaign promise to withdraw China's most-favoured-nation trade status with the US on

-----

---

<sup>1</sup> **Okpeh** is Reader/Associate Professor of African History and Deputy Director Centre for Gender Studies at the Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria. He is also consultant on Gender and Development Studies. He has authored/co-authored and edited/co-edited many books including *Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007); *Population Movements, Conflicts and Displacements in Nigeria*, Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2008); And *China in Africa: Threats and Opportunities* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2009). He is the Editor, *Journal of Globalization and International Studies*.

the account of Beijing's perceived poor human rights record. Furthermore, in 1995, China virulently reacted to the unofficial visit of Taiwan's president Lee Teng-hui.<sup>1</sup> Against popular views canvassed by the US and her Western allies on the platform of UNO, China has also shown keen interest in developing military capabilities that would enable it project its conventional and nuclear forces beyond its border and immediate coastal region (Macciarola and Oxnam, eds., 1991; Sutter, 1992; Munro, 1992; And Segal, 1994). Then too, aside from its tremendous economic transformation, China has remained a catalyst for East Asian economic integration. Studies (Overholt, 1994; Wong, and Zhang, 2003; UNCTAD, 2004; World Bank, 2005; Bergsten, 2006) have shown that the rising profile of China as a regional and global political and economic power has sparked off a new age of economic integration and cooperation in East Asia. In addition, China has continued to expand her economic tentacles to other developing countries, especially those in the African continent, much to the chagrin of the developed countries of North America and Europe, since this is gradually but radically altering traditional bases and contexts of cooperation in the global economic system.

This paper examines the significance of China's appearance on and increasing dominance of global politics in the course of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We would first isolate and critically examine the issues underpinning and arising from China's emergence as a world power following the demise of the USSR. This would be followed by an appraisal of the contending perspectives on the meaning and substance of the development. Afterwards, the paper interrogates the implications of China as a power to be reckoned with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order on the basis of which a conclusion which integrates our major arguments in the discourse would be drawn.

---

<sup>1</sup> As part of this show of power, the authorities in Beijing order military exercises along Chinese coast across the Taiwan Strait. Defying international condemnation, China also fired several missiles that landed in the sea near Taiwan.

## **2. Emerging Issues from China's Increasing Global Relevance**

The rebirth of China after about five hundred years of decline would no doubt remain one of the major events during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This development has however thrown up a number of critical issues over which analysts of the international political economy are contending. While some of these issues are mere speculations over what to expect in the course of the century, especially with the growing economic and military strength of China, some of them are real and serious issues whose implications are already being felt. Arising from the important place they occupy in the understanding and appreciation of the China saga in modern history, it would be appropriate to isolate and carefully analyze them as the basis for developing our fundamental arguments in the on-going discourse.

The first of these issues relate with the growing prospects of China consolidating her status as a regional hegemon and the implications of this on the stability of Asia. Early in the 1990s, particularly after the exit of the USSR, it was already obvious China was fast becoming a major contender for both regional and global power, having not been seriously involved in the Cold War politics between the East and the West. Thus, under the dynamic leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China leveraged on radical economic and social reforms that were driven by the combined philosophy of moderate communism and limited capitalism to achieve greater economic ties with the industrialized West, sustained accelerated economic growth and development and internal political stability. China has emerged and like a colossus, very powerful indeed. In addition to being the world's most populous nation (with a population of 1.2 billion people), China is large and geo-strategically located in the Asia-Pacific. With not less than 3, 000, 000 personnel in uniform, it has the world's largest military. Furthermore, China possesses strategic-range nuclear weapons in addition to being a permanent member of the UN Security Council and therefore possessing a veto power in the supra-national organization (Macciarola and Oxnam, eds., 1991; Sutter, 1992; Roy, 1994; Scalapino, 2003: 73-82; Onishi, 2005; And Roberts, 2006).

Extrapolating from the above, analysts have suggested a number of scenarios as possible consequences of China's growing significance, first in Asia and second in the global scene. With respect to the Asia-Pacific region, it has been argued that following US gradual reduction of global military involvement in the immediate post Cold War era, a power vacuum has been created and is now being contested for by the major regional powers in Asia-Pacific. Early in 1994, Roy (1994:104) analyzed the context of this power tussle as follows:

Northeast Asia has been relatively peaceful for the past forty years. The post-Cold War era, however, will bring new security challenges to the Asia-Pacific region. Perhaps the most serious of these challenges involved China's expected emergence as a major economic power in the new future. While a developed, prosperous Chinese Economy offers the region many potential benefits, it would also give China the capability to challenge Japan for domination of East Asia.

While the actual substance of this challenge is not clearly stated, Roy predicted that China is most likely to step in as a regional hegemon because of the instability of Japanese economic strength and the weaknesses of her armed forces compared with China. Today, this prediction would appear to be true.

Similarly, some analysts (Roberts, 2006; And Bolt and Willner, 2006) have underlined the possibility of an arms race in the region as a direct consequence of the struggle for supremacy between the two countries. Subscribers to this view have argued that there has been a steady arms build-up across Asia – Pacific in response to the struggles for regional supremacy between China and Japan (as well as their allies) since the early 1990s. The growing militarization of the region this entails has been a source of worry for the international community. A flashpoint of possible conflicts in the near future is the contested Spratly Islands, located on the South China Sea; an area believed to be oil-rich.<sup>1</sup> Table 1

---

<sup>1</sup> The Spratly Island is at the Southern escarpments of the Chinese mainland and is a collection of stony outcroppings and islets. With the increasing global depletion of centre

below suggest that China would be most favoured in asserting a forceful claim over this Island. The table also suggests that many South-Pacific countries would support the Chinese leadership should they one day militarily confront their rivals

**Table 1: Naval and Air Force Available to China, Selected ASEAN Countries, and Vietnam, 1994**

ASEAN Countries	Combat Aircraft	Large Warships	Patrol (SSM)	Craft	Submarines
China	5000	54	860		46 + 5 SSN
Malaysia	69 + 6 armed helos	4 frigates	(207)		0
Singapore		6	37		0
Indonesia	192 + 6 armed helos	corvettes	(8)		2
Vietnam	81	17 frigates	24		0
	185 + 20 armed helos	7 frigates	(6)		
			48		
			(4)		
			55		
			(8)		

**Source:** Compiled from International Institute of Strategic Studies (1993: 145-165), *The Military Balance 1993-94* (London: Brassey's).

over the Island.

The implications of the statistics on the table above are obvious. Not only would China enjoy more backing from her regional neighbours than Japan in the eventuality of an intra-regional confrontation over the Island, but with her growing economic advantage and membership of the UN Security Council, she has the prospects of mustering more international clout than Japan. In addition, China is the only nuclear power in the region as at today. But the grim prospect of an eventual conflict has intensified the militarization of the region. A dimension of this is the proliferation of military pacts and other alliances existing between some ASEAN states and the developed countries in Europe and the US. Table 3 graphically demonstrates the states involved, the nature of these alliances and their temporal durations. In a way, this is to be expected because

---

of international tension in the Southeast Asia since the end of the Cold War. Virtually all the countries in the region that have common border with it have a history of laying claims to parts of the island because of this geo-strategic importance.

of the competitive nature and character of the sustained capitalist-driven economic transformation process the region has experienced in the last two-to-three decades. However, the point should be

**Table 2: Patterns of Alliances involving ASEAN States (in effect as of 2000)**

<b>States</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Temporal Domain</b>
China-North Korea	Defence Pact	July 1961 – present
China-Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan	Non-Aggression or Neutrality Pact	April 1996 – present
Japan-United States	Defence Pact	April 1952 – present
South Korea-United States	Entente or Consultation Pact	October 1953-present
Indonesia-Australia	Entente or Consultation Pact	December 1952 – present

**Source:** Adopted and modified from Gilbert and Sarkees (2004: 211-222), “Measuring Alliances: The Correlates of War Formal Intestate Alliance Dataset, 1816-2000”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 41.

made that this development raises serious worries about the security of the entire Asia-Pacific. At least four of these worries should be mentioned, even if briefly, as follows:

- (i) the need to improve relations among East Asian countries in order to create a conducive atmosphere for the avoidance of regional conflicts;
- (ii) the need to provide opportunities for East Asian countries to reach a consensus on security issues;
- (iii) the need to have a platform for contributing to the gradual development of a truly regional and more advanced political and security regime in East Asia;
- (iv) And the need to more specifically provide possibilities for China and Japan to improve their bilateral relations. (Mingquan and Liu Aming, 2004:143-181).

Another important issue emerging from the reality of China on the corridors of global power is associated with the anxiety being expressed in some quarters over the prospects of the country stepping into the vacuum created by the exit of the USSR and the consequent diminishing significance of the ideology of communism. Such worries were expressed by some US diplomats to the effect that a former US Assistant Secretary of States for East Asia and Pacific affairs (Kelly, 2004b: 41; Gilbert and Sarkees, 2004; And Kelly, 2004b) lamented that China is challenging the status quo aggressively through expanding its influence in Southeast Asia by way of enhancing its diplomatic representation, increasing its foreign assistance, and signing new bilateral and regional agreements.

A corollary of this view is the contention that given its communist pedigree, the ascension of China may well mean the intensification of ideological contestation around the world. For those who defend this view, references to China's "imperialist activities" in countries of the Southern hemisphere (particularly those in Africa and Latin America) and the very apparent improvement in Sino-Cuban relations as well as the growing closeness between China and Venezuela under Hugo Chavez, are strident indications that the ideological rift between capitalism and communism is far from being resolved (Okpeh, 1995; Devlin, *et al.*:2006). It is further observed that by vigorously pursuing these actions, the Chinese leadership is pointedly telling the world that the ideology that underpinned the about seventy-five years of the existence of the USSR still has some global clout symbolized in the Peoples Republic of China alongside their remaining socialist allies in particularly South America. While this supposed ideological potency is questionable and could be written off as mere propaganda, the point should be made that socialism is still very relevant as an ideology of development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order.

China's rising global profile has also become a great Philip in the economic integration process in Asia-Pacific. Against the backdrop of the emerging New World Order (NWO) and the neo-liberal driven globalization process, this fact is significant and should be noted. Regionalization impulses across the globe were sparked off by the emergence

of what is called “Fortress Europe,” following the demise of the USSR and the emergence of the NWO. It was also a direct consequence of the globalization process underpinned by post-industrial neoliberalism. European countries had hoped to improve their economic and political influence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by coalescing into one powerful regional bloc. China’s economic ascendancy is said to be an important variable in the regionalization impulses in East Asia. Emphasizing this point, for example, Wong and Zhang (2006: 267) point out that:

China since the early 1980s has become an increasingly important player on both the world and particularly East Asian regional markets. Since Asia absorb a large proportion of China’s export (44% in 2003) and is a major supplier of China’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), it is not hard to see that China’s rapidly growing economy since 1978 has impacted significantly on many East Asian economies to their mutual advantage....The emergence of China’s economy is therefore said to play an accelerated role in building up East Asia’s cooperation and integration.

At least three critical areas stand out in support of the above claim which should be mentioned, even if briefly for purposes of emphasis. The first is in the area of intra-regional trade. For over a decade or two now, China has remained the main impetus in regional trade interdependence in East Asia. In addition to stimulating their growth potentials and capacity utilization levels, most East Asian countries are experiencing considerable increases in their respective shares of exports to China. Some statistics would help buttress the point being made here. While for the past two decades, the proportion of Japan’s exports to China has more than tripled from 3.9% in 1980 to 12.2% in 2003, the share of Korea’s export to China increased from direct trade in the 1980s to 18.1% in 2003 (IMF, 2004; *China Statistics Yearbook*, 2004; UNCTAD, 2005; Wong and Zhang, 2006:275; And Kelly, 2004b). Similarly, Taiwan’s direct export to China experienced a remarkable



increase from zero direct trade in the early 1980s to 14.1% in 2003; Hong Kong's from 6.0% in 1980 to stunting 42.7% in 2003; and Singapore's from 1.6 % to 7.0% (Wong and Zhang, 2006:275). A survey of major trade developments in East Asia reveals that the region's exports to China from 1995-2001 grew at an average rate of 11.5% per annum (Ng and Yeats, 2003; *China Daily*, 2003; And Wong and Zhang, 2004:275). These statistics suggests that China is indeed the engine house of the economic growth of the region. Second, for a fairly long time now, China has remained the world's most favoured destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). East Asian countries, particularly Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, to mention just a few, accounted for an overwhelming share on flows of FDI into China in 2003. By the end of 2005, for example, the Singapore Department of Statistics (2008) declared that China was the second largest destination of Singapore's cumulative direct investment abroad with \$19.0 billion or 12.4% of annual total. As Table 3 glaringly shows, East Asia's FDI in China has experienced steady growth since 2000. Consequently, as China's economy continues to grow, so would foreign investment into East Asia through China.

**Table 3: Trade Intensity Indices between China and East Asian Economies, 1997-2003**

Trade Partner	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Japan	Korea	Singapore	Malaysia	Thailand	Indonesia	Philippines
1997	7.1	1.0	3.2	2.2	1.1	0.7	0.8	1.3	1.0
1998	7.3	1.2	3.5	2.3	1.2	0.8	0.9	1.6	1.3
1999	6.9	1.1	3.4	2.1	1.2	0.7	0.9	2.1	1.1
2000	6.2	1.0	3.1	2.0	1.2	0.8	1.0	2.3	0.8
2001	6.2	1.1	3.3	2.2	1.2	1.0	1.0	2.1	0.9
2002	5.9	1.2	3.1	2.2	1.2	1.3	1.0	2.0	1.0
2003	5.7	1.3	2.9	2.1	1.3	1.2	1.0	2.0	1.1

**Source:** Computed from data in IMF, *Direction of Trade Statistics* (various issues); and Wong and Zhang, (2004: 279).

An interesting dimension of this development is the marked increase in China's FDI in East Asian countries. Studies (Wong and Chan, 2003; Wong, 2003; Wong and Zhang,

2004: 277; And Kokubun and Wang, eds. 2004) have demonstrated the pattern, nature and character of these investments and the implications of this for East Asian regional cooperation and integration.

Third, since the late 1990s, China has continued to carry the responsibility and by implication, the burden of being the regional “big brother,” which has not only put her at the forefront of all East Asian regional affairs, but endeared her to the countries in the region. For example, during the Asian financial crisis of 1997, Beijing steadfastly refused all temptations and pressures from the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and the US as well as the IMF and the WB to devalue its currency, the Renminbi. This is partly said to have helped in stabilizing the economies of the region and aided their speedy recovery from the crisis (Wong and Zhang, 2006: 280). Furthermore, realizing the imperatives of creating a web of Free Trade Areas (FTAs) as a sine qua non for regional integration, China, on November 4, 2002, signed an epoch-making framework agreement with ASEAN in Cambodia to establish an FTA by 2010. This agreement established the road map for trade liberalization in goods and services for most countries in the region by 2010 and for the less developed ASEAN nations like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam by 2015. A consequence of this was the formation of China-ASEAN FTA (or CAFTA). Wong and Zhang (2006: 280) underlined the critical place of this move in the East Asian regional integration process in the following passages:

The formation of the China-ASEAN FTA (CAFTA) signifies the creation of an economic region of 1.7 billion consumers with a combined GDP of US\$2 trillion and a trade volume of US\$ 1.2 trillion. It offers an effective means for some ASEAN states to overcome their size disadvantage by pooling resources and combining markets.

Additionally, the FTA deepened intra-regional trade and investment and accelerated bilateral tourism and cooperation in construction, energy and financial matters. Thus, China’s emergence as a global economic and political power has created a new growth power house for East Asia.

The bilateral and multilateral trade agreements initiated by the Chinese authorities in the last ten to fifteen years are transforming East Asia into a regional bloc of immense consequence.

### **3. Perspectivizing the Dragon in Africa: A Moment of “Second Imperialism” or “Progressive Partnership”?**

China’s increasing influence has generated controversies outside the Asia-Pacific region with regard to what her *real* motive is. In Africa for example, the polemic is just beginning to mature with intense resonance,<sup>1</sup> between those who see such phenomenon as largely imperialistic and those who conceive it as a new dawn for the continent (Goldstein and Pinaud, *et al*, 2006; Le Pere, ed., 2006; Taylor, 2005a:45-48; Taylor, 2005b; Alden, 2007; Emeagwali, *et al* in Emeagwali and Foster eds., 2006: 258-269; Okpeh, *et al* eds., 2009). Arising from the importance of this two contrasting positions on and perceptions of China’s increasing interest in Africa and the implications of this on foreign policy options, it is necessary to look at the issues in the debate, weigh them on the scale of national interests, and see to what extent they would influence developments in the continent. Such close and circumspective review of alternatives has become even more imperative because of the need to insulate African states from the negative consequences of the NWO and the type of economic philosophies underpinning its existence.

Those who see the increasing presence of China in Africa as essentially imperialist point to the political economy of the phenomenon and explain why the emerging relations would not benefit African countries. For these Afrocentricists, for want of a better nomenclature (Goldstein and Pinaud, *et al*; Taylor, 2005a; Taylor, 2005b; And Okpeh, *et al* eds., 2009), the nature and character of Chinese activities in the continent is reflective of aspects of the erstwhile European imperialism in Africa. At least three

---

<sup>1</sup> The USA Africa Dialogue Series hosted and coordinated by Professor Toyin Falola of the Department of History, University of Austin at Texas, USA also ran an interesting, lengthy and thorough series on this debate for better part of 2007. For details see [USA Africa Dialogue Series@google.com](http://USAfricaDialogueSeries@google.com).

variables makes it so: (i) Chinese quest for Africa's vast raw materials, particularly oil to sustain its growing population and industries; (ii) Chinese attraction to untapped African markets to sell Chinese cheap manufactured products; and (iii) generally, African countries would serve as rich fields for profitable re/investments of Chinese surplus capital. In order to ensure an enabling environment for all these, China has concluded both bilateral and multilateral economic and socio-cultural agreements with scores of African countries. Vigorous efforts are already being made to introduce Chinese language and culture in a number of these countries' institutions of higher learning. In Nigeria for example, some universities like the Lagos State University, Lagos and the University of Abuja located in Gwagwalada, some 40 kilometres from the nation's capital, have Centres for Chinese Studies. Similarly, China helped Kenya to set up a Confucius College, in Nairobi to facilitate Chinese cultural studies in the country.

Perhaps for illustrative purposes, it would be germane to further elaborate on this. According to Taylor (2005:45), a major influence in this perspective of thought, China's economic interest in Africa is anchored on at least three fundamental assumptions, namely:

- (i) macroeconomic environment across Africa is taking a favourable turn as a result of the increased pace of privatization of public utilities, liberalization of international trade and relative political stability;
- (ii) the popular believe of Chinese manufacturers and shopkeepers that the type of goods which they produce and sell have immense potential in African economies than those of the industrialized countries in Europe and North America; And
- (iii) the believe by both Beijing authorities and captains of industry that Africa is rich in natural resources, particularly crude oil, non-ferrous metals and fisheries.

Extrapolating from the above, it is easy to decipher why China has continued to intensify its economic interactions with the African continent. For proponents of the “second imperialism” thesis therefore, the Chinese are in Africa to exploit the opportunities provided by the latter’s development inertia in the globalizing world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and not to halt it. Thus, in the ensuing Sino-African relations, contemporary African economies are being repackaged as the safety valves of modern Chinese capitalist economic transformation process, a repetition of what happened to the continent under colonialism during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Ample evidence does exist in support of the preceding argument. In the first place, the apparent meteoric expansion of the Chinese economy during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and particularly since the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has significantly increased her oil requirements (International Energy Agency, 2000; 2004; 2005; And Bergsten, 2006:50). As Table 4 on China’s oil imports by regions graphically indicates, this would appear to be partly the primary reason driving Sino-African improved relations in recent years.

**Table 4: China’s Oil Imports by Regions (Percent)**

<b>Region 2004</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2004</b>
Asia Pacific	60.6	26.2	14	11.5
Middle East	39.4	47.5	56	45.4
Africa	0	16.7	23	28.7
Others (Europe, America)	0	9.6	7	14.3

**Source:** Adopted and modified from Bergsten, *et al* (2006:132); International Energy Agency (2000: 50); US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2004:156); And China OGP (*Oil Gas and Petroleum Newsletter* (2004).

Indeed, since 1993 China graduated into a net importer of oil and it has been projected that this would constitute 45% of its oil use by 2010 (Falola and Genova: 2005:72). As a direct consequence of this, we are further told that:

China has been faithfully developing linkages with oil-rich countries in Africa, such as Angola, Nigeria and Sudan. Since around 1995 China has pursued an “outward-looking oil economy” policy. This is for

primarily economic reasons as the average production cost of Chinese onshore oil is comparatively very expensive compared to African or Middle East oil (Taylor, 2005:45).

Thus, Chinese oil companies are in almost all oil producing countries in the continent and even beyond (they are in Canada, Peru and Venezuela, to mention just a few). This economic diplomacy is conducted using what the Chinese refer to as “special relationships”<sup>1</sup> Second, as a critical means of guaranteeing her economic interest in (Taylor, 2005:45. Also Goldstein and Pinaud, *et al*, 2006; And Emeagwali, *et al*) in Africa, China has continued to increase the amount of her joint ventures and particularly her trade in the continent (Emeagwali and Foster eds., 2006; And Okpeh, *et al* eds., 2009). This has not significantly improved African economies because Sino-African trade has been largely unbalanced in favour of China. Recent studies on this have proved this point to be true, as Taylor (2005:45) once again points out:

...Sino – Africa is still very lopsided in favour of Chinese exporters, who are flooding African markets with cheap household products of poor quality. Such imports into Africa most certainly help China’s trade development but do little to encourage indigenous manufacturing.

For economies that have been victims of the last two decades of neo-liberal – driven WB and IMF sponsored structural adjustment programmes, the consequences of the trade deficit implied in the above unequal relationship could be (and indeed is) counter productive.<sup>2</sup> Thus, since Sino-

---

<sup>1</sup> This foreign policy caveat transcends conventional international relations and covers a wide range of issues that promote Chinese national interest. Under this, the Beijing authorities are at liberty to relate with any country and over whatever issue (including arms sales). For example, when the late General Sani Abacha regime in Nigeria was sanctioned by the Commonwealth and USA, he found solace and warmth in the arms of the Chinese. Similar situations were replicated in Libya, Sudan, Guinea Bissau and most recently Iran and Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup> We should add that cheap Chinese imports undermine local industries, thus inhibiting multiplier effects on the economy. For example, Nigeria lost 1.5 million jobs in the

African trade relations are not conducted on relatively equal or mutual reinforcing footing, they can not have the multiplier effects required to stimulate the desperately needed growth in African economies.

Third and related to the above, is the consequences of the Chinese arms trade on political equanimity across the continent. China is a major exporter of arms into Africa. Records (Munro, 1992; *China Daily*, 2005; Alden, 2007; Wong and Chan; And Taylor, 2005) have shown that China is currently the world's fifth largest arms exporter and the Chinese authorities are hoping to transform their military industrial complex into a top global actor by 2020. As part of this highly ambitious and nationalistic plan, Beijing authorities have factored Africa as a major destination for a large chunk of the products of their military industrial complex. The preponderance of Chinese light and heavy weapons across the continent and in particular, foci of social conflicts is an eloquent attestation of this fact. The list is indeed overwhelming: from Ethiopia to Eritrea, Sudan to Somalia, Rwanda to Burundi, Liberia to Sierra Leone, and Angola to Guinea; the Chinese factor in all these conflicts is glaring and has been largely responsible for their escalation and longevity. A closer look at the political economy of the Chinese arms trade would reveal China's strategic narrow economic calculations which have very little or nothing to do with the welfare of the largely impoverished masses of African continent.

The situation in Sudan would help to illustrate the point in context here. Reports have shown that as at 2005, Sudan obtained 34 fighter jets from China and the Sudanese Air Force was equipped with \$100 million worth of Shenyang fighter planes, including a dozen supersonic F-7 jets. (Taylor, 2005:45). It is important to point out here that the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is the largest shareholder (about 40%) in Sudan's largest oil venture. Furthermore, the Sino-Sudanese oilfield projects covers 50, 000 square miles in the Southern non-Muslim

---

garment industry between 2000 and 2005 and not less than 14 Kenyan factories have been shot since 2005, while those still remaining are operating at 50% capacity. For African economies to benefit from Chinese trade, is suggested that they must set quotas for Chinese exports as was done in Brazil.

region of the country and it is expected to produce 15 million tons of crude oil annually. With an estimated proven reserves of 220 million tons, the project is one of the largest China has undertaken overseas. It is on record that China supports the Sudanese government in its conflicts with the rebels from the South (Taylor, 2005: 45).<sup>1</sup> The point here is that in addition to have found a profit-spinning market for her arms in Africa, the existence of this type of Chinese external trade remains a major factor in the intensity of violent social and political conflicts in some parts of the continent.

Fourth, China's policies towards the continent which have caught the fancy of some ruling elites in Africa is its principle of "non-interference in domestic Affairs," and its re-reading of rights-based issues and democracy. For example, China says that the Global Democracy Project has a neo-liberal foundation that links it to western imperialism; that all countries of the world reserve the right to choose the type of government and leadership they want; and that the good governance conditionality attached to foreign assistance which integrates rule of law, accountability and other human rights issues, constitute a violation of recipient country's sovereignty. Some scholars have associated the political rascality of some ruling elites in parts of Africa with this kind of foreign policy disposition. The obstinacy of the ruling elites in Zimbabwe and Sudan would graphic cases in point. President Mugabe defiantly refuses to see reason with world leaders by insisting on ruling his country the way he wants. His socio-economic and political reforms have not gone down well with many world leaders (or even his people for that matter) because they have only ended up bringing hardship to his fellow citizens. Today, Zimbabwe is a ghost of its glorious past. Inflation is at its highest peak in the annals of the country's post independent history; many women and children are dieing of hunger and starvation and from diseases; and the international sanctions are still in force with debilitating implications on the welfare of the people. Similarly, the memory of the Dafur carnage in Sudan is still fresh in our minds. The confrontation between

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Sudanese government forces, armed with Chinese weapons, use Chinese facilities as bases from which they launch attacks and dislodge Southerners in the vicinity of new oil fields.



government forces and the rebels left hundreds of thousand people either death or displaced, women and children being the worst affected. That Beijing maintains a solid and robust relationship with these countries in defiance of the international community underscores the Chinese factor in the political crisis in contemporary Africa.

The second perspective enthusiastically welcomes increased Chinese involvement in Africa and views the development with great optimism. Drawing on historical inferences regarding Sino-African interactions and the imperatives of South-South cooperation, scholars in this spectrum of thought (Pinaud, *et al*, 2006; Le Pere ed. 2006; And Emeagwali, *et al*, 2006: 258-269; Okpeh, *et al* eds., 2009) not only encouraged contemporary Sino-African relations, but argue that it would immensely benefit the continent and its peoples, who in the face of unbridled neoliberalism in the form of globalization, are in dire need of responsible and accommodating trading partners to jump-start their economies and consolidate on their development process. The thesis here is that as a result of their common historical antecedence as victims of European imperialism, deepening Sino-African relations would greatly improve the economies of the latter and augment its bargaining power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This argument is anchored on a number of variables which should be identified and explained. First, as China expands and consolidates its industrialization process, its demands for some African raw materials would expectedly stimulate an agricultural revolution in the agrarian and allied sectors in Africa. For example, it has been pointed out that:

...China's presence in Africa has increased the bargaining power of African countries tremendously. The terms of trade for agricultural commodities as well as industrial minerals have increased significantly to the advantage of primary producer (Emeagwali, *et al*, 2006:264).

In addition, China is currently the main importer of African cotton and a variety of other agricultural products, thus maintaining a driving force for African countries to build up fragile agrarian sectors. Experts from the U.S. have

predicted that China's demand for cotton will reach 12 million tons by 2010, or about half of the world total output (Pinaud, *et al*, 2006; Le Pere, ed. 2006; And Emeagwali, *et al*, 2006). The implication of this for the agricultural sector is obvious. With the increased consolidation of the growth in China's economic relationship with Africa, fond hope is now being expressed that the continent would have a new lease of life from what it experienced in the hands of Western European powers during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Second, it has been pointed out that China's preference of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries is a distinctive option for Africa, while her conception and position on human rights is an intermediate force for making negotiation with tyrannical African leaders possible. Emphasizing this African policy content in the guidelines for Sino-African relations, the Beijing authorities on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2006 released a five - point proposal as follows: (i) To foster a sincere friendship and become each others reliable "all-weather friend"; (ii) To treat each other as equals, respect each other's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs; (iii) To seek common development on the basis of mutual benefit; (iv) To enhance consolidation and cooperation in international affairs; And (v) To look into the future and create a more splendid world. The guideline further explains that China would stand for mutual support on major issues concerning state sovereignty, territorial integrity, national dignity and human rights; will be willing to urge the United Nations and other international organizations to pay attention to the question of economic development for the south; And will push forward the establishment of a just rational multilateral trading system that would enhance the power of developing countries in the decision-making process of international financial institutions (*China Daily*, 2006; And Ziyang, 1982). For the Afro-optimists therefore, increasing Chinese involvement with Africa would greatly ameliorate the political status and influence of the latter at the UN and consequently on the global stage. Apart from offering the continent and its peoples an alternative partner in the strategic construction of alliance and counter-alliance, such positive interactions would help the continent to avoid the pitfalls of the past with which the continent is still grappling.

Third, scholars here have also pointed out the fact that growing involvement of China with Africa would pave the way for increased Chinese investments, development assistance and economic empowerment in the continent. Available records (Pinaud, *et al* 2006; Le Pere ed., 2006; And Emeagwali, *et al*, 2006) have shown that Africa's trade with China grew for an upward of 500% between 2000 and 2005. The same records indicate that by early 2006, not less than 700 Chinese companies were operating in 49 countries in the continent, making China Africa's third largest trading partner. This is a phenomenal trade growth rate that can not be compared with any other geographical region in the world. For, as Pinaud (in Emeagwali, *et al*, 2006:263) points out:

...it took ten years for bilateral trade between China and Africa to grow from \$10 million in the 1950s to \$100 million in the 1960s, 20 years to grow from \$100 million to \$1billion, and another 20 years to grow from \$1billion to \$10 billion. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the trade volume between the two sides jumped from \$10.8 billion in 2000 to \$30 billion in 2004.

An important fall out from this is the significant increase in Chinese investments across the continent. A checklist on this would reveal a plethora of development projects straddling construction, transportation, telecommunications, water conservation, hydropower development, oil-drilling and industrial construction, etc.

Some examples would appropriately illustrate the point being made here. The Chinese are involved in railway construction in Angola, port construction in Gabon, the construction of a football stadium, office blocks and an industrial complex in Sierra Leone, the Heglig pipeline and a dam in Sudan, road construction in Rwanda, and the more general construction in Botswana. Furthermore, the Chinese have heavy investments in telecommunications in Kenya and Ethiopia; the oil industry in Sudan; the coal and gold in South Africa; copper mining in Zambia; nickel in Burundi and cobalt and copper mining in Congo; extensive coffee production, vegetable farms and fishing in Uganda and Zambia. This is notwithstanding other investment deals in

the railway, textile, oil and gas sectors as well as aero-technology in Nigeria, education, professional training and tourism development in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

There has also been a steady increase in China's development assistance to African countries. For example, in response to Nigeria's acceptance of Chinese oil-drilling companies access to operate in the country, China pledged to grant her \$5million for infrastructure construction and RMB 5 million (\$624,000) for anti-malaria drugs, training for Nigerians to control malaria and bird flu as well as cooperation in technology. Recently, it was reported in some national dailies that the Beijing authorities approved a package of development assistance to Nigeria amounting to the tune of several billions of naira (*The Nation*, 2009). Such development assistance to countries in Africa is in line with her promises at the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2005 and other subsequent such interactions. At the Addis – Ababa Action Plan (2002-2004) for example, we are told that:

...the Chinese government made series of commitments, including increased assistance to African countries under the FOCAC framework. They planned to step up efforts to strengthen cooperation in human resources, and to train up to 10, 000 African personnel in different fields in the least developed countries in Africa. Eight more African countries were awarded destination status for outbound Chinese tourists, thus strengthening cultural and people –to people exchanges (Emeagwali, *et al*, 2006:261).

For these scholars therefore, the emergence of China as a global economic power on the one hand and on the other, her increasing involvement with Africa would immensely improve the economic condition of the latter. They argue that the spin-offs of these developments would go a long way in ameliorating the standard of living of the peoples of Africa. Increased Chinese investments, development assistance, technical expertise and trade in goods and services would provide the stimulus required to spur up African economies in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup>

century. Defenders of this perspective conclude by contending that all the continent needs at this point in time is a well – mobilized followership and a steady flow of dynamic leaders with sufficient political will power to consolidate on Africa’s interactions with China and make the most of it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The debate over the global pre-eminence of China in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would for a very long time to come dominate intellectual discourses across all regions of the world. Whether as an academic or national policy issue, the reactions to the emergence of China on the corridors of power have been diverse indeed. As we have tried to show in this paper, such reactions are expected since the China phenomenon is gradually and radically altering the patterns and structure of alliance in the international system. What this is showing is that whereas the largely ideologically framed bi-polar world order of the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may have significantly been overshadowed with the demise of the USSR, international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would still be conducted along both old and (specifically) new ideas on economics, politics, religion and culture, as well as peoples perceptions on these in the strategic deployment of resources to defend national interests.

In an era of intense neo-liberal globalization championed by the coalition of world-wide captains of industry and multinational corporations, developing countries like those in the African continent have no other choice than to re-strategize on the basis of the history of their relations with other nations and in terms of their core national interests. There is the urgent need to strengthen the capacity of the continent’s economic structures through the institutionalization of fundamental changes that would shore them up and make them more competitive and responsive first, to the needs of the people and second, to the changes in the international system. This needed structural re-direction would not be possible without the reformation of the polities, societies and value systems of the continent. Our development must be grassroots based, the

leadership must be made accountable to the people, the political class in Africa must have the political will to carry the development aspirations of the people to the next level, rule of law must prevail and national systems must reflect the collective values and aspirations of the people. Indeed, there are serious lessons to be learnt by African countries from the China phenomenon.

## **REFERENCES**

Alden, C. *China in Africa* (London, 2007).

Bergsten, C. Fred *et al* (2006), *The Balance Sheet-What the World Needs to Know About the Emerging Superpower* (New York: The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Institute for International Economics)

*China Daily* (2003), “An Engine for Asian Region”, (Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January).

*China Daily* (2005), “China becomes World’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Largest Exporter”, (Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April).

*China Daily* (2006), 12<sup>th</sup> January.

*China Statistics Yearbook* (2008), (China Statistics Press)

China OGP (Oil Gas and Petroleum Newsletter (2005), *Xinhua News Agency*

Devlin, R., (2006), *The Emergence of China: Opportunities and Challenges for Latin America and Caribbean* (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank)

Emeagwali, G. T., Yu-Hua, X. and Yong-Hong, Z (2006) “Africa, China and the Way Forward”, in Emeagwali, G. T. and Foster, Walter B. (eds.), *The African Experience: Past, Present, and Future*, (New York: Whittier Publications, Inc, Island Park), 258-269

**Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr., Ph.D., Benue State University (Nigeria)**

Falola, T. and Genova, A. (2005), *The Politics of the Global Oil Industry: An Introduction* (West Port: Praeger Publisher, USA).

Goldstein, and Nicholas Pinaud, N. *et al* (2006), *The Rise of China and India: What's in it for Africa?* (Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Gilbert, D. and Sarkees, M. (2004), "Measuring Alliances: The Correlates of War, Formal Intestate Alliance Dataset, 1816-2000", *Journal of Peace Research*, 41.

International Energy Agency (2000), *Energy Market Report*, July 10.

International Energy Agency (2004), *Energy Market Report*, May 12.

International Energy Agency (2005), *Energy Market Report*, July 13,

International Monetary Fund (2004), *Direction of Trade Statistics*, (Washington D. C.: IMF Economic Research Department).

Kelly, J. (2004a) "An Overview of US East Asia Policy," (June).

Kelly, J. (2004b), "US East Asian Policy: Remarks to the Woodrow Wilson Center Conference on George Bush and Asia: An Assessment" (Washington D.C., November 9<sup>th</sup>).

Kokubun, R. and Wang, J. (eds. 2004), *The Rise of China and a Changing East Asian Order*, (Tokyo and New York: Japan Center for International Exchange).

Le Pere, G. (ed. 2006), *China in Africa: Mercantilist or Partner in Development* (Madrid,).

Macciarola, Frank., J. and Oxnam, Robert B. (eds. 1991) *China and East Asia: Implications for American Policy, Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*.

Munro, Ross H. (1992), "Awakening Dragon: The Real Danger in Asia is from China," *Policy Review* (Fall).

Mingquan, Z. and Aming, L (2006) "The Political and Security Implications of the Emerging East Asian Community: A Chinese

- Perspective”, in Poh – Ping, L. and Yean, Tham S., *et al* (eds.), *The Emerging East Asian Community*, pp.143-181.
- Nixon, R. (1994), *Beyond Peace* (Random House).
- Okpeh, O. O. Jr. (1995), “Has Socialism Really Died with the Collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics? A Preliminary Comment”, unpublished paper.
- Okpeh, O O. Jr. (2009), *China in Africa: Threats And Opportunities* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers)
- Ng, F. and Yeats, A. (2003), “Major Trade Trends in East,” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 3084, (June).
- Onishi, N (2005) “The Japan – China Stew: Sweet and Sour”, in *New York Times*, January 19<sup>th</sup>
- Pinaud, N. *et al* (2006), *The Rise of China and India: What’s in it for Africa?* (Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).
- Roy, D., “Hegemon on the Horizon? China’s Threat to East Asian Security,” in Rourke, John T. (ed. 1996), *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in World Politics* (Connecticut; Duskin Publishing Group/Brown and Benchmark Publishers.
- Roy, D. (1994) “Hegemon on the Horizon? China’s Threat to East Asian Security,” *International Security* (Summer).
- Roberts, B. (2006), “Alternative Futures”, in Paul J. Bolt and Albert S. Willner (eds.), *China’s Nuclear Future* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner Publishers).
- Segal, G. (1994), “China’s Changing Shape”, *Foreign Affairs* (May/June).
- Scalapino, Robert A.(2005) “Internationalism and Nationalism in East Asia: Present Trends and Future Prospects”, in Poh – Ping, L. and. Yean, Tham S., *et al* (eds.), *The Emerging East Asian Community: Security and Economic Issues* (Malaysia: Penerbit University Kebangsaan).
- Singapore Department of Statistics, (2003).



**Okpeh O. Okpeh, Jr., Ph.D., Benue State University (Nigeria)**

Sutter, Robert G. (1992), "East Asia: Disputed Islands and Offshore Claims-Issues for US Policy," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress of the United States, July 28.

Taylor, I. (2005a) "Enter the Dragon: China's Growing Presence in Africa", *OSSREA Bulletin*, Vol. II, No.3, (October 2005), pp45-48;

Taylor, I. (2005b) "China-Africa: Who's Using Whom?," *The African Report Quarterly* (First Edition, May 2005)

*The Nation* (2009), February 12<sup>th</sup>

US-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2004), *Report to Congress of the U. S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission* (Washington, DC Government Printing Office).

UNCTAD (2005), *World Investment Report*, (Geneva: UNCTAD).

Wong, J. and Chan, S. (2003) "China's Outward Direct Investment: Expanding Worldwide", *China, an International Journal*, 1-2.

Wong, J. (2005) "China's Economy in 2004: Stability Takes Precedence over Growth", in *East Asia Institute of National University*, Singapore, number 222.

Wong J. and Zhang, Y. (2005), "China as a Catalyst for East Asian Economic Cooperation", in Poh – Ping, L. and Yean, Tham S. et al (eds.), *The Emerging East Asian Community*, p.267.

Wong, J. and Chan, S. (2003), "China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement: Shaping Future Economic Relations", *Asian Survey* XLIII-3.

Overholt, William H. (1994), *The Rise of China: How Economic Reforms is Creating a New Superpower*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company Ltd.

Zhao Ziyang, Z. (1982), *China's Economy and Development Principles*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, China).

## **Electronic Sources**

*In the Eye of the Storm? Implications of China on the Corridors of Global Power*

<http://w.w.w.chinacom.cn/English/features/book/152684.htm> (assessed on January 5, 2008)

<http://w.w.w.state.gov/p/eap/r/s/rm/2004.38335.htm> (assessed on February 21, 2008).

<http://www.mofcom.gov.c>, (assessed on February 21, 2008).

Singapore Investment Abroad (2008),  
[www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/survey/siasummary.pdf](http://www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/survey/siasummary.pdf) (assessed on December 12, 2008)

[www.state.gov/p/eap/ris/rm/2004/33064.htm](http://www.state.gov/p/eap/ris/rm/2004/33064.htm) (assessed on January 4, 2009)

[www.nytimes.com/2005/01/19/international/asia/19letter.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/19/international/asia/19letter.html) (assessed on January 10, 2009)

USA Africa Dialogue [Series@google.com](http://Series@google.com). (assessed on January 15, 2009)