

What Pan-Africanism on the Silk Road?

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank the organizers and the speakers at this international conference of the Schiller Institute, and Solidarité & Progrès, who asked me to intervene. This is the second time that I have the opportunity to speak with you here, in Germany.

I'm a historian and I intervene as Secretary General of the Pan-African League—UMOJA. Umoja means “unity” in the African language of Swahili. We are a political party, active in some 15 African countries, most notably in Congo, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. We are active also in the Diaspora: France, Belgium, England, Switzerland, and North America, and we have sympathizers in China and in Russia. The headquarters of our movement is in Cotonou, in Benin.

Our political orientation is the tradition of the “Prime Combat,” the model for the United States of Africa,¹ which is aimed at making Africa self-reliant in realizing its development by its own means. We aspire to restore to ourselves our own local and national governing aspirations. Our political program starts from the recognition that Africa is at the crossroads of globalization and of balkanization, and it must free itself through the following three steps: the conquest of power at the local and presidential level by progressive and pan-Africanist forces, the construction of a politically integrated Africa with its own values, and finally, the creation of international alliances collaborating with us in assuring that Africa will no longer be the playground of world disorder.

Each one of these three stages must effectively investigate the necessity to search effectively for a new paradigm within international relations, because of challenges



Dr. Amzat Boukary-Yabara

which present themselves today in different forms such as, for example, the emancipation of women, which is a great African project, the ecological question, the demographical problem, the digital revolution, and the new domain of bio-technology, and in what we are very concerned about, us Africans, what I call the second phase of decolonization—because there has been a first phase during the 1960's generally, which was definitely not sufficient.

One China, One Africa

My intervention, therefore, is on the resolution of the equation posed by China to Africa: *What Pan-Africanism on the Silk Road?*

First of all, China is not a new actor in Africa. Around 1415, Chinese admiral Zheng He reached the coasts of East Africa during a period when the new silk road was about to be replaced by the Great discoveries and the route to the Americas. During more than five centuries, Africa was forced to open itself to all human and economic predations, in the context of slavery and of colonization.

China, on its side, shut itself off to the outside world before suffering the European and Japanese foreign occupations. In order to recover its own destiny, China first worked towards its political reunification with Mao's Revolution of 1949. The Bandung conference in 1955, the support for African national liberation movements and for the building of the Tanzania-Zambia railroad, showed that China, despite its geographical distance and the difficulties of linguistic communication, didn't wait to become a great power before coming to the help of the Africans during that first period of decolonization.

In the 1960's, several African countries recognized the People's Republic of China, including some French colonies before France did, for example, and supported China's return to the United Nations. Rather than looking to Europe and the United States for support, China engaged in South-South cooperation with the Group of 77 or with the BRICS, and even contested some of the rules of the WTO. Finally, China has no connection to

1. The idea of The United States of Africa (USA) was first coined by Marcus Garvey in his 1924 poem, “Hail, United States of Africa”.

the structural adjustment policies which caused the collapse of all of the African states and economies in the last forty years. To develop herself, China never followed the Washington consensus or the IMF or World Bank directives.

However, the project for a New Silk Road policy in Africa brings responses, but also poses new questions concerning the Chinese presence. Let us be clear: China defends its interests and will develop its new Silk Road whether the West or Africans like it or not. Africa is the last frontier in that road, and the criticism espoused by the Western media against the Chinese presence in Africa is more motivated by the decline of the Euro-American influence in markets which they thought were going to be theirs forever, than by a real interest on the future of Africans for whom the question is not whether a new colonialism will replace a former one, but how to recuperate our sovereignty.

The first answer to those questions for Africa is that no development is possible without undergoing liberation and a revolution. We consider Pan-Africanism to be the movement which organizes African liberation and revolution. It's a political, economic, cultural, and scientific revolution, in which development is not an ideology but a paradigm—the paradigm of unity. Since Chou Enlai, Chinese diplomacy opened spaces in Africa relative to this paradigm of unity. A last example of this is that of Burkina Faso which just broke diplomatic relationships with Taiwan and announced that all projects previously entrusted to Taiwan have been taken over by Beijing. Indeed, the major condition that China poses in its partnership is that of recognizing the principle of One China. Pan-Africanism is also based on the principle of a “One Africa.” One China, One Africa.

After Humiliation, Reparations and Reconstruction

In the present state of affairs, relations between China and Africa are not equal since China is a State-Continent and Africa is a continent of some fifty states of which none is equal to China, in spite of the potentialities of the territories like Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. When China, or another actor, negotiates with an African country, the Africans must negotiate with the general interest of all of Africa in mind. For that, every country must have a national policy which is complementary to a continental policy. In theory, it is up to the African Union (AU) to enable a collective response, but this institution, whose headquarters is located in Addis Ababa and which was built by

China, has no supranational authority. The African Union has structural weaknesses such as its financing by the West, and the fact that it does emanate from the sovereignty of the African people. Nor is it in phase with the real political aspirations of Africa. If China, like Europe and the U.S.S., has an African policy within the context of the Forum for the Chinese Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Africa has no Chinese policy nor a European or American policy. Africa has no solid relations, either people to people, company to company, civil society to civil society, or political parties to political parties. Only Pan-Africanism can therefore fill that gap.

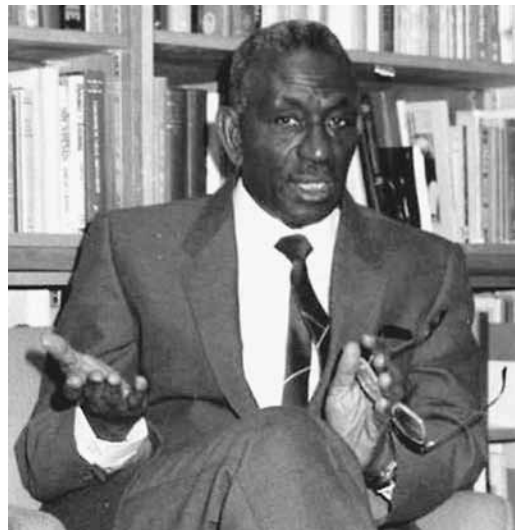
The second point touches upon the question of reparations, a struggle carried out relentlessly by Africa, in vain, towards those political, military, financial, and religious actors who enriched themselves through the centuries of slavery and colonization. China is also demanding reparations from Japan for the massacres committed during the 1937-1945 occupation: the rape of Nanjing, the bacteriological experiments on civilians, the Chinese women violated by the Japanese soldiers. . . . So long as China was weak, Japan refused to face its own criminal past. Today, China has become strong, and imposes on to Japanese historians the necessary revision of their national history as a precondition to all negotiations, including the lifting by the Chinese of their veto against Japan's demand to have a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

The Chinese and the Africans alike suffered from occupation and colonial humiliation. The Western museums are full of objects stolen from Africa as well as from China, and they have also invaded the African art market. For example, the Japanese sanctuary of Yasukuni is to Chinese-Japanese relations, the equivalent of the Island of Gorée to Euro-African relations. Last month, the Senegalese authorities renovated, with financial help of the European Union, the Europe Plaza in Gorée, an island which was a European slave herding center during several centuries. Not a single word was mentioned about this past slavery. The example of China towards Japan shows that the honor of a people lies in the defense of its history and its national heritage. The refusal to admit facts which are certain and duly established, because of quibbling, is contrary to true history. This is why Africa must be intransigent with historical truth.

Africans Must Decide

China is also part of the African Development Bank and of the Caribbean development bank. However, the priority for Africans and Caribbeans is to establish a Pan-

African Bank for reparations and reconstruction. That Bank must be built upon a revolution of the present financial system. In that system, the dollar and the European currencies which are backed by the Euro-American military industrial complex, which is engaged in a fight against the CFA [two currencies in the former French colonial sector which are guaranteed by the French Treasury] front, are dominant. Africa cannot, therefore, involve itself in a project which includes Europe and the United States under such conditions. This is why within the Pan-African milieu we believe, in all modesty,



Senegalese scholar and scientist Cheikh Anta Diop in 1960 called for industrialization, nuclear power, and the highest levels of education.

that the New Silk road should not include Europe in its neo-liberal and neo-colonial form. It would be unconceivable for the African civil societies to have to participate in an alternative project with forces which have dominated them historically. China is building corridors for its own development. The Westerners control areas for their own stability, and the Africans have less and less maneuvering room even if opportunities could be numerous. A Silk Road along which Africa sells its resources to China who resells them back to Africa as manufactured products, is not an equal to equal system, or is not a win-win partnership. It's the reproduction of a colonial mechanism with the Chinese multinationals replacing the Euro-American multinationals.

In that context, what are the real markets that Africans can keep in Africa and look forward to gaining in China? I don't see any, so long as we do not write in our constitutions our commitment to the transformation in Africa of raw materials into manufactured products in order to build an internal market which will meet its own needs. The point is for us to decide what goods we intend to put into circulation on the highways and on the railroads and which will be delivered across the integrity of the African continent. So long as Africa will not have made its economic revolution, it will never be an equal to equal partner of China, of Europe, or of the United States. We defend a pan-Africanist political economy where the rates of growth would correspond to real opportunities for the African people. China's capacity to mobilize its diaspora in order to avoid depending on foreign aid must inspire Africa to mobilize its

own diaspora for its own financing. To achieve that, we recommend a strong approach to development for Africans and by Africans and not the sentimental approach of charity. Development is a question of interest which does not allow any room for capriciousness.

The Purpose of Infrastructure

The infrastructure projects financed by China are not projects initially conceptualized by the Chinese, but by the Africans. Since the 1960's, several African countries had plans to develop based on infrastructures construction, roads, bridges, hydro electrical dams, and factories of production. At the continental level, for example, we can talk about the Action of the Lagos Plan of 1980. The African countries were also competing between East and West to get material or financial support. Ideology was then a tool for development. When the West was conditioning aid to liberal governance criteria, China was showing that the liberal democracy model was not necessary to develop and invest in Africa. Starting in the year 2000, China invested in Africa, responding mainly to the requirements of African governments and of the AU concerning great infrastructure projects.

In reality, Chinese investments in Africa are very weak compared to Chinese investments in the rest of Asia or even in Europe, but they are sufficient to transform the situation. The moment China invests in a territory or in a sector which appears insignificant, they give it a real importance. Laying out a red carpet treatment, China values even the weakest. The African tours of Chinese officials enhance the African leaders while those of the French President are mainly humiliation sessions. [applause] A development plan cannot be reduced to financing infrastructure projects, but it is up to the Africans to put the content into the envelope. Do we want infrastructure at the service of the people or people at the service of infrastructure? What are we going to put on the Silk Road all across the African continent?

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Cheikh Anta Diop Institutes

The question of language, science, technologies and environment is also central. The development of Con-

fucius Institutes throughout Africa calls for a pan-African response via the Cheikh Anta Diop Institutes, named after that wise Senegalese who, starting from philology and anthropology, demonstrated the unity of African civilizations which goes back to Ancient Egypt, and who, in a book originally published in 1960 entitled *The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State*,² presented an overall plan for the economic development of Africa and called for the teaching of an African language throughout the continent. The objective is to create a work language for Africa as a whole such that, for example, the work language between China and Africa would be neither English or French, but a language from Africa and one of China. This is a fundamental requirement. The working languages at the Organization of Shanghai Cooperation are Russian and Chinese. China has also been able to modernize its own economy and its international relations while keeping cultural elements which are part of its long history. Africa must also maintain this same sort of cultural requirement. [applause]

On the question of technology, China supported the access of Nigeria to space through the financing and launching of its communications satellites. In exchange, Beijing bought a share in Nigcomsat, the Nigerian federal communications company. For China, it's a matter of competing with the U.S.A. and Israel in the communications sector of Africa. For Nigeria, which is the first African power, it's a question of forming and training high level technicians which could make of that country the first African space power.

This is a vision which must be extended to the whole of the African continent, according to African interests, with the introduction of a true scientific program at the African Universities. In the 1980s, Burkina Faso president, Thomas Sankara, asked the USSR to train two Burkinaban scientists in order to enable the country to participate in the space adventure, which is the great adventure of mankind. Very much ahead of his time, Thomas Sankara was also preoccupied about the impact that space debris could have on the climate of a country like Burkina Faso, struck by draught and desertification. He had already observed a link between demography and the agricultural question, especially concerning the access to arable land around which there is today

2. Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1974).

a new world competition on the African continent.

A Federal African State

The Pan-African development project takes into account both the necessary industrialization of Africa and the preservation of its environment, in the framework of achieving food self-sufficiency. Capitalism is no response to environmental challenges and thus the Paris agreement on climate is not an agreement for Africa. The principle of peace through environmental cooperation (environmental space building) would be a means to rethink the question of resources and of natural spaces which are, in general, across borders.³

Numerous African countries have launched emergency plans for the 2025-2030 horizon picking up on neoliberal and foreign recipes which have failed since forty years. This predictable failure of those emergency plans can only favor a process of re-colonization of Africa, so long as the struggles remain politically divided or absorbed by a system which maintains the illusion of a possible reform. An organized and disciplined revolution with demographic support cannot be avoided.

For the Pan-African League—UMOJA, the construction of a Federal African State must constitute the major objective of the African and Progressive organizations convinced of the odious character and the lack of future perspective of the world system now in place. China will probably dominate the world through its New Silk Road, and in that context the African resources will be more important for China than U.S. treasury bonds. Africa is thus the last border of world competition, but it can become—and this is our wish before the end of the century—the first world power if it works through its unity project in a sovereign way.

The responsibility is a heavy one. The task will demand years of work to get the results, but we are already engaged in a number of electoral processes from 2019 to 2021. The Pan-African league—UMOJA is a political movement. Before thanking you, we invite all the organizations and personalities present who are willing to contribute to our work, to make contact with us. “Umoja ni Nguvu,” Unity makes strength. Thank you very much for your attention.

3. In 2011, Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe created the Kavango-Zambesi cross border conservation area (KaZaTFCA), the largest cross borders conservation zone on the entire planet. That type of project can be adapted to the Lake Chad basin or the Sahel region.