

Essays

Yoruba-Chinese Ethical Intersectionality: Towards a Community of Shared Future in Afro-Asian Diasporic Spaces

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Abstract

Diasporic communities, as geographies of national cultures abroad, are central to cultural hybridity as new cultures emerge when migrants intersect with their host communities. They have also been construed by national governments as informal trajectories for continuities of economic and diplomatic relations. This study examines the cultural intersectionality of the Yoruba and Chinese diasporic communities by situating the points of convergence for normative ethics within the Yoruba – Chinese sociocultural experiences as cross-cultural templates for diasporic spaces serving to consolidate official national partnerships. The study explores case studies from performances of the Chinese *Ru* tradition, founded on three basic virtues of *ren*, *yi* and *li*, and juxtaposes them with Yoruba ethical equivalents of *ṣ'èniyàn* (humaneness), *òdodo* (righteousness) and *ìwà-ètó* (propriety) as prerequisites for qualifying as *omólúàbí*. The study contends that these ethical codes, retained in diasporic communities through family traditions, music and theatre, are viable templates for smooth Nigeria-China relations in building the proposed community of shared future within the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Introduction

The 2018 Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was focused on a shared future between China and Africa through what is tagged a “Win-Win” cooperation. Dr. Zhou Pingjian, the Chinese ambassador to Nigeria, maintained that Africa and China share similar historical experiences, developmental prospects and strategic interests. Nonetheless, his speech referenced the African philosophical underpinning of the Belt and Road economically-driven initiative, notably through the maxim “if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together” (Pingjian, 2018: 61). This diplomatic submission reflects the importance of cultural factors in shaping the Chinese approach to exchanges with African countries, and was again highlighted by President Jinping Xi during his inaugural speech at the opening of the 2018 FOCAC, which was supported by various Chinese ethical sayings elaborating on the Chinese values of sincerity, friendship and equality. While emphasizing on working together for common development and a shared future, he reiterated the need that Africa-China cooperation be hinged on cultural prosperity through more people-to-people exchanges (Xi, 2018). Thus, the seventh of the ten cooperation plans from 2019 to 2021 elaborates on China’s resolve to consolidate the exposure of its citizens to African civilisation through the creation of an Institute of African Studies and African culture centres, while it continues to project the Chinese culture through the creation of more Confucius Institutes in African institutions (Xi, 2018).

For one, the Chinese people-to-people exchanges have been driven by the creation of Chinese cultural centres either as Confucius Institutes or language classrooms globally. The creation of cultural centres for cultural engagements beyond national borders started with the first phase in the late 19th century, when they were developed to facilitate the cultural annexation of nationals living beyond the geographical boundaries of the state. The major protagonists during this era were Italy, Germany and France with the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Schulverein zur Erhaltung des Deutschtums im Auslande*, *Societa Dante Allegieri*, and *Alliance Francais*, instituted to teach the languages and cultures of their respective countries to migrant communities (Paschalidis, 2009: 277-279). This confirmed the importance of keeping the connection between the homeland and diasporic communities in an era that witnessed the struggle for the control of different territories between European superpowers. In expatiating on the efforts of countries of origin to retain a connection with diasporic communities, Gsir and Mescoli (2015: 7) posited that culture is an important tool with which governments maintain contacts with emigrants from their countries. They also documented that emigration policies and bilateral agreements, alongside the practices of diasporic communities,

help in the maintenance of cultural contents of countries of origin within host countries (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015). As a fallout of cultural contacts, they further asserted, discussions involving different cultures often entail comparisons which emphasize differences based on modernisation (often in terms of domination using “indices of civilization”) (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015). Such discourses, however, have fault lines when one considers the dynamism of culture in a globalized world, especially with the emergence of new cultures through cultural hybridity.

Bhabha (1994) explained cultural hybridity as a process of negotiating boundaries of differentiations, a process which Burke (2009) captured as one of adaptation and acceptance resulting from cultural intersectionality, as opposed to rejection and segregation. For Bernhard (2013: 13), a hybrid cultural identity is formed when individuals incorporate “new forms and practices” in their behaviours. She then identified four typologies of hybridity namely dialogical relations— necessitated by cultural contacts, layers of resistance and acceptance; glocalization—adaptation of the local by the global and vice versa; coexistence of difference—through collaboration of actors; and legitimacy—through ownership by stakeholders (Bernhard 2013: 13-15). The intersections between politics and hybridity become evident when the semantics of the terms “Diaspora” and “creolisation” are disaggregated. While the former emerged as a Pan-African response to the essentialization of racism, the latter underscores the advancement of non-essentialized Diaspora communities through the collaboration of people of diverse origin within the blending of cultures, albeit with the preservation of the connect to the homeland (Prabhu (2007: 3-4).

In this study, the term “diasporic communities,” within present conditionalities, is adopted to capture multiple communities of immigrants, refugees, expatriates, as well as exile communities beyond its limiting Jewish origination of dispersal, alienation and negotiating return (Clifford, 1994: 303-304). It thus captures the dynamism of culture through intersectionality, and the potential for the emergence of a hybrid culture which addresses the context of power asymmetry in today’s globalisation drive. However, it must be stated that delineating diasporic communities as exclusive from their host communities has assumed more complexities as continuous movements and interactions of people, and with them their cultural contents, gradually blur the lines of cultural differentiations (Clifford, 1994: 304). Thus, while acknowledging that the intersections of cultures could lead to the emergence of new practices by specific diasporic communities, the study also notes that some aspects of both tangible and non-tangible components are retained within such communities. These components remain identity markers, as would be

shown through the ethical components discussed in subsequent sections of this study.

This study intervenes within the context of the intersections of power and hybridity which are inferable from the concept of globalisation itself, often with the asymmetric qualification of either “below” or “above”, wherein the practice of domination is implicit. Following from Kraidy’s (2002) position on the need to contextualize the application of hybridity as a term, this study is situated within the Nigeria-China relational context, with the premise that the increased diplomatic, economic and sociocultural engagements between these nations from Africa and Asia necessitate an investigation into points of cultural convergence within diasporic spaces. This is pivotal to eliminating cultural frictions hitherto witnessed in such interactions and developing a cultural hybrid, which balances the power equation within diasporic communities of both countries. It would also help in debunking contextual fallacies and mythologies that predispose Africans and Asians to suspicion against one another based on negative stereotyping hinged on perceived ethical contradictions. Such an understanding is important in achieving the goal of building a community with a shared future, as projected during the 2018 FOCAC Summit. Beyond Afro-Asian relations, this discourse is relevant to the debate on migration and the reception of refugees across different parts of the globe in the wake of displacements from war-torn zones. A focus on cultural ethical intersections would facilitate new ways of thinking and acting, as against the recent anti-immigration policies and stance in the West. It behooves the adoption of a more critical lens which scrutinizes the notion of “criminality” and “burden”—with reference to immigrants in the wake of extremist nationalism (populism)—through a consideration that they are equally humans with moral consciousness.

The Nigerian-China Diasporic Relational Context

The notion of globalisation presupposes that there is no one static culture to return to since cultural hybridity emerges as a product of cultural intersectionality between Diaspora and host communities. Within this discourse, Yuval-Davis’ (2017: 3) concept of situated intersectionality is adopted to advocate its generic applicability within defined boundaries, beyond its feminist limitation to black women. However, it goes beyond the conception of asymmetrical power relations through an exploration of a Sino-Yoruba ethical convergence with an equal universal appeal. While most theorisation of intersectionality focus on the extant power dynamics through indices of certain cultural contexts, the level of ethical consciousness within the Sino-Yoruba ethical paradigms is reflective of similar patterns of moral probity. Within diasporic

communities, the implication of this is that respect for cultural pluralism within host countries is beneficial for mutual enlightenment on the other's cultural inclinations (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015), whereby the process of assimilation results in the glocalization of host communities. In the same vein, the integration and empowerment of diasporic communities in host countries are at times realised through what Clifford (1994:307) called "multiple attachments," as derived from sociocultural intersections such as transnational marriages from which creolized cultures emerge.

It is important to state that language remains central to cultural retention in diasporic communities, most especially as the medium for the transmission of culture.

However, the combination of other cultural assets and resources such as food, clothes, decorations, architecture, furniture, arts, music, medicine, religion and education also help communities in the Diaspora to retain connection with their home countries (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015). This was exemplified in the case of the Senegalese Murid Brotherhood through the reproduction of Touba (their town of origin) in the Diaspora by creating closed ritual communities named after it in places like Turin, Italy. The rituals included the reading of the *Xasaids* (founder's poetry) and communal activities during meals and leisure (Diouf, 2000: 694). Such rituals, in this regard, help in producing feelings of "solidarity, affection, cooperation, and mutual support" within the Murid Diaspora (Diouf, 2000: 695), as the homeland became a reference point for cultural habits. Similarly, the development of diaspora policies abroad through institutionalized awards, celebration of national¹ culture(s), holidays and festivals, and other diplomatic engagements enhance the link between home governments and diasporic communities (Gsir and Mescoli, 2015). These policies are, however, often guided by cultural ethics as reflected in the above referenced 2018 speeches of Dr. Zhou Pingjian and President Xi Jinping in respect of Africa-China cooperation. Within the Sino-Nigerian relational context, there have been continuities in the past eight years regarding the celebration of the Nigerian Cultural day in Beijing, which complements the establishment of a cultural centre in the Chinese city. For the Chinese Diaspora in Nigeria, the Confucius Institutes have served as meeting points, in the past decade, for the celebration of important Chinese feasts such as the Spring Festival and the Chinese cultural month, among others.

The retention of national culture abroad, as Clifford (1994) posited, is itself a form of nationalism that connotes the attempt to affirm a connection that may have been lost through space and time. Similarly, Olorunyomi (2010)

1 The use of "national" and "nation" in this article is in reference to groups with ethnonyms and not modern nation states which vary in composition as we have them today.

reiterated that foundational epistemic traditions are embedded in folkloric traditions of African diasporic communes, such as is embedded in the trickster divinity, logically fashioned to explain the reality of happenstance among the Yoruba Diaspora. These folkloric traditions often serve as repertoires of ethical principles inherited from nations of origin. Pares (2004) corroborates this in the documentation of the practice of Candomblé in Bahia, among the “Nago nation,”² as a reinvention of the Yoruba Orisa (deities) worship with embedded “key ritual features” used to maintain a connection with the African heritage. Nonetheless, Ayorinde (2004: 209) was quick to point out the hybrid components within cultural continuities in the Diaspora resulting from the “challenges of transmission over space and time, societal constraints on practice, and the encounter with other cultures.” For example, the institution of 12 Obas of Sango (the Yoruba god of thunder) in Bahia, with no direct correlation to political structures in Yorubaland, is an indication of diasporic continuity and change in the practice of African traditional religion (Pares, 2004). While detailing such changes is beyond the scope of this work, it is important to note that “regional variants” within cultures of origin do not allow for consistent cultural purity, as there are ever changing dynamics through cultural intersections.³ In terms of gender determinants, Clifford (1994) posited that women adapt better to new challenges presented in the Diaspora and this often redefines patriarchal cultural heritages, with women assuming prominent roles and responsibilities hitherto reserved for men. Such shifts are at times engendered by social influences from cultural practices within host communities. In line with this shift, Bodomo and Panjadic (2015) accounted for the significant presence of the African women Diaspora in China, including single ladies who engage in studies and/or independent businesses. It is difficult to rule out their ability to better adapt to new social conditions as one significant factor for this presence.

In the age of the internet of things where most countries aspire to the creation of smart cities, one cannot ignore the importance of technology, especially television and the internet, to the layers of global cultural connect of diasporic communities with their home countries on the one hand, and host countries on the other (Mathews, Lin and Yang, 2014). Thus, through the broadcast media, telecommunications and new media, these communities

2 The Nago cult exemplifies the overlapping identities of people in the Diaspora with ritual initiation serving as the basis of identifying with the nation and not necessarily through Yoruba descent, although the term initially referred to the Yoruba Speaking people. Thus nationalism transcends the realms of political differentiation to theological affinities (see Pares, 2004).

3 Ayodele (2004) exemplifies this syncretic practice of African traditional religions in Cuba, as the religions come into contact with Catholicism.

are able to follow live events and update themselves on the state of affairs in their home countries (see Clifford, 1994), while their new cultural habits and mannerisms are at times imbibed by members of their home countries who likewise monitor activities of their relatives abroad through the various communication media. For instance, informal communication with Nigerians living in Guangzhou showed that they have access to Nollywood movies and, irrespective of the hard censorship on the media in China, they create informal channels of maximising information gathering through the social media. For the Chinese, they could easily access information on their homeland from different cable channels such as the China Global Television Network (CGTN). On the flip side, intermingling with citizens of host countries facilitate enlightenment about migrants and their cultural disposition. This micro-layer of interactions also serves as springboards for high-level transnational engagements, thereby helping to build ties between host communities and countries of origin.⁴ For members of the Diaspora, it also aids their acquisition of cultural capital and social networks as they negotiate through the socio-political and economic systems in host communities (Mathews, Lin and Yang, 2014).

Cultural intersectionality has also been made easier with the availability of faster and easier modes of transportation, especially with the resurgence of the Old Silk Road being championed through China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative⁵ in the last seven years. The initiative entails series of partnerships founded on the blend of cultural legacy and modern international diplomatic practices involving policy connectivity, infrastructure connectivity, trade connectivity, financial connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity (Ji and Hu 2017). This study contends that the people-to-people connectivity underlies the success of the other four initiatives, as cultural intersectionality is important to ensure the sustainability of mutual development of policies, trade and financial engagements as well as infrastructural development. This is based on China's dialogical approach of equal partnerships which brings cultures into conversation with one another. At the heart

4 This role is what Bodomu (2012) has termed the bridge theory in which the diasporic communities are studied as essential groups in themselves, with a focus on their relevance to both host communities and communities of origin.

5 The Belt and Road Initiative was coined on December 13, 2013 at the Central Economic Working Conference to capture President Xi Jinping's idea of a 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road covering about 90 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania that have signed intergovernmental memorandum with China as at August 31, 2018 (see Deqiang and Zhengrong, 2017: 1; http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/01/c_137435639.htm). The Silk Road was named by the German Richthofen Ferdinand Von in 1877 to describe the routes connecting African, Asian and European civilisations

of this conversation are the diaspora communities that are culture carriers with the fluidity which engenders better cultural understanding between their countries of origin and host countries.

Historical Antecedents of Afro-Asian Relations

Within the Afro-Asian relational context, the 15th century visit of Admiral Zheng He to the East African coast (perhaps Ethiopia) is often referenced as the earliest trade-based contacts between Africa and China (Bodomo and Teixeira-E-Silva, 2012). China's official cultural interactions with Africa, however, date back to May 1955, when an initial cultural agreement was signed between China and Egypt (Yayuan, 2010). This agreement had been foreshadowed a month earlier at the April 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, where a communique was signed by representatives of 29 Asian and African countries. The communique contained the promotion of economic and cultural cooperation among other things.⁶ By 1958, Nigeria was part of the cultural delegation from Africa to China alongside Morocco, Ghana, Somaliland, Uganda and Angola. The following year, ten delegations from China visited Africa with 50 African delegations reciprocating the visit to explore areas of cultural partnerships (Mulinda, 2015: 250).

However, before the signing of official cultural agreements, there are indications of earlier cultural contacts between the Africans and the Chinese. One of such is contained in the Santerian Myth of Changó Safancon (a variant of Shango, the legendary Yoruba monarch of the Od Oyo Empire) among the African Diaspora in Cuba. As the narrative goes, he had been transformed into a Chinese having visited the land of "small and yellow" people with slanting "eyes." According to Ayorinde (2004), this narrative is indicative of contacts between the Yoruba and the Chinese during, and perhaps before, the Middle Passage. More recently, Li (2015a; 2015b) traced indications of the earliest contacts between China and Africa to the Shang Dynasty (17th – 11th B C) based on "remote" archaeological evidence. However, African presence in China is more evidential in the presence of the *Kunlun*⁷ during the Han Dynasty (202 BC -220 AD). He concluded that Black presence in China must have resulted from Africans migrating from the African Continent and South East Asia. More importantly, he contended that beyond the prevalent narrative of being engaged as domestic slaves, they participated in reputable occupations, which led them to attain prestigious heights including top military leadership positions and a government officials in China (Li, 2015a: 19). There have since

6 See Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference of Bandung (24 April, 1955). Accessed from http://franke.uchicago.edu/Final_Communique_Bandung_1955.pdf

7 This was the word used to describe black people.

been increased movements of Africans to China and vice versa, often entailing both temporary and permanent migration on diplomatic, cultural and economic grounds.

In regard to contemporary migrants, Bodomo (2015) observed that the negative media projection of the African Diaspora in Guangzhou, a town which serves as a base for economic migrants, greatly undermines the positive contributions of these communities to Africa-China relations. In countering this negative media projection, he identified six Chinese cities with prominent African presence to include Guangzhou, Yiwu, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Macau. While it is difficult to know the exact number of Africans in China⁸, Bodomo and Pajancic (2015) estimated that about 500,000 Africans are present in China within any one year. At this juncture, it is important to note that most studies on Africans in China have centred on the economic and diplomatic contexts of relations (Mathews, 2015; Mathews, Lin and Yang, 2014; Bodomo and Teixeira-E-Silva, 2012; Brautigam, 2009), while others on sociocultural interactions have emphasized more on divergence and conflicts rather than the convergence of cultures (Mulinda, 2015). More recently, Bodomo (2018: 76 -77) posited the Bridge Theory of Diaspora Interactions in China, in which he advocated for more studies on the cultural contents and habits of both Africans and Chinese from different area studies. Among other things, he advocated that the African Diaspora communities be considered as bridge communities, which could foster socioeconomic interactions between their home countries and China.

This study thus latches onto the concept of bridge communities in considering Diaspora communities as culture carriers, while focusing more on the points of cultural convergence in Africa-China relations. This is because intangible cultural components serve as basic guides for both macro and micro interactions. This study thus agrees with Bodomo and Teixeira-E-Silva (2012) that multilingual contexts necessitate identity formation and community building among cohabitants as noticed in the engagement of Diaspora communities with their receiving communities. As noted above, the Chinese have prioritized socio-linguistic interactions in the establishment of Confucius Institutes in different countries so as to facilitate exchanges between nationals of other countries, both within China and abroad. It is this approach that informs the focus of this study on the normative principles which essentialize the cultural habits of Africans and Chinese as contained in their languages, in the bid to create a counter narrative to what Li (2015a) referred to

8 Such difficulty often arise from inaccurate official documentation by immigration authorities especially due to illegal migration (at times tolerated by the state (see Mathews, Lin and Yang, 2014: 220), while there is also the continuous flow of nonresident economic migrants (Bodomo and Pajancic, 2015: 128).

as ethnocentrism⁹ in a neo Afro-Asian relational context. Subsequent sections will explore some fundamentals of the Yoruba and Chinese, ethics and establish the points of cultural intersections using some basic moral principles.

The Yoruba Ethical Worldview

Without the pretence of an exhaustive discourse on such a vast topic as Yoruba ethics, this study focuses primarily on the centrality of good neighbourliness to Yoruba social arrangements based on its relevance herein. The ethical system of the Yoruba is built around a cosmology, which conceptualises interrelations between the ethereal and physical as determinants of the affairs of everyday living. Moral principles are thus derived from an epistemic system that encapsulates a holistic conception of the universe as fundamentally embodied in the Ifa¹⁰ Corpus, a system of divination with anecdotes and adages providing explanations and guidance for the commune and individuals within it. In line with Akintoye's (2010: 34) submission, the Yoruba codes of conduct are primarily informed by belief in the afterlife, which demands conformity to high ethical standards, including exhibiting the virtues of honesty and trustworthiness while on earth in order to have a "high quality of life" thereafter.

The inculcation of virtue starts from the familial terrain; wherein, within closely knitted extended family arrangements, the traditional Yoruba compounds serve as informal spaces for moral education, during which evenings are used for handing on both ethical instructions and general education to children in courtyards within each homestead (Akintoye, 2010: 37). In a consciously gerontocratic context, respect for the elderly is prioritized. Nonetheless, the elderly are expected to always reciprocate this gesture to keep a balance within the commune. Such expectations are often captured during rituals when "respectful references" to "those who had gone before" and "those who are coming after" are made. Johnson (1921: 121) corroborated this when he clarified that inferiors were customarily obliged to respect their superiors in age and status, meaning these two indices were important in attaining the position of an elder. Lijadu (1929: 11) captured this in his documentation of Ifa, through the saying *bí ọmọ bá tẹriba fún bàbá rẹ, ohun gbogbo tí ó bá n nàwọ lé á máa gún régé, iwà rẹ a sì máa tutù pẹşẹ-pẹşẹ; bí aya bá tẹriba fún ọkọ a sì jèrè bọ*. This translates as: if a child honors the father, all that s/he embarks

9 Li (2015a) explains this as a subtle form of discrimination, which differs from racism in terms of forceful domination and exploitation.

10 Fadipe (1970: 269-270) described Ifa as the Orisa of palm-nut divination revered as an all-knowing oracle consulted for guidance on all private and public needs (usually at a fee) by his devotees and the community at large. Ifa consists of thirty-two nuts (with three or more spots) used for divination by a priest and Ifa is usually worshipped every 5 days.

upon will run smoothly, and his or her character behoves that of a gentility; a wife that respects her husband is benefitted in the end. The saying also shows that within the Yoruba worldview, respect has its rewards with the blessings of being successful attached to it. In this respect, the Yoruba are well noted for their acts of curtsying while talking to superiors, usually the elderly. While the male folk prostrate or lie flat on their bellies, the females kneel in reverence. What is more, the importance of reciprocity makes greeting habitual among them; so much so that there are greetings for virtually all life situations, often prefixed by the phrase “E ku” (which literarily translates as “well done”). On the reverse side, Ifa maintains that there are dire consequences for being disrespectful to the elderly. As the verse goes:

...a dáfá f'áwọn aláìgboràn tí wípé, kò s'èni tí ó le mú wọn. Èétírí? Eyin kò mọ pé àjẹpẹ ayé kò sí fún ọmọ tí n na àgbà awo, àtẹlẹpẹ kò wà f'áwọn tí n na àgbà isẹgùn; ọmọ tí n na àgbà àlùfàà níbi tí ó gbé n kírún, ikú ararẹ lí ó n wá; wàràwàrà mà ni ikú idin, wàràwàrà (Lijadu, 1929: 49).

It forecasts for the disobedient who says that no one can discipline him/her. How possible is that? Do you not know that there is no survival for a child that beats an experienced cult member, those who beat elderly medicine men cannot tread long in the land of the living, one who beats an imam where he is praying is looking for his/her death. The maggots die in quick succession, in quick succession.

In spite of the importance attached to respect for superiors, it is important that every member of the community has their rights of expression and participation fully guaranteed and protected by the lineage head (Akintoye 2010: 38). Within the Yoruba ethical paradigm, there is a strong nexus between custom and morality as unwritten codes guide day to day interactions between members of the community. Offences are thus punished through social ridicule and/or physical punishment administered by a legitimate authority determined by the gravity of the offence.¹¹ Morality is deeply intertwined with religion as reflected in the administration of oaths during adjudication to unravel hidden truths about acts that violate the community, while retributive justice is reserved for the Supreme Being through the instrumentality of

11 The legitimate authority could be civil whereby physical punishments are inflicted, or divine, where the Supreme Being (Ọlórún) is invoked by the parties to ensure justice (especially where there is power asymmetry among disputing parties). Based on communal ethics, the family serves as the base for moral education and discipline which extends to other community members (either as individuals or a collective) where an individual creates disequilibrium by violating societal ethos (see Fadipe, 1970).

the relevant *òrìṣà*¹² (god) (Fadipe, 1970). The ethics of communalism which emphasize brotherhood, cooperation and collaboration are captured in proverbs that are frequently employed among the Yoruba for didactic purposes. Examples of such include *àgbájọ ọwọ́ la fi ní soyà, àjèjì ọwọ́ kan ò gb'èrù d'óri* (A collaboration of hands is needed to complete tasks, no estranged hands can achieve success), *f'otún wẹ òsì, f'òsì wẹ otún l'owó fi ní mó* (washing the left with the right, and the right with the left ensures the hands are clean) and *igi kan ò lè d'ágbó ẹ* (a tree cannot make a forest) among others. It is important to note that the extension of good manners and helping hands is not confined to the family and community members alone. As it is today, the embrace of modernity did not erode the importance of warmth that the Yoruba extend to visitors, even when they are considered subordinates. The sayings *ọnà ló jìn, ẹrú ní baba* (the slave also has a lineage no matter how distant) and *ibí kò y'átò, bí a ẹ b'ẹrú l'a b'ómọ* (both slaves and freeborn are mothered through the same process) aptly capture this important ethical code of common humanity, and the importance of treating strangers and subordinates in the appropriate manner. Fadipe (1970: 304) explained that mealtimes are specifically noticeable in terms of the display of Yoruba hospitality, during which unexpected strangers are invited to partake of meals irrespective of whatever quantity was prepared. While referencing the proverb *àjọje níi dùn* (commensalism makes a meal relishing), he noted that visitors from farther distances often enjoy special dishes from hosts as an emphasis of the prioritization of hospitality among Yoruba ethical values.

A discourse on Yoruba ethics would be incomplete without reference to the concept of *omólúàbí*,¹³ a generic word for a perfect exemplar of a thoroughly bred individual. An *omólúàbí* is expected to encapsulate the values of decency, honesty, hard work, humanness, selflessness and contentment.¹⁴ The *omólúàbí* is critical to the Yoruba sociological paradigm since the individual is a representation of a social structure from which s/he emerges (Fayemi, 2009), with more specific attachments to the family and age group. As such, the development of an *omólúàbí* is a communal responsibility aptly captured in the Yoruba adage *ẹni kan ní bímọ, igba ẹniyàn ní bá a wò ó* meaning it

12 The Yoruba tradition alludes to the existence of 400 + 1 *òrìṣàs*, often interpreted to mean their innumerability, with each occurrence often tied to activities of the relevant *òrìṣà*.

13 The etymology of the word has been subjected to debates by scholars with some references to the phrases *omọ tí Olú iwà bí* (a child begotten of the Lord of virtues) and *omọ tí Olú iwà bí (ẹni a kọ, tó sì gba ẹkọ)* (a child with a character of a well-bred) (see Fayemi, 2009)

14 Jamiu, Akeem. 2007. Yoruba Politics and the Concept of Omólúàbí. *Nigerian Muse*. from http://www.nigerianmuse.com/spotlight/?u=Yoruba_Politics_And_The_Concept_Of_Omoluabi_by_Hakeem_Jamiu.htm accessed on November 18, 2016.

takes a woman to birth a child but two hundred people (the size of the village) to raise the child. This Yoruba communal sociological paradigm thus fits into the common dream of the Africa-China project of a partnership to build a community of shared future. Its ethics are well suited to joint ownership and responsibility in ensuring that people equally participate in determining the destiny of mankind and preserving the world for future generations.

Confucianism and Chinese Ethical Symbolism

Just as the Yoruba reference Ifa as the authority for their normative ethics, the name Confucius reflects the source from which the Chinese draw their official codes of conduct. The word Confucius is derived from K'ung Fu Tzu,¹⁵ a Chinese philosopher, statesman and educator from Qu Fu, who lived from 550 to 476 B. C. His philosophy, which entailed the 'Ru' Tradition (the tradition of scholars), was adopted and secularized by feudalist regimes dating back to Han Wudi (140-87 B. C.), the emperor of West Han Dynasty, to consolidate their authority (Yao, 2000; Zhang and Schwartz, 1997; Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al., 2012). The Ru tradition was centred on three main virtues namely ren (humaneness), yi (righteousness) (Yao, 2000) and li (propriety) (Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al., 2012). The adoption of the teachings of Confucianism has nevertheless been accompanied by "critical inheritance" over the years, as suited to different Chinese cultures in order to take care of certain contradictions (Zhang and Schwartz, 1997; Huang and Gove, 2012). In essence, the acceptance of Confucius and Confucianism differ across the periods before, during and after the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Zhang and Schwartz, 1997). In spite of this, certain factors have remained constant over the years, and these include the importance of family, value of education and filial piety¹⁶ (Huang and Gove, 2012), similar to the Yoruba ethical context discussed above. Drawing from the three main virtues, Confucian ethical prescriptions also require that communal living is guided by Zhi (wisdom), Xin (honesty and trustworthiness), Zhong (loyalty), Shu (reciprocity, altruism and forgiveness) and Xiao (filial piety) (Yang, Irby and Brown, 2012)

15 This etymology is traced to the Jesuits of the 16th Century Europe who adopted it as they explored the Chinese knowledge system (Yao, 2000). Yao (2000) writes this as Kong Fuzi meaning Master Kong in reverence for Kong Qui or Kong Zhongni and puts the period of his existence as 557-479 BC, while Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al. (2012) dates the period as 551-479 BC.

16 Filial piety represents the respect derived from children by their parents which has a lot of implication for the social harmony of the larger community. This is part of the hierarchical ethical system of five basic levels of human relations including father-son, emperor-subject, husband-wife, elder-younger, and friend-friend. See Huang and Gove (2012) and Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al (2012).

The controversy surrounding the acceptance of Confucius and his teachings is traceable to his mission as the purveyor of the old tradition and guide for the chaotic feudalist state in trying to illuminate the Dark Age. He advocated for the adoption of moral virtues as against punitive laws to ensure good governance (Yao, 2000). The symbolism of Confucius' personality in China has since remained of great relevance. The institutionalisation of his teachings entailed the creation of the Chinese Association of Confucius Study in Qu Fu during the post-revolutionary regime of Deng Xiaoping. The teachings were then adapted to the four modernisation sectors of industry, agriculture, national defence, and science and technology (Zhang and Shwartz, 1997). The central pedagogic theme of Confucianism to its followers is the importance of living by the Principles of Heaven and Earth, and recreating these principles in the maintenance of societal progress and political order. The central theses of these doctrines are that goodness can be taught and learnt; and that it is only through wisdom that there could be harmony and peace in the society (Yao, 2000; Huang and Gove, 2012). The Chinese are therefore committed to the study and transmission of the ancient classics of Confucianism, which has spread across East Asia, notably to Korea, Japan and Vietnam (Yao, 2000; Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al., 2012), and translated to a global ambition in recent times with the establishment of cultural centres abroad. As with the demand for reciprocity among the Yoruba, the flow of Confucian ethics encapsulates the transmission of wisdom, responsibility and benevolence from the superior to his subordinates, while the subordinates display obedience, loyalty and respect to their superiors (Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al, 2012).

The spread of Confucianism, thus, reaches beyond the continental boundaries of Asia to other parts of the world including North and South America, the Middle East, Europe and Africa, amongst other places, where the Chinese Diaspora serve as the cultural bridge between their host nations and countries of origin. Huang and Gove (2012) maintained that in North America, for instance, Chinese societies remain guided by the tenets of Confucius in their daily dealings. They exemplified this by examining the priority given to education, which aligns with Confucius' societal stratification model,¹⁷ and the primary role given to the family (parents) in terms of the child's education (see also Ersheng Gao, M.D. et al., 2012). It follows therefore that although there are other ethical schools of thought in China, including Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism remains foundational and most influential with reference to the behavioural patterns of the Chinese both at home and in the Diaspora. The increasing presence of the Chinese in Nigeria and vice versa

17 The scholars (*Shi*) were said to be at the highest level of the strata followed by the farmers (*nong*) then the workers (*gong*) and lastly the Businessmen (*shang*).

thus necessitate a study of points of cultural convergence in countering pre-conceived stereotypes leading to mutual suspicion of one by the other. In line with Bodomo's (2018) notion of the Diaspora as bridge communities, it is important to concentrate on how immigrants from both ends can leverage on cultural similarities in promoting Nigeria-China relations. This study thus focuses on the cultural content of the interactions, with the position that micro level engagements are significant for sustaining high-level relationships in building a community with a shared future in the Global South.

Sino-Yoruba Cultural Intersections

Ren / Š'èniyàn (Humaneness)

From *the Analects of Confucius*, Ren is considered as a fundamental principle of Confucianism and can simply be defined as love (Yang, Irby and Brown, 2012). Within this context, it symbolises an aspiration to having a perfect moral standing through a genuine consideration for the other (Yang, Irby and Brown, 2012). The Yoruba equivalence of this is Š'èniyàn, which implies having a humane personality. On this rests the basic ethical doctrine for the consideration of the ethical persona within the Yoruba culture as captured in the concept of "Ọmọlúàbí," one with high moral value and good standing in the society. This principle finds its equivalence as universal of the Kantian categorical imperative: "Do not do unto others what you do not want them to do to you." The emphasis on Ren is reflected in one of the sayings of Confucius who maintained that the "nobility of virtue is more important than the nobility of birth," thus requiring that every human person act in a noble and respectable manner. The Yoruba maintain the same stance through the maxim which states that iwà rere sàń ju wúra àti fàdákà lẹ, which translates as "good behaviour is more profitable than gold and silver" (gold and silver within this context being used in reference to nobility and wealth). Within both cultural contexts, the word Ren and ọmọlúàbí encapsulate the concepts of "benevolence, charity, humanity, kindness, goodness, humaneness, compassion, pity, love and virtue" (see Babor, 2011). In the conversation between Confucius and Fan Ch'ih contained in *The Analects*, selflessness, endurance and perseverance are identified as key components of Ren, whereby the other comes before self. Fan Ch'ih, in his search for wisdom, inquired about the true meaning of benevolence. Confucius responded that: "The benevolent man reaps the benefit only after overcoming difficulties. That can be called benevolence." In the Yoruba ethical parlance, the rewards of endurance are contained in several anecdotes within the Ifa¹⁸ Corpus. For instance, the superiority of

18 The Dìlógún is a structured documentation of the Ifá Corpus, in which each of the 16 Odù contained therein is arranged according to the relevant themes of the human

Ọ̀bàrà-Méjì over the other fifteen Odù is based on its benevolence (Verger, 1989). As the story goes, Ọ̀bàrà-Méjì had invited the other Odù for a meal in spite of the fact that they had visited to mock him as a pauper. This left him hungry afterwards. However, the pumpkins that the other Odù (obviously oblivious of their value) had left him in gratitude contained precious stones, which enriched Ọ̀bàrà-Méjì and made life much more comfortable for him. This principle is instructive for Afro-Asian relations today within the context of building a community of shared future. Informal communication with Nigerian returnees from China reveals alleged exploitative economic relations, which for them is based on the Chinese cultural ethos. They have also been reportedly victims of arbitrary police raids which, for them, was based on unfounded suspicion due to their nationality. On the other side, interactions with some Chinese plying their trade in Lagos, Nigeria reveal that they engage in businesses with Nigerians with extra care due to the stereotype that Nigerians are corrupt. These mutual suspicions have rather led to burning bridges of inter-cultural exchanges within diasporic spaces and are thus inimical to the building of a shared future. In ensuring cultural literacy, the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative needs to draw on points of ethical intersections such as humaneness, where the other's interests come first. As applicable at the macro level of diplomatic engagements, benevolence is a very important virtue, especially when one considers the suspicions around the terms of Chinese developmental loans to African countries.

Yi/ Ọ̀dodo (Righteousness)

The Chinese word “Yi” stands for righteousness within the context of doing what is right (Yang, Irby and Brown, 2012). As Babor (2011) put it, the word Yi requires having to be forthright irrespective of conditionality or circumstances surrounding the events. It entails having a sense of duty and being responsible by doing “what one ought to do.” Within the Yoruba parlance, it is expected that each member of the community be guided by a sense of forthrightness even in the face of adversity. The adage that *olóòótọ́ kì í l'ẹ̀ní / l'ẹ̀ní* could be translated in two ways, dependent on the diacritics, to convey basically the same meaning. The first translates as “the righteous does not have kith and kin,” while the second translates as “the righteous lacks a mat.” Both convey the message that it is not uncommon for the righteous to be unpopular or poor within the community. However, s/he must remain focused and be guided by the principle of honesty in the fulfilment of social responsibilities. This is also in line with the Confucius teaching that “the superior man is aware of righteousness” while “the inferior man is aware of profit” (Babor,

body, religious system, social relationships and nature (Ayorinde, 2004).

2011). He likewise teaches that the motive of an action is what matters most rather than the result(s) of the action. In a similar vein, Yoruba ethics stipulate that *ẹ́rí ọ̀kà̀n*, the word for conscience literally translating as “the evidence of the heart,” is the most reliable judge of every action of the human person. Within such ethical considerations, *ẹ́rí ọ̀kà̀n* judges *èrò ọ̀kà̀n* (intention) in deciding whether an action was indeed right or wrong. As Confucius taught, “in his dealings with the world the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of what is moral.” The ultimate value of every action, as these cultures demand, is its implication(s) for the moral. This is also important for the transnational relations between the Yoruba and the Chinese diaspora, especially since the people-to-people exchanges are basically economically driven, even if there have implications for diplomatic interactions. The peculiarity of this principle is that it emphasizes the difficulty of maintaining righteousness even in familiar spaces. Expectedly, it becomes more complicated for the Diaspora wherein the communities operate in unfamiliar spaces. As Mathews (2015) reflected, clashes between African migrants and security agents in China are at times because they operate within unfamiliar spaces, especially in contexts where it is difficult to integrate with local communities. Nevertheless, being mindful of the need to hold forth in the face of adversity, as required by the *Yi / Ọ̀títọ́* principle, is important for acceptance and nullifying suspicion of diasporic communities by locals. This is key in the building of mutual trust, which is a vital condition for building and sustaining China’s global vision of a community of shared future.

Li / Ọ̀wà Ẹ̀tọ́ (Propriety)

Li is an encompassing system of morals including “tradition, customs, propriety, etiquette, politeness and legal rules.” It is the basis for building socio-political order in the community (Yang, Irby and Brown, 2012). The Confucian recommendation that this be done through the rectification of names (Yang, Irby and Brown, 2012) aligns with the importance that the Yoruba attach to names as definitive of a person’s character, and essential to whatever is named. This is captured in the saying *orúkọ ní ro ni*, which means that a name imprints character on the bearer. The importance attached to names among the Yoruba is demonstrated in the extant practice of naming ceremonies that entails a seven-day ritual waiting period during which consultations are made, and the name of a new-born is carefully selected. Such is the importance of this ritual that it is captured in another adage that *ilé là á wò, ká tó sọ ọ̀mọ l’órúkọ*, which infers that the naming process must involve family members in ensuring that a proper selection of a name is done for the child. This aligns with the Confucian insight that the name of an individual serves as a guiding principle for actions during his/her life process. The

connection between name and action is contained in the saying of Confucius that “a gentleman is ashamed of his words outstripping his deeds” (Confucius, 1979), which exactly replicates the Yoruba expectation of a man living up to his name. The symbolism of name within the Yoruba culture spills over from the individual to the community with which the individual is identified. This is based on the communal principle of the upbringing of every child which makes him/her the ambassador of the community. In essence, the name of the community must be safeguarded in every action of its members, who are expected to act with integrity. The project of expanding the people-to-people exchange within the cultural component as outlined by President Xi at the opening of 2018 FOCAC must take cognisance of the layers of representation in the projection of national imagery across different continents. With both Nigeria and China contending with the negative imagery being projected, especially by Western-owned media, the integration of properly oriented Diaspora communities into the bilateral approach would be a major driver for the successful implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. The Nigerian and Chinese Diaspora are already playing leading roles in fostering mutual understanding through entertainment and sports. In Nigeria, the commemoration of Chinese festivals in schools and cultural centres has likewise helped in projecting the rich cultural values of China through the activities of its Diaspora who serve as tutors at the Confucius Institutes. Continuities in this respect bodes well for successes of future partnerships between the two countries.

Conclusion

The importance of diasporic communities as cultural ambassadors in ensuring the success of people-to-people engagements cannot be overemphasized. The governments of Nigeria and China should thus initiate policies to keep them in connection with the homeland based on points of ethical intersections as explored above. With the 2013 declaration of the One Belt One Road Initiative, a new phase in the modus operandi of China’s interactions with 65 countries along the ancient Silk Road across Asia, Europe and the African continent was ushered in. With about 90 countries signing bilateral agreements with China five years on, this new support for openness within the global economic framework has a lot of implications for the diasporic communities of countries that are involved; especially within the frame of building a shared future through economic, political and cultural collaborations.

Against this backdrop, Muttarak (2017: 6) proposes the need to interrogate the impacts of Chinese migrants in OBOR countries by considering indicators of their demography such as size, composition and distribution. While this

quantitative analysis may be fundamental, this study posits that the cultural import of the Chinese into Africa has a lot of implications for ensuring the success of the OBOR initiative. Nigeria, as part of the collaborating countries in the initiative, remains a strategic partner to China, as it partly supplies part of China's crude oil consumption while providing a ready market for Chinese products with its increasing population. The growing economic exchange has necessitated the creation of economic development zones in Nigeria such as the Ogun Guangdong, Imo Guangdong, and Lekki Free Trade Zones.¹⁹ For one, the proliferation of Confucius Institutes across Nigeria has been misconceived in some quarters as a neo-colonial initiative with which China aims to colonise the country. This study submits that to clear this doubt, enhanced cultural literacy, through the realisation of the points of ethical convergence, is fundamental while drawing examples from the Yoruba-Chinese principles of humaneness, righteousness and propriety. This cultural consideration is fundamental, as cultural habits at the micro community layer of interactions largely underlie macro national diplomatic and economic policies. Though the socio-political climate of host countries remains an important determinant factor for cultural integration of migrants (see Muttarak, 2017: 10), cultural similarities are also important in facilitating integration through mutual acceptance. This presupposes the tendency of better disposition by migrants to imbibing local habits, settling into host communities, learning local languages, educating their children in the same institutions with the locals and intermarriages.

Conclusively, this study is non-purist as it acknowledges that cultural hybridity is a reality within home countries, and cultures do as well assume new dimensions within the Diaspora. However, such hybridities should not be considered as obstacles or entanglements, but as opportunities to explore points of convergence to facilitate cultural understanding. Further studies in the area of cultural convergence which explore hybridity are thus advocated in ensuring the successes of operationalizing the building a shared future.

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¹⁹ See List of Free Trade Zones in Nigeria. Accessed from <http://www.nigeriatradehub.gov.ng/Portals/0/Documents/LIST%20OF%20FREE%20TRADE%20ZONE%20IN%20NIGERIA.pdf> on October 18, 2017.

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