Harmonious racism

THE CHARGE OF NEW COLONIALISM has two aspects, which are not completely compatible with each other. Hilary Clinton articulates one of them best when she criticizes that the Chinese assume the role of “harmonious racism.” Officially, the call for peaceful coexistence of different political systems symbolizes China’s normative foreign policy and constitutes China’s soft power in the developing world in general, and in Africa in particular. Socially as well as culturally, however, the Chinese display a racist attitude toward the darker-skinned Africans, despite the fact that racism leads neither to policy discrimination practically, nor does racism constrain China from treating African nations as ideological, strategic, and global governance allies. On the one hand, China’s African policy is characterized by classic realism, in that China does what most other major powers do in Africa. They seek economic opportunities in terms of resources, market, and labor. On the other hand, China manifests a contrast in its pursuit of a harmonious world with due respect to cultural differences. As a result of China’s preoccupation with harmony and aid, its concessions to African nations are made at the state level, even if racism influences its policies from time to time at the individual and corporate levels. The rise of China as an advocate of harmony has caught the world’s attention. Meanwhile, with the seeming Sinicization in Africa, the question on the kind of soft power needed by China to achieve its goal, without causing anxiety among its watchers, remains. The concern is more pronounced especially in the case of realists who do not believe a word about harmony.

Sinicization and realism

Foreign and Chinese observers regard 2006 as the benchmark of China’s return to Africa, as China dubbed 2006 as the “Year of Africa.” The fast-growing Chinese investment, trade, immigration, and aid witnessed in Africa testify to the expansion of Chinese influence in the continent. At the same time, African presence in China is continuously increasing for various purposes. By and large, the Chinese believe that China and Africa are in a win-win economic situation. In addition, China gains significant new sources of energy supply, for example, but continues to provide aid to needy African nations. Their positions in multilateral organizations are usually mutually attuned. Their distance from each other rules out territorial disputes that still poison contemporary international relations in Asia.

Chinese enthusiasm with their opportunities in Africa is met with suspicion, if not antagonism, in some parts of the world. The debate over the nature of the seeming Sinicization of African centers on the concerns over the China threat. In the United States, the critics conceive the threat both in terms of substituting for American supremacy and impeding to the spread of liberal democracy in Africa. For local African writers, the threat is perceived in the alleged exploitative consequences of Chinese investment environmentally, as well as economically. That said, governments of African nations predominantly perceive China in a positive light, despite localized incidents, which sometimes generate a negative attitude among Africans. China supports and enjoys the support of African nations on most global governance issues. Accordingly, the multiplicity and varied results of Sinicization disallow any easy assessment. Hence, there is the call for sophisticated analyses.

Sinicization is, in part, Anglicization to the extent that the institution setting the growing Chinese presence in Africa represents and embraces market capitalism, which reproduces globalization and the liberalistic values underlying it. The China threat, felt due to China’s growing influence in Africa, reinforces rather than undermines certain American values and, therefore, rests upon China’s assimilation of globalization through its own manner of Anglicization, namely, marketization and privatization. Realists suspect that China’s motive is driven by profitability, which parallels mercantilism in 19th century Europe and blinds them from any socialist spirit of sharing gains squarely with local labor. The environmental consequences of Chinese ventures similarly follow the practices of their Western predecessors, despite consistent reminders by the Chinese authorities to behave otherwise. Most noteworthy to Western observers is China’s quest for energy. They believe that energy security concerns explain China’s ascension on the suppressions of human rights in Africa’s failing states. In response to the accusation that China supports African dictators for the sake of acquiring energy, the Chinese official rebuttal points to Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, who in fact used to be “staunch allies of the West” and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, who was never China’s ally but “a guest of many Western leaders.” In any case, Sinicization in Africa insinuates China’s Anglicized national interests, except that it is China, instead of the United States, that appears ready to take the lead in the coming decades.

Harmony

Another side of Sinicization that justifies the charge of a China threat to a certain degree is China’s consistent rejection of global intervention on human rights violations. However, China’s insistence on the principle of sovereign autonomy, which questions the legitimacy of intervention, has a much deeper cultural root than the critics are willing to take note. Long-held cultural values in China, embedded in Confucianism, Taoism, and even modern Maoism, share the wisdom of ruling by modeling, which is about preaching and learning. Intervention would be a sign of moral decay of the intervening party as it would signal the loss of its civilizational attraction. Much stronger early Chinese dynasties did not value intervention of any sort, either. Therefore, China’s relative power weakness in recent decades cannot fully explain China’s restraint for intervention. Nonetheless, China intervenes in a peculiar way. Specifically, it intervenes privately through persuasion, instead of punitive sanctions. Thus, Chinese intervention is heavily subjective to the personal faculty of its diplomats. Chinese diplomats mediate behind the scene for resolutions acceptable to both the global intervening forces and the local government. The purpose is by no means global governance. It is about avoiding crossing sides, hence harmony. Harmonious intervention ensures that the local government understands its own precarious situation under both external and internal pressures. Harmonious

International observers evaluate the expanding Chinese presence in Africa according to their own countries’ involvement in Africa in the past, as observed by a Chinese analyst who contends that “The charge of neocolonialism is in large part the West’s anxiety over China’s rising presence and influence in Africa rather than just a humanitarian concern.” Thus, China is being criticized for practicing a new form of colonialism, presumably to replace the old European colonialism.
China's civilizational soft power in Africa

China's civilizational soft power in Africa

intervention reassures African nations of China's continued support to the former's autonomy, and prepares a platform that could set the stage for the dialogue at the right time. In this way, the local government could give in without giving recognition to the norms proclaimed by the global forces, and therefore the process reduce their national perception of intervention. China has painstakingly applied harmonious intervention in North Korea, Myanmar, and former Sudan.21 In former Sudan, for example, China stationed a peacekeeping force for six years, and once intervention, Beijing could press Darfur to accept a relatively neutral alternative. All friend, China would be part of the peacekeeping to ensure its fair operation. Harsh provisions in the UN authorization on this Sudan mission were accordingly tabled at China's insistence.

For another recent example, honoring its non-intervention stance, China was the last to recognize the change in Libyan regime, despite the high cost of its slow response. Beijing refrained from voting on UN sanctions, but because, according to an official source, the wording of the resolution indicating the possibility of abuse did not warrant China's support, but the Arab League's wish for UN intervention had China's respect.22 China's non-intervention philosophy carried it to the point of yielding the rights to the opposing Libyan-liberall forces, for which are suspected by critics to dominate China's African policy.

In effect, Sincitization brings enhanced relationships between China and African nations, in particular, demonstrates a style of realism unheard of in Western international relations textbook.23 China is ready to pay for the preservation of autonomy of an African nation even for unknown reasons.24 China did not hesitate on the occasion of a lingering Beijing/Olympic political brouhaha to mobilize its national political resolve, which requires harmonious diplomacy. China adamantly opposed the proposed unilateral intervention in Darfur by the western powers.25 China did not yield the opposition at the risk of provoking an anti-Beijing Olympic campaign that labeled the Olympics "the genocide games."26 Furthermore, China has characterized financed large projects in Africa that were not aimed at profitability since the 1960s. The most noteworthy of which was probably talked in Tanzania in the past, and even was the Conference Center for the African Union in Addis Ababa.

Cajoling harmony comprises a conventional wisdom in China's African policy long prior to the critics' suspicion that contemporary China's calculated interest in Africa favors dictating the terms.27 In the case of former President Lu's visit to Africa from 1964-1973, Chinese foreign ministers tour Africa every year as no other counterparts outside the African continent have ever done. The Chinese style of realism carries the belief that outsiders cannot solve domestic conflicts, not to mention trying to solve the conflicts abiding by a pretentious universal standard of human rights. As long as a legal government is installed in the country, the Chinese principle of harmony is to cope with it within the scope of China's capacity. To do even slightly otherwise, the Chinese government relies heavily on the regional organizations to take the lead. Involvement of regional organizations was quite apparent in the case of Myanmar and the Association for African states not aimed at profitability since the 1960s.

In practice, nevertheless, Chinese soft power contrarily lies in the intellectual capacity to appreciate diversity in harmony. This is certainly evidenced in China's model in the South China Sea, where China's assertion of sovereignty is objective.28 China's soft power appears to be happening. The South China Sea is where China practices indirect and soft harmonious disciplining. Similarly, harmonious diplomacy may lead to a style of ambiguous balancing as regards global power. When global power appears to be imbalanced, China's diplomacy tries to draw a set of core national interests to sacrifice them in the short run in order to indicate its readiness to compromise. US arms sales to Taiwan is such a questionable area. For example, China's opposition has been on and off. The purpose of ambiguous balancing is opposite to that of harmonious disciplining, namely, to compromise without the semblance of compromising. Both are in line with the aforementioned style of harmonious intervention whereby China intervenes on behalf of the global forces for the sake of restraining them from really intervening. China does this by providing a seemingly acceptable compromise into symbolic compromise in the immediate run.29

The other form of harmonious diplomacy is harmonious racism, which is relevant in Africa. For the Chinese, learning from the Chinese institution, practicing Chinese medicine, and receiving Chinese investment pose no pressure on Africa's extant social system or lifestyle. Note the statement that "We just tell them the good practices that we believe. Whether they will adopt these or not, and how will they adopt them, it's up to them to decide. We have never asked African countries to follow China's model."30 There is no such transformation of values to think African lowest social status in a survey.31 Moreover, the lack of motivation to move from civilizational learning to cultural assimilation sometimes hinders social mingling and reproduces racism in daily life. Life like China and thinking like the Chinese carries the connotation to culturally complicate and to downsize of soft power that contrasts a different combination of liking the African way of life but downing the United States:

Liking China and downing the life together could enforce a style of soft power that contrasts a different combination of liking the African way of life but downing the United States.

with concussion in the immediate aftermath, does not appear to be happening. The South China Sea is where China practices indirect and soft harmonious disciplining. Similarly, harmonious diplomacy may lead to a style of ambiguous balancing as regards global power. When global power appears to be imbalanced, China's diplomacy tries to draw a set of core national interests to sacrifice them in the short run in order to indicate its readiness to compromise. US arms sales to Taiwan is such a questionable area. For example, China's opposition has been on and off. The purpose of ambiguous balancing is opposite to that of harmonious disciplining, namely, to compromise without the semblance of compromising. Both are in line with the aforementioned style of harmonious intervention whereby China intervenes on behalf of the global forces for the sake of restraining them from really intervening. China does this by providing a seemingly acceptable compromise into symbolic compromise in the immediate run.

The other form of harmonious diplomacy is harmonious racism, which is relevant in Africa. For the Chinese, learning from the Chinese institution, practicing Chinese medicine, and receiving Chinese investment pose no pressure on Africa's extant social system or lifestyle. Note the statement that "We just tell them the good practices that we believe. Whether they will adopt these or not, and how will they adopt them, it's up to them to decide. We have never asked African countries to follow China's model." There is no such transformation of values to think African lowest social status in a survey. Moreover, the lack of motivation to move from civilizational learning to cultural assimilation sometimes hinders social mingling and reproduces racism in daily life. Life like China and thinking like the Chinese carries the connotation to culturally complicate and to downsize of soft power that contrasts a different combination of liking the African way of life but downing the United States:

Liking China and downing the life together could enforce a style of soft power that contrasts a different combination of liking the African way of life but downing the United States.

With the rise of China attests to its peculiar style of harmonious diplomacy. China has painstakingly applied harmonious intervention in Africa. In response, China resorts to an ambiguous disciplining of aid and privileges to African states likely characterizes the support for Chinese positions resonates accordingly with the geopolitical relationship, as well effective in combination with the calculated national interest. How these ways of thinking combine, reconcile, or otherwise, will have to be the choice of actual people at all levels.

Chih-yu Shih teaches cultural studies and political psychology at National Taiwan University, and is also a student of civilizational politics in East Asia and intellectual politics pertaining especially to the races. He is Editor-in-chief of Asian Ethnology (cyshih@ntu.edu.tw).

Notes
Note on notes: All web addresses accessed on 5 May 2012
4 Anabelu A. Lemos and Daniel Ribineb, "Taking Ownership or Just Changing Owners?" in Manji and Marks, pp.64, 69.
14 This bias is well-noted by Bates Gill and James Kelly. 2007. "The Tenous Hold of China inc. Africa," The China Quarterly paper 37.
21 See note 1, p. 28.
24 See note 1, p. 28.