

# China and Africa: Getting Culturally

## Closer

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Cultural exchanges are dialogues between minds, communications of sentiments and ties of friendship between people. Cultural exchanges between different countries help to enhance mutual understanding and promote win-win cooperation. In human history, cultural exchanges began with the very emergence of culture. Africa is known to be the origin of Mankind, and together with China both are cradles of human civilizations with long histories and splendid cultures. Cultural exchanges between China and Africa can be traced back to a distant past. In fact, “As early as 2000 years ago in the Han dynasty period, China and Africa got to know each other and began indirect trade relations. In 1405-1433, the Ming dynasty navigator Zheng He sailed westward through the Indian Ocean and beyond for seven times, out of which he reached the African coast four times. Nowadays, the story of Zheng He's voyage is still counted in countries such as Kenya. The foundation of New China in 1949 opened up a new era of China-Africa relations. In May 1956, China's establishment of diplomatic ties with Egypt opened up diplomatic relations between new China and African countries.” (Assistant foreign minister of the People's Republic of China, Zhai Jun 2009). However, the Cooperation between China and African countries has often been portrayed as an economic one. Despite multiple exchanges in the areas of culture and knowledge production, not much is written about Chinese culture in Africa (and vice versa) or knowledge production interaction between both China and African countries (Mulinda 2015). Since the end of the 20th century, the China-Africa cooperation has been gradually oriented and rationalized; more attention has been devoted in the field of cultural exchanges and cooperation. Especially in the areas of culture and education (Yang Lihua 2013). In the past five decades, relations between China and Africa have grown in leaps and bounds.

This relationship has gone beyond political and economic ties, to cultural exchanges, deepening friendship between the two sides (Mwongeli 2013). At present days, the cultural exchanges between China and Africa have reached a new level and can be summed up in the following points (Chinese minister of culture 2014): 1) the frequent inter-governmental high-level visits. Only between 1997 and 2000, China and African countries have exchanged more than 200 government cultural delegations including ministers and cultural celebrities. 2) Performing arts groups visits. In the past few decades, performing arts groups such as Acrobatic Troupes, National Ballets, Folk Art Troupes visits between China and African countries amounted to hundreds of thousands of people. 3) Art exhibitions. In recent years, China and African countries have mutually held art exhibitions of all types and sizes up to a hundred times. 4) Cultural institutions is increasing in Africa, such as the Confucius Institute in Cameroon, Egypt etc., the cultural centers established in Benin, Mauritius, the Africa division of the China Central Television's in Kenya (CCTV Africa) and the Martial arts museums established in different African country etc. In China, more and more Chinese students have started to study the African culture in Universities and primary schools such as Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua QiuBing school, etc. Special cultural events like "Culture Day", "Film Week" and book fairs, etc have been organized. For instance, the "Algerian Film Week", the "Tunisian culture Exhibition" to the Chinese audience, the "Chinese film week", "Chinese culture month", "Chinese book Fair" to the African audience.

The 21st century's globalization and the rapid development of the Information Technology as well as the transport industry have brought together the people of Africa and China. Nowadays, it is estimated that more than 100 million Chinese people live and work in Africa (Li Anshan 2000), while around 30 thousand Africans reside in China (Mathews, Gordon & Yang 2012). The difficult coexistence between the Chinese and Africans either at workplace or in everyday life where the difference of cultures and behaviors result sometimes in conflicts have been pointed out (Serge 2008). The technological know-how, vital to the striving African industries still in an embryonic stage is heavily undermined by the language barrier. In fact the skillful Chinese engineers once in Africa are confronted with the French, English as well as local languages spoken by locals, and many of the translators hired within the local labor market are still in intermediary stage of the Chinese languages. Some of them despite being very fluent in Chinese language, are not used to the Chinese working environment and labor tradition. Therefore, overcome the cross-cultural challenges between Chinese and Africans are a matter of priority.

It is clear that China and Africa have enjoyed a long history of cultural exchanges, and that the booming and diversity of cultural exchanges between China and African countries in recent decades has deepened the ties between both parties and opened the gate to people to people communication and understanding. However, some challenges still need to be overcome by both sides to improve the outcomes of the China-Africa cultural exchanges and further strengthen the people to people relationship. It is certain that the future of China-Africa relation is bright and full of countless opportunities.

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