

An Investigation of Nigeria-China Cultural and Management Significance

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ABSTRACT

The China-Nigerian ties have gained momentum in the last few decades with china acknowledged as Nigeria's largest trading partner in West Africa. The trade mostly involves manufacturing, construction, mining, agriculture. To facilitate this trade, thousands of Chinese firms have invested heavily with some even relocating their activities to Nigeria. In terms of benefits, Nigeria has gained from job creation while China has profited from lower wage bills, improved government relations and local knowledge. However, although majority of Nigerian employees have benefited from China investments, discontents continues among Nigerian elite who feel excluded from Chinese top management (because human wants they say is insatiable). Similarly, the Chinese style of management has come under scrutiny as it differs from Western management styles that dominate Nigerian management following century long colonial history. This paper examines the China's management in Nigeria, its implications, challenges and solutions. The paper observes that there is a strong relationship between Nigeria and Chinese cultures as both are hedged on similar cultural value system as Ubuntu and ren-yi-li respectively. The paper further acknowledges the impact of Western management and calls a hybrid management that is appropriate for African development.

Keywords: China, Cultural value, Development, Management, Nigeria, Resource valuables, Skill transfer, Western Culture

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Nigerian newest suitor, China, has emerged as one of the largest trading partner, political alliance and technological expert over the past decade. Trade between China and Nigeria augmented from \$2 billion in 2005 to \$6.5 billion in the first five months of 2017 an increase of 33 percent over the same period. The volume represented 7.6 percent of the total trade between China and Africa and 36.4 percent of total trade volume between Nigeria and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). China's investment in Nigeria grew by 27 percent in 2016, China has already invested or financed over \$22 billion worth of projects in Nigeria, while more than \$23 billion worth of projects are ongoing. Accompanying the investment, China's technology management and experienced personnel have also entered Nigeria which greatly boosts the diversification and development of Nigeria economy. Nigerians have a strong enthusiasm to welcome Chinese investment which they see as one of the pillar improving domestic economy. Scholars have argued that china is not a threat to Nigeria since it imposes no condition to Nigerian government

before signing contract and is willing to invest where Western Countries are unwilling to invest, because where others go and see no opportunity, there Chinese sees great opportunity, for instance in physical infrastructure, industries and Agriculture (Dollar, 2016). It is also notable that African governments of which Nigeria is part of believe that closer political and economic relationship with China is an assurance of future economic prosperity and progressive development (Muriithi, 2017). The Nigerian government also finds recognition and equal treatment when dealing or negotiating with Chinese government compared to Western countries that mostly threatens Nigerian government as former subjects and impose strict terms and conditions.

China's presence in Nigeria is of three purpose, namely to attain resources valuable for its development goals, find market for its fast growing economy, and finally, for political alliance meant to fulfill Chinese dream of becoming a global Influence (Gill, Huang & Morrison, 2007). Generally, Africa of which Nigeria is not excluded sees China as a model of modernization that is sensitive and responsive to

her needs in respectable manner compared to states (Muriithi, 2017). Recently China underwent thorough industrialization and modernization and therefore is seen as good model of Nigeria since both are developing countries facing basically similar challenges.

Despite the arrangement for or against China's presence in Nigeria, the emergence of China as an economic giant is shaping the economic formula and presents a new development paradigm for Nigeria and the world. Rather than term China a threat to its existence, Nigeria needs to maximize arising from China engagement in the Country. According to Jackson *et al.* (2011), lack of cross-cultural understanding on parts of Chinese managers, government officials, workers and communities can hinder effective management greatly. This paper examines Chinese management in Nigeria, its implications, associated challenges and solutions. The overall objective is to develop a theoretical managerial foundation for effective China-Nigeria organizational management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

China and Nigeria Job Market

Nigeria is a regional economic and self-determined powerhouse that is strategically located in Africa. The nation is resources-endowed with a young and growing population over 200 million and estimated to be 203 million in 2025. Nigeria's resources have increased job opportunities and human capital demand as it attracts both foreign and domestic investors. By 2030, more than 34 million households, with more than 180 million people, are likely to be earning over \$7,500 yearly, making the nation aspiring consumers. This implied a potential rise in consumption from \$388 billion yearly to \$1.4 trillion – a prospect that is already attracting investments by multinational consumer-goods producers and retailers.

Although there are majority of local Nigerian employees who have benefited from Chinese presence in Nigeria, the proportion of Nigerian top managers, engineers and other professionals is far less compared to their Chinese counterpart (Sautman, 2015). There is continued discontent among Nigerian elites who feel excluded from Chinese management. They have been resentful, though, unhappy with unbalance relationship in which China has taken proprietorship of Nigeria natural resources using Chinese labour and equipment without transferring skills and technology. "China take our primary goods and

sells us manufactured ones". This was also the essence of colonialism, Lamido Sanusi, the former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, wrote in the *Financial Times* in 2013.¹

Some critics further observes that the aim of China is to repeat exploitation practice done by Western colonies. For instance, Herbert (2009) terms Chinese companies in Nigeria as poor employers compared to other International businesses and organizations. There are numerous studies that have looked at the positive side of Chinese presence in Nigeria. According to Sautman (2015), it should be clear that the Chinese enterprises recognize the importance of localizing their activities, involving more local training in tasks performance and in bridging the gap between Nigeria and Chinese cultures.

Sautman (2015) further stated that Chinese firms in Nigeria have created more employment with 400 Chinese enterprises under study allocating four-fifths of their jobs to local Nigerian employees, thereby playing a critical role in poverty reduction and economic growth. Specific industries such as extraction, construction and manufacturing industries have employed between 75% and 80% of local workers. However, it is not only the Nigerian workforce that benefits from employment workforce, to the contrary, Chinese enterprise have associated lower wage bills, improved government relations and acquisition of local knowledge to strengthen relationship between China and Nigeria.

To empower Nigerian workforce, the Chinese government and enterprises are said to be committed to training Nigeria professional. In terms of specific skill transfer and human capital development, China has granted scholarships to many Nigerian citizens in different field of study and at different level including studying of their Language which is studied both in Nigeria and in China, this will in turn empower Nigerian citizens as language barrier will no longer be a major problem between the two countries.

Biased Western Management Ideology

Management has been defined as the practice, and science of getting things done through others (Cole, 2004). It has also been defined as

¹China in Africa: The New Imperialists. The New Yorker, 12 June, 2013. Retrieved 4 October, 2019 from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/china-in-africa-the-new-imperialists>

the function of planning, organizing, leading and controlling (Samson & Daft, 2012). Abedi (2001) has noted that management is the development of human and non-human resources over work.

The advent of management can be traced as far back as 5000 BC when small societies planned, organized, led and manages their domestic and commercial affairs (Olusoji & Ogunkoya, n.d.). The advocate of the contemporary management theories was mostly 20th century Western scholars who sought to find solutions to prevailing management and production crises in Europe and America. Having come from engineering, economic and classical sociological background, the founders emphasized on individualist approach to work and overall productivity. Tasks were divided and assigned to individuals whose performance were measured against established standards (Samson & Daft, 2012). The methods of management were basically strict supervision and monitoring of activities performed with associated rewards and punishments to good performers and poor performers respectively (Fashoyin, 2005; Mangaliso, 2001).

The contemporary management principles applied in Nigeria are Western based with little relevancy to Nigerian cultural orientation, management, and human development needs. The advocates of these theories believe that since they have worked in Europe and America, they can be duplicated in other parts of the world including Nigeria. From an African perspective, people are a community and there is no room for individual survival as this dehumanizes relationship and performance (Mbigi, 1995). Likewise, Nigeria do not treat people as economic tools and often pay attention to group performance (George, Owoyemi & Okanlawon, 2012). For the Africans, like their Asian counterparts, the person doing a task is more important than the task being performed (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2011). However, with no background to Western management principles and practices, many Nigerians often find it difficult to adopt Western management styles thereby explaining major failure and conflicts among Nigerian firms, cooperation and governments.

Nigerian Management

The Nigerian management is a product of Western theories, practices and ideologies while the Western countries have written much about other countries and their style of management,

for instance, Chinese management theories, little research has been done on Nigeria management. The Western interest on China was basically due to its huge market compared to Nigeria which seemed to have no managerial value to Western colonies. To fill the gap in Nigerian management, the Western countries imposed their management styles to Nigeria, its people, businesses and governments.

The modern Nigerian management is a product of post-colonial, post-instrumental and Nigerian renaissance. The post-colonial era reflected management styles based on colonial legacy and practices imposed upon Nigerian by their colonial masters and was characterized with fatalistic, reactive, authoritarian, resistance to changes (Jackson, 2004). The style which was adopted by Nigerian governments and other organizations was not effective and was termed as ineffective and prone to corruption. To improve and make workable, the Western governments and multinational organizations modified it by introducing a post-instrumental management style, an approach that emphasized on results and objective achievement. Though the style was termed as more people friendly as it balanced people and performance, the approach still considered people as “resources” like capital, land and buildings (Jackson, 2002), making it less effective in the management of people (Jackson *et al.*, 2011).

In recent years, the call for Nigerian renaissance has gained momentum, the approach calls for Nigerians to liberate themselves from all form of colonialism and post-colonial ideologies and adoption of Nigerian driven value systems. The approach is being exercised across the continent among communities and businesses with the education sector targeted as prime to entrenchment of the Afro-centric movement (Mbigi, 2000; Ntibagiriwa, 2003; Obiakor, 2005).

Nigerian Management Dilemma

The dominance of the Western management in Nigeria is difficult to eradicate overnight given the lengthy period of colonial involvement and ruler-ship in Nigeria. The western style of management is well spread and practiced in many countries where Western education systems and cultures are deeply rooted and practiced. The education systems are based on Western curriculum with little application to Nigerian cultural values, needs of modern organizations, governments or development. In Nigeria, there is no difference between a

Nigerian, European or an American graduate as they all demonstrate the same values, which may be contrary to Nigerian value systems and beliefs. According to Iguisi (2009), the Western management models cannot be appropriately adopted in Nigeria without substitute to the predominant local cultural values.

Recognizing the importance of Nigeria initiated style of management, Iguisi (2009) suggested that suitable Nigerian models be developed by carefully studying successful companies in Nigeria and adopting their styles of management. However, unlike the Western management models, the Chinese style of management seems easily integrated into Nigerian cultures and is likely to gain favor than Western styles. The Chinese specifically emphasizes on group orientation, respect for authority, interdependence, maintenance of face and members' dignity and honoring others (Yau, 1994). These aspects are the same fundamentals Nigerian value across the continent.

To ensure successful management, Jackson (2004) has observed the need for hybrid approach to management. Such an approach should integrate important aspects of Nigeria traditional values and other world cultures in order to have an approach that fits Nigerian context and needs. No pure Western, Nigerian or Eastern style will work effectively in modern Nigeria given the dynamic nature of cross-cultural diversity, needs and perception.

Chinese Management Style

The managerial practice among Asian managers is the same, China included. A cross-cultural study on managerial careers between Japanese, Taiwan and Hong Kong managers found that managers in these countries are similar to those of other Asian countries irrespective of the nationality, organizations and industries (Baba, Granrose & Birs, 1995; Chow, 1995, Granrose, 1995). However, a critical look at the foundation of Chinese management style would send more light in relation to Chinese management in Nigeria.

According to Fashoyin (2005), unlike the Americans, Japanese and European management patterns, the Chinese contemporary management theory and practice have not developed into a system or theories. The authors that argue that Chinese management is at its early development stages although there are indications that the style is directed towards a commercial angle. What is termed as Chinese management have

evolved over five thousand years and is founded on rich culture, government influence, market orientation and Chinese foreign management styles. However, what is not in doubt is that Chinese management is based on Confucian dynamism, a form of intentional truth which involves sensible feeling, bounded rationality and guided by ethics (Mou, 1983). According to scholars and researchers, Confucianism started about 2,000 years ago and has seen progressive development ranging from the Classical Confucian the Neo-Confucian, the reformist Confucian to the Modern Confucian (Lam, 2003).

In terms of management, Confucianism is core to Chinese culture and has major impact on the management of Chinese business organizations and human resource management (Child & Warner, 2003). The Confucian principle have also influenced cooperation management in relation to ethics, social responsibilities and organizational culture (Lin & Ho, 2009).

The Confucian dynamism principle act as the main drivers for employee-self -enhancement, openness to change, stability and security and overall contributions to the society (Routamaa, 2013). The main principles are 1) *ren* (virtue) which denotes compassion and humanity, 2) *yi* (moral rightness), 3) *li* (conventions, customs, values, norms). The ability to possess the three (*ren-yi-li*) is termed as *junzi*. A person who possesses *junzi* combined with trustworthiness and wisdom is considered as a model for others. Whether in organizational structure, decision-making, procedures, strategies or treatment of stake-holders, the principle of *ren-yi-li* is expected. Similarly, masters and employees must conform to *ren-yi-li* principles in term of business practices, organization and how it is operated from management, marketing, customer relations to human relation management (Jackson, Louw & Zhao, 2011).

Best Performing Chinese Firms

The principle of *ren-yi-li* should be reflected in all Chinese persons irrespective of of their position in an organization or society. A Chinese person cannot be delinked from *ren-yi-li* in terms of moral, social responsibility and harmony. A study by Hay Group (2007) among 37 Chinese organizations singled out three unique competencies that make Chinese CEOs succeed in their organizations in China and abroad, all founded on the principles of *ren-yi-li*, namely morals, social responsibility and Harmony.

- **Morals:** A moral competency denotes a personality that does what is right irrespective of circumstances. The success of Chinese CEOs is also attributed to their moral and ethical standing. It is observed that when organizations have leaders with good morals, they are able to lay strong foundation for success. The Chinese leader are also said to have high level of moral standing making them stand high in a world plagued with inequality and unfair business practices.
- **Social responsibility:** A major focus of Chinese CEOs operating best performing and fastest growing business is their concern, commitment and attention to social responsibility. This involves conducting businesses while paying attention to the environment and industry, support regulations meant to enhance social obligations, avoiding unfair business practices and profits, and promoting social values. The result is helping to build a healthy and responsible economic system beneficial to both the industry and society.
- **Harmony:** Beside strong conviction to having high moral standards and practice social responsibility in organizations and businesses, Chinese CEOs and managers alike are associated with desire for harmonious operations. The harmony competency is an even important virtual given the complex situations involving other businesses, divisions, local and national government. With their advanced skill in negotiations, the CEOs strive for harmonious results satisfactory to all parties. With different alternatives being presented during negotiations, parties are expected to present and define their views but with a goal to attain consensus decision. Since the focus is on long term success and sustainability, the decisions are meant to benefit all parties, now and in the future.

Areas of Improvement among Chinese Managers

Though Chinese managers and CEOs have succeeded both locally and internationally due to their strong morals, social responsibility concerns, and harmonious competencies, they still face some challenges among them which include shortage of talent management, inability to create conducive organizational climate and lack of innovativeness (Hay Group, 2007).

- **Talent management:** Chinese organizations are said to experience high talent shortage.

This leads to sky rocking wages and high turnover as organizations compete for available talents. A study conducted by Hay Group among 30 CEOs had 23 of the rank talent shortage among the top three challenges experienced (Hay Group, 2007:5). Unfortunately, only few organizations put real effort to develop or manage organizational future capability for growth and success.

- **Organizational climate:** The creation of an organizational climate is the duty of top, middle and lower management. However, Chinese leadership and management is predominantly paternalistic implying a more directive style. While the leadership is credited for caring for the employees, emphases on educational and cultural values make the leaders rarely focus on visionary leadership. Leaders who adopt visionary leadership and participative approach are said to improve their organizational performance and overall positive climate as their employees are energized to contribute to the common goal (Hay Group, 2007).
- **Innovative:** The growth of Chinese economy and expansion worldwide has been attributed to the achievement-driven CEOs and government support. The success and growth is also associated to the “ability of Chinese businesses to replicate processes and operations, adapting them in order to deliver improved efficiency and cost” (Hay Group, 2007:6). However, with the rapid market expansion and globalization, the Chinese business like other world businesses are experiencing intense competition and decreasing profit margins. To overcome the challenge, the Chinese businesses must move away from adaptors to more value adding and differentiated products, a process attainable through innovation. The need to build innovative environment must be supported by legal, structural and economic environment (Hay Group, 2007).

Characteristics of Chinese and Nigerian Businesses

It is of great importance to point out the main characteristics of both Chinese and Nigerian cultures so as to shed more light on why Chinese presence in Nigeria is having much impact on the country; management and development (See Table 1).

Table1. China-Nigeria business characteristics

Chinese businesses	Nigerian businesses
Guanxi (关系) : This is known to be interpersonal ties or networks and doing business with only known persons.	Humanity: Shared values and based on group context or collective values.
Jiating (家庭) : In this aspect, family relationship is recognized as foundation of good behaviors, support and prosperous businesses (Leung & Chan, 2003).	Family ownership: Most businesses are rooted in families, ethnic, linguistics, reflect regional history and founders values and vision.
Mianzi (面子): This refers to ones reputation or prestige be it at work, family or society. The value of maintaining self and other people’s dignity and self-respect is a mark of a Chinese business person(Leung & Chan, 2003).	Loyalty: Employees are loyal to their traditional groups where they seek comfort, in-group support, collaboration and take collective decision making. Individual ego and self-gratification are shunned (Booyesen, 1990; Matondo, 2012).
Lijie (理解): Customary etiquette and practices are maintained in all business transactions and indicate the values of Chinese culture whether dealing with fellow Chinese or other cultures. Irrespective of business situation, a Chinese still remains a Chinese. Protocol observation highly valued (Gu, Hung & Tse, 2008).	Business practice: In terms of customary etiquette, Nigerians value and respect authority and maintain prescribed rules and power distance. Depending on the occasion, they will behave accordingly, but observation of authority and set standards are a norm.
Conflict management (冲架管理): Chinese use non-confrontational styles in conflict resolutions. Specifically, Chinese prefer compromising rather than competing while at the same time favor avoidance to collaborating (Ma, 2007).	Conflict management: Conflict is discouraged, avoided while maintaining peace and enhanced through promoting internal harmony within ethnic, religious or professional groups (Matondo, 2012; Shonhiwa, 2008).

Table 1 indicated that there are more similarities than differences between Chinese and Nigerians. With much emphases on family orientation, relationship (interpersonal connections) and networks, the two regions believe in group work, social responsibilities and harmonious relationship. This implies that the two countries share relationship building before doing business as their essential strength.

Making Chinese Managers Effectively in Nigeria

Having discussed and dealt on the major similarities between China-Nigeria culture, management and work expectations, it is important to indicate critical areas that Chinese need to improve in their interaction with African managers and workforce. The improvement areas cited by numerous scholars are: language, ethics at work and poor working conditions.

- Language: Language is an important tool for communication if business must be carried on be it in small or large scale rate. However, though important to any business success, language was and is still a major hindrance to effective Chinese-Nigerian Communication. This can be seen with the business transaction carried so far between Chinese and Nigerians especially with the locals which will lead to the need of translators due to the language barrier. Therefore, the need for Chinese to train themselves on English speaking ability and giving more opportunities to the Nigerian citizen to study Chinese language both in Nigeria and in China should be emphasized.
- Work ethics: A conflict between Chinese and Nigerian workers arose from each group’s

behavioral patterns and expectations. Chinese managers’ perspective of work is based on their Confucian dynamism which expects workers to be committed in practicing ethics and sacrifice for the good of all other workers and the common good of the organizations. Many Chinese especially those working in the construction industries accuse Local Nigerian workers of not working very hard, not thinking about the company’s future, not thinking of their own future, spending all their earnings without planning, yet they have large families that depends on what is earned. To Chinese, Nigerian workers need to adopt modern work ethics and disciplines that have seen China rise to its current level of competitiveness in the global market place. Lee (2009:656) notes, “Chinese managers use their own hard work as example and demand similar sacrifice from the Nigerian workers..... “sacrifices are necessary for economic take-off, and workers are the implicit sacrificial lambs”. The Nigerian workers on the other hand have a different interpretation to assigned tasks. Through their influence from the colonial past regimes, many see the Chinese demand as exploitive and violating moral economic standards and labour rights.

This made them to react negatively to Chinese management at the work places. The need to have common understanding based on the expectation of both cultures will lead to a common measure of success and performance thereby making Nigerians appreciate the long traditional Confucian approach to work that is highly valued by Chinese. Training in this area would aid in ensuring that both Chinese and Nigerians see themselves from the same aspect and see each other, not as enemies but as team mates.

- Working conditions: The working conditions at Chinese companies in Nigeria differs from Nigeria working conditions. However, there are common practices and behavior that seems present in Nigerian citizens among them edgy labour relation, poor working conditions, lower pay and inimical attitudes displayed by Chinese employers towards Nigerian workers, unions and general unfair labour practices and human right abuse. Most workers are also employed on casual basis thereby missing benefits associated with permanent employment. However, according to Baah and Jauch (2009), the relationship is improving gradually as union become more recognized and able to address the varied negative issues affecting workers.

CONCLUSION

The presence of China in Nigeria has both positive and negative implications on the country's development. With Nigeria gaining more from Chinese investments, the need to develop good management practices that benefits both Nigerians and Chinese managers and employees is essential. Nigerian management has been predominantly Western oriented, rooted in the colonial autocratic and paternalistic practices and decision making. With Nigerian management being based on Western theories which did not reflect any Nigerian theory or ideology, a call for Nigerian originated and driven management style is gaining momentum. In the midst of these drives are the Chinese entry to Nigeria where they are having major impact on Nigerian cultures and businesses. The Chinese cultural value, customs, beliefs, and collectivist practice to a large extent resembles Nigerian cultural practice, explaining the acceptance of Chinese culture in Nigeria. Chinese presence in Nigeria have as well faced challenges and accusations based on poor working conditions, language barriers, and overall hardness of manager towards local

workers. An improvement in working relationship can be enhanced through good communication skills, hybrid management, talent management, creating conducive working climate and innovativeness. It is for both Nigerians and Chinese to work in collaboration as they stand to gain economically, socially, and politically, all leading to development of stronger partners. It is a marriage that must be made to work no matter the difficulties.

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