
THE IDEA OF HARMONY OR “HE” IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIAL OUTLOOK AND THE DYNAMICS OF PERFORMING NIGERIA CHINA SYMPHONY

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Harmony or “He” is a fundamental and central normative theme that has been clearly discernable in the trajectories of China’s long history, evolving and being refined through the ancient times to the present and featuring prominently in contemporary efforts at Chinese national rejuvenation.

From the point of Chinese history which spanned over 5000 years, the word “harmony” once carved on tortoise shells is not a freshly minted political jargon but a philosophical tradition. Philosopher Confucius (551BC-479 BC) expounded the philosophical concept of harmony without uniformity, which translates that though the world might be full of differences and contradictions, it is of supreme importance to strive for balance and achieve harmony.

An Italian missionary Matteo Ricci, who visited China more than 400 years ago, observed in his writings that the Chinese cherished harmony and peace.

The evolution of harmony in Chinese philosophical tradition contributes and enriches the philosophical outlook of historical dialectical materialism, which clarifies and provides the material foundation in the complex trajectories and gives social contents to harmony. Harmony is not an unattainable Hegelian ideal form of social mullion of perfection but a solid form to be achieved at various stages of human and societal development marked by peaceful coexistence and combinations of various elements working in complementarity and support of each other. Harmony

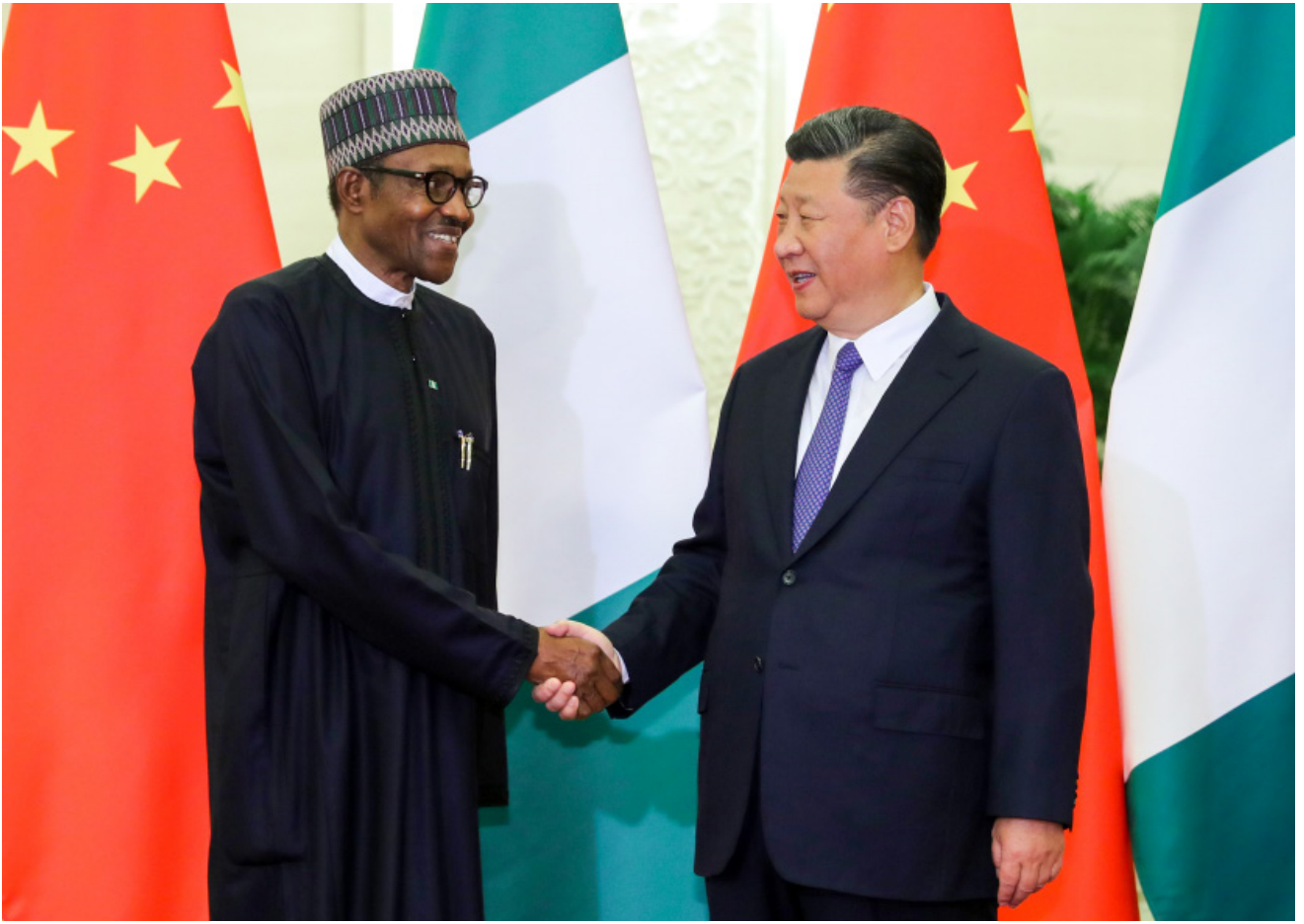
is achieved through unity in diversification and largely means coordination, combination, integration and peace among different elements in Chinese diplomacy; it is a reflection of Chinese people’s ethical principles.

The affable late premier Zhou Enlai played a vital role in formulating the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” in 1954, which are now the fundamental guidelines of China’s International relations. And in the early 1980s China’s foremost reform leader, the late Deng Xiaoping proposed the “independent foreign policy of peace”. Since the turn of the century, the Chinese leadership has pledged to take “a path of peaceful development”.

Former President Hu Jintao expounded copiously on the theme of harmony domestically and advocated the concept at the United Nation’s 60th anniversary summit, and proposed that multilateralism, mutually beneficial cooperation and the spirit of inclusiveness should be upheld to realize common prosperity and to build a world where all civilizations coexist harmoniously and accommodate each other.

At the end of 2005, the Chinese government for the first time issued a white paper on peaceful development. “Harmony” was described as the building of a peaceful and prosperous world considered the ultimate goal of China’s development.

Even up to this day, the world is by no means trouble free. Regional flash points, local conflicts and terrorist at-



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018, Beijing. (Photo/Xinhua)

tacks continue to flare. Recently, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which killed millions of people and disrupted the global economy and social exchanges through unprecedented disruptions of international travels, is a reminder that all human beings are aboard the same ship and can only paddle to safety together. Despite this brutal reminder, some circles in some parts of the world still think in terms of zero sum game or winner takes all. Global economic recovery lacks speed and momentum. There is cloud of pessimism about the future of humanity. However, it is common sense that with increasing connectivity, no one, no matter how powerful or wealthy, can remain immune from negative factors when facing such a grim situation. President Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy for a new era which is grounded on "He" or Harmony and cooperation illuminates a path of infinite optimism and should, as such, generate conversations and reflections and contribute to its global practice.

Former deputy director of China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) Mr. Ruan Zongze noted that the continuity in the strategies of different generations of Chinese leaders show that China, facing a complex and changing world, has always regarded peace and harmony as priority.

Within the context of the emerging framework of Nigeria – China cooperation in the building of a community with a shared future for all mankind, the concept of harmony has assumed more importance. The Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, H.E Cui Jianchun has already proposed an initiative with the outline of "sharing Chinese harmony and performing China-Nigeria symphony" in his introductions of the initiative. He explained that in traditional Chinese culture, people uphold the concept of harmony because it is generally accepted that harmony is the most important traditional value facilitating personal growth, social progress and a country's development. And concerning performing Nigeria-China symphony

he declared that symphony is the metaphorical reference to win-win cooperation between China and Nigeria. Explaining further the operational variables in the concept, Ambassador Cui Jianchun posited that at the level of citizens and nature, we advocate kindness and harmony with the aim to achieve the goal of “harmony in coexistence”, adding that both China and Nigeria have abundant human resources and vast natural resources. He therefore urged that guiding, encouraging, educating and supporting everyone to be kind and respectful, adapting to and protecting nature are the prerequisites for performing China- Nigeria symphony. The performing of China- Nigeria symphony at several levels with distinct features can lead to specific goals. At the level of family and society, he counseled for happiness and friendliness with the hope to achieve the goal of “harmony in interpretation”, pointing out that happiness and friendliness are the foundation of social stability. He considered these important human categories which would help establish stable and harmonious society as the basic guarantee for performing China- Nigeria symphony. Building on the prerequisites of happiness and friendliness as the foundation for social stability, he extrapolated to the level of nation and culture and advocated unity and concordance with the hope to achieve the goal of “harmony in diversity” referencing to the broad diversities of China and Nigeria which are estimated to have 250 and 56 ethnicities respectively. The top Chinese diplomat to Nigeria added that these groups yearn for harmony and cultural integration and concluded that promoting unity and concordance between nation and culture is the real value of performing China- Nigeria symphony. Further articulating the trajectory of performing China- Nigeria symphony, H.E. Cui Jianchun posited that the peace and consonance would thrive at the level of country and governance and inevitably lead to the goal of achieving “harmony in development”. As the evolving trend of human aspirations moves to peace and collective security, China- Nigeria symphony would contribute to the global orchestra in promoting world peace and improving the quality of governance.

The powerful metaphor of Nigeria-China symphony evokes the image of the considerable mileage that Nigeria-China cooperation has attained in recent times in bilateral relations and the wider framework of China – Africa cooperation under the guidance of its effective and time honored mechanism of the Forum on China – Africa cooperation (FOCAC). Since its founding at the turn of this

century in 2000, the FOCAC process has phenomenally changed multilateral cooperation between China and African countries, generating tangible inputs to Africa’s important need for economic development, social stability and inclusive and sustainable growth.

The concept of harmony and even performing symphonies would be meaningless without creating the material conditions to sustain it. China’s long philosophical tradition of seeking harmony and peace took a turn of practical enrichment with the founding of New China on the broad united front of the Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). In constructing modern China, the leadership of the CPC has created material conditions to turn the philosophical tradition of harmony into a material force contributing to the current drive to Chinese national rejuvenation, transforming the long traditional concept of harmony into a practical roadmap for generating common prosperity. China has taken the tangible steps to share its concept of harmony in Africa, not as mere philosophical reflections and musings but supporting the material basis to advance it.

Harmony is a shared aspiration of persons, peoples or communities to coexist together but these aspirations are best served when the basis of sustenance is continuously reproduced to meet the ever growing needs of the society in which people and communities hope to coexist. The objective imperative to coexist and to achieve harmony is not obtained by mere wishing it but through continuous and sustained efforts to achieve it.

Performing Nigeria-China symphony to generate win-win outcomes has been continuously strengthened on several diverse pillars and the conditions of harmonious lyrics, arising from it, are the result of complimentary and vigorous efforts of both sides to advance it. Despite the phenomenal mileage it has reached, it is still a work in progress but has, as its guarantee, the strong political will and mutual respect of the leadership of the two sides. The ever expanding symphony between Nigeria and China has expanded to various sectors.

China, as the second largest economy in the world, has continued to play significant roles in the socio-economic and infrastructural development of Africa, in Nigeria in particular, over the years. It is without doubt that no other country has had such impact on the African continent as that of China. A.U.S.-based management consulting firm, in its report in 2017 based on field research, corroborated the fact that in several key sectors, spanning from infra-

structure to trade and investment, China is clearly in the lead of other countries in its engagement with Africa. Her presence is everywhere and the impact is enormous which an ordinary person on the street can feel.

Nigeria and China established diplomatic relations in 1971, a relationship that has spanned over fifty years and has been of mutual benefit to both countries. China has, within a short period and through focused leadership and domestically generated policy choices, transformed itself from a poor developing country into an increasingly prosperous major country. China has become the factory of the world, producing most of the manufactured goods of the world and now in cooperation with Africa in the field of industrial and production capacity creating local industrial capacities in Nigeria.

Since 1971, Nigeria and China have continued to achieve and witness fast growing pragmatic bilateral relations through strategic partnership. This by extension has great elements of strategic partnership which include sharing common values and interests; mutual understanding and respect; specific areas of interests; and commitment to promoting the interests of each other on a win-win basis.

Nigeria's membership of FOCAC and joining the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further given impetus and increased opportunities for cooperation including connectivity, infrastructure, finance, trade and investment. In September, at the 2018 FOCAC meeting in Beijing, President Muhammadu Buhari acknowledged that Nigeria benefited from over five billion dollars' worth of projects from China. Through FOCAC and BRI, our partnership has resulted in the construction of the first urban rail system in West Africa with \$500 million. There is the 180 kilometers rail line connecting Abuja and Kaduna, which is a showcase of Chinese technology.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has become an opportunity to further strengthen Nigeria-China strategic partnership and raise it to a new level. Chinese medical science and expertise were deployed to help Nigeria manage and curtail the crises as it did for other countries. Chinese support has been critical to Nigeria's fight against the pandemic. The Chinese government puts human lives first, and the Chinese responded to the pandemic in Nigeria with the same commitment as they did in China.

The Chinese government donated medical equipment to various government offices to help fight COVID-19 in Nigeria and other countries in Africa and the rest of the world. We are aware that year 2020 was an extraordinary

year in which China really showed that she is indeed a friend to Nigeria. In the common fight against COVID-19, China and Nigeria supported each other from the very beginning. President Muhammadu Buhari commended China's efforts in fighting against COVID-19 in his statement of solidarity. When the pandemic broke out in Nigeria, China was among the first to offer help, and has sent medical supplies and shared experience on treating COVID-19. The mutual support between China and Nigeria vividly proves that solidarity and cooperation is the most powerful weapon to defeat COVID-19.

China has shown that she is a worthy friend and a reliable partner of Nigeria in standing up to the challenges. It sent a high level official to Africa despite the pandemic. Over the past 30 years, China has always put Africa top on the agenda for the first foreign visits of Chinese leaders and high-level officials every year. The visit to Nigeria in January 2021 by His Excellency Wang Yi, the State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China, was historic and significant as this added color to the 50 years of friendship despite the scourge of the pandemic.

In the last fifty one years of diplomatic relations, Nigeria and China have witnessed thriving cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Thousands of Nigerians travel to China at various intervals for capacity building. Those trained Nigerians return back and begin to contribute to the well-being of the nation. There is enormous potential in the area of people-to-people and cultural exchanges between China and Nigeria.

The number of Nigerian students studying in China rose greatly in recent times, which stands first in all African countries. Many of them are covered by a wide variety of scholarships, studying master and doctorate degrees in engineering, medicine, agriculture and other majors.

In the year 2000 at the first FOCAC conference, China declared the exemption of RMB10 billion worth of debts for relevant African countries. The 2018 Beijing Summit of FOCAC was another landmark as China again rolled out debt forgiveness and interest-free loans as a way of building trust and goodwill and lessening the financial burdens of poor African countries. China has built more than 6,000 kilometers of railways and roads in Africa, nearly 20 ports, more than 80 large power plants among others in terms of infrastructural development.

Nigeria as a country is a major beneficiary of this relationship under the FOCAC platform. The Chinese have carried out several infrastructural projects. Many Chi-

nese-funded projects have been successfully completed. Some of the projects include the 187 km Abuja-Kaduna standard gauge railway line which was commissioned in 2016. The 315 km Lagos-Ibadan railway line and the Itakpe-Warri railway line have also been commissioned.

In the history of the existence of the ECOWAS sub region, there has been no experience of light train, but the friendship has given birth to the Abuja urban light rail project which was commissioned in 2018. The light train is the first of its kind in West Africa as a whole. There are bountiful results in bilateral cooperation, such as the four airport projects in Abuja, Port Harcourt, Kano, and Enugu, with Abuja now enjoying brand new airport terminals, the Zungeru Hydropower Plant, Abuja Keffi-Lafia Makurdi Road, Lekki Deep sea port, Ogun Guangdong Free Trade Zone, Lekki free trade zone, to mention just a few. His Excellency Cui Jianchun said that the symphony produces great melody when harmonized. It is also logical that Nigeria, just like China, can attain giant development with great harmony across all sectors. China and Nigeria have rich cultures and enduring traditions, cultural diversity and mutual learning which are embedded in the lifeblood of both nations. The China-Nigeria relationship has spanned over 51 years and as such both countries have a lot to learn from each other.

Recently, the Chinese government also showed care for the well-being of Nigeria as a nation especially as we move gradually towards the general elections. Advice that brings about improvement and advancement only comes from friends who are sincere and loving. We see this demonstrated by China through her Ambassador to Nigeria.

His Excellency Cui Jianchun, the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Nigeria, has called for harmony and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria, saying these are keys to development and integration in every society.

Bringing together the Nigeria-China symphony he believes would further enhance the people-to-people ties between both countries. In his words, "Today is a very important day for China and Nigeria and last year we have talked about building the China-Nigeria Five GIST GDP Strategy. So, relating to the people's connectivity, today we are sharing Chinese harmony and performing the Nigeria-China symphony. The logic is that in China, we value, cherish harmony and I think harmony is international, and in China we have a long history of practicing the idea. So, I try to get across the Chinese idea about harmony and its four elements; harmony in coexistence, harmony in integration, harmony in diversity and harmony in development".

There could be no advancement in any society without both capital and human development. The Chinese government has over the years developed capacities of Nigerians in various quarters which are now yielding fruits in driving our economy in the right direction. I will limit myself to just five aspects.

1. Capacity building: In 2019, the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASENI) sent 60 of its engineers to China for four months training on manufacturing of transformers in Nigeria. A statement issued by NASENI said the training was targeted at establishing a fully indigenous transformer plant to be operated and managed by Nigerians with local content as priority. Those engineers would return to Nigeria to deploy different specializations acquired in China along the manufacturing line of transformer plant and High-Voltage Testing Lab. The establishment of Nigeria's indigenous transformers manufacturing plant would remove anomalies. In 2013, NASENI, through the Federal Government, signed an agreement with the Chinese Great Wall Industry Corporation (CGWIC).

2. Technical training in the railways: Through the established train services in Nigeria, lots of young Nigerians have been given well-paid employment. The large train station at Idu, Abuja Nigeria has been a harbor for employment for many Nigerians. The Abuja-Kaduna rail line and Abuja light rail were constructed by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) under the Belt and Road Initiative. The Chinese also trained many young Nigerians to operate as drivers for the train. Fatimoh Abiola is the first woman in Nigeria that is licensed to drive a train. President Muhammadu Buhari officially declared the full operation of the Abuja light rail on the 12th of July, 2018. He said transport is a lifeline for cities; as such he was full of appreciation to the Chinese government. He acknowledged the high-quality project, and expresses his gratefulness to the Chinese government and people for their support for Nigeria's development. With the construction of the light rail, the local community has benefited tremendously as nearly 5,000 jobs have been created.

3. Media exchanges: The media plays pivotal roles in nation building. It serves as mirror of the society. The impact of the men and women of the media profession is critical as messages sent to the public can either make or mar the society; as such they need training and capacity building. In June 2018, over 400 delegates and senior government officials from 42 African countries were in Beijing for

the fourth Forum on China-Africa Media Cooperation. The delegation from Nigeria is among the highest-level media participants. The Forum aims to enhance media cooperation and exchanges between China and Africa and boost the development of China-Africa ties in general. According to the former Deputy Minister of the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and Director of National Radio and Television Administration, Mr. Nie Chenxi, China, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, will continue to work for a win-win friendship with Africa, where all parties are satisfied with the developments and exchanges to ensure the long standing relationship is sustained. At the Forum, stakeholders from Nigeria and other African countries exchanged views with their Chinese counterparts on cooperation and the development of the media sector, with most calling for more support in the areas of digital broadcasting and content improvement. According to the International Federation of Journalists, China has sponsored journalists from 70% of low- and middle-income countries for media visits. The offer has found wide acceptance in Africa, and has helped in building capacities of media men and women. As a media practitioner, I have the privilege to go on media training in China on several occasions. I remember the training I attended sometime ago that accorded me the opportunity to study at the prestigious Tsinghua University. In 2018, I was among the five journalists from Nigeria who participated in the media training for top African Media Administrators organized by the Ministry of Commerce, People's Republic of China in conjunction with the China International Publishing Group (CIPG).

4. Education access: China is one of the major countries where Nigerian students have found support in term of higher education. The cost of studying in China is relatively low when compared with countries such as the USA, Canada, UK, and other European countries. With the knowledge of this among the Nigerian society, students who decide to study in China are less burdened. There are also many universities and government sponsored scholarships that cover the entire cost or part of the tuition fees. Some students end up spending nothing on their education. In 2019, the Chinese government stated that 512 out of the 6,845 Nigerian students then studying in China were on Chinese government scholarship. This was disclosed to journalists in Abuja through a press statement by the Press Officer in the Embassy of China in Nigeria, Mr. Sun Saixiong. He said the scholarships cover

students undergoing their master's and doctorate degrees in engineering, medicine and agriculture among others.

The Chinese government has also made provision for learning of the Chinese language here in Nigeria. There are many Chinese language teaching institutes in Nigeria, including, for example, the China Culture Centre in Abuja, the Confucius Institutes in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria, the University of Lagos and some secondary schools within the capital city, Abuja.

5. Cooperation in military affairs: In 2019, the Chinese government pledged N2 billion (50 million Yuan) in military equipment and training in support of Nigeria's counter insurgency operations in the North East. The then Ambassador of China to Nigeria, Dr. Zhou Pingjuan made the statement during the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), between Nigeria's Minister of Defense, Mansur Muhammad Dan Ali and Dr. Zhou Pingjuan on behalf of the People's Republic of China at the ministry of Defense. On the 3rd of December, 2020, the Ministry of Defense in Nigeria through the Special Assistant to the Minister of Defense on Media and Publicity, Mohammad Abdulkadri informed media men that the Nigeria-China diplomatic relations dates back to 1971 and has since been cordially enhanced by both countries with signing of various MoUs. They include provision of gratis military aid in 2013, 2016 and acquisition of defense equipment in 2019 among others.

The visit of Minister Wang Yi to Nigeria in January 2021 for the 50th year of our bilateral relations revealed a lot about our win-win cooperation. During a joint press conference, the two Ministers told newsmen China and Nigeria will continue to strengthen cooperation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and firmly support each other until the pandemic is completely overcome. Minister Wang Yi also stated that the two countries will continue to expand cooperation into areas including digital economy and green economy so as to achieve diversified development; the two sides will deepen military and security cooperation in efforts to enhance Nigeria's capacity in safeguarding national security.

The fundamentals of Nigeria-China cooperation are grounded in several complementarities between the two countries, and not least is the sharing of the same National Day on the 1st of every October and the synergy of the two countries in the performance of symphony and sharing in the Chinese idea of harmony to build a community with a shared future for the entire humanity. 