'China: A thousand feet tall tree knows its roots'

By Dr SANDE NGALANDE

THERE would be no modern Africa as we know it without China's numerous acts of friendship and generosity in Africa.

Amid the huge amount of negative energy towards China-Africa decades long and all-weather friendship, Africa should not lose its focus and must not forget where she has come from with China.

An online publication, "Why Africa loves China" (2019) characterizes this type of energy as a "Sino-phobic narrative championed by the West."

Sino-phobic narratives raise a strong danger especially in the young generation of distorting the truth underlying China-Africa relations.

In the era of fake news and lack of scholarly readership, people tend to believe all that is presented before their modern gadgets used to mine daily news especially on social media.

African scholars aware of the true characteristics of the Sino-Africa engagement are increasingly getting agitated by the distortions in the characterisation of the origin and growth of China's pursuits in Africa.

In my work as director of the Confucius Institute (CI) at the University of Zambia (UNZA), I have had a number of opportunities of visiting China.

During the visits, I have always marveled at the electric pace at which China has developed.

I and many teams from African Confucius Institutes have been given chance to visit highly developed modern cities in China.

Advancements in technology, telecommunications, road networks, the education and health sectors as well as the general infrastructure have always been mesmerising.

The careful mix between deep rooted Chinese culture, long and strong history, education and modern developmental ways provides moments of captivating lessons.

One is almost always mistaken to think there has always been such a prosperous and flamboyant China as presented in modern looks.

The known saying in Africa that 'China was once poor like us' does not make sense until you get into contact with the brutal reality presented in the history of China's struggle for independence and economic emancipation.

In all my engagements with China, I have never been so emotionally and spiritually moved by the reality behind the real struggle China fought than what I have recently seen.

The unveiling of the Chinese people'shistory a few days ago of the struggle, perseverance and militance against all odds before my eyes in a little but historically very important city of Yan'an was life changing.

I got an invitation to present an academic paper together with a team of African and Chinese thinktanks at the international symposium called "The Yan'an Spirit and Exchanges on Governance Experiences Between China and Africa".

It was organised by the China-Africa Institute of the renowned Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

I chose to present a paper on the theme, "The Yan'an Spirit and the Modern China."

The contents of the paper can be a subject for another discussion and being developed for a book chapter.

Until now, I knew nothing about the city of Yan'an.

When I set my eyes on literature about this city, I begun to engage the humble history of China and begun to draw strong parallels between China and Africa's history.

By humble, I mean China was an impoverished state in every sense of the word.

The city of Yan'an is celebrated as the birthplace of the revolution and the centre of the Chinese Communist Revolution from late 1935 to 1947.

The city was at the end point of the famous long march and became the base for the Rectification Movement which was the first ideological mass movement initiated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) between 1942 to 1944.

Yan'an was, therefore, the communist base located in the remote and isolated mountainous area in northern Shaanxi ("Rectification Movement", 2019).

The city was isolated but also surrounded by enemies, making it look up to itself for survival.

The venue of the conference was in the city of Yan'an.

We flew from Beijing and as we approached Yan'an, I begun to relate the topography as I could see from the plane's window to the amazing literature I read about the birthplace of modern China.

As the captain announced the beginning of descent into the city airport, we could feel the discomfort from the turbulence caused by the mountainous air spaces.

I could not see anything except a range of mountains.

I began to think about the areas where the Chinese People's Communist Party revolutionary guards were hiding in order to mount a spirited fight that would liberate China from both external and internal enemies.

China's civil and international wars are food for another article.

Out of nowhere, we saw reclaimed land from the mountains and we soon landed at a small, single lane airport by Chinese standards.

In China, everything is massive.

We were greeted by the warmth of the hospitality of the friendly people of Yan'an.

Both old and young are full of heart-warming smiles.

From the outset, no one would ever know such are a people that bore the brunt of a war frontline. The symposium was a well thought mixture of tours of historical sights and meetings.

As we begun the tours immediately after arrival, the stunning truth of the hardworking, self-reliant, persevering and resilient people of Yan'an took away all our sleep from the jetlag and the confusion in difference of time.

We were arriving around noon at which time most of Africa was just waking up.

A city with a heavy sense of loss in their hundreds of thousands, millions if you like, to the struggle of both political and economic independence, is home to the profound history of two great Chinese leaders; Chairman Mao and current President of China Xi Jinping.

Chairman Mao consolidated his leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in this region.

President Xi Jinping's soul and spirit were mentored in Yan'an when he spent his time of youth with villagers under Chairman Mao's policy that required educated youth from Beijing to spend a considerable amount of their lives living with villagers and peasants, eating what they ate and cultivating with them in the fields.

These are two great stories that we cannot exhaust in one space.

In his own words, President Xi, after returning to Yan'an more than 40 years but now as president of China, said, "It's so exiting to come back and see you again. January of 1969 was my first important step in life. In a major sense, my life started here, at Liangjiahe. Seven years of my life were spent here. Physically I left this place years ago, but left my heart here," (Liangjiahe Village: A story of Chinese President Xi Jinping, 2018).

During the struggle, Chairman Mao Zedong was successful in cultivating a resilient spirit in his followers by understanding the times he lived in and predicting the future, laying a strong literacy and educational foundation for the masses, emphasising hard work through agriculture, and nurturing peasant power.

In this period, he lived with peasants in the cave houses of Yan'an, hiding from enemies but also encircled by enemy lines, unable to seek or receive help from the outside.

The people, therefore, believed in him until he won the wars, united China and became the first leader of the People's Republic of China.

Under Chairman Mao's leadership, President Xi went to live in the same cave houses with the peasants in a politically liberated but still impoverished China.

There was hardly anything to share and hardly anything to eat, but President Xi helped the villagers to dig themselves out of poverty.

This is the story of the two great leaders in the same great historical city.

The city as we know it now enjoys both political and economic freedom.

It is a growing but prosperous city.

It's lifestyle is not necessarily altered but highly improved with people enjoying the prosperity together with mainland China.

On one of the tours, we got into cars climbing along the apple farms in the mountains.

At one point, our car broke down.

The vice president of the China-Africa Institute Professor Lisaid, "Don't worry my friends. Let's go into the apple fields and enjoy the apples as we wait for a replacement car."

The mouth-watering apples that have transformed the lives of the peasants are big, succulent, and delicious.

As you eat them, you can not believe this is happening in a land that had suffered so much and was almost brought to nothing by human disasters.

One evening, a Chinese friend from another city came to visit me.

He flew all the way from his hometown and spent a night at the hotel we lived in so that we could talk.

That evening, I walked with him to do some shopping in the city.

As we walked past a school, I could hear jubilant and prosperous sounds of children playing in the school grounds.

That day, we had just returned from visiting the Yan'an Revolutionary Memorial Hall where we heard gruesome stories of how the solders suffered to liberate China.

As they were encircled by enemies at one time, there was hardly anything to eat for the soldiers.

We saw in the memorial hall animal skin belts for wearing uniforms that were boiled and used as source of food.

My heart was filled with emotions in remembrance of the children of those soldiers.

And I said to my friend in a heavy voice, "It is unfortunate the fallen soldiers could not live to see their children flourish."

Then a thought by Lu Yao, one of China's greatest novelists whose works we had enjoyed in a drama, said, "The greatest happiness of life lies in the creative process, rather than the result."

With consolation, I said to myself, "They are the happiest of all because no one will ever snatch this history away from them."

China Policy in Focus (2019) confirms that "Egypt became the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with China in May 1956. By the early 1960s, over 10 African countries, including Morocco, Algeria, and Sudan, had established diplomatic relations with China. By the end of the 1970s, 44 of the 50 independent African countries had entered into diplomatic relations with China."

China showed her resolute need for engaging Africa politically, at the time Africa suffered her worst pains of colonial and imperialist reign of terror.

China did not join the imperialist reign at that moment but chose to celebrate Africa's achievements in gaining political independence.

This was evidenced by China's sending of Special Envoy Marshal NieRongzhen to attend Ghana's independence celebration ceremony as Africa's first independent state in Sub-Sahara Africa.

Soon after, Tanzania and Zambia became independent and established diplomatic ties with China. President Nyerere of Tanzania and President Kaunda of Zambia did not only want to help liberate other African states but also wanted to quickly find sustainable means of developing their countries. A TAZARA project was first of their major infrastructure projects.

They sought to naturally get help from their former colonial masters.

In disbelief, they were told by the West that the project was economically not viable, useless in other words.

When President Nyerere, on behalf of his friend President Kaunda, visited Chairman Mao in China, Chairman Mao said, "Tanzania is our close friend, if they grew stronger, we would become stronger…You have difficulties, so do we. But your difficulties, are different from ours. We will still help you build this railway even if it means we won't be able to build railways on our own land."

It is not coincidence that the recent 2013 Xi Jinping's first visit to Africa as president of China happened in Tanzania.

In his own words, President Xi said, "The moment I set foot on this beautiful land, I was overwhelmed by the friendship of the Tanzanian people towards the Chinese people. The government and people of Tanzania held a special and grand welcoming ceremony for me and my delegation, but also the profound traditional friendship between the two countries and the two peoples".

The later part of the speech was reminiscent of President Nyerere and Chairman Mao's engagement. The welcome accorded to President Xi was representative of Africans' feelings toward a great leader of a great country but also a great friend of Africa.

A different forum would be necessary for us to engage fully on the lessons Africa must learn from the city of Yan'an that are now known as the 'Yan'an Spirit'.

In this space, we sought to remind ourselves of a China we have always had; in President Kaunda's language, 'an all-weather friend'.

Chairman Mao's quote above and the subsequent construction of the TAZARA has been a hallmark of China's policy towards Africa.

China believes in a strong and united nation with strong (African) allies.

Her engagement with Africa has always been peaceful and in solidarity with Africa's dream to economically liberate herself.

When China had two apples, she was able to give one to Africa without conditions.

Now that she has several hundreds of apples, should we be surprised she is able to give more than a dozen to Africa?

Let us judge China based on her actions and not speculation.

As we celebrate China's 70th anniversary and 55 years of bilateral relations with China, we must not forget the journey we have had with a friend in need and in deed.

As the Chinese saying goes, "A tree a thousand feet tall knows its roots."

'The author is a director at the Confucius Institute at the University of Zambia ((UNZA).

• THE team of Chinese and African think tanks listen to a Presentation by Professor Cao Guxi, second from left, one of President Xi's contemporaries who has keenly followed President Xi's leadership development and worked with him in the 1970s as part of the Beijing Educated Youth in Yan'an.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF ZAMBIA

PROVINCIAL DELIMITATION SITTINGS SCHEDULE
14TH OCTOBER TO 30TH NOVEMBER 2019

Activity	Date	Day	Province/Town	District Schedule
WESTERN PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting1	14-Oct-19	Monday	Western /Mongu	Mongu, Limulunga, Senanga, Nalolo, Kaoma, Nkeyema,
Sitting 2	15-Oct-19	Tuesday	Western /Mongu	Luampa, Kalabo, Sikongo, Shan'gombo & Sioma
Sitting 3	16-Oct-19	Wednesday	Western /Mongu	Sesheke, Mwandi, Mulobezi, Lukulu, Mitete & Luampa
SOUTHERN PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	21-Oct-19	Monday	Southern / Choma	Choma, Pemba, Monze, Kalomo & Zimba.
Sitting 2	22-Oct-19	Tuesday	Southern / Choma	Mazabuka, Chikankata, Gwembe& Livingstone,
Sitting 3	23-Oct-19	Wednesday	Southern / Choma	Kazungula, Sinazongwe, Siavonga & Namwala
EASTERN PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	28-Oct-19	Monday	Eastern/Chipata	Chipata, Chipangali, Chadiza, Vubwi, Mambwe, Lumezi & Petauke
Sitting 2	29-Oct-19	Tuesday	Eastern/Chipata	Chasefu, Kasenengwa, Katete, Sinda, Lundazi & Nyimba
NORTH- WESTERN PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	4-Nov-19	Monday	North Western/Solwezi	Solwezi, Kalumbila, Mushindano, Kasempa, Mwinilunga & Ikelenge
Sitting 2	5-Nov-19	Tuesday	North Western/Solwezi	Mufumbwe, Kabompo, Manyinga, Zambezi & Chavuma
COPPERBELT PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	7-Nov-19	Thursday	Copperbelt/Ndola	Ndola, Luanshya, Masaiti, Mpongwe & Kitwe
Sitting 2	8-Nov-19	Friday	Copperbelt/Ndola	Mufulira, Kalulushi, Lufwanyama, Chingola & Chililabombwe
LUAPULA PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	13-Nov-19	Wednesday	Luapula/ Mansa	Mansa, Chembe, Samfya, Lunga, Milenge, Nchelenge
Sitting 2	14-Nov-19	Thursday	Luapula/ Mansa	Chifunabuli, Mwense, Chipili, Kawambwa, Mwansabombwe & Chienge
NORTHERN PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	18-Nov-19	Monday	Northern / Kasama	Kasama, Mungwi, Mbala, Senga hill, Mpulungu & Chilubi
Sitting 2	19-Nov-19	Tuesday	Northern / Kasama	Luwingu, Mporokoso, Lunte, Lupososhi, Kaputa & Nsama
MUCHINGA PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	21-Nov-19	Thursday	Muchinga/ Chinsali	Mpika, Kanchibiya, Lavushimanda & Nakonde
Sitting 2	22-Nov-19	Friday	Muchinga/ Chinsali	Chinsali, Shiwan'gandu, Isoka Chama & Mafinga
CENTRAL PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	25-Nov-19	Monday	Central/ Kabwe	Kabwe, Kapiri mposhi, Ngabwe, Chibombo, Chisamba & Itezhi-tezhi
Sitting 2	26-Nov-19	Tuesday	Central/ Kabwe	Mkushi, Luano, Serenje, Chitambo, Mumbwa & Shibuyunji
LUSAKA PROVINCE DELIMITATION SITTING				
Sitting 1	29-Nov-19	Friday	Lusaka / Lusaka	Lusaka, Kafue, Chilanga, Luangwa,
Sitting 2	30-Nov-19	Saturday	Lusaka / Lusaka	Chongwe, Rufunsa & Chirundu
	1-Dec-19	Sunday	END OF PROVINCIAL SUBMISSIONS	

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