

AFRICAN UNION AGENDA 2063 AND ACHIEVING MODERNISATION VISION FROM CHINA'S EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper examines the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Africa's vision for modernization learning from China's experience. The paper adopted secondary method for data collection, and findings show that, China's relationship with Africa has a complex history that dates back to ancient times, reaching notable peaks during the Ming dynasty. It was not until the establishment of the People's republic of China in 1949 that a coherent strategic approach towards Africa began to develop, primarily aimed at countering Western imperialism. The engagement with Africa was characterized by a pragmatism that sought sustainable economic development, market transformation, and flexible collaboration. The Chinese model of development has garnered interest as a potential blueprint for African countries. The approach underscores the importance of infrastructure, strategic planning, and partnerships that prioritize equitable terms of engagement, contrasting sharply with the often-prescriptive models offered by Western governments and their agencies. The paper concludes that, China's rapid economic growth, which has paved the way for Chinese modernization, has a unique approach to development, combining elements of planning and market-oriented reforms. China has not only been modernizing its economy, but also has become a significant partner of many developing countries, including African countries, in their development efforts. The relationship between China and Africa in the context of modernization is worth exploring, as it has the potential to reshape the global economic landscape, where Africa should follow China closely for experience sharing.

Keywords: experience-sharing, Modernization, Africa's Vision, infrastructure build-up, Global Development Initiative

Introduction

China's modernization experience offers valuable lessons for Africa, particularly in areas like agricultural development, infrastructure, and economic diversification. China's engagement with Africa has been marked by a significant focus on modernization efforts across various sectors, ranging from infrastructure development to educational exchanges. The past few decades have seen China emerge as a key player in Africa's economic landscape, with extensive investments and development projects aimed at fostering growth and sustainable development on the continent. These modernization efforts have been characterized by initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to enhance connectivity and economic cooperation between China and African nations. Chinese investments in Africa span diverse sectors, including transportation, energy, telecommunications, and education. The

construction of railways, roads, and ports has been a cornerstone of China's infrastructure development projects in Africa, facilitating of renewable energy sources in Africa, contributing to efforts to address climate change and promote sustainable development.

The current African model of development is the integration of many fragmented post-colonial polities into larger groupings, initially for purposes of economy of scale for trade, investment, and infrastructure development. African countries have long acknowledged that with generally low per capita income, vast but untapped natural resources and single-commodity dependence, they cannot individually sustain growth and development within the global economy. The continent has the largest mineral deposits in the world in terms of quantity and diversity and, despite being home to the largest number of least-developed countries, Africa the second fastest growing economy after Asia, growing at an average five percent per annum in recent years, but challenges of modernization always perpetuate and destroy the future of Africa in global order.

Therefore, this paper neither intends to compare China's experience in modernization and Africa, nor to analyse China's experience, but to highlight some of the lessons Africa would learn from China's modernization and how the lessons should be applied to address African Union's Agenda 2063. This requires a clear account of the Chinese experience which, although unique in many ways still affords some interesting potential opportunities in many parts of Africa. After briefly introduction, the paper seeks to discuss China's experience in Modernization, lessons of China's modernization for Africa and applications of lessons to African Union's Agenda 2063.

Objectives of Agenda 2063

Agenda 2063 serves as the African Union's comprehensive blueprint for the continent's transformation and development over a 50-year period. It embodies the collective aspirations of Africans and aims to facilitate progress towards a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful Africa that fully participates in the global arena. The agenda is structured around seven core aspirations, each translated into specific goals, targets, and actions to be achieved at national, regional, and continental levels (Cole, 2017).

The seven aspirations of Agenda 2063 are as follows:

- i. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development: This aspiration emphasizes the need for economic growth that benefits all segments of society, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- ii. An integrated continent, politically united, and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance: This goal stresses the importance of unity among African states, promoting collaboration and solidarity across the continent.
- iii. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law: This aspiration seeks to enhance governance frameworks, uphold human rights, and ensure legal accountability across African nations.
- iv. A peaceful and secure Africa: The agenda aims to address conflicts and promote security, fostering an environment where all citizens can thrive without fear of violence or instability.
- v. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values, and ethics: This objective highlights the significance of cultural heritage and identity in fostering a sense of belonging and pride among African people.

- vi. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth: Emphasizing the role of human capital, this goal focuses on empowering the youth and women, ensuring they play a crucial role in Africa's development.
- vii. Africa as a global player and partner: The final aspiration aims to position Africa as a significant player on the global stage, advocating for equitable partnerships and ensuring the continent's interests are represented internationally.
- viii.

China and Modernization

China's rapid growth into the second largest economy in the world was opening up in the 1970s, this period China witnessed vast growing in economic and political influence today, these makes China not only one of the most influential countries in today's international politics and economics but an inspiration to the developing world. In a world dominated by the Western economic paradigm of capitalism, and political ideology of liberal democracy, which in many ways have been imposed on the Global South, and are prized as the path toward modernization and economic development for many countries across continents, China is marching towards modernization and economic development on a different path, deviating from the Western-centric prototype and concept of development. China has been pursuing a development and modernization trajectory based on its own historical grounding and experience, unique internal conditions and realities, as well as cultural and civilizational foundations.

In many ways, China's rapid economic growth and prosperity is not only an inspiration for countries in the developing world, but offers an alternative economic and political model for the Global South versus the Western-centric model of development that is exemplified by the "dependence trap," where the Global South is the development aid recipients, while the North, composed of a few wealthy countries (former colonial masters), is the provider of development aid with prescribed structural conditionality's and packages intended to underwrite structural reforms, continuing inequalities and inequities, fortified by asymmetries in wealth, power, and resources, which fundamentally reflect the unequal divide between the North and South. In many ways, China's experience of development and modernization is somewhat unique to itself and was never an attempt to copy and imitate the West. Nevertheless, like many developing countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, China experienced and lived through the bitter pill of imperialism and colonization. It suffered a "century of humiliation," which refers to the period of intervention with and subjugation by Western powers. Clearly, the Global South and China have a shared and common experience of colonialism and imperialism, bringing them closer as partners in pursuing a development and modernization path more reflective of the Global South's respective conditions, realities, and historical experience (McFarlan, 2014).

Although China's economic development and modernization experience cannot be copied and emulate absolutely because each country has its unique conditions and situation, China serves as a guide and inspires countries in the developing world to pursue development and modernization based on their distinct and unique historical experience and their indigenous, local and respective conditions and realities, preserving their independence as a sovereign nation-state beyond the dictates of a

superpower or a few rich countries. For me, this makes China a significant example of a country in the developing world that is pursuing a destiny relying on its own strength and internal capabilities while relating to the world in a responsible, peaceful, friendly, and cooperative manner.

Lessons from Chinese Modernisation for African Agenda 2063

The Chinese experience in modernization and industrialization offers valuable insights for African countries striving to achieve the African Union's Agenda 2063. This experience underscores the importance of adapting development strategies to local conditions while learning from successful practices elsewhere.

i. Understanding the Context of Modernization

China's rapid economic growth illustrates that modernization is a complex process influenced by socio-political structures. Critics of modernization often highlight issues such as income disparity, cultural homogenization, and environmental degradation that accompany industrialization efforts. These concerns have fuelled resistance against adopting similar models in developing regions, including Africa. It is crucial for African nations to recognize that while the Chinese model provides useful lessons, it should not be blindly imitated but rather adapted to fit their unique socio-economic contexts.

ii. Balancing State and Market Dynamics

China's approach to industrialization exemplifies the potential for different socio-political arrangements beyond the typical state-market dichotomy. For instance, state-funded initiatives in infrastructure development and special economic zones (SEZs) have proven effective in catalysing economic growth without abandoning market principles. Such models can inspire African countries to find a balance between government involvement and market-driven initiatives to foster sustainable industrial growth.

iii. Learning from Specific Case Studies

The outcomes of Chinese investment in African industrial parks reveal both successes and challenges. The Eastern Industrial Zone in Ethiopia demonstrates how Chinese projects can create jobs and lead to local regulatory advancements, while the Viana Industrial Park in Angola highlights the pitfalls of misaligned development initiatives. These case studies suggest that successful industrialization in Africa may depend on aligning foreign investments with the specific national strategies and governance frameworks of African nations.

iv. Emphasizing Adaptive Learning

Chinese leaders advocate for a flexible and context-driven approach to development. Key tenets of this philosophy include avoiding rigid models and adjusting strategies based on local experiences and challenges. This adaptive learning process allows countries to evolve their policies in response to changing circumstances, which is particularly relevant for African nations navigating their paths toward modernization.

v. Recognizing Governance as a Foundation for Development

Strong governance and institutional frameworks are essential for leveraging foreign investments effectively. Historical experiences, such as in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo, demonstrate that weak governance can exacerbate inequalities and hinder economic progress. African countries can benefit from China's emphasis on governance reform as a prerequisite for successful industrialization, ensuring that investments contribute to broad-based economic development rather than entrenching existing disparities.

Application of Lessons to African Union's Agenda 2063

China's modernization experience can significantly contribute to the African Union's Agenda 2063 by offering a model for development that prioritizes people-centred governance, inclusive growth, and sustainable development. China's emphasis on infrastructure development, technological advancements, and poverty reduction can serve as a roadmap for Africa's transformation. Adem (2023) argued that Africa can learn from the experiences of China. Africa can use China's rise as a historic opportunity to change its position for the better in the international system. Africa could improve its position in the global society while there is still a convergence of interest between its own and that of a rising China. Learning about what to learn, and how to learn from China should be a major consideration in Africa's quest for prosperity in the twenty-first century. Therefore, for Africa to apply lessons the following measure should put in-place:

- i. Governance and Development: China's experience in national governance, development strategies, and poverty alleviation can inform Africa's efforts to build stronger institutions and implement effective policies and achieve Agenda 2063 objectives.
- ii. Infrastructural Development: China's leap in infrastructure projects, notably in the construction of roads, railways, and energy infrastructure, can help Africa overcome its infrastructure gaps and facilitate regional integration, which is a key pillar of Agenda 2063.
- iii. Technological Advancements in Agriculture: China's successes in technology and innovation in agriculture and renewable energy, can help Africa modernize its agricultural sector and improve productivity thereby achieving food security.
- iv. Industrialization and Value Addition: China's experience in establishing economic zones and promoting value-added production can inspire Africa's efforts to diversify its economies and reduce dependence on raw materials. This can transform Africa from basically a primary producer to an industrially led economies.
- v. Human Capital Development: China's emphasis on education and skills training, particularly through vocational education, can help Africa develop a skilled workforce, a critical factor in achieving Agenda 2063 goals.
- vi. Sustainable Development: China's commitment to green development, including renewable energy projects and environmental conservation, can help Africa address its environmental challenges and promote sustainable development.
- vii. Peace and Security: China's approach to development, which emphasizes peace and stability, can help Africa strengthen its capacity for safeguarding peace and security, which is essential for achieving its development goals.
- viii. Trade and Investment: China's strong trade and investment relationship with Africa can provide valuable opportunities for economic growth and

development, particularly through initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Challenges and Opportunities

Africa confronts numerous challenges that hinder its path toward modernization and sustainable development. One of the most significant issues is the reliance on primary commodity exports, with over 70% of African economies depending on these for their merchandise export revenues (Mutethya, 2024). This dependence has locked the continent into a lower position within the global industrial value chains, perpetuating cycles of poverty and economic instability. Additionally, many African nations are grappling with increasing indebtedness and economic challenges exacerbated by external crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions like the conflict in Ukraine. Another critical challenge is the lack of infrastructure, which is essential for economic growth. Currently, fewer than one in three Africans have access to electricity, with rural areas suffering even more severely (Bakele-Thomas, 2025). This infrastructural deficit complicates the development of higher-value manufacturing and agricultural sectors, as well as the efficiency of trade. Moreover, fluctuating growth rates driven by political instability, conflicts, and volatile commodity prices have resulted in an inability to sustain economic progress over time.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for Africa to leverage partnerships, particularly with China, to enhance its development trajectory. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) presents a vital avenue for infrastructure investment, facilitating the construction of essential economic and trade routes that can connect Africa to global markets.

Skills and knowledge transfer from Chinese investments are also pivotal. Initiatives that prioritize local participation in infrastructure projects and emphasize vocational training can create jobs and ensure that African professionals are equipped to lead in various sectors (Atitianti, 2024). Successful examples, such as the training of engineers and technicians in Chinese institutions, underscore the potential for knowledge exchange to support Africa's industrialization and infrastructure development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, China's path to modernization offers a powerful example for Africa and the broader Global South. With its role as Africa's largest trading partner, China's investments, trade relationships, financial support, infrastructure development and technological contributions are helping African countries to future modernization. Zafar (2010) offers a succinct summary of the areas Africa can learn from China and achieve the desired development when he asserts that First, the political economy of Chinese reforms and the shared gains between political elites and the private sector can be partially transplanted to the African context. Second, the Chinese used diaspora capital and knowledge in the early reform years. Third, rural reforms in China helped accelerate economic take-off through a restructuring of property rights and a boost to both savings rates and output. Fourth, Chinese growth has taken place in the context of a competitive exchange rate. Five, port governance in China has been exemplary, and African landlocked economies can benefit significantly from port reform in the coastal countries. Six, China has experimented with a degree of decentralization that could yield benefits for many Sub-Saharan African countries. Seventh, Africa can

learn from China's policies toward autonomous areas and ethnic minorities to stave off conflict. Africa can learn from China's experiences and conduct developmental experiments for poverty alleviation goals.

Recommendations

For Africa to achieve modernization as emulated by Chinese the following recommendations are as follows:

- i. African nations should focus on strategic partnerships on manufacturing, and technology transfer. This involves aligning its national development plans as what China deed.
- ii. Africa should create robust regulatory frameworks, and strengthening institutions to ensure sustainable development.
- iii. Africa can learn from China's development-oriented government approach, focusing on well-coordinated industrial policies and long-term planning.
- iv. Africa should seek for knowledge transfer in areas like digital technologies, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture can contribute to innovation and economic diversification.
- v. African should integrate its manufacturing and industries, particularly in sectors like mining and agriculture, theses can create value-added jobs and promote industrial growth.
- vi. Establishing joint scholarship programs and research initiatives from other sisters countries can help build human capital and develop a skilled workforce for Africa's industries.

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