An Analysis of China–Ethiopia Relations during the Cold War

M. Venkataraman and Ato Gedion Gamora

This article analyses the bilateral relations between China and Ethiopia during the Cold War period and brings out the interplay of domestic, regional and extra-regional factors that went into the shaping of bilateral relations. China's growing involvement and various attempts at consolidation of political and economic relationship with African countries—a relatively recent phenomenon—is perceived as a result of the dynamic interplay of economic and political factors. As with other African countries, China's interaction with Ethiopia in the post-Cold War period is markedly different from pre-1990 years. This article investigates the political/economic factors underlying this shift. It describes and analyses the factors that led to China's political and economic ties with Ethiopia (and Africa) during the years of Mao and Deng Xiaoping. It concludes that motivated by the desire to realise its priorities and goals, China's venture into Africa and Ethiopia was shaped by the shift in relations between the United States (US) and China and the Cold War dynamics in the Horn that prevented any kind of consolidation of relations with Ethiopia on the one hand and regime change in Ethiopia on the other.

INTRODUCTION

China's ties with Africa and with Ethiopia since the proclamation of People's Republic in 1949 have seen many shifts and changes. Broadly speaking, one can identify three distinct phases in the relationship. The first phase can be said to begin from 1949 and lasted until the death of Chairman Mao Zedong in late 1970s; the second from the period of Deng Xiaoping to the late 1980s; and the post-Cold War era as the third phase. This article discusses the first two phases only.

Although it is important to emphasise, at the outset, the fact that modern China's ties with Africa and Ethiopia since the end of World War II have been more political in nature than economic, yet, the entry point for any kind of human interaction has always been trade in the form of exchange of goods and services and so, one cannot neglect the same as far as China and Africa is concerned. However, despite this universal trend,

CHINA REPORT 45 : 1 (2009): 7–22
SAGE Publications Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC
DOI: 10.1177/000944550904500102

not always can one ascertain this to be a stepping stone for consolidation of political ties. Certain political developments can intervene to prevent such consolidation. In the case of China and Ethiopia, several such political developments emerged in between that governed their bilateral relations. Political and ideological orientations decided much of the interaction between them.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) under a communist regime was born only in 1949 when the African nationalist struggle for independence was on. Therefore, the seeds of any type of economic relations between 'modern' China and Africa have largely been absent. In fact, during the initial years of post-revolutionary China, the Chinese communists were undertaking the task of transforming the war-torn market-oriented economy into a command economy and so, up until economic reforms were undertaken in the late 1970s, China's economic interaction with the outside world was negligible (John C. Hsu 1989: 2) In other words, there were hardly any economic ties worth mentioning that China and Africa (and Ethiopia) shared with each other than the little political support that was offered to each other's cause at that time. However, despite the absence of strong economic ties at this point, there have been, in the past, trade ties between China and Africa, even before modern China was born. The nuances of the relationship can be understood only when these background aspects are made clear.

Friendly relations between China and Africa can be traced back to ancient times despite the fact that the two regions *are* separated by vast distance. It is noted by Filesi that the first contact between China and Africa took place near the Red Sea borders of the continent during the first millennium AD for trade purposes (Filesi 1971: 10). However, Wenping (2005: 41) argues that 'the earliest contact took place during China's Han Dynasty in 200 BC' itself. The views, however, differ. Chinese scholars like Gao Jinyuan (1984: 241) have noted that Chinese officials were sent to Africa and received African magicians into their country way back around 2000 years ago.[1] And the great African scholar, Ibn Batuta, had supposedly visited China in the fourteenth century AD and Chinese naval fleets have visited African coasts 'several times' during the fifteenth century AD.[2]

There seems to be no evidence as to whether these ancient trade relations were carried out at state level; in the absence of state level trade relations, it is possible that they were carried out by individual merchants. The reason for this is rightly noted by Filesi that Chinese and Africans were not much of seafaring nations and their harbours and ports were too small or not built to accommodate ships, particularly on the African coast (Filesi 1971: 1–10). Maritime traders were dealing with the inhabitants of the coastal area along the Indian Ocean and the Gulfs of Aden and Persia, and wherever the merchants from different directions met (ibid.).

[1] The different views are expressed in the article by Gao Jinyuan (1984).

[2] Li Anshan (2005: 60). The author narrates, besides the development of African studies in China, the historical contacts that took place since ancient times.

There are other compiled documents and evidences convincing enough for us to understand the long relations between China and the African nations bordering Red Sea, particularly Egypt and Ethiopia. For instance, Abay has mentioned Egypt in a Chinese book as the great river 'of very clear and sweet water' (ibid.: 2). Moreover, it has been noted that Egypt tried to create diplomatic relations with China in the fifteenth century AD and had supposedly sent a 'mission with the Ambassador Sayyid Hasan', but the mission was 'attacked by robbers and the ambassador was killed' (ibid.). From then onwards, no more attempt at creating diplomatic relations was made until mid-1950s so far as Sino-Egyptian relations is concerned.

It is important to underline the two basic commonalities that China and Africa share: (*a*) strong ideological affinity; and (*b*) group identity. The impact of Marxist–Leninist ideological doctrine, emphasising economic equality, on the new African elites who were then waging independence struggle against colonial rule cannot be ignored. China itself was undergoing a long period of civil war between the Guomindang government led by Chiang Kai Shek and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong, who wanted to establish a communist government in China. By 1949, Mao succeeded in doing so. And obviously, it should be recollected here that, as part of the Cold War, the struggle for independence of African countries, sadly, turned to one of struggle between the West (led by the US and capitalist ideology) and the East (led by the former Soviet Union with socialist ideology) to turn them on to their respective ideological camps, which, once again, very sadly continued even after these countries attained independence from their colonial masters. As a result, some of them indeed embraced this ideology, while some others were brought under the Western camp. There is a strong indication that this ideological affinity can be seen in many of today's African countries, which follow more or less the same ideological lines of China, including Ethiopia. Group identity is expressed in terms of belonging to the so-called 'Third World' group of countries. This is revealed in subsequent paragraphs.

Another noteworthy point is that Africa's fifty–three states, as they appear today, are result of their colonial history. They are products of conquest and separation, amalgamation and continuity, carved out by the imperial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Chazan 1988: 303). These 'new' states, with only a few exceptions such as Ethiopia, Egypt and Liberia, that achieved independence in the 1960s, were also old societies with pre-colonial history of their own (Tordoff 1993: 2). As colonies, Africa countries were not economically or politically visible in a global arena dominated by colonial powers. As pointed out by Rugumamu (2001: 71), 'colonialism culminated in the distortion, disarticulation and under development of African economies', resulting in severely deformed state structures and dominant class left marginalised, and cultural forms perverted. Consequently, these developments shaped the destiny of the African continent and its relations with China.

One can date China's involvement in Africa in the post-World War II period to the mid-1950s, at a time when relations with China's southern neighbours—Pakistan and India—were vacillating and with India, particularly turned sour. China, under Mao,

sought to strike an independent course of action, away from the tutelage of Soviet Union, in view of Nikita Khrushchev's détente with the US and his denial of any kind of help to develop atomic arsenal for China. Coupled with that was the issue of legitimacy that got complicated due to the representation of Taiwan at the United Nations (UN). By the late 1950s, as with the Soviet Union, Sino-Indian friendship got strained resulting in a border war in 1962. The intense competition between China and Soviet Union for influence in Africa should also be seen along this line. Therefore, by the time African countries gained independence from their colonial masters, China was a 'Pariah' in the community of nations and hence, this explains the motivations behind China's involvement in Africa. It was precisely because of this that China, under Mao, sought to extend its tentacles by attempting to lure African and Asian countries to its side at the Bandung conference (explained in detail later). Therefore, the beginning of China's interaction with Africa was basically political in nature and hence its aspiration to consolidate its relations with African countries was unquestionable (Larkin 1971: 5–8).

Although China entered the African scene in support of their independence cause and thereby to identify itself with African countries' cause as one of 'Third World cause', yet, it should be noted that despite the compulsions to get closer to Africa, it did not turn into a very strong relationship as it is seen today. This is because of three important reasons. First, at the domestic level, China was grappling with intense ideological struggle. The Hundred Flowers Movement in 1950s and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) in the late 1960s had its impact upon the way China was to behave with the outside world. Second, as mentioned earlier, at the international level, differences emerged with its ally, the Soviet Union, to the extent of breaking relations. This also had its impact in terms of losing an important ally and the sense of being isolated. Third, the distribution of balance of power between Cold War enemies—the US and Soviet Union—prevented any big role for China. It is under these circumstances that China–Ethiopia relations developed. It is pertinent, hence, to begin from a note on the historical contacts and ideological underpinnings that shaped their bilateral relations.

HISTORICAL CONTACTS AND IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

It should be noted at the outset that historical contacts between China–Ethiopia specifically have not been documented much and there is a significant literature gap on this issue. Apart from the frequent reference by academicians and political leaders of a significant presence of historical contacts, the same have not been adequately researched. According to the few available literature, contacts between Ethiopia and China have been there for a long time. Duvandak (1949: 12), for example, points out in his book a place called Houng-Chih that represented Abyssinia, which is the

other name for Ethiopia, where different kinds of animals lived around second century AD. From this coast, animals, including rhinoceros, were exported to China, while China had its principal export of green tea to Ethiopia. Even this day, Chinese green tea is favourably consumed by many Ethiopians. It is evident that although China and Ethiopia are located thousands of miles away from each other, historical contacts, like that of with some other countries in Africa, have been there. Li Anshan (2005: 62) notes that there have been books written by Chinese scholars on Africa and the first book appeared to have been published in 1936, which explains the history, culture, ethnic groups, politics, economics and the like of Ethiopia. What is worth mentioning here is the four similarities that the authors have mentioned. To quote them: '…both were ancient civilizations, both had a political organization undergoing transformation from a feudal to a modern system, both suffered from capitalist invasion and the decline of handicraft industries, and both were victims of imperialism' (ibid.).

The abovementioned should not only be seen as an indication of the commonalities but also the extent to which both these countries have visualised their respective political concerns as identical. It is these identical concerns, long expressed, that have paved the way for the type of relations that exist today.

One can also note positive contacts, or rather support, at the political level, during the period of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie when the two countries supported each other in the international arena. Li Anshan (2005: 62) notes that the book written by Chinese scholars mentions the great sympathy of the Chinese towards the Ethiopian people in their struggle against the Italian invasion by stating, 'the cruel threat towards them is an indirect threat towards us' (as quoted in ibid.). Fraser (1969: 24331) also notes that China, which was then ruled by Kuomintang's (KMT) Chiang Kai Shek, strongly opposed the Italian aggression on Ethiopia and in quid pro quo, Ethiopia supported Chinese claim to become a member of the UN Security Council even when diplomatic relations between the two did not exist. Emperor Haile Selassie was noted for his international role and was appreciated by Western powers, particularly the US, as a prominent leader in Africa.

IDEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The Five Principles

At the ideological level, a landmark development that contributed to an enhanced outlook of China as well as to perceive China as a friendly nation was the enunciation of the five principles of peaceful co-existence called *Panch Sheel*. As noted earlier, since the founding of the PRC, its leaders attached high importance to developing relations with African countries. They have held many expositions on consolidating Sino-African traditional friendship and promoting friendly cooperation. In this framework, a two-pronged strategy—political and economic—was used to bring about close relations with African countries. Politically, China's diplomacy was intended to facilitate close

ties with Africa. The five principles was explicitly put forward during the historic ten nation tour of African countries by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai as:

> a) China supports the Arab and African peoples in their ***struggle to oppose imperialism*** and old and new colonialism and to win and safeguard national independence b) It supports the pursuance of a policy of ***peace, neutrality and non-alignment*** by the Governments of Arab and African countries c) It ***supports*** the desire of the Arab and African peoples to achieve ***unity and solidarity*** in the manner of their own choice d) It supports the Arab and African countries in their efforts to settle their disputes through ***peaceful consultations*** e) It holds that the ***sovereignty*** of the Arab and African countries should be respected by all other countries and that ***encroachment and interference*** from any quarter ***should be opposed***[3] (Gittings 1974: 210–11; I.C.Y. Hsu 1975: 794).

These reflected the spirit of Bandung conference.

In fact, at the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, the five principles lifted China to a significant height because Beijing (then Peking) not only proclaimed its intention of non-interference as a cardinal principle in its foreign relations, it also intended to woo the newly independent states of Africa and other parts of Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, where a significant size of Chinese live, and Latin America towards its side by opposing US imperialism and thereby attempted to garner support for its membership in the UN. It should be noted here that the chief diplomatic legacy of Bandung, the 'five principles of peaceful co-existence', was not born at the conference, having first appeared in a Sino-Indian agreement on Tibet which was signed in Peking on 29 April 1954. Until the upheavals of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, the 'five principles' were the official cornerstone of China's foreign policy (Hutchings 2001: 42). They became so again from the late 1970s and have remained so ever. What is important to note here is that since the Bandung conference, China has long believed Africa to be diplomatically important.[4]

The rationale for giving such importance to Africa emanates from China's political priorities, on the one hand and the extent of its achievement through other means—meaning other countries—on the other hand. It can be argued here that China failed in its strategy of getting the support of the developing nations, particularly from its soft underbelly—Southeast Asian region—and its venture into Africa and the Horn was a product of its failure in that part of the world. The reasons are:

[3] See 'Premier Zhou Enlai's Three Tours of Asian and African Countries', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/siliao/3602/3604/t18001.htm (accessed on 24 November 2008).

[4] Many scholars have agreed to this view. See, for example, Ian Taylor (2006a). For older historical overviews, see Alaba Ogunsanwo (1974); Alan Hutchinson (1976); Philip Snow (1988).

1. Several of Southeast Asian countries were not willing to reconcile their historical differences with China as they saw China as not only a *big* neighbour but also an irredentist nation bent on dominating them.
2. The presence of a large number of ethnic Chinese in their countries was a significant threat to their political and economic control.
3. Most of the Southeast Asian countries were pro-Western and hence, were not willing to go along with the Chinese offer at Bandung for dual citizenship with the condition that they recognise Taiwan as an integral part of China. (Venkataraman 2006: 154)

In other words, since many of the pro-Western Southeast Asian countries did not go along with the Chinese diplomatic game plan, China's only other option was to look towards Africa due to the following reasons:

1. African countries were either not supportive of American role or were indecisive on any kind of American domination/presence in their region;
2. unlike Southeast Asian countries, the presence of Chinese population in African countries was minimal or non-existent;
3. most of the African countries were just gaining independence; and
4. most importantly, as a result, many African countries, including Ethiopia, were willing to recognise Taiwan as an integral part of China.

By this, one of the most important foreign policy objectives of China seemed to be realised.

Economically, China came up with eight principles while in Mali, as part of the ten nation tour of Zhou Enlai that aimed at luring Africa towards its side. It is worth noting them here. They are:

1. The Chinese government always bases itself on the principles of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries.
2. Strictly respects the sovereignty of the recipient countries, never attaching any conditions nor expecting any privileges.
3. China provides economic aid in the form of interest-free or low interest loans and, when necessary, extends the time limit for repayment.
4. The aim of Chinese aid to other countries is not to make the recipient countries dependant on China but rather to encourage self-reliance.
5. The Chinese government will help the recipient country to get quick results so that the recipient governments may increase their income and accumulate capital.
6. The Chinese government provides the best-quality equipment and material of its own manufacture at international market prices.

7. In giving any particular technical assistance…the personnel of the recipient country fully master such technique.
8. The Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands or enjoy any special amenities. (*The African Economist* 2003: 5)

The given principles should be seen as a desperate attempt to counter US–Soviet influence in Africa—to whatever extent that might have been realised at that point of time—which however, did not bring sufficient results due to problems that China was facing at the domestic front. The heavy drought in China, which affected the economy of that country during the late 1950s and early 1960s, was, according to Larkin (1976: 139), a cause for 'drastic curtailment of political work in Africa', apart from the GPCR that China was undergoing then. In other words, the proposed economic and technological aid were pursued strictly for ideological purposes, as China was contending with the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for the international leadership of communism and for support to recover the seat at the UN Security Council.

Developments in the second half of the 1960s exhibited another similar, and even more, retreat in Chinese external activities. During 1967 and 1968 in particular, due to 'the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,[5] almost all Chinese ambassadors were recalled to China …' (ibid.). As China was preoccupied with its own affairs during the years of the Cultural Revolution, it witnessed a decline in China–Africa relations and correspondingly with Ethiopia due to greater isolation of China.

The decline was due to several possible reasons. First, the assistance to Africa was carried under a situation when China's economy was in a very difficult position, that is, with the end of the Cultural Revolution, all aspects were short of funding. Second, China's economy itself needed funding and technology. With the relaxation of tensions with the West in the early 1970s, the Chinese government's attention naturally turned towards cooperation with developed countries. Third, the relation with Albania and Vietnam, two major Chinese aid-receiving countries deteriorated, which suggested the limitation of foreign aid. And finally, of course, the change of leadership in China—the death of Mao-tse Tung in 1976—more or less affected the continuity of foreign aid policy (Cornelissen and Taylor 2000: 616; Moise 1994: 157–87).

THEORY OF THREE WORLDS

Another noteworthy aspect of Sino-African and Sino-Ethiopian relations is the stress on underdevelopment as a key issue linking Africa and China. In this new framework,

[5] The revolution was launched to purge 'capitalist roaders' from the leadership of the CCP, and China isolated itself from the outside world and paid a heavy price for this dogmatic and isolationist foreign policy. With the death of Mao in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended. For further information on Cultural Revolution, see Robinson W. Thomas (ed.) (1976) and Moise (1994: Ch. 8).

which was developed in early 1970s, and was publicly outlined in a 1974 speech by Deng Xiaoping to the UN General Assembly, the Theory of Three Worlds categorised countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America as belonging to the third world (Roy 1998: 30), while US and USSR made up the first world and developed countries between the first two—most of them in Europe, Canada and Japan—as the second world. Deng said that as a socialist country, China belonged to the third world (Hutchings 2001: 445). Regarding this theory, Chairman Hua Guo-Feng confirmed the necessity to strengthen their relations by creating unity among proletariats. Fraser aptly put it as follows:

> ...unity with the proletariat, oppressed people and Nations of the world, with the socialist countries and, unite with all countries and with the third world countries subjected to aggression, subversion, interference, control and bullying by super powers and form the broadest united front against super-power hegemonies (Fraser 1978: 29183).

Another notable point was the support given by African nations to the entry of China as a permanent member of UN. As indicated by Ogunsanwo (1974: 285–86), the success of the PRC in gaining seat in the UN was supported by the Africans' vote which constituted 34 per cent of the total vote given in favour of China and this can be considered as an inalienable form of strategic significance of Africa further contributing to a deep-rooted role of China internationally.

RELATIONS DURING THE HAILE SELASSIE REGIME

As pointed out earlier, the Afro-Asian conference at Bandung, Indonesia, on 18 April 1955, was a good opportunity for China to draw world attention and thereby get the support from countries of Asia and Africa. In the conference, among representatives from the twenty-nine participating countries, were Colonel Nasser of Egypt, Yilmaa Deressa of Ethiopia (Ambassador in Washington) and Prime Minister of Sudan, Azhari, leading their respective delegations (Fraser 1956: 14181). In fact, it was during this conference that 'the first Chinese diplomatic contacts with Africa took place…' (Larkin 1976: 16). The five principles of peaceful co-existence were accepted at the conference with slight amendment of the phrase 'peaceful co-existence' and this was a great success for China (ibid.).

The conference was positive in accelerating diplomatic ties with the 'third world', particularly Africa. Following the conference, a Chinese delegation led by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai visited several African countries, including Ethiopia, that led to furthering close ties. However, Zhou Enlai's visit to Ethiopia in 1964 did not lead to establishment of diplomatic relations for reasons to do with Cold War.

Pertinent among the reasons were: first, Emperor Haile Selassie had close relations with the US and this was feared by China as impairing its ideological line and diffusing 'communist propaganda'. Second, China supported the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) that was fighting against the Haile Selassie regime for independence from Ethiopia and in cooperation with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). During 1969–70, China extended its support to the ELF guerrilla forces that were trained by China and PDRY and large quantities of arms were smuggled to Eritrea through Aden across the Red Sea (Abir 1974: 131, 174). Third, the front for the Liberation of Western Somalia was also supported by China and Somalia (ibid.: 131). Fourth, China was aspiring to introduce 'Chinese revolutionary model' in all ex-colonial and underdeveloped countries and to lead the Marxist–Leninists and communist world (Fairbank et al. 1973: 913; Larkin 1976: 3).

On 4 December 1970, Ethiopia and China established diplomatic relations and on 9 October 1971, Emperor Haile Selassie visited China and signed economic, technical and aid agreements spanning a five year period (Fraser 1970: 24332). This was possible because of the 'détente' between China and the US, as can be seen from high level visits of US officials, including the visit of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to Peking in mid-1971, followed by Nixon in 1972.[6] Normalisation of relations between the US and China was a signal to Emperor Haile Selassie to follow suit. In the agreement between China and Ethiopia, China granted an interest-free loan of $210 million to be repaid after a 10 year grace period, beginning on 1 January 1980 until 31 December 1991 (*Ethiopian Herald* 1971: 1–4).

A protocol to this agreement was signed on 20 February 1973, between the two parties. Included in the protocol was the construction of four rural development projects in Ethiopia. The projects mentioned in the protocol were the construction of a road from Woldiya to Woreta, twenty water wells and their distribution system for provincial towns, a veterinary station and eight diesel power stations for the same towns. These projects were said to be the first batch of projects to be implemented in Ethiopia with Chinese help (*Ethiopian Herald* 1973: 3).

These bonds of diplomatic relations were possible due to the change in Chinese diplomatic dealings with the West. There was a heated debate in the UN General Assembly concerning admission of China into the UN on the one hand and the 'change in the direction' of foreign policy within China on the other hand. This was revealed as China established diplomatic relations with one of the Western powers, Canada, in October 1970 (Warren 1975: 2). China was in the process of drawing back the curtain of isolationism between itself and the Western powers.

[6] For an excellent analysis on the astute statesmanship of Prime Minister Chou En Lai, see Terry Otis, 'Chou En Lai's Statecraft in Sino-American Rapprochement', National War College, September 1989, http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA437563 (accessed on 24 November 2008).

Furthermore, contacts with the US showed a remarkable headway since President Nixon's period. In due course, the UN resolution of 25 October 1971 granted the PRC a permanent membership of the UN, replacing the Republic of China in Taiwan. As noted earlier, subsequent visits of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in mid-1971 and of President Nixon in 1972 to Peking manifested the growing relations between China and the US (ibid.). With this, the gap which existed between China and the West got minimised and had positive spillover effect on China–Ethiopia bilateral diplomatic relations.[7] It is evident therefore that much of China–Ethiopia relationship depended on how the configuration of relationship between China and the West turned out. The interconnections cannot be neglected in any case.

Other than this aspect, factors such as the strategic location of Ethiopia in the Horn and China's desire to keep balance of power against Soviet activities in Somalia and in the southern Arabian Peninsula contributed further towards strengthening bilateral ties (Larkin, 1975: 13).

Third, as pointed out by Abir (1974: 183), 'Ethiopia's position in Africa and the third world, and its position as the centre of the OAU [Organisation of African Unity]' was important. The headquarters of OAU (now AU) is located in Ethiopia's capital city Addis Ababa along with other major international organisations like the Economic Commission for Africa. Fourth, relations during the time of Emperor Haile Sellasie had been mainly influenced by the Ethiopian position of supporting 'One China Policy', which claims that Taiwan[8] is an integral part of the mainland China. Currently, it is one of the foreign policy priority of China and a pre-condition for establishing diplomatic relations and to extend technical assistance to other nations. This policy has been firmly followed by Ethiopia since then. Consequently, on 4 December 1970, Ethiopia and China formally established diplomatic relations.

Analysing the subject, Rourke (1991: 208) argues that 'a great deal of China's history in this century (20th c) can be interpreted as part of the struggle of the Chinese people to regain their pride and to rid their country of the last vestige of outside influence'. That has been evident in Beijing's foreign policy emphasis on the importance of sovereignty, independence of action and Chinese nationalism following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. Ever since its communist victory, China has been determined to bring in the reality of national reunification and regain territories it considered were lost during Chinese period of weakness in the face of imperialist aggression.

[7] The Cold War triangular between Washington, Moscow and Beijing helped to facilitate this. For a good analysis on this see Roy (1998: 30–31).

[8] Taiwan is located in a geographically important area about 100 miles off the southeast coast of mainland China. It has proximity to the Philippine islands in the South, the Japanese archipelago in the North and lies in between China's largest industrial and commercial city of Shanghai and the former British colony of Hong Kong which has now been reverted to China. Taiwan was also used as a forward base by the Japanese in World War II. For a good analysis on the issue, see M. Venkataraman (2006).

RELATIONS DURING THE DERGUE REGIME

Bilateral diplomatic relations continued to evolve during the Dergue regime as well. Concerning the projects agreed to be implemented in Ethiopia during Haile Selassie regime, none of them were realised before the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution. Among the projects proposed to be implemented were the installation of electricity to eight provincial towns and the construction of the last diesel station which was completed on 20 July 1979. The construction of the Woldiya–Woreta road was completed in 1985 only. As a result, further agreements were concluded between the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) and the PRC later (IKF 1981: 42).

On 5 January 1977, an eight member mass media delegation headed by Lt Col Asrat Desta, member of the standing committee and head of press and information of the PMAC, paid a 15 day working visit to PRC (Chhabra 1977: 8316). The visit was aimed at gaining experience from China. In the mean time, the New China News Agency (NCNA) office was opened in Addis Ababa, but was short-lived because of the closure of the office in March 1979 due to its 'propaganda against Ethiopia regardless of repeated warnings' by the Ethiopian government (Fraser 1980: 30017). The nature of the propaganda was not explained in the original source. This factor led to the deterioration of relations between Ethiopia and China.

DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS

The initial years of cordiality did not last long. Their relations suffered in the later years, between 1977–82, when Ethiopia turned to the USSR for support and obtained from it US$ 1 billion military assistance. By the mid-1980s, Ethiopia's total value debt to the Soviet Union was US$ 1.7 billion. As noted earlier, China's relations with Africa and Ethiopia should be seen in the context of its relations with big powers, particularly Soviet Union. Hence, its foreign policy towards African countries in general and Ethiopia in particular, underwent changes because China gave priority to power race, mainly against the Soviet Union, in Ethiopia and Somalia (Fraser 1978: 29183).

Added to this was China's stand on Ethio-Somalian war of 1977–78 that further hindered their bilateral relations. To the surprise of Ethiopia, China extended its resolute support to Somalia and advocated the Somalian invasion of Ethiopia. During the visit to Somalia on 30–31 July 1978, the then Chinese Deputy Premier, Chen Muhua, stated that China stood 'firmly on the side of Somali people in their just struggle to safeguard national independence and state sovereignty' (ibid.: 29704). On the contrary, however, it was not Somalia which was invaded but Ethiopia by the Somalis. The reason China supported Somalia was to counterbalance the Soviet presence in Ethiopia and to narrow down the international activities of the Soviet Union. The relations between Ethiopia and China, hence, deteriorated.

In retaliation, Ethiopia lodged its official condemnation against China's stand. Lt Col Mengistu Haile Mariam stated that China 'being the new supplier of bullets' for 'the reactionary forces of Somalia…had directly or indirectly launched a concerted assault against us' (*Ethiopian Herald* 1978: 5). On the other hand, Sino-Somalian relations were warm and this was disclosed on 19 May 1979 by Omar Arteh Ghalib reporting that 'Somalia had the best relations with China, which was supplying both military and economic aid' (as quoted in Fraser 1979: 29877). Conversely, Somalia severed the relations with the Soviet Union and abrogated the Friendship Treaty concluded in 1974 (Fraser 1978: 28760), which had negative effect on the diplomatic relations with Ethiopia (Chhabra 1974: 8731).

RESTORATION OF RELATIONS

As China's relations with Soviet Union changed, so did Ethio-Chinese relations. It improved significantly after 1983 when President Gorbachev's new foreign policy initiatives (as well as domestic reforms) coincided with reforms in China under Deng Xiaoping. It provided new grounds for mutual understanding (Hutchings 2001: 42). Deng Xiaoping urged the regime to focus on development and modernisation, and let facts, not ideology, guide its path (*Newsweek* 2005: 20). Since then, China has done just that, pursued a modernisation path that is pragmatic and not ideological. As a result, China's new foreign policy centred on the strength of the economic system and rigid defence of national sovereignty (ibid.: 22). This was the turning point of China's foreign policy in contrast to the past revolutionary heady days of Maoist 'solidarity'. A point worth noting is that China's economic dealings with African countries are today based on evaluation of their perceived economic potential (Taylor 2006b: 944). Post-Mao foreign policy, in other words, was a significant departure from that of Mao years and much of the laurels for the 'new thinking' goes to Deng Xiaoping.

From this consideration, a delegation led by President Mengistu Haile Mariam made an official visit to China and thereafter the two countries signed economic, social, political and cultural agreements. Similarly, a delegation led by members of politburo of CCP visited Ethiopia (Fraser 1988: 12964). Since then the relation of the two countries has been getting warmer.

POLICY OF NON-INTERFERENCE: TIANANMEN AND ITS AFTERMATH

Events following Tiananmen massacre contributed to better relations between not only China and Ethiopia but also with Africa as a whole. In what argued to be purely a domestic affair, Western nations reactions and condemnation, including an arms

embargo imposed by the US and European Union (EU) upon China, were seen as an infringement of sovereignty. In this much drawn out controversy on 'human rights', many African nations, including Ethiopia, came to the rescue of China. Criticisms of human rights record, it should be noted, have not been a new feature for Africa, for it has also been on the receiving end of such criticisms. What it led, therefore, was to induce Beijing to seek closer ties to non-Western countries. Developing countries were effectively elevated to a 'cornerstone' of Chinese foreign policy in an effort to build coalitions to shield Beijing from Western criticism.

The commonalities of African countries in terms of their opposition to intervention in human rights with regard to China can be seen here, and this has been an important issue to bring Africa and China even more close. Of course, the aftermath of Tiananmen incident has been one of increasing domestic and foreign pressure on Chinese politics—need for political reform and not just economic reform.

Given their numerical weight in international organisations, African states played an important role in the Chinese stratagem. Since many African leaders at the time were themselves undergoing domestic and external pressure to liberalise their political systems, they were more than willing to go along with China's claims that Western demands for democracy and the respect for human rights amounted to thinly veiled imperialistic manoeuvres, intent on interfering in the domestic politics of developing states and undermining their stability and progress at large. The issue has only forged greater ties between China and Africa, including Ethiopia, and much of what is seen today in terms of Chinese omnipresence in Africa has to do with this.

CONCLUSIONS

As can be seen, from the revolutionary era of Mao to post-revolutionary era of Deng Xiaoping, China's relations with Ethiopia (and by implication Africa) have undergone sweeping changes. The period of Mao was marked by undetermined relationship with Ethiopia, where, as during the era of Deng Xiaoping, the relations turned better. Since China obviously conceived of itself as one indispensable pole in the international system, the government reached out to non-Western states to bolster its international position vis-à-vis the US, particularly room for manoeuvre within the UN Security Council and other international bodies. It was a cleverly worked out strategy that made China look for options outside Asia and into Africa and Ethiopia. The strategy was to identify regions that could potentially fulfil its objectives and goals—politically gain entry into the UN as a permanent member by exiting Taiwan, incorporating historically claimed territories such as Taiwan (Macao and Hong Kong already been incorporated and Taiwan being the only territory left out—apart from those being claimed in India's north and east) and economically lay the foundations for Chinese markets and thereby become a leading political and economic power in world politics.

Therefore, China–Ethiopia relations can be explained by pragmatic compulsions on the part of both the countries. In view of this, Beijing moved to modify and broaden the conceptualisation of it's (inter)national interests. Consequently, the Chinese leadership regarded a more active foreign policy as the best strategy to defend and assert its national interests. The need to expand and strengthen China's bilateral relations, including those with the states in Africa south of the Sahara, was part of this strategy. Accordingly, China's rapidly increasing engagement in Africa does not so much reflect a singular or specific policy towards the continent. Rather, it is part and parcel of a wider policy thrust which manifests itself equally in China's relations towards other regions of the world such as Latin America and the Middle East. With Ethiopia, one can see an incremental strengthening of relationship, particularly since the late 1980s, that continued to the post-Cold War era as well. The assumption of power by Gorbachev in Soviet Union and its change of policies and the subsequent relaxation of tension between China and Soviet Union, the demise of socialism, the Tiananmen incident, the changes in the Dergue regime's thinking, all of which contributed towards a new outlook of China vis-à-vis Ethiopia and Ethiopia vis-à-vis China. It is in this dimension that the bilateral relations should be seen.

REFERENCES

Abir, Mordechai, *Oil, Power and Politics* (London: Frankcass, 1974).

Chhabra, Hari Sharan (Ed.), *Africa Diary* (New Delhi: Africa Publications, 1974).

———, *Africa Diary* (NewDelhi: Africa Publications, 1977).

Chazan, N., Mortimer, R., John, Rothchihid, Donald (Eds), *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (Lynne Reinner Publishers, Inc., 1988).

Cornelissen, Scarlett and Ian Taylor, 'The Political Economy of China and Japan's Relationship with Africa: A Comparative Perspective', *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 615–33.

Duvandak, Jan Julius, *Chana's Discovery of Africa* (London: Arther Probsthain, 1949).

Ethiopian Herald, 'China granted $210 million…', *Ethiopian Herald*, 6 October 1971, p. 12.

———, 'A Protocol Signed between China and Ethiopia for the Construction of four Rural Development Projects', *Ethiopian Herald*, February 21, 1973.

———, 'China: The New Supplier of Bullets for Somalia', *Ethiopian Herald,* 12 September 1978, p. 8.

Fairbank, John K., Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia*: *Tradition and Transformation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973).

Filesi, Teobaldo, *China and Africa in the Middle Ages*, (London: Francass, 1971).

———, *China and Africa in the Middle Ages*, (London: Frank Cass, 1972).

Fraser, Robert (Ed.), *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1956).

———, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1969).

———, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1970).

———, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1978).

———, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1979).

———, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1980).

———, *Keesing's Contemporary Archives,* (London: Keesing's Pubs. Longman Group Ltd, 1988).

Gao Jinyuan, 'China and Africa: The Development of Relations over Many Centuries', *African Affairs,* Vol. 83, No. 331, April 1984, pp. 241–50.
Gittings, John, *The World and China, 1922–1972* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974).
Hsu, Immanuel C.Y., *The Rise of Modern China*, 2nd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).
Hsu, John C., *China's Foreign Trade Reforms: Impact on Growth and Stability* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
Hutchings, Graham, *Modern China: A Companion to a Rising Power* (England: Penguin Books, 2001).
Hutchinson, Alan, *China's African Revolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1976).
Imperial High Authority (IKF), *Woreta-Woldiya Road Feasibility Study*. Addis Ababa: Twenty Six Annual Report, 1981.
Larkin, Bruce D., *China and Africa 1949–1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).
Moise, Edwin E., *Modern China: A History*, 2nd edition (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1994).
Li Anshan, 'African Studies in China in the Twentieth Century: A Historiographical Survey', *African Studies Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2005, pp. 59–87.
Newsweek, 'China's might: Can the world handle a Second Super Power?', *Newsweek*, Vol. 3, May 2005, p. 20.
Ogunsanwo, Alaba, *Chinese Policy in Africa, 1958–1971* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
Otis, Terry, 'Chou En Lai's Statecraft in Sino-American Rapprochement', Paper presented at National War College, September 1989, http://handle.dtic.mil/100.2/ADA437563 accessed 24 November 2008.
Robinson, W. Thomas (Ed), *The Cultural Revolution in China* (California: University of California Press, 1976).
Rourke, John T., *International polities on the World Stage* (Connecticut: Dushkin McGraw Hill Publishers, Inc., 1991).
Rugumamu, Severine, 'Globalization and Africa's Future: Towards Structural Stability, Integration and Sustainable Development', Occasional Paper Series. *African Association of Political Science (AAPS)*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2001.
Snow, Philip, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988).
Taylor, Ian, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise* (London: Routledge, 2006a).
———, 'China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 5, 2006b, pp. 937–59.
Tordoff, William, *Government and Politics in Africa,* 2nd Ed. (Hong Kong: Indian-University Press, 1993).
Venkataraman, M., 'Taiwan and South China Sea in Sino-ASEAN Relations—An Overview', *China Report*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2006, pp. 153–77.
Warren, Weinstein (Ed.), *Chinese and Soviet Aid to Africa* (New York: Praeger publishers Inc., 1975).
Wenping, He, 'All Weather Friends: A Vivid Portrayal of Contemporary Political Relations between China and Africa', in Kinfe Abraham (Ed.), *China Comes to Africa: The Political Economy and Diplomatic History of China's Relation with Africa* (Addis Ababa: EIIPD and HADAD, 2005).

Authors' Address: M. Venkataraman, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. E-mail: venks44@yahoo.com.
Ato Gedion Gamora is currently working as research assistance at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. He holds Master's Degree in Political Science and International Relations from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. E-mail: ggamora@uneca.org, gediongam@yahoo.com