



Chinese Modernization in the Eyes of African Students

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Abstract

This article explores the perceptions and experiences of African students studying in China regarding Chinese modernization efforts. Through qualitative interviews and surveys conducted among African students in Chinese universities, the study examines how these students perceive China's rapid development and modernization initiatives. The findings reveal that African students view China as a model for economic growth, technological advancement, and infrastructure development. Many students appreciate China's emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship, and scientific research, which have contributed to its transformation into a global economic powerhouse. They admire China's progress in key sectors such as telecommunications, transportation, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence, highlighting the country's achievements in bridging the digital divide and fostering sustainable development.

Moreover, African students express admiration for China's commitment to poverty alleviation, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. They note China's efforts to lift millions of people out of poverty, improve living standards, and promote ecological conservation through green initiatives and clean technology. Many students commend China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for promoting connectivity, trade, and cultural exchange between China and Africa, thereby fostering mutual benefits and cooperation. In conclusion, the article highlights the significance of Chinese modernization in shaping the perceptions and experiences of African students in China. It calls for continued dialogue, collaboration, and partnership building to foster a deeper understanding of Chinese modernization and its implications for Africa's development trajectory. The voices of African students serve as a catalyst for meaningful engagement, exchange of ideas, and building a shared future of prosperity and cooperation between China and Africa.

Keywords: China, Modernization, African Students.

INTRODUCTION

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 trade and connectivity within and beyond the continent.

Additionally, China has played a pivotal role in the expansion of renewable energy sources in Africa, contributing to efforts to address climate change and promote sustainable development. In the context of Chinese modernization efforts

in Africa, it is crucial to consider the perspectives of African students who have chosen to pursue higher education in China. These students represent an important demographic that bridges the cultural and academic gap between Africa and China. By examining their experiences, challenges, and aspirations, we can gain valuable insights into the impact of China-Africa relations on individual lives and broader societal dynamics. African students studying in China bring diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills back to their home countries, contributing to human capital development and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Their experiences in Chinese academic institutions provide them with unique opportunities for personal and professional growth, enabling them to acquire new competencies and insights that can benefit their communities upon their return. Understanding the perspectives of African students in China is essential for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in shaping the future of China-Africa relations. By listening to their voices, we can identify areas for improvement in educational exchanges, cultural integration, and mutual cooperation, ultimately strengthening the bonds between Africa and China for the benefit of both regions. In

conclusion, the intersection of Chinese modernization efforts in Africa and the perspectives of African students studying in China offers a rich field for exploration and analysis. By delving into these interconnected themes, we can deepen our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics shaping contemporary China-Africa relations and work towards a more inclusive and mutually beneficial partnership.

CHINESE INVESTMENT IN AFRICAN EDUCATION

Chinese investment in African education has become a significant aspect of China-Africa relations in recent years. As China's engagement with Africa continues to deepen, educational initiatives have emerged as a key area of cooperation. Chinese investments in African education come in various forms, including scholarships for African students to study in China, infrastructure development for schools and universities, training programs for African educators, and partnerships between Chinese and African educational institutions. This growing trend reflects China's commitment to promoting mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and capacity building in Africa, while also benefiting China by fostering goodwill and strengthening its influence on the continent. Understanding the dynamics of Chinese investment in African education is crucial for appreciating the evolving relationship between China and Africa in the 21st century.

Overview of Chinese Investment in African Education Sector

China's engagement with Africa extends beyond infrastructure and trade to include investments in the education sector. Recognizing the importance of human capital development for sustainable growth and socioeconomic advancement, China has been actively involved in supporting educational initiatives in Africa. Chinese investment in African education encompasses a wide range of activities, from infrastructure development to capacity building and knowledge exchange. One of the key pillars of Chinese investment in African education is the establishment of educational institutions and training centers in various African countries.[1] Through partnerships and collaborations with local governments and academic institutions, China has set up schools, universities, and vocational training centers to provide quality education and skills training to African students.

These institutions offer a diverse range of academic programs, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, business, agriculture, and healthcare, aligning with the development priorities of African nations. In addition to establishing educational institutions, China has also implemented scholarship programs to facilitate the mobility of African students to study in China. [1] These scholarships cover tuition fees, accommodation, and living expenses, enabling talented and deserving students from Africa to pursue higher education in Chinese universities.

By investing in the education of African students, China aims to enhance human capital development in Africa, build academic and research partnerships, and foster people-to-people exchanges between China and Africa. Furthermore, Chinese investment in the African education sector includes capacity building programs for teachers, administrators, and policymakers.

China provides training opportunities, workshops, and seminars for African educators to enhance their teaching skills, curriculum development, and educational management practices. These capacity building initiatives contribute to improving the quality of education in Africa and promoting knowledge transfer between Chinese and African educational professionals. Overall, Chinese investment in the African education sector plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable development, enhancing human capital, and strengthening the bilateral relations between China and African countries. By investing in education, China demonstrates its commitment to supporting Africa's socioeconomic progress and building a knowledge-based economy that empowers future generations.

Scholarship Programs and Exchanges for African Students in China

Chinese scholarship programs for African students have been instrumental in facilitating educational opportunities and cultural exchanges between China and Africa. These programs aim to attract talented individuals from African countries to study in China, fostering mutual understanding, academic collaboration, and long-term partnerships between the two regions. One of the flagship scholarship programs offered by the Chinese government is the Chinese Government Scholarship (CGS) program. The CGS program provides full scholarships to African students at various academic levels, including undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees. [2] The scholarships cover tuition fees, accommodation, medical insurance, and a monthly stipend, allowing students to focus on their studies without financial constraints. In addition to the CGS program, many Chinese universities also offer scholarships specifically targeted towards African students.

These university scholarships are tailored to meet the needs and interests of African students, offering opportunities to study in diverse fields such as engineering, medicine, agriculture, and business. Furthermore, some Chinese universities collaborate with African institutions to provide joint scholarship programs that promote academic exchange and research collaboration. Apart from scholarships, China also encourages student exchanges between African and Chinese universities through various exchange programs. These programs enable students to spend a semester or a year studying abroad, immersing themselves in a different academic and cultural environment. Through student exchanges, African students have the opportunity to broaden

their horizons, develop cross-cultural competencies, and forge lifelong friendships with their Chinese counterparts.

Moreover, Chinese universities actively engage with African student communities on campus, organizing cultural events, academic seminars, and networking opportunities to enhance the overall student experience.[3] These initiatives create a vibrant and supportive environment for African students in China, fostering a sense of belonging and community within the diverse student body. In conclusion, Chinese scholarship programs and exchanges for African students in China play a pivotal role in promoting educational cooperation, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding between China and Africa. By investing in the education of African students, China contributes to human capital development in Africa, cultivates future leaders, and strengthens the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two regions.

AFRICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHINESE MODERNIZATION

China's increased engagement with Africa in recent years has significantly impacted various sectors, including education. African students studying in China have witnessed firsthand the positive impact of Chinese investments on education infrastructure in Africa, the opportunities for acquiring new skills and knowledge, as well as the influence of Chinese modernization on their career aspirations and goals. This section will delve into African students' perceptions of these key aspects of Chinese modernization.

Positive Impact of Chinese Investments on Education Infrastructure in Africa

China's investments in African education have improved infrastructure, expanding access to education, providing learning materials, and modernizing farming practices. These investments have also boosted teacher training programs and facilitated knowledge transfer, aligning with Africa's socioeconomic needs[4]. The investments have been praised by African students. Chinese investments in education infrastructure in Africa have been instrumental in enhancing the quality and accessibility of education across the continent. African students studying in China often acknowledge and appreciate the role that Chinese investments have played in improving educational facilities, resources, and opportunities in their home countries. The development of schools, universities, research centers, and vocational training institutions supported by Chinese investments has contributed to the expansion of educational opportunities for African youth. Furthermore, Chinese-funded scholarships, exchange programs, and capacity-building initiatives have enabled many African students to pursue higher education in China and acquire advanced skills and knowledge in various fields.

These educational opportunities have empowered African students to gain valuable insights, expertise, and

experiences that can be applied back in their home countries to contribute to national development and progress. The exposure to Chinese teaching methods, technologies, and best practices has broadened the horizons of African students and equipped them with a competitive edge in the global job market. African students studying in China often express gratitude for the scholarships, mentorship programs, and research partnerships facilitated by Chinese institutions, which have nurtured their academic growth and professional development. The collaborative projects, joint research initiatives, and cultural exchanges supported by Chinese investments have fostered a spirit of innovation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing among African students, Chinese scholars, and educators. Overall, African students perceive Chinese investments in education infrastructure as a catalyst for sustainable development, human capital formation, and socioeconomic transformation in Africa. They recognize the long-term benefits of building a skilled workforce, fostering intellectual exchange, and promoting cross-cultural understanding through educational cooperation between China and Africa.

Opportunities for African Students to Acquire New Skills and Knowledge

China's scholarship programs and vocational training opportunities have provided affordable higher education for African students, expanding short-term vocational training programs in agriculture, healthcare, and poverty reduction [2]. These programs have also been integrated into Chinese business projects, promoting socioeconomic progress and knowledge exchange in Africa. Studying in China provides African students with unique opportunities to acquire new skills and knowledge that are essential for personal and professional growth. The diverse academic programs, cutting-edge research facilities, and innovative teaching methods available in Chinese universities offer African students a dynamic learning environment conducive to exploring new ideas, disciplines, and perspectives.

Many African students appreciate the emphasis on practical skills, hands-on experience, and interdisciplinary learning in Chinese higher education, which equips them with a holistic approach to problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. The exposure to Chinese language, culture, and history broadens their cultural awareness, linguistic abilities, and cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to navigate global contexts with confidence and competence. Moreover, the networking opportunities, internships, and industry collaborations facilitated by Chinese universities create pathways for African students to gain real-world experience, build professional connections, and explore potential career options. The integration of theoretical knowledge with practical skills, entrepreneurship training, and leadership development programs offered in China empowers African students to become agents of change,

innovation, and progress in their respective fields. African students studying in China often highlight the role of mentorship, career counseling, and soft skills development programs provided by Chinese institutions in shaping their academic trajectories and career aspirations.

The exposure to emerging technologies, digital tools, and research methodologies in China enhances the competencies of African students and prepares them to adapt to the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. Overall, African students view their educational journey in China as a transformative experience that equips them with the skills, knowledge, and mindset needed to thrive in a competitive world. The cross-cultural exchange, experiential learning, and personal growth opportunities offered by Chinese universities broaden the horizons of African students and empower them to make meaningful contributions to society, both locally and globally.

Chinese Influence on African Students' Career Aspirations and Goals

Chinese businesses and government projects in Africa are creating employment opportunities for African graduates with relevant skills. A 2017 McKinsey report found 89% of employees in Chinese companies were Africans [2]. Chinese companies offer skills training, apprenticeships, and new technologies, enhancing employability. The 2022 African Youth Survey revealed 77% of African youth view China as the most influential foreign power in Africa [2]. The influence of Chinese modernization on African students goes beyond academic pursuits and extends to their career aspirations and goals. African students studying in China often cite the impact of China's rapid development, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit on shaping their professional ambitions and vision for the future.

The success stories of Chinese companies, startups, and entrepreneurs inspire African students to explore new career paths, venture into business opportunities, and embrace innovation as a driving force for change. The exposure to China's robust economy, strategic industries, and global market presence motivates African students to seek pathways for economic empowerment, job creation, and sustainable development in their home countries. Many students express a desire to leverage their experiences in China to contribute to key sectors such as infrastructure development, renewable energy, information technology, finance, healthcare, and manufacturing, where Chinese expertise and investment have made significant strides.

CRITICISMS AND CHALLENGES

While African students studying in China have experienced numerous benefits and opportunities as a result of Chinese modernization efforts, there are also criticisms and challenges that they face during their academic journey. This section will explore the concerns related to cultural assimilation and loss

of African identity, the unequal distribution of educational opportunities and benefits, as well as the language barrier as a hindrance for some African students.

Concerns about Cultural Assimilation and Loss of African Identity

Critics argue that China's educational initiatives in Africa may lead to cultural assimilation and loss of African identity [5]. The emphasis on vocational training may undermine local knowledge systems and lead to the adoption of Chinese cultural norms, potentially diluting African identities. One of the primary criticisms voiced by African students studying in China is the apprehension about cultural assimilation and the potential loss of their African identity. The process of adapting to a new cultural environment, social norms, and academic expectations in China can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation, marginalization, or alienation among African students. The differences in language, customs, values, and traditions between China and Africa may create challenges in forming meaningful connections, building strong relationships, and maintaining a sense of belonging for some students. Furthermore, the pervasive influence of Chinese culture, media, and lifestyle on campus and in the local community can overshadow the diverse cultural heritage, experiences, and perspectives brought by African students.

The pressure to conform to Chinese social norms, dress codes, and behavioral expectations may erode the unique identity, self-expression, and cultural pride of African students, leading to a sense of cultural dissonance or identity crisis. Many African students express a desire to strike a balance between embracing the opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and preserving their African roots, heritage, and values while studying in China. They seek platforms for celebrating diversity, promoting intercultural dialogue, and fostering mutual respect and understanding between African and Chinese students. The need for cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and awareness in educational settings is highlighted as essential to creating an environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to share their perspectives and experiences. Overall, the concerns about cultural assimilation and loss of African identity underscore the importance of promoting cultural diversity, intercultural competency, and cultural heritage preservation in higher education institutions to ensure a sense of belonging, pride, and respect for all students.

Unequal Distribution of Educational Opportunities and Benefits

China's investments in Africa have been criticized for their unequal distribution of educational opportunities, with aid often concentrated in specific regions, primarily benefiting urban elites and exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities, and

focusing on vocational training rather than capacity-building [6]. Despite the positive impact of Chinese investments in education infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives in Africa, there are criticisms about the unequal distribution of educational opportunities and benefits among African students. The disparities in access to scholarships, research funding, study abroad programs, and academic resources based on socioeconomic status, academic merit, or institutional affiliation can create barriers for marginalized or disadvantaged students to fully benefit from Chinese modernization efforts. Some African students studying in China raise concerns about the lack of transparent and inclusive policies governing admission criteria, scholarship selection processes, and resource allocation in Chinese institutions, which may perpetuate inequalities and hinder the academic advancement of underprivileged students.

The competition for limited financial aid, research grants, and internship placements can exacerbate existing disparities and limit the participation of students from diverse backgrounds in transformative educational experiences. Moreover, the concentration of Chinese investments in select regions, disciplines, or institutions within Africa may widen the gap between urban and rural areas, public and private universities, and well-established and emerging academic programs, leading to uneven development and resource distribution in the education sector. The need for equitable access to quality education, mentorship, career guidance, and professional development opportunities for all African students is emphasized as crucial for achieving inclusive, sustainable, and equitable growth in the continent. African students advocate for policies that promote diversity, equity, and social inclusion in higher education, ensuring that every student has the chance to fulfill their academic potential, pursue their passions, and contribute meaningfully to society. The call for targeted support, mentorship programs, and community engagement initiatives that address the needs of underrepresented groups, minorities, and marginalized communities resonates with the vision of creating a more just, inclusive, and supportive learning environment for all students.

Language Barrier as a Hindrance for Some African Students

African students in China face challenges due to language barriers, cultural differences, and limited proficiency in Mandarin or English. This hinders communication, academic performance, and social integration [7]. Despite China's educational investments, these issues highlight the need for a balanced approach addressing cultural preservation, equitable access, and language support. The language barrier poses a significant challenge for some African students studying in China and can impede their academic progress, social integration, and overall well-being. The dominance of Mandarin Chinese as the primary language of instruction,

communication, and interaction in Chinese universities may pose difficulties for non-native speakers, including African students who are not proficient in Mandarin or have limited exposure to the language. The complexities of mastering a new language, adapting to different linguistic structures, and navigating academic coursework in a foreign language environment can create stress, anxiety, and frustration for African students, impacting their confidence, performance, and engagement in the classroom. The need for language support services, language proficiency assessments, and language enhancement programs tailored to the needs of non-Chinese speaking students is underscored as essential for promoting academic success.

PERSPECTIVES ON CHINESE MODERNIZATION EFFORTS

China's modernization efforts have transformed the country into a major player in global affairs, with rapid economic growth, technological innovation, infrastructure development, social and cultural changes, and environmental sustainability initiatives. This transformation has lifted millions out of poverty and improved living standards. China has made significant investments in research and development, leading to breakthroughs in areas like artificial intelligence, digital technology, renewable energy, and high-speed rail. Infrastructure projects like the Belt and Road Initiative have connected countries, facilitating trade and economic development. However, China faces challenges related to environmental sustainability and ecological conservation. As a major economic power, China plays a crucial role in shaping international trade, diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation. Understanding China's modernization journey is essential for gaining insights into its impact on the global community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHINESE AND AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS

In light of the experiences and perspectives shared by African students studying in China, as well as the opportunities and challenges identified in the realm of education, cultural exchange, and collaboration between Chinese and African governments, the following recommendations are proposed.

Strengthening Educational Partnerships and Collaborations

Establishing joint scholarship programs, research initiatives, and student exchange opportunities between universities in China and African countries to promote academic mobility, knowledge sharing, and capacity building in key priority areas such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), sustainable development, and global governance. Investing in faculty training, curriculum development, and quality assurance mechanisms to enhance the academic standards, teaching methodologies, and research outputs of higher education institutions in both

regions, ensuring alignment with international best practices, industry demands, and societal needs for a skilled workforce and informed citizenry. Supporting entrepreneurship ecosystems, incubation centers, and innovation hubs that connect students, researchers, and entrepreneurs from China and Africa to collaborate on cutting-edge projects, start-up ventures, and social enterprises that address local challenges, explore new market opportunities, and foster cross-border partnerships for sustainable growth and systemic change.

Addressing the Challenges and Criticisms Raised by African Students

Improving transparency, accountability, and communication channels within Chinese universities, government agencies, and bilateral cooperation frameworks to address the grievances, concerns, and feedback provided by African students regarding issues of academic support, financial aid, cultural integration, and student services that impact their overall well-being, academic performance, and social inclusion. Enhancing cultural sensitivity, diversity training, and intercultural competence among faculty members, administrative staff, and student ambassadors to create an inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environment for international students from Africa and other regions, fostering a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for promoting cross-cultural understanding and solidarity among diverse student populations. Establishing counseling services, mental health resources, and peer support networks that cater to the specific needs, challenges, and aspirations of African students studying in China, recognizing the importance of holistic well-being, emotional resilience, and community connection in navigating the complex dynamics of academic life, personal growth, and intercultural interactions in a foreign country.

Promoting Cultural Exchange and Preserving African Identity

Celebrating cultural diversity, heritage preservation, and cross-cultural dialogue through festivals, exhibitions, language classes, and community engagement activities that showcase the rich traditions, creative expressions, and historical legacies of African nations in partnership with Chinese cultural institutions, media outlets, and civil society organizations. Encouraging intergenerational storytelling, oral history projects, and digital archives that document the lived experiences, aspirations, and contributions of African students in China, capturing their unique perspectives, achievements, and challenges in shaping a shared narrative of friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect between peoples of different backgrounds, beliefs, and worldviews. Collaborating on joint cultural heritage conservation projects, museum exchanges, and artistic collaborations that promote cross-border understanding, artistic innovation, and sustainable tourism development, highlighting the

interconnected histories, shared values, and shared futures of China and Africa as vibrant, dynamic, and interconnected societies in a rapidly changing global landscape. By implementing these recommendations and fostering a climate of trust, reciprocity, and mutual support between Chinese and African governments, educational institutions, and civil society partners, we can create a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous future for the next generation of leaders, scholars, and citizens who will carry forward the torch of friendship, learning, and collaboration across borders, disciplines, and generations.

CONCLUSION

This article explores the experiences of African students studying in China and the dynamics of educational partnerships between Chinese and African governments. It highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by these students, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and academic excellence. Strengthening educational collaborations and cultural exchange initiatives can enhance mutual understanding, academic excellence, and friendship between China and African countries. Addressing these concerns is crucial for creating a supportive environment for their academic success and personal well-being. The study suggests that ongoing research, dialogue, and collaboration between scholars, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders from China and Africa can help develop evidence-based insights, policy recommendations, and innovative solutions. African students' experiences can influence Chinese modernization efforts in Africa, promoting knowledge sharing, innovation diffusion, and capacity building in key sectors.

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