

# Historical and Current Status of China-Africa in Economic and Cultural Exchanges: A Case Study of the Chinese Hongyu Company in Zimbabwe

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*Since the 2nd century BC, the Chinese have gradually blazed the famous “Silk Road” on land, promoting the integrational and common development of Eastern and Western civilizations. The Tong Dian (completed in 801), a noted Chinese ancient classic in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), excerpted Du Huan’s precious book, Stores on Journey, regarded as the first bridge of cultural exchanges between China and African countries. According to these ancient books, the Chinese invented paper-making techniques spread along the Silk Road to the Arab world, now Central Asia and West Asia. It gradually spread to Europe, Africa and other parts of the world.*

*Modern trade between China and African countries is expanding gradually. Economic trade between China and African countries has supported a considerable market, demonstrating the benefits and prospects of maintaining international multilateral trade. In particular, it must be emphasized that increasingly closer economic and cultural exchanges occur between China and Zimbabwe, an emerging country in central Africa. Hongyu, a privately owned Chinese company, is an outstanding commercial typical in Zimbabwe. The company’s representative businesses are four; for example, constructing a public clean water system has benefited 300,000 Ndebele people in Gweru city. The commercial operation of Hongyu shows significant enlightenment: Chinese and African people work together to build a community with a shared future for humanity.*

*Keywords: Silk Road, economic and tradable exchanges, Zimbabwean economy, Hongyu Company, win-win cooperation*

## INTRODUCTION

Human civilization expeditiously flourishes through multi-faceted social interactions. In the second century BC, the Chinese first took to open up the famous ancient “Silk Road,” historically promoting the integrational and common development of Eastern and Western civilizations. This historic exchanged road now shows great vitality again. Similarly, although China and Africa are thousands of miles apart, China has established official informational channels with African society since the Tang Dynasty in the early 9th century. The paper-making technology invented by the Chinese in 105 AD significantly contributed to human civilizational development. Through the Silk Road, Chinese paper-making technology first spread to the Arab world, now Central Asia and West Asia, during a period of the ancient Chinese Tang Dynasty more than 600 years later. Subsequently, this historic innovational technology gradually spread to Europe,

Africa and the rest of the world. Contemporary China increases tight economic and cultural exchanges with burgeoning African countries like Zimbabwe. Because China is the world's largest developing country, and Africa is the continent with the most developing countries. More than a third of the world's population is in China and Africa. The economic trade between China and African countries has become an enormous market, demonstrating the benefits and prospects of safeguarding international multilateral trade. The commercial operation of Hongyu, a private Chinese company in Zimbabwe, is a typical example. For instance, this company built water channels for local ethnic Ndebele farmers free of charge and made unpaid investments in the fight against COVID-19. Their remarkable works form four significant enlightenments. In short, China and African countries work together to build a better society.

### **A Historical Review of China-Africa Trades**

Ancient Chinese people, depending on self-creative technical supports including paper-making technology and ocean-going navigation etc., as well as the ideal guidance of mutual assistance and friendship, maintained constant exchanges with the ethnic groups and countries in present Central Asia and Northern Africa. Those pioneer influences have stretched to now.

#### *Full Bloom on the Silk Road in Ancient Chinese Han Dynasty*

A prominent feature of Chinese refined traditional culture is harmonious with all countries and makes friends everywhere. Ancient Chinese sage Confucius said: "Is it not delightful to have friends come from afar (Confucius' disciples, c.540 B.C.-400 BC)?" The Chinese people have always followed this principle since the mutual benefit is a cornerstone of friendly exchanges among different places. During the ancient Chinese Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-8 AD), the central royal court blazed the world-famous "Silk Road." According to historical records of *The Han Book* (accomplished in 105) compiled by an imperial historian named Ban Gu (32-92) and others, an imperial envoy named Zhang Qian (c.164 B.C.-114 BC) and his entourage were sent to contact the countries set upon an oasis in the Han Dynasty' Western Regions and to fight against the invading forces federatively. "Thus, the northwestern countries began interacting with the Han Dynasty (Ban et al., 105)." It was also recorded in the classic titled *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (accomplished in 1084) compiled by a famous ancient Chinese scholar Sima Guang (1019-1086); in 2 AD, "the State of Huang Zhiguo presented rhinoceros" to Liu Kan (9 B.C.-6 AD), emperor of the Western Han Dynasty (Sima,1048). Dutch scholar J.J.L. Duyvendak (1889-1954) commented in his book titled *China's Discovery of Africa* that some Western scholars asserted "the State of Huang Zhi" was present Ethiopia in East Africa (Duyvendak, 1949). Thus, that entry in the above classic is the earliest official recorded material exchange between China and Africa.

The ancient Silk Road started from the eastern Yellow River civilizational birthplace of Chang'an, the capital of the Western Han Dynasty. It extended westward through mountains and grasslands to connect many residents of different colorful skin groups in "the northwestern countries." Along the Silk Road, the Eastern and Western personages, such as envoys, merchants, monks, scholars and artisans, went back and forth like an endless stream. During a period of the ancient Chinese Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), a scholar named Yang, Xuanzhi (?-555), in his book titled *Luoyang Jala Records* (accomplished in 1084), summarily described those historical scenes: From the West of Cong Ling Ridges (the ancient Chinese historical name for the Pamirs) to Daqin (the ancient Chinese historical name for the Roman Empire), hundred city-states engaged in tradable and cultural exchanges with the Han Dynasty. Many officials, merchants, artisans et al. hurried up for business along the Silk Road (Yang, 547).

The most classic, the "Four Great Inventions," created by ancient Chinese, was first transmitted to many parts of the world along this overland Silk Road. An English philosopher and statesman named Francis Bacon (1561-1626) praised in 1620 the Chinese inventional gunpowder, the compass and the printing for changing the whole face and condition of things in the world (Bacon, 1620). The four ancient civilizations, including the Yellow River civilization, the Egyptian civilization, the Babylonian civilization and the Indian civilization, play highly crucial roles in human developmental history. Thanks to the Silk Road, the four civilizations link each other across time and space (Li, 2019).

From 1405 to 1433, the Chinese Imperial Court of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) sent Zheng He (1371-1433) as an official envoy to befriend the overseas Western states. Zheng led the world's largest maritime diplomatic fleet and sailed 45,000 km on seven voyages. These Ming fleets visited more than 30 countries and regions belonging to parts of Asia and Africa along the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans now. The fleets arrived at the present-day African territory four times, among which at least seven ancient countries and regions could be traced and verified, such as Mogadishu in Somalia and Mombasa in Kenya etc. now (Qin, 2011; Zhang, 2005). In 1431, the Ming fleets eventually reached present the Port of Beira in Mozambique during the period of the seventh voyage time, bring many items representing the Chinese civilization with them, such as silk and porcelain etc., to trade with the oversea inhabitants' spices and medicinal materials etc. (Ma, 1451; Preparatory Committee etc., 1985). Chinese people have made friends worldwide, and Chinese culture also spread far and wide. The Ming blue and white porcelain treasures in the Bella Museum still clearly show that vivid, lively historical scene (Yan, 2012). Historians call it the "Maritime Silk Road" that initiated ancient trades between the East and West.

American Yale University historic professor Valerie Hansen believed the Silk Road was as iconic a statue in world history as the Colossus of Rhodes or the Suez Canal. The in-depth study revealed many trades and exchanges between East and West along the Silk Road, including silk, paper and spices, paintings and dances, etc. The professor stressed: "The Silk Road is a fascinating story of cultural transmission and an intricate chain across Central Asia and China." Further research showed that silk was not the most important good on the road, and "paper, invented in China before Julius Caesar was born, displays a bigger impact in Europe." Professor Hansen emphasized: "Perhaps most significant of all is the road's transmission of ideas, technologies and artistic motifs (Hansen, 2015)." The once separated and different civilizations join together by newly created historical conditions; thus, integral human civilization can develop in a higher, faster and broader scope.

#### *Chinese Paper-Making Technology Spreads to Europe, Africa and All Over the World During the Tang Dynasty*

Wordage is the most critical communicational tool in transmitting ideas, skills and organizations. Long after the creation of wordage in history, paper exploratively was made the most essential and convenient medium for writing. In late December 1978, precious cultural relics, such as ancient pieces of paper, bronze wares and coins, were unearthed in Zhongyan village, Taibai township, Fufeng county, Shaanxi province in China. Through carbon-14 determination, the ancient paper named "Zhongyan Paper," titled by scholars and other bronze wares etc., was confirmed the produced combinational time, years during a period of Emperor Xuandi (91 B.C.-48 BC) to Emperor Pingdi (1 B.C.-6 AD) of the Western Han Dynasty. Scientific research proves that "Zhongyan Paper" is the earliest paper created by Chinese people in human civilizational history (Luo, 1978; Pan, 1998.).

More innovative and systematic paper-making technology was documented in the famous classics titled *The Later Han Shu* (accomplished in 445), compiled by the ancient Chinese scholar Fan Ye (398-445). During a period of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), a court official named Tsai Lun (?-121) invented more novel paper-making technology for the first time in the first year of Yuan Xing (imperial year title, or 105 A.D.) in the world. He had directed the men to "make paper by bark, ramie, rags and fishnets." Imperial officials and social persons used it all from then on so that "the whole society called it Marquis Tsai Paper (Fan, 445)." This is a significant milestone in human civilizational development. Chinese paper-making technology gradually spreads to the world via the overland Silk Road. From August 18 to 22, 1990, the International Association of Paper Historians (IPH) held the 20th Congress in Malmedy, Belgium. The 20th IPH Congress unanimously recognized that Tsai Lun was a great inventor of paper technology; China was the inventor of the paper country (International Association of Paper Historians, 1990).

In Central Asia, the Talas River runs through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, anciently known as the Henchus River. According to the records of Famous ancient Chinese classics titled *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid* (accomplished in 1084), in the tenth year of Tianbao (751) of the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907), Gao Xianzhi (?-756), the Frontier Envoy and Minister of the Tang's Anxi Capital Garrison, led the Tang' army and fought against the troops of the Dashi (only named by the Tang, meaning Arabian Empire) near

the Henchus River, known as “The Battle of Henchus” or “The Battle of Talas” (Sima, 1084). History often moves forward by collisions. Many Tang soldiers and accompanying artisans were captured in that Battle. A young man among them was named Du Huan, a relative of Du You (735-812) who once served as prime minister in the Tang Dynasty. Since the captive artisans and Du Huan mastered some skills to make paper, gold and silver commodities and constructional items, they were recruited to labor and to run manual workshops. Thus, Du Huan worked and lived in many places of the Arabian Empire for eleven years, now Central Asia, West Asia and North Africa. In the first year of Baoying of the Tang Dynasty (762), Du Huan returned to Guangzhou, China, on a trading freighter from a port on the east coast of Africa. Soon, he wrote a book titled *Stores on Journey*, presenting his experiences abroad and about the countries there. Some of its contents were recorded into the famous classics *Tong Dian* (accomplished in 801) compiled by Du You. Contemporary scholars believe that the *Stores on Journey* is one of the earliest important official historical referenced documents in ancient China, expressing geographical appearances, local customs and social, economic and cultural conditions in West Asia and Africa (Li, 2017).

It is recorded in *Stores on Journey*, quoted in *Tong Dian*, that Tang artisans kept their family names and set up workshops within the territory of Dashi (Arabian Empire) to make products (Du, 801). They made some full, rich Chinese characteristic products such as painting, silk, gold and silver utensils and paper. Some analyses of the *Stores on Journey*'s historical documentation are the followings:

First, Du Huan met a group of Chinese artisans in the capital Akula of the Arab Empire's Abbasid Dynasty, now Kufa City, in southern Iraq. For example, he saw an artisan painter named “Fan Shu from native Jing Zhao.” Tang Dynasty's capital was Jing Zhao, now Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province, in China. Second, these Chinese artisans performed many technical tasks, such as “the goldsmith,” who grasped metal melting technology, and others learned the technical ability to “make textiles and silks.” The third, more crucial thing was that the two “weavers” controlled paper-making technique produced the homologous goods in the group; they came from the “eastern place of the Chinese Yellow River” and were named “Le Huan” and “Lü Li,” respectively (Du, 746). That is to say, paper-making technology, one of the Chinese “Four Great Inventions,” was introduced to the Arab world during the period of the Tang Dynasty.

Some international scholars have researched more about the spread of Chinese paper-making worldwide. Professor Jonathan M. Bloom at Norma Jean Calderwood University of Islamic and Asian Art at Boston College in America pointed out: “Paper was invented in China more than 2000 years ago.” After the Battle of Talas in 751, “Chinese prisoners captured by the Arab commander Ziyad ibn Salih introduced paper-making to Samarkand.” Samarkand is now the second-largest city in Uzbekistan. The ancient “Samarkand Paper” made by the skilled “Chinese prisoners” of the Tang Dynasty was famous for its exquisite application (Bloom, 1999; 2001). Thanks to the ancient Tang' skilled craftsmen working hard, Chinese unique and advanced technologies such as paper-making, weaving and metal melting spread into the territory of the Arabian Empire. Subsequently, this historic innovational technology gradually spread to Europe, Africa and the rest of the world. In short, Chinese paper-making has contributed significantly to human civilizational development in history.

#### *Guide Diversified Exchanges Between China and Africa*

Du Huan from the Tang had remained in the vast Arabian territory for eleven years and gone to many cities and places. For example, Du Huan went with the Arab army to Akula in 758. Soon after, he traveled to a state of “Molin.” According to the local customs and practices described by Du Huan in *Stores on Journey*, modern scholars agree that Molin now belongs to the territory of Africa. But where is the exact position that scholars say differently?

According to scholars such as Zhang Yichun et al., the ancient state of “Molin” is The State of Eritrea or Ethiopia in today's Africa. Because scholar Zhang expressed that Du Huan ended up in Massawa Port of Eritrean and boarded an ocean-going cargo ship bound for Tang. After several twists and turns on the return voyage, he finally landed at the motherland port of Guangzhou, China (Du, 746). Scholar Wang Ting believed “Molin” was today's Mali in Africa (Wang, 2001). Scholar Xu Yongzhang said “Molin” was African Morocco or the Maghrib. In short, the precise location needs to be further investigated by contemporary scholars.

However, in his *Stores on Journey*, Du Huan described many things, such as local social economy, culture and religion. What he expressed is similar to present African countries to some degree. For example, in the book recorded in Molin, men were dark-skinned with moving and forceful personal characters in social customs. There were little rice and wheat and little green vegetation in the lands. After the publishing of *Tong Dian*, the very remote information about Africa was first disseminated to the Tang central administrative system and social scholars. Chinese social elites knew what was happening in distant Africa for the first time. In a word, Du Huan's *Stores on Journey* seems to build a long bridge or passage between Chinese culture and Arab Islamic culture and African culture in history. It is of great reference value for us to research developmental exchanges between ancient China, West Asia, and North Africa.

### **Tradable Boom in Contemporary China-Africa**

Modern China and African countries are very close in economic exchanges. Hypothetically speaking, ancient China and some African east coast countries might initially establish a communicational channel expressed by *Stores on Journey*. More than 1,000 years later, the economic trade between modern China and burgeoning African countries have become a vast market. China is the world's largest developing country, and Africa is the continent with the most developing countries. More than a third of the world's population is in China and Africa. Sharing weal and woe, the Chinese and African peoples have forged a deep friendship rooted in our similar historical experiences, development tasks and shared aspirations. We will strengthen collective dialogue, enhance traditional friendship, deepen practical cooperation, and work together toward an even stronger China-Africa community with a shared future.

#### *China-Africa Bilateral Trades Grow Steadily*

China and African countries have helped each other on the road to economic development and national rejuvenation and have written a splendid progressional chapter together. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has accelerated commercial exchanges with African countries since 1949. Bilateral trade between China and Africa stood only at 12.14 million US Dollars (USD or \$) in 1950 but reached \$100 million in 1960, up \$1 billion in 1980 and over \$10 billion in 2000. China also announced in 2000 to cancel the debts of some African countries and actively cut down a debt repayment total of 10.9 billion *yuan* Ren Min Bi (RMB or ¥) for 31 heavily indebted less developed countries and least developed countries in Africa. Subsequently, the bilateral trade between China and Africa showed rapid growth momentum. In 2008, the trade exceeded over \$100 billion, of which China exported \$50.8 billion to Africa and imported \$56 billion from Africa (Information Office of State Council of PRC, 2010). In 2015, China's trade with Africa reached a valuable peak of approximately \$ 145 billion, and China's outward foreign direct investment (OFDI) stock to Africa increased to \$ 37 billion (United Nations Comtrade, 2015). Continuous trade has promoted common economic development and expanded the cultural exchange scope between the two sides.

For example, The Republic of Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in southeast Africa with an area of 390,000 square kilometers and its capital, Harare. There was a total national population of 16.9 million in 2021. Shona is the leading ethnic group, accounting for 84.5% of the population. The second place is the Ndebele, with about 14.9 %. Zimbabwe is rich in mineral resources, including 62 abundant minerals such as gold, platinum, nickel, lithium, coal, etc., and 17 rare metals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2022). The extant imposing "Great Zimbabwe Ruins," built by the Shona people in the 11th century, are the highest-level ancient civilizational symbol in sub-Saharan Africa. The ruins were selected for the *United Nations World Heritage List* in 1986. In terms of modern history, the "British South Africa Company" established colonial rule on Zimbabwean soil in 1890. Zimbabwean people fought a bitter struggle against the white racist regime in the 1960s and achieved national liberation finally.

The Chinese people have given strong support to the Zimbabwean cause since 1949. Zimbabwe became an independent nation on April 18, 1980; on the same day, China and Zimbabwe established diplomatic relations. Long stable economic and cultural ties have existed on both sides. Every year, Zimbabwe exports tobacco leaf, cotton, ferrochrome and copper to China and imports mechanical and electrical products, computers and communicational technologies and textile products. For example, the total bilateral tradable volume was \$560 million, up 88.55% year on year in 2010. China assisted Zimbabwe with some

constructions, such as the Harare National Stadium, the telecom transformation of “Mobile One Network,” and the operation and maintenance of China’s Modern Ark 60 turboprop feeder commercial airliner. The Chinese government has also sent medical teams and agricultural experts to Zimbabwe (Economic and Commercial Office of the Embassy of PRC, 2011).

On December 1-2, 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping was invited to pay a state visit to Zimbabwe. He published bylines in Zimbabwe’s largest newspaper titled *the Herald*. Xi Jinping praised that the Zimbabwean people always safeguarded “national independence and national dignity” and devotedly dedicated to building “a stronger African continent through unity.” He affectionately expressed that despite the vast distance between China and Zimbabwe, both people “have maintained a traditional friendship that is deep and firm (Xi, 2015).” Many friendly exchanges between China, Zimbabwe, and the African continent continue to increase. African nations have also tried to develop their economies, starting many new constructional projects.

### *Communal Stage: “Chinese Dragon” and “African Lion”*

In recent years, China and Africa have worked hand in hand to give full play to their respective economic strengths. Hundreds of millions of people in multi-ethnic Africa are making unremitting efforts to realize their industrialized and modernized dreams. Painstaking works have brought significant changes in African situations. On African soil, many infrastructural projects have sequentially been built, such as electrified railways, expressways, hydropower stations and industrial parks etc., attracting global attention. Industrialization and urbanization have taken rough shapes in many African countries. In late July 2018, the President of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping, visited Africa. He highly commended the friendly and hard-working African people for their economic growth. President Xi stated that a fully promising African continent became “one of the fastest-growing regions in the world.” President Xi Jinping figuratively described faster economic development there as “forging ahead like a galloping African lion (Information Office of the State Council of PRC etc., 2018).”

China-Africa commercial cooperates are expanding in depth and breadth. Many Chinese industries export goods and undertake projects from various African sectors. Meanwhile, African companies import many Chinese industrial and consumptive products and export local commodities to China. “The total tradable volumes between China and Africa during the period of 2014-2020 had been \$1,319.9 billion.” From 2009 to 2021, China remained Africa’s largest trading partner for 12 years. “The proportion of China-Africa trade in Africa’s total foreign trade rose yearly, over 21 percent in 2020.” The Chinese people sincerely assist the African brothers in their economic development. “From 2013 to 2018, China’s foreign aid amounted to ¥ 270.2 billion, of which 44.65 percent to African countries (Information Office of State Council of PRC, 2021).”

In Zimbabwe, China Jiangsu International Economic and Technical Cooperation Group Co., Ltd. undertook an important reconstructive and expansionary project, a contract value of \$150 million. Victoria Falls Airport mainly obtained a concessional loan from the Export-Import Bank of China. Then, after it was completed, Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe attended the complete ceremony of Victoria Falls Airport on November 18, 2016. This international airport will increase passenger capacity from 700,000 to 1.5 million annually. Social mass economic construction is connected with cultural life. In Zimbabwe, a classical Chinese dragon dance is often performed in the capital of Harare during a period of the traditional Chinese Spring Festival. The dragon soars dramatically, and the crowd cheers warmly. That means “Chinese Dragon” and “African Lion” dance together on the historic grand stage. The African residents and constructive Chinese workers work together and live happily.

### *More New Enterprises Set Up to Speed Up Production*

China’s every aid project to Africa always is designed elaborately. Thus, Chinese projects are closely related to infrastructure, culture and education, which are most urgently needed by African countries. The financial supports for those implemented projects are grant assistance, interest-free loans and concessional loans. From 2000 to 2020, China built many infrastructural assisted projects for Africa, for example, “more than 13,000 kilometers of roads and railways, more than 80 large power facilities, more than 130 medical

facilities and 170 schools, and the construction of 45 gymnasiums” etc., more importantly, “more than 160,000 African personnel trained by Chinese companies in various fields.” A significant number of Chinese civilians have gone to Africa to build factories. Many companies with Chinese equity participation play vital roles in various African national industrial chains in construction, transportation, electronics, healthcare, and medical care. By the end of October 2021, “China had set up more than 3,500 classified enterprises in Africa, among which private enterprises gradually become the main investible forces to Africa.” Various typological Chinese joint-stock enterprises “had employed more than 80 percent of local African employees, directly and indirectly creating millions of job opportunities (State Council Information Office of PRC, 2021),” and actively contributed to the prosperity of local populaces. Those practical activities have written the open, inclusive and win-win developmental stories associated with them, peaceful and developmental missions have spurred the united efforts to build a community with a shared future for humanity.

China and Africa worked together towards the social and economic goals of a win-win partnership; a showy act was the establishment of the “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)” in 2000. At “FOCAC Beijing Summit” on September 4, 2018, the leaders of China and Africa reached a strategic consensus on building a “China-Africa community with a shared future.” The whole call on all countries to work together toward a community with a shared future for humanity, an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world. People of all ethnic groups “enjoy lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity, and a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation, to uphold and advance world peace and development.” Faced with the current severe situation, we firmly uphold multilateral trading regime and oppose protectionism to “support the efforts for an open and inclusive world economy (Beijing Declaration, 2018).” This is an essential agenda of the China-Africa community with a shared future. It has charted a course for China-Africa to pleasantly cooperate in the new era and set grand working goals for both.

### **Typical Example: A Chinese Private Hongyu Company in Zimbabwe**

Through the ages, China and African countries have maintained a long-standing friendship and engaged in frequent economic exchanges. Thus, a series of representative moving stories expressing human civilizational progress emerged. The followings show a typical example: the commercial operation of a private Chinese Hongyu company in Zimbabwe.

#### *Qualitatively Build the Projects to Benefit the African Lives*

In recent years, the Republic of Zimbabwe’s economy has maintained a growth momentum despite the slow global economic development. In 2021, Zimbabwe’s nominal gross domestic product (nominal GDP) was \$21.4 billion, the real economic growth rate (real EGR) was 7.8%, and the per capita GDP was \$1266. Inflation was running at 139% that year. In addition, the total external debt was \$14.199 billion, accounting for 65.89% of nominal GDP. However, the overall economic situation in this landlocked southeast African country remains feeble.

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2022). Hongyu, a privately owned Chinese company founded in Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital, has been operating for over 16 years. Mr. Li Jiaqi, over sixty years old, is the company’s President. He has a household registration in Lanzhou City, Gansu province in China, till now. Mr. Li Jiaqi majored in English at Tianshui Normal College in Gansu province and graduated in 1980. Mr. Li created a distinguished commercial record in Africa. He founded and served as the first President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Zimbabwe so that Chinese merchants and Africans respectfully named him President Li. Therefore, President Li Jiaqi was also elected as an overseas member of the 10th Political Consultative Conference of Gansu Province in China. In 2022, I contacted President Li directly via mobile phone video and also obtained some written materials from him. Those valuable materials show some economic activities of Chinese enterprises in Zimbabwe.

President Li Jiaqi repeatedly expressed through his mobile video that Chinese companies’ first and ultimate operating goal was to serve the needs of local Zimbabwean residents. Fulfilling basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and transportation is crucial for human survival. Minority ethnic groups in rural

Zimbabwe, such as some of the Ndebele, still have preserved the traditional “Chieftain System.” The chief distributes land and decides essential matters within the ethnic group. Thus, social and economic developments are slow there. He said: “We will help them if we can, and our company will also benefit from that.” For example, as President of Hongyu, Li unhesitatingly decided to do a project to build a public clean water supply (PCWS) system for the residents of Gweru City and nearby villages. Gweru, as a municipality and the capital of the Midlands province, is home to the unique and underpopulated Ndebele ethnic group. The city is located near the railway and routes through Harare. Gweru sits on a piece of high ground on the banks of the Gweru River. To get drinking water after first settling here in history, the Ndebele used “umkwelo” or a ladder to descend from the high ground to the river. Hence the municipality’s original name was “iKwelo,” meaning “steep place.” The changed present name of “Gweilu” was confirmed in 1982. Thus, the water shortage has been a severe problem for the populace.

To build PCWS, President Li and his employees poured many workforce and funds, and it took three years finally. They systematically built roads, water channels and power systems. After PCWS was put into operation, the number of favored residents was about 300,000 in the Gweru area. Smooth roads also facilitated material transport and boosted local crop production and marketing. Moreover, Hongyu opened a flour mill in Harare, where the company headquartered was located, to serve the local public’s daily needs. The mill specially implemented the processing method of incoming materials at a low price, which rural farmers sincerely welcomed. Infrastructural construction is vital for economic development and a key driver of productivity. As further argued by *World Development Indicators 2018 of the World Bank*, roads, electrical supplies, public water supply equipment, telecommunication and other infrastructures are momentous stimulants to residential communities and economic production, especially in rural areas (World Bank, 2018).

Scholars Richardson Kojo Edeme, Nelson C. Nkulu and Jane Francis CIdenyi et al. elaborated again that infrastructural development effectively achieved economic growth, especially for most African countries dependent on agriculture. Furthermore, building infrastructure in rural areas could improve farmers’ living standards and foster employment creation. The scholars worked at the Department of Economics, University of Nigeria, Nsuka City, Nigeria. After examining the infrastructural developmental effects on agricultural output and farmers’ employment in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), they reached this conclusion using some economic mathematical models (Edeme, Nkulu and CIdenyi, 2020). After Hongyu built PCWS to serve the inhabitants of Zimbabwe, they got more opportunities to start new businesses. Both practice and theory show a win-win situation between China and Africa has emerged.

#### *Actively Participate in the Establishment of an African Industrial Park*

With the international economic integrative acceleration, China, Zimbabwe, and other African countries are increasingly in contact with each other in commercial activities. The Zimbabwean government significantly increases economic ties with friendly countries. The executive authority has proactively formulated a new primary national guideline named “Look East Policy.” Under this new policy, Zimbabwe actively pursues resumed renewed and broader engagement with China and other Asian countries. To help own African brethren sincerely, China has invested in infrastructure such as roads, water and sewerage projects, hospitals, etc. Chinese companies have assisted Zimbabwe in exploiting various natural resources, which are economic cooperatives agreed upon by the two governments. Many varietal products have been traded between the two countries fairly. They are mineral products from Zimbabwe and complete sets of machinery, equipment, and dairy products from China. Both participants have been sharing productive dividends.

For example, the total bilateral productive import and export between China and Zimbabwe amounted to \$ 6.41792 billion from 2015 to 2019. In 2016, it was \$1114.77 million and rose to \$ 134.299 million in 2019, an increase of 20.47 %. Compared with the ordinary 2019 and the raging epidemic in 2021, the bilateral import and export increased by \$539.28 million, a growth rate of 40.16 %. From January to July 2022, the total bilateral import and export products between China and Zimbabwe reached up to \$1,256.61

million, an increase of \$366.03 million and a year-on-year growth of 41.6% compared to the same period of 2021 (Huating Industrial Research Institute etc., 2022).

An economic upturn boosted Zimbabweans' building ambitions. In 2020, the Zimbabwean government gathered confidence and strength to formulate and implement the strategic *VISION 2030*: "Consistent with the collective aspirations and determination of the Zimbabwean people to achieve the Autonomous and Prosperous Upper-Middle Income Society by 2030, the Republic of Zimbabwe launched *VISION 2030* to chart a new transformative and inclusive development agenda." It is an only governmental pursuit accordance with this vision "to implement broad-based change, create new wealth and expand horizons of economic opportunity for all Zimbabweans, with no one left behind (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2020)." The realization of the vision is further divided into several stages, progressing steadily. According to the First 5-year Medium Term Plan titled *the National Development Strategy 1: 2021-2025 (NDS1)*, "Economic Growth and Stability" is the first guideline. Meanwhile, other vital guidelines have also been established, such as "*Security of Food and Nutrition*," "*Drive the Economy Close the Upstream Value Chain and Structural Transformation*," and "*Environmental Protection, Climate Resilience and Natural Resource*," etc.

During national strategic planning, Hongyu set up a timber processing plant in Harare. President Li Jiaqi, on the one hand, guided the careful management to participate in the market competition; on the other hand, they decided to recruit many local workers, more than 200 at the most. He keeps an eye on marketable competition for commodities, meanwhile, pays close attention to the lives of African residents. An excellent social welfare image enables Hongyu to carry out their business smoothly. The better the economic benefits, the more capital accumulation. He examines Zimbabwean and the whole African diverse marketable dynamics and thinks about what economic theories to be used to make appropriate commercial development. After careful schemes, he determines to seize the merchant opportunity and to create conditions for many more significant and medium-sized Chinese state-owned and private companies to enter the Zimbabwean market. President Li had directed his team to scheme an important entrepreneurial activity—to buy a piece of land to create an industrial park. Accordingly, the park will attract investment from China and other countries to take part in it.

In 2005, the Hongyu company, run by President Li, started the construction of an industrial developmental park in Harare. The company had purchased 47 hectares of planned land, and the project team carefully designed the drawings. They used many relatively advanced mechanical facilities to carry out the park's infrastructure, which took three years. Meanwhile, the company first provided job opportunities for the local Shona and Ndebele ethnic inhabitants, and they could earn money from the park to support their families. Secondly, the company taught the employees working skills, including mechanized operating, construction management, equipment maintenance, etc. Some young Africans acquired skills that would last a lifetime. The industrial park' designated goal was achieved in 2008. According to the plan, a few Chinese merchants had entered the park successively, paying \$20 per square meter. Today, the number of Chinese companies in the garden is close to 50. An industrial park's domanical rich commercial price is now up to \$200 per square meter.

Regarding industrial park construction and other commercial operations, Hongyu follows a principle that all economic activities must be closely linked to the Zimbabwean national developmental strategy. President Li has always focused on the *VISION 2030* goal that all attempts strive to make Zimbabwe arrive "An Autonomous and Prosperous Upper-Middle Income Society by 2030." Hongyu's managerial policy shows the posture to carry out this national strategy. They cover several aspects, including complying with Zimbabwean banking and financial regulations, creating a competitive and friendly commercial environment, increasing investment, strengthening political and economic engagement with the Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups etc. One of Hongyu's net results is that they have made a steady increase in the taxes paid.

However, some men ignored the positive win-win benefits of bilateral international cooperation and preferred to investigate the legitimate commercial affairs of others. They made irresponsible remarks about Zimbabwean new policy and sincere Chinese aid offer, dishing the dirt. Mr. Obi Egbuna Jnr Simunye revealed on Zimbabwean's largest daily newspaper titled *The Herald*: "Before these inquisitors stumbled

on Zimbabwe's 'Look East Policy,' some of them were parroting, entirely groundless." The inquisitors irresponsibly appraised those bailouts and accused them of "wrong and unnecessary." He specifically listed the economic constructional projects assisted by the Chinese people and their good economic and social benefits. Mr. Simunye said: "If we would guide by the historical annals and not emotionalism or suspicion, it should be clear this action by the Chinese is even more valuable (Simunye, 2016)." These actions are welcomed in any country and nationality to serve the populace's lives, productions, and cooperative economic constructional projects. As the great economist Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) said: "The economic conditions of modern life, though more complex, are in many ways more definite than those of earlier times." Thus, "the growth of free activities, of constant forethought and restless enterprise, have given a new precision and a new prominence to the causes that govern the relative values of different things and different kinds of labor (Marshall, 1890)." Hongyu's example from one side shows that China and Zimbabwe enjoy mutual benefits and pleasant cooperation.

### *Integrated Application of Chinese and African Cultures*

China has fully implemented the "Belts and Roads" proposed in recent years. The proposals contribute to an all-encompassing economic process to help Zimbabwe achieve its goal of becoming an "Upper-Middle Income Society" by 2030. Interconnectivity and integrated developments are crucial to the proposals and a general trend in economic and cultural exchanges between China and Africa.

According to the determinate vocational guideline, Honyu effectively gathers information on markets and businesspeople, discusses inter-regional consumptive demands and explores how to use the international funds flowing into Africa etc. The company owns more than 20 small shops scattered around Harare and elsewhere, but they have certain chain store qualities. To improve commercial efficiency, the company must understand the consumptive psychological status and pointedly give the consumers irresistible attraction. Corporate owner President Li Jiaqi deeply understands absorbing African culture into the business. Li often personally walks along the streets to survey customers' spending when visiting restaurants and supermarkets while carefully consulting relevant information. It is not uncommon to see the capital residents go window shopping. Therefore, various restaurants or supermarkets work hard to attract customers with different advertisements. As scholar Jacob Shenje said that consumers of fast foods in Harare daily faced "thousands of voices and images from newspapers, on billboards, radio and television." Many of these customers are well-educated, diverse and technologically proficient. So, the challenge for marketers is finding "a hook that will hold customers' attention." President Li thinks that those sound and visual campaigns are cultural displays. Culture displays glamour, its most strong expression by the tensional effect of celebrities and brands. Shenje's research ideas here may be cited again as a summary: "Managers should ensure that any celebrity selected to endorse the product possess the right personality and other symbolic properties associated with the celebrity (Shenje, 2017)."

Honyu staff carefully implemented their operational plan. They decorated the supermarket chain with colorful local ethnic pictures and icons, first keeping African rich cultural, social and political consciousness. Meanwhile, the staff also installed Chinese elements such as red lanterns, cute pandas, etc. African national pictures were unrestrained in the chain stores, and Chinese traditional arts were implicit—combining the two made great fun. Many children and young men entered the stores immediately to appreciate and shop. In my video link interviews across the Indian Ocean, Commercial President Li said through the screen: "I envy African friends who express their own culture anytime and anywhere; they also like Chinese culture very much. He must lose his identity if a person loses his national culture!" Based on such considerations and careful management, the business always brings crowds together with some of Honyu's bigger stores in Harare, celebrating happiness and even spontaneously singing and dancing. At the moment, cultures of African ebullience and Chinese implicitness added radiance to each other and economy and friendship mixed integration. This is the most beautiful picture of different nations and ethnic groups advancing together in harmony.

Scholars Johanna von Pezold and Miriam Driessen used rigorous academic methods to analyze the win-win situation between China and some African countries in the African commercial market. The scholars first investigated why specific African ethnic costumes produced by Chinese workers were popular in the

African market. They overall felt those costumes were “affordable, fair, bold and bright color.” The two scholars positively evaluated the two screening countries’ marketable situation: “Mozambican and Ethiopian manufacturers and traders, from the grassroots up to cultural elites, engage with Chinese imports with creativity and verve.” Pezold and Driessen presumptively made the following generalizations based on the survey data: Many African businesspeople often did so by three methods. First, the businessmen incorporated “Chinese materials or design elements into their products.” Second, they liked to “co-creating new designs and dress with their Chinese counterparts.” Third, African stylists “daringly alter the imported fabrics,” including those from China (Pezold and Driessen, 2021). The commercial markets in both countries are similar to those chain stores in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the scholars’ conclusions reveal an inevitable cooperative result between Chinese and African commercial enterprises—achieving a win-win situation.

### *Build New Hospital to Fight COVID-19*

The atrocious coronavirus (COVID-19) attacked humans during 2020-2022 and brought a series of severe disasters. For example, the estimates announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that the total death toll associated directly or indirectly with the COVID-19 pandemic (described as “excess mortality”) from January 1 2020-December 31, 2021, approximately had reached 14.9 million, ranging 13.3 million to 16.6 million (World Health Organization. 2022).

According to the “World Economic Outlook Update” released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the beginning of 2021, the global economy affected by COVID-19 shrunk by 3.5% in 2020 alone (International Monetary Fund, 2021). The global GDP fell by about \$3.52 trillion that year. It was close to the size of Germany’s GDP in 2019. As a result, all countries try to take measures to stimulate their economies. However, the IMF noted in its *World Economic Outlook 2022* that global economic growth would “forecast to slow from 6.0 percent in 2021 to 3.2 percent in 2022 and 2.7 percent in 2023.” The picture is grim very. “This is the weakest growth profile since 2001 except for the global financial crisis and the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (International Monetary Fund, 2022).” Both reports indicated that those years were the most difficult times for the global economy since the end of World War II. Almost all the growth of the past few years has come to naught, and the crises that occurred had not been seen for a century. From just one economic perspective, the flow of goods and services across countries was much slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and global supply chains even were interrupted.

The Chinese and Zimbabwean people united in fighting against the epidemic. President Li Jiaqi ordered his only son and daughter-in-law, studying medicine in the United States, to return to Zimbabwe in 2020. The father and son pooled all their private money and tried every means to get a business loan again. They quickly invested in building a small private hospital in Harare. The private hospital provided them with free and urgent medical care without conditions. Immediately after that, two young Chinese doctors and nurses emergently trained jumped into the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. 110 Chinese workers and business people working in Africa and groups of Zimbabwean residents et al. were unlucky enough to catch the virus.

Dr. Abhishek Tripathi said: “In managerial economics, the corporate theory based on profit maximization or valuable maximization is generally used to explain managerial decision-making (Tripathi, 2019).” The Chinese-owned private hospital had treated and rescued many COVID-19 patients for free, regardless of cost. African people highly praised these Chinese businessmen. The hospital opened by President Li and his son and daughter-in-law did not strive for narrow commercial “profit maximization or valuable maximization” but the popular or social maximum healthy and safe benefits. Undoubtedly, President Li has ascended to a new height in his career.

Nobel Prize economic winner 1976 Milton Friedman (1912-2006) published “*The Social Responsibility of Business*” in *the New York Times* in 1970. He expounded his view that the only social responsibility of enterprise was “to increase its profits,” which was also shared by many businessmen. He characterized those who opposed this view as “puppets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society.” He denounced their ideas as “fundamentally subversive doctrines.” Nick O’Donohoe, Chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF.) Social Innovation Council considered the fast-moving

times had made some theories obsolete. He affirmatively expressed: “While Friedman may be right that business is business, multiple different companies worldwide show that this belief is not necessarily consistent with the corporate social innovational investment (Donohoe, 2016).” Not exclusively limited to commercial profits in running the shopping mall, but it is adherence to realize commercial value through the most effective service to society. This is a high-level management and the right path to go sustainable development. Under President Li’s leadership, Hongyu company aims to create “An Autonomous and Prosperous Upper-Middle Income Society by 2030” per the Zimbabwean strategy. In short, satisfy local African inhabitants’ needs and aspirations for a happy life. This is not some “fundamentally subversive doctrine” but is a win-win at a high level: the growth and profitability of the company and the well-being of the general public simultaneously. This business method also fits into Zimbabwe’s national program—“Trade Transformation.”

People worldwide have stood the test and blazed a new developmental path to combat the once-in-a-century pandemic. On the 6th Global Business Forum (GBF.) Africa 2021 in Dubai, Hon. Dr. Constantino D.N.G. Chiwenga formulated that perhaps the pandemic was an opportunity for us to “explore how we can utilize our capacities.” He serves as Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe (The 6th Global Business Forum Africa, 2021). The Chinese and Zimbabwean people have made concerted efforts to fight the disease and achieved great success. There is no doubt that people all over the world have the confidence to overcome all difficulties.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hongyu company has made achievements and accumulated experience in commercial operations in Zimbabwe. The economic and cultural exchanges between the Chinese and African peoples have stood various long historic, harsh realistic trials and are unbreakable and everlasting. The company’s enlightening significances are as followings:

### **Improve the African Inhabitant’s Living Standards**

Chinese state-owned and private enterprises in Zimbabwe as Hongyu gratis and actively engage in commercial activities such as building water pipelines, roads and communicational lines etc., in cities and villages. Those projects have solved some local inhabitants’ vital and productive problems. Chinese companies will continue to assist African countries in their economic development better. Facts have shown that the Chinese people sincerely and selflessly help the African people and are true friends of the African people.

### **Introduce Appropriate Advanced Productive Technology**

When assisting African citizens or operating in corporate business, Hongyu staff have applied relatively advanced technology in their commerce. Science and technology improve productivity, making it a win-win for companies and Africans. Advanced technologies spread through projects to benefit Africans more. Undoubtedly, more continuing applications are the key measures to increase constructional speed for Africa.

### **Promote Different Cultural Integration Actively**

Hongyu highlights the African cultural components in the chain-store operation while adding Chinese cultural elements. Cultural performance originates from productive labor, and artistic effect guides economic development. This wins the love of all the people. Our responsibility and the historical trend is to continuously strengthen cultural exchanges and integration between China and Africa.

### **Treat Patients in Emergency Situations**

The ultimate developmental goal of human civilization is a healthy and happy life for all. Saving lives is above all else. President Li, his son, and others had devoted themselves to running the hospital, treating

patients and providing free medicine when COVID-19 invaded. They embrace this concept, carry it out, and have contributed to Chinese oversea beneficent actions. It demonstrates excellent significance.

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