



The main objective of MISTRA's study titled *The rise and decline and rise of China – searching for an organising philosophy* (2015) was to understand the dynamics of China's history and current course in their relation to sub-Saharan Africa, to enable successful interaction and policy comparison. This policy brief outlines some of the major recommendations arising from the study.

✓ Comparing value systems

When salient traditional African and Chinese values interact, they readily share many of the same kinds of moral judgements.

✓ Differing worldviews

✓ Relations between science and society

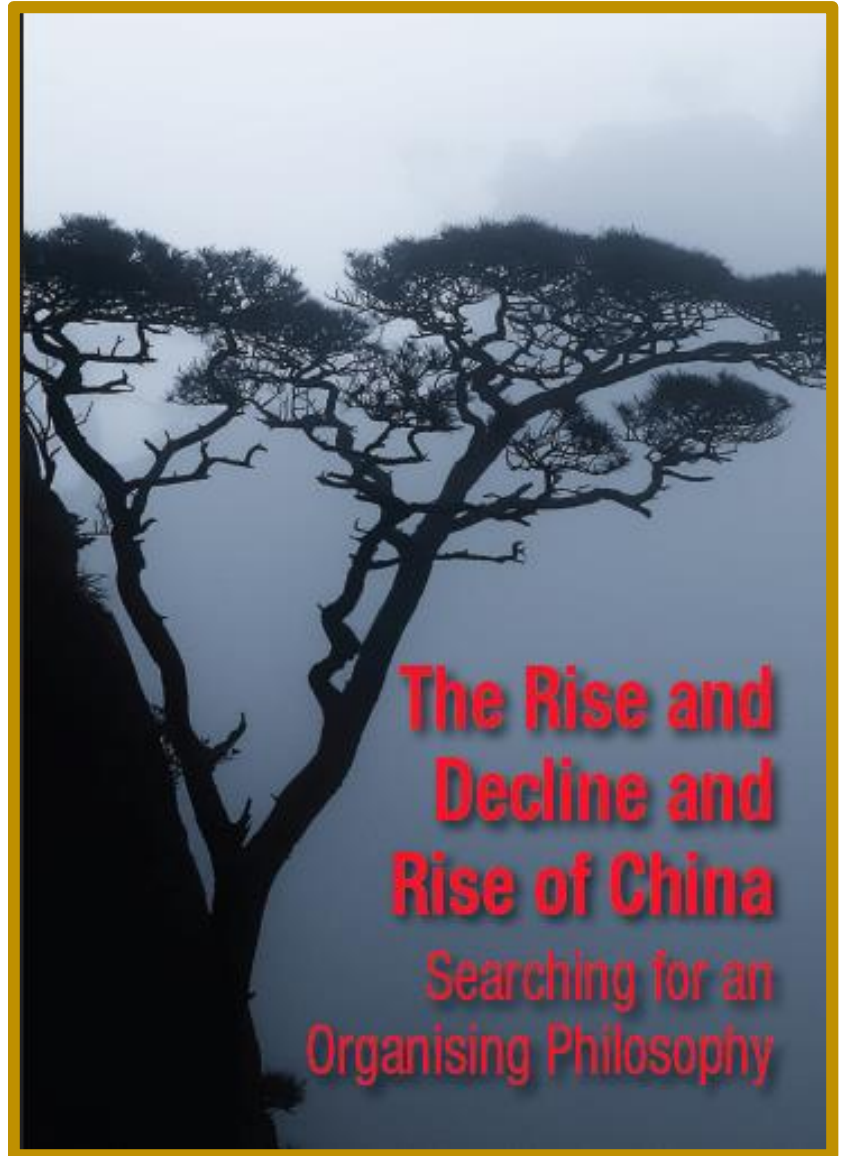
China developed science and technology based on a strong pragmatic relationship with society, and this development was, at the same time, linked to the political and ideological development of Chinese society.

✓ Salient issues on governance

Both Confucian and ubuntu ideals of governance entail that the job of those in government is to promote the good of the people.

✓ Economic approaches

Overall, there are significant differences between China's and Africa's economic framework conditions and growth trajectories. Because of their different political, economic, social and cultural structures, sub-Saharan countries cannot simply mimic China if they want to develop. However, they could usefully take certain cues from some recent Chinese developments



✓ Reflections on Chinese society

By looking at the rise, decline and rise of the Chinese civilisation it is clear that history as well as culture, considered in context of the long duree, are in a continuous state of transformation and flux. Some mechanisms to facilitate as well as regulate society are to be noted.

✓ China's relations with the world

Political transitions can benefit from taking note of the Maoist legacy of 'self-reliance' that resulted in a debt-free economy for pre-reform China. This philosophy stressed national autonomy, cultural nationalism and patriotism, mass mobilisation, and labour-intensive industries.

Comparing value systems

When salient traditional African and Chinese values interact, they readily share many of the same kinds of moral judgements.

1. They both appeal to the idea that one's basic aim in life should be to live in a genuinely humane way.
2. They both agree that much of what is involved in developing the valuable aspects of human nature is developing, sustaining and strengthening positive or supportive relationships with others.
3. They both construe aggressive competition, power seeking and unilateral decision-making as objectionable for being discordant.
4. They both maintain that the family is the morally ideal, and most intense instance of a harmonious relationship, to be prized above all and to be replicated in various ways throughout society.

Differing worldviews

5. Hierarchy is central to the Confucian tradition, which differs from the common understanding of *ubuntu* as substantially egalitarian and democratic.
6. The difference encountered between African and Chinese cultures is with the approaches to in-groups and out-groups. Amongst the Chinese, a strong harmony motive is directed mainly towards those who are already part of one's *guanxi*.
7. Both by and large seek to avoid conflict but the way in which they do this, or what conflict means for them, may differ. The common concern for the Chinese is to save face; and so to direct anger or even criticism at someone in a public setting is frowned upon.

Relations between science and society

China developed science and technology based on a strong pragmatic relationship with society, and this development was, at the same time, linked to the political and ideological development of Chinese society.

8. In China the practice of meritocracy and the values of Confucianism tended to support science and scientific technological innovations, especially in recent times.
9. Contact between scientists from China and the rest of the world through the ancient Silk Routes and Maritime Routes provided opportunities to share scientific knowledge.
10. In the rapid development of the digital age this interaction is escalating and the epistemological gap between China and Africa is becoming obsolete.

“30 lessons learnt about China from MISTRA's research”

Salient issues on governance

Both Confucian and ubuntu ideals of governance entail that the job of those in government is to promote the good of the people.

11. The desirable feature of Chinese governance is its famous meritocracy, a Confucian ideal that has been realised to some substantial degree in practice over many centuries.
12. The Chinese polity utilises various channels to ensure popular legitimacy of the socio-political system; and it has, in the recent period, shown remarkable capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.
13. An undesirable facet of Chinese governance, at least for contemporary Africa, has been a tendency towards paternalism that is forcing, or otherwise manipulating people, into living in ways judged by rulers to be good for them.

14. The approach in China is that political and economic reform, within a given social system, should be a gradual and adaptive process, as opposed to recourse to ‘shock therapy’.

15. The Chinese experience has demonstrated the virtues of ‘bottom-up’ development: local and state officials in provincial, county and village governments play an active role in promoting development.

Economic approaches

Overall, there are significant differences between China’s and Africa’s economic framework conditions and growth trajectories. Because of their different political, economic, social and cultural structures, sub-Saharan countries cannot simply mimic China if they want to develop. However, they could usefully take certain cues from some recent Chinese developments:

16. Institutional reforms, with state agencies driving macroeconomic changes, are needed in African countries in order to achieve long-term development.

17. Policy consistency, certainty and continuity are critical.

18. The state should enable people to take advantage of market opportunities.

19. How to change working conditions and remuneration as productivity improves is a lesson worth noting.

20. A hierarchical approach to governance in China is combined with both subtle and enforced ways to nudge various sectors of society towards co-operation.

21. The Chinese tendency to be frugal, to save, to persevere in the face of setbacks, to put in long hours, to devote time to literate education and to adjust traditional practices for the sake of innovation form a cluster of what is sometimes called ‘Confucian Dynamism’.

22. China stresses national autonomy, nationalism and patriotism, mass mobilisation, and labour-intensive industries.

23. Greater movement towards offshoring, in relation particularly to basic manufacturing as China reconfigures its economy, may yet provide major opportunities for Africa to initiate its own industrialisation.

Reflections on Chinese society

By looking at the rise, decline and rise of the Chinese civilisation it is clear that history as well as culture, considered in context of the long duree, are in a continuous state of transformation and flux. Some mechanisms to facilitate as well as regulate society are to be noted.

24. China has long employed systems of control to segregate urban and rural populations.

25. China is a multicultural state with a single dominant ethnic group.

26. Strategies for engaging with the Chinese should include consideration for their typically strong national identity. Practicing *guanxi* while interacting with Chinese business and political leaders can be challenging, especially for non-Chinese who might misunderstand its power.

China’s relations with the world

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27. China is playing a growing role in peacekeeping in Africa that points to potential synergies with South Africa’s own African peace and security priorities. Economically, the growth in two-way trade and investment, since the start of diplomatic relations in 1998, allowed South Africa to diversify its global commercial relations.

28. As China rises, so will greater clarity be required with regard to the definition of its strategic role in the global socio-political and socioeconomic terrains; and it will be expected to shed much of the current ambiguity and reticence.

29. The introduction of the Land and Maritime Silk Route reflects a global strategy for the long term. Underpinning this are new institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS New Development Bank.

30. Africa needs to be an active player in defining the emergent global order, re-establish relations with China that the reality of geography dictated thousands of years ago, and at the same time chart a new course for its own development.

To explore China through the teachings of Confucianism is but one of many ways to engage with these questions. Confucianism has not only buttressed what many characterise as the longest-lasting state in human history but – combined with the modern injection of the ideals of social justice – more recently has occasioned the largest ever reduction of poverty of literally hundreds of millions of people over a period of 30 years.

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