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The Cash of Civilizations:
How African Civilization Has Found Another Dupe In Chinese Efforts to Buy Long-term Control Through Short-Term Deals

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Background

Today there is increasing speculation concerning the consequences of the emergence of the Peoples Republic of China as a major power. This was exemplified by the theme of the 2012 ISCSC conference: “The Coming Clash of Civilizations: China versus the West.”

In engaging in such speculations, it would be wise to remember the explanation of Arnold Toynbee that:

“I reject the present-day habit of studying history in terms of national states; these seem to be fragments of something larger: a civilization. In so far as man needs to classify information before interpreting it, this large scale unit seems to me to be less distorting than a smaller scale.”

Unfortunately because so much study and data is compiled under the rubric of the nation state, this can be harder to accomplish than conceive. Thus it is that the growth of the nation of China, and the relative change in the conditions of the United States of America as a nation, are so often cited as examples of the historic transformation that is occurring in today’s world.

It is often stated that in Africa, China is displacing, and potentially clashing with, both former colonial powers and the U.S. It has become the continent’s largest provider of development funding and provides, as well, a stream of Chinese immigrants. These immigrants are establishing themselves as individual economic actors across a spectrum of African economic sectors, small, medium and large.

Forty years ago, when I first went to Africa, the Chinese were present as small teams that Mao Zedong sent to build and run power plants, hospitals, industrial plants, and other major infrastructure assets. What then characterized the Chinese in Africa was their insularity from the Africans themselves.

Back then, while many Chinese had been taught the local language, they only used it in their formal functions. Otherwise, when they did venture beyond their official locations, they would walk together in groups, closely huddled next to one another, and not directly engaging anyone else on the street.
Though the Chinese built important infrastructure for the continent of Africa, and sold large quantities of cheap goods there, the greatest influence – the dominant foreign presence – in Africa over the last years of the Twentieth Century were the Western donors, especially the former colonial powers. The Westerners didn’t have to speak the local language because the elite spoke theirs – often the direct result of massive assistance for overseas studies in American and European universities. Western donor assistance also included significant investment in both “hard” concrete infrastructure and “soft” institution building in terms of operational, managerial and technical assistance.

The “soft” aspects were seen as key to both immediate operational efficiency and long-term sustainability by Africans themselves. Private Western companies made money from assistance-related activities. However, they generally shied away from long term commitments and substantial in-country investment; this was due to their general discomfort with Africa’s highly uncertain investment climate, its lack of a well-established rule of law, and the capricious demands and changing personalities of local politics.

Today, dramatically, much has changed.

The Chinese are present not only officially but also informally. They are private business people, heads of large construction firms, restaurant owners, food and flower farmers, and sellers of assorted sundries in local markets. It is estimated that more than one million Chinese men and women may live in Africa today.2

In addition, large Chinese state corporations have ever-growing interests in extracting African oil, timber and minerals. We note: Chinese state companies, unlike Western companies, feel very much at home working through the machinations of centrally controlled political economies. Moreover, the Chinese government itself has tried to buy large tracts of land to produce export food for the Chinese mainland market.

Selective African regimes today receive substantial imports of Chinese military equipment. In 2012 China pledged twenty billion dollars in investments to Africa over the next three years.3 China has also signed approximately fifty education assistance agreements with African nations and is negotiating with the Seychelles its first use of African port facilities for military vessels.4

Meanwhile, Western nations have increasingly withdrawn from providing significant state-building support. The United States is obsessed with “the war on terror” and therefore increasingly directs its foreign assistance to programs that it feels help to win minds and hearts – mainly health and education. Large foreign assistance expenditures have swung to the establishment of a significant American military presence in Africa.
What remains of classical development aid is only a shadow of a past that centered on substantial nation-to-nation investment in the promotion of cultural connectivities and the education of future African leaders. Today, when the U.S. looks at both militant Islamic fundamentalism and the growing Chinese influence in Africa, it sees growing potential political-military adversaries. No longer does it see cultural and spiritual competitors.

Western and Chinese views diverge, not only on what should be done but also on the likely consequences of their different orientations.

- The West, especially the USA, thinks that by promoting Western democratic ideologies, focusing on immediate political / military interests, they will be able to weaken perceived competitors. They hold that China, economically, and Islamic fundamentalism, militarily, will fail. Africa will “evolve” socially and politically, with increasing Westernization and as part of the prevailing global political economy. Specific African nations and leaders are seen as instrumentally, but not fundamentally, important. So, funding comes with advice, admonitions, and conditional ties. The West call these part of a policy dialogue. African elites see this as hypocritical annoyances.

- Conversely, the Chinese act as if by accepting African leaders and African leadership practices as enduring, and by focusing their investments on penetrating into African commerce, they will establish long term integration into Africa itself. Unlike the West, the Chinese are short on overt intervention but long on relentlessly building economic dependencies.

Put another way, the West seeks to transport Western institutions into Africa, especially through African civil society. By contrast, China appears in the process of demographically infusing, rather than integrating, into Africa. They are doing so in a fashion that will lacquer their presence across multiple socio-economic layers.

The United States is betting on the creation of military alliances, cultural addictions and institutional intertwinings. The Chinese are seemingly betting on creating economic addictions, demographic intertwinings and personal leadership alliances. The West thinks it can transform African society and institutions. The Chinese think they can outfox African society and institutions.

Both the West and China give little credence to the strength of traditional African society and institutions. Yet in both of these strategies there may lie poison pills.

Efforts to induce change through influence and admonition are easy to undercut by ignoring in practice what is accepted in theory. Concomitantly, efforts to seduce though enticement and ingratiation are easy to undercut by simply accepting the benefits and then refusing to reciprocate with the expected response.
The bias of the West, especially the United States, is in their seeing China’s actions in Africa as clashing with Western civilization, and the bias of the Chinese rests in their seeing themselves as able to replace Western influence by cajoling Africans rather than trying to convert them. I suggest that, at least in Africa, not only is there is no clash of civilizations, or even interests, between the U.S. and China, but that, in fact, China, if not intentionally then inadvertently, is taking on the greater responsibility. Its task will be to maintain the Western-created nation state system in Africa and the continent’s post-colonial national political economies.

However, I also believe that in the long run the Chinese are not going to be any more successful in “conquering Africa”, than was the West before them. Rather, it is African Civilization that will be the real victor and Africans the power holders of that civilization.

The Academic Devaluation of African Civilizations

We can understand present and evolving Africa through concepts of civilization, especially those of Arnold Toynbee. Specifically helpful is the approach of conceiving civilizations as units of analysis above the nation state, built, nurtured and consciously expanded by elites. 5

Begin by asking why sub-Saharan Africa is not regularly viewed as a separate civilization. Highly popular thinkers typically emphasize African “failures.” Thus they are led to assume that Africa does not, has not, and cannot, play in the same league of civilizations as the West or China. In addition, there is the sad reality that many discount Africa’s importance due to factors such as racism, ethnocentrism, and the relative paucity of material manifestations of Western and Asian classic civilizations, particularly writings and material monuments.

Here is an ironic example: it denies the existence of African civilization while it envisions a role in Africa for both the West and China. It is from a letter Sir Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, and a geographer, anthropologist, eugenicist and statistician, wrote in 1873:

My proposal is to make the encouragement of the Chinese settlements at one or more suitable places on the East Coast of Africa a part of our national policy, in the belief that the Chinese immigrants would not only maintain their position, but that they would multiply and their descendants supplant the inferior Negro race... (which) possess too little intellect, self-reliance, and self-control to make it possible for them to sustain the burden of any respectable form of civilization without a large measure of external guidance and support.

The Chinaman is a being of another kind, who is endowed with a
remarkable aptitude for a high material civilization…. The natural capacity of the Chinaman shows itself by the success with which, notwithstanding his timidity, he competes with strangers, wherever he may reside....

The Anglo-Saxon race ... are restricted to ... where the climate is temperate. ...to inhabit permanently; the greater part of Africa is the heritage of people differently constituted to ourselves....

I wish to see a new competitor introduced—namely, the Chinaman. The gain would be immense to the whole civilized world...6

Now while we may empirically condemn Galton’s phrases and principles, one has to be struck by Galton’s premises: (1) Africa’s future should be decided by the West and China, and (2) Africa has little real power to affect the situation itself. This apparently manifests itself today with Chinese money and immigration. The Chinese are replacing Africans in a host of traditional Africa roles – such as in the fields of trade, small market retail and agriculture. 7

The Importance of Borders and Thresholds

It is ironic that many of the negative factors, so often stated as obstructions to the emergence of African civilization, actually have provided a unique form of protection for Africa. Africa has incubated its own civilization and has cast its relationship with other civilizations in a unique fashion. Thus, it differs dramatically from other great civilizations.

For example, one of the most frequently repeated concepts associated with civilization concerns cities. The emphasis on cities marginalizes, by definition, non-urban civilizations. Polynesia stretches over thousands of miles and years, with continuous efforts at expansion and consolidation. It is composed of a myriad of cultures -- but no identifiable cities. So, too, it is with the more hybrid case of Africa, which has had cities that were largely manifestations of, consolidations of, what were really village civilizations within each local area. The African Civilization’s structure thus has been somewhat analogous to that of the separate Polynesian Islands.

In additions to having cities, most civilizations have extended themselves across a variety of large spatial entities defended by military troops and fortifications. Toynbee makes a point that the frontiers of these entities have acted to both block and provide entry points between those civilizations and external “Barbarians”. “Limes” is the Latin word for military frontier but Toynbee also characterizes its importance as a “threshold”.

“If the cultural ‘limen’ of a growing civilization is aptly described as the hospitable threshold of an ever open door, the military limes of a disintegrating
civilization can no less aptly be compared to a forbidding barrage astride a no longer open valley”

“…the erections of limes sets in motion a play of social forces which is bound to end disastrously for the builders; and for them, the only way of avoiding ultimate disaster would be to preclude this fatal course of events by insulating completely from one another, the two incompatible societies whose respective domains the limes artificially demarcates.”

**Africa’s Naturally Protected Frontiers**

Such insulation between groups is rarely possible in history. Even such formidable barriers as the Great Wall of China or Hadrian’s Wall in Britain are eventually breached. What makes the African case so different is that its civilization, and its competing societies, have largely engaged each other in the interior.

1. Africa south of the Sahara did not create “limes” but was instead largely defended by natural obstruction to which Africans themselves had adapted. Thus, the immense desert that separates sub-Saharan Africa from North Africa was only passable with arduous and hazardous effort.

2. Africa was once known as “the white man’s grave.” One reason was the especially virulent strains of malaria for which many Africans have partial immunity through mild sickle cell anemia. This encouraged non-Africans to limit contact and residence to defined coastal forts and settlements. Similarly, the tsetse fly, which breeds under the shade of dense forest cover, and which carries deadly equine sleeping sickness, limited the use of military cavalries. Further, the density of the forests and the lack of navigable rivers made systematic penetration into the interior insufferable. Finally, ocean travel was dependent on sailing vessels and was therefore slow and convoluted due to the nature of prevailing winds and currents.

The result was the creation and adaptation of an African civilization centered in the interior of the continent. Africa’s civilization has never been coastal. It has rather been based in the hinterland and focused on associated villages and groups, with only a few rare large urban communities. But the coast, the ocean, the desert sands, served their purpose as a meeting ground for the African and the stranger. The African participants emerged from the interior and the stranger (till colonialism) did not even attempt to enter into, let alone change, the real world of African civilization.

**The Nature and Control of the “Cash and Carry” Trade**

What the stranger and the African did was to engage in what can be denoted as a “cash and carry trade. By “cash and carry” I mean trade in wholesale quantities at specific
locations rather than in an open market. The goods were paid for in full, with the buyer transporting the goods away in their entirety. There is no credit, no necessary long term or repeated transaction, no attached service element, no mandatory knowledge by each party as to what, for whom, or how the other either obtained their goods, or what they are going to do with the goods obtained in trade.

Each party in “Cash and Carry” basically comes with what they have to offer and takes away as much of what they want as they can get in return. In the case of Africa, the goods coming out of Africa varied, but they included ivory, gold, hard woods, pepper, cotton, indigo cloth, animal hides and slaves. Europeans provided weapons, beads, iron and copper bars. Asians brought silk and ceramics.

Those controlling the border contacts carefully guard their positions, and then introduce the traded goods into their own societies for their own purposes. The preponderance of goods provided by Africans to Westerners was of value as productive assets in Western production systems. In contrast, the European goods provided Africans were predominantly of value as means of enhancing political or social power by Africans within African societies. In Africa, such traditional relationships, psychological and social, still prevail under the guise of what are seen, by outsiders, as modern capitalist market transactions or as national and corporate financial dealings between Africans and non-Africans.

The Natures of African Civilizations

Traditional civilizational theorists maintain that civilizations have edges, boundaries and thresholds that need to be established, cultivated, and protected. I agree. African civilization drew its edges at the choke points of the wholesale “Cash and Carry” trade with outsiders, (i.e. the rim of the Sahel and its cities, the coastal towns for slaving and trading).

Within those boundaries there developed a genuine African civilization defined by elements quite different from those of either the West or the East. The challenge is how best to characterize these civilizations. Frequently they are equated with African political entities: Ghana, Mali, and Greater Zimbabwe; with geography, such as Western Sudan, East African, or Congo; or via linguistic families such as Bantu, Swahili, and Hamitic. But none of these truly have the coherent authentic, dynamic, and purposeful qualities found in the concept of “civilization.”

I propose is to take seriously Toynbee’s conclusion that religion is at the foundation of all civilizations. If we so identify African civilizations, we can speak of three African civilizations: African animistic civilization, African Islamic civilization, and African Colonial-Christian civilization.
I. Afro-Animist Civilization

The most unusual of these three civilizations is the one I label the Afro-Animist civilization. Afro-Animist civilization is built upon a religious vision of the world as being an expression of an all-encompassing vital force. One of the great challenges to recognizing African animism, as a religion, is that its institutions and organization are most clearly expressed in what Europeans consider African “art.” However, what to Europeans is seen as decoration, or the personal expression of the fabricator, to Africans is actually a combination of creation, performance and possession. These are directly tied to achieving real purposes, including economic benefit, community unity, rites of passage, bodily health and association with ancestors.

Afro-Animist civilization often shares the characteristics of other civilizations in reverse order. That is, its communities are much more relational than they are spatial. Its art is much more a tool of direct transformation than a manifestation of phenomena in everyday life. It is the spirit world that is considered ever present and the material world that is seen as truly fleeting and uncertain. When Animistic practice creates material things such as masks, fetish statuary, and sacred areas, it does not see these as “real” until they are imbied with a spirit reality. Then, even after it is both materially and spiritually real, it is expected that the concerned item will eventually become worthless when the spirit reality leaves it.

The difficulty with understanding the presence and operation of the African Animist vision is that its characteristics are so obscure. It is easier to see the walls of a city than a nebulous secret society, or an actual performance rather than the internal sense of the performer. Logical and empirical descriptions cannot really express Animism experientially. One needs to look at the arts themselves, including writings, such as Camara Laya’s “The Radiance of the King,” to sense the mystery that goes beyond intellectual understanding. 14

Like “Cash and Carry,” the characteristics of African Animism continue to play out today in everyday life in Africa. This includes the political economy today hidden under the façade of the nation state and a supposed modern capitalist market system.

Even though other civilizations have layered themselves upon it, Afro-Animism is still a dynamic factor in what happens throughout much of Africa today.15

II. Afro-Islamic Civilization

Afro-Animist civilization is almost completely an African creation, what Toynbee calls an “unaffiliated” civilization. But the second African civilization, Afro-Islamic civilization, is what Toynbee would call a "satellite” civilization. 16
The initial attraction of Islam to Africans was that it created a new basis for “community” among groups that needed to operate over extensive areas beyond and outside their Animism communities. Thus it was the traders and high political elites who initially adopted Islam in Africa; they established urban settlements in selective areas in the Sahara, throughout the Sahel, and on the coasts of East Africa, to serve as resting and exchange points for the trans-Saharan and seaward trade.

Though it occasionally tried, Islam did not destroy Animism in Africa. Even today, one finds that Islam and Animism can co-exist among the same believers. Under these circumstances, Islam is the religion that most serves purposes outside the family and village, and allows interaction across groups in urban areas in the pursuit of economic opportunity. Such “Islam” has historically been generally simple, flexible and non-fundamental. Meanwhile, Animism in practice reigns within the family and community as the life force of the relationships that bind and make them one unit, and as the foundation for longstanding clan claims to land and resources.

III. Afro-Colonial Christian Civilizations

Dramatic things happened between the 1870s, when Galton wrote his note, and the Conference of Berlin in 1885, where the major Western powers reached agreement on how to divide up Africa. By 1885, through a series of critical technological breakthroughs, the West was finally able to breach the natural fortresses of Africa -- its deserts, unnavigable interior rivers, dense forests, disease-ridden settlements and difficult ocean currents.

These breakthroughs included the steamship that provided rapid large scale transportation of goods and people directly between Europe and Africa; the railroad, that provided a means of access and direct transporting to the coast of resources from the interior; and medical progress such as refined forms of quinine to treat malaria and public health practices that significantly ameliorated the incidence of many transmittable diseases.

Last but not least was the machine gun¹⁷, invented by Hiram Maxim in 1885 and whose role in colonialism was immortalized in the lines of the English poet and politician, Hilaire Belloc, who wrote:

"Whatever happens, we have got the Maxim gun, and they have not."

¹⁸ The expansion of European colonial empires into Africa ushered in what I term the Afro-Colonial Christian civilization. Afro-Colonial Christian civilization was a satellite civilization of Western Christianity. In Afro-Colonial Christianity, the vision is of God the Father as the white man, with salvation obtained through subservience to his commands and administration, and delivered through his established political and
religious orders and hierarchy, including the nation state, and the church.19

Colonial Rule and the Relation between African Civilizations

The Colonial Era replaced African controllers at high levels with Europeans. It subordinated locals to clearly defined roles of influence or service on the local level. The Europeans controlled power, often through the indirect rule of subservient African leaders, as well as all large investments, from plantations to mines to trading companies. On the intermediate level, several outside groups, such as Lebanese, Indians, Jews and Greeks, carved out specialized niches that established themselves as both forward and backward links between the clearly bounded European colonial spheres and native African markets and African-managed small production units.

As regards Afro-Animism, the Europeans tried to replace or suppress it – from missionaries destroying ritual fetishes to the Belgians outlawing secret societies because they saw them as a competing with allegiance to Belgian administration. As regards Afro-Islam, colonial authorities felt more at home theologically with Islam as a higher religion. In West Africa, their actions against Animism actually resulted in an increase in Muslim as well as Christian believers. Colonial authorities generally followed a policy of accommodation to Islam as long as the respective Islamic authorities did not interfere or undermine colonial rule.

In the end, the colonial era provided neither a respite nor an end to Africa’s animists and Islamic civilizations. Rather it controlled the time, place and extent of their relative expression. It established frontiers and thresholds within Africa in ways that it saw as most beneficial for the assertion of European control over high value production and resources and for the control of the cash economy. The African elites, who in previous times controlled the Cash and Carry trade between Africa and the outside world, dissolved into a host of different roles according to their abilities and possibilities.

Colonialism, Cash and Civilization in Africa

However, cash itself remained a critical element in the transfer between spheres. The colonial powers wanted cash for the cost of governance, while Western settlers and business interests wanted cash as profits. The problem was that the political economy of Animist Africa, and even Islamic Africa – outside of traditional traders – was a world where riches were accumulated through enduring relationships, not monetary transactions.

The colonial system, therefore, had to make a conscious effort to create a need for cash on the part of the majority of Africans in order that the different populations and civilizations could economically engage. The answer was to create for the average
African a host of previously unknown cash needs: head taxes, household taxes, school fees, and the monetization of traditional African agricultural commodities. These taxes had “relational” as well as financial ends, and were perceived by Westerners as part of the process of civilizing the Africans.

Sir Frederick Luggard, the first British Governor General of Nigeria wrote:

“Even though the collection of the small tribute from primitive tribes may at first seem to give more trouble than it is worth, it is in my view of great importance as ... the contact with officials, which the assessment and collection necessitates, brings these tribes into touch with civilizing influences....”

William Ponty, the Governor of French West Africa, said:

“For the native ... taxation, far from being the sign of a humiliating servitude, is seen rather as proof that he is beginning to rise on the ladder of humanity, that he has entered upon the path of civilization.”

The Consequences of Decolonization

Through such Western eyes, Colonial Afro-Christian civilization was clearly a new stage in the advancement of civilization in Africa and an arrangement with enduring benefits and capacity for long-term sustainability. Such was not, however, to be the case. Thus, World War II and its aftermath carried over the unfinished business of World War I in Europe and extended it to the entire world. A major factor in the rapid transition was that in the aftermath of World War II, America’s will was dominant. The creation of the United Nations, and the clearly anti-imperial ideology of Roosevelt, and then Truman and Eisenhower, meant that the largely arbitrary borders of African colonies were rapidly transformed into the frontiers and thresholds of newly independent states.

Unfortunately, most of the new African states were unprepared to be independent nations. They lacked the human, institutional and physical infrastructure for effective governance. Though their “statehood” was largely a façade in terms of capacity to govern, it did provide them with new sovereign frontiers – the artificial borders established by their colonial masters. It also provided them the corresponding power to manage access by both foreigners and their own citizens to power, privilege and resources within their boundaries, under the guise of the doctrine of Westphalian sovereignty.
The Rise of African Nations -- New Roles in the New World Order

Decolonization was choreographed through a set of new international institutions, beginning with the United Nations systems and the international financial structure. Thus was framed the beginning of a new world order, with international institutions that over time stewarded the expansion of the number and diversity of independent sovereign states. Yet these new international institutions, through their actions in the name of now emerging global policies, practices and standards, also gnawed away at the classic, supposedly absolute, sovereignty of states as understood under the Westphalian order.

The various concerned parties, across the spectrum of the participating civilizations, scrambled to create new niches for the old African ways. Africans moved up in the Afro-Colonial Christian hierarchies. African Animism reemerged from obscurity, now more open. Afro-Islamic civilization began to expand its community-based activities, moving into more prominent urban roles. Europeans devised new neo-colonial roles as advisors and managers. Especially critical was that the end of the Age of Colonialism in Africa provided opportunity for Africans who had been trained in European political and military style but who retained the values of Afro-Animistic, Afro-Islamic and Afro-Colonial-Christian civilizations: they created a new power elite.

Along with somewhat novel modern state responsibilities such as “president”, minister”, and “general,” they assumed the traditional role of controllers of the new choke points of the wholesale cash trade under the guise of government responsibilities and powers that they increasingly de facto privatized for the benefit of themselves and their relational group.

International Development and African Nations

Yet that encapsulating facade of modern statehood was a vital charade that had to be supported and managed. In response to that need arose one of the yet most unappreciated and uniquely new forces for global change – the concepts, practices and consequences of international development assistance.

While inspired by the Marshall Plan and then adapted for assistance in the modernization of selective nations by Truman, the final international development model took form under President Eisenhower with the creation in 1957 of the International Cooperation Agency. Eisenhower believed international assistance could be a vital tool in the cold war arsenal. Eisenhower felt the strongest force influencing the former colonies was neither communism nor capitalism but nationalism, and it was to that motivation that foreign assistance needed to respond.

Largely with that understanding, for over three decades, the institutions and donors of
international development assistance provided the means for African nations to maintain and function as political states. But regardless of the mechanisms: grants, loans, technology assistance, technology imports, education scholarships, and the construction of infrastructure - African elites found ways of skimming for their direct personal benefits. Such skimming was de facto accepted under the political justification of the cold war and the humanitarian argument that such aid still assisted needy populations and purposes that would otherwise go unaddressed. Thus, geo-politics and pan-national humanitarian became the two supporting pillars of international development.

The End of the Cold War and Repositioning African Civilization

The sudden end of the Cold War pulled the pillow of national security support from under the canopy of international development assistance. As a compensatory reaction, there was a scramble to reinforce the humanitarian pillar through the creation of a new set of justifications around what became officially known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This was accompanied by an expansion of the understanding of humanitarian assistance to encompass emerging ideas of human security and the right of international humanitarian intervention, independent of the wishes of the concerned sovereign state. Ironically, in Africa, the result was an actual collapse of the national facade of specific African states such as Sierra Leone, Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe. Such governance collapses resulted in a self-reinforcing tilt away from assistance that supported the failing state towards even more humanitarian and human security interventions. This resulted in a growing vacuum of political, economic and social stability.

So it was that the various elements of Africa’s three civilizations were inevitable drawn in to fill this vacuum when they saw the “cash equation” in tumult and up for grabs. The responses, however, often went beyond the nefarious to the pathological. Afro-Animist civilization responded with the emergence of non-state actors, including various militias.

These militias actually used distorted animistic rituals to dismember functioning social units and communities. They then reconstituted new groups with allegiance to themselves. Next, they focused on the control of the choke points for the extraction of valuable natural and mineral resources. Afro-Islamic civilization began to fall prey to the cash rewards provided by foreign political Islamic interests, in return for accepting the guise of more pro-Arab and fundamentalist Islamic doctrines and practices.

Afro-Colonial-Christianity increasingly separated itself from official governing structures and its components began to restructure themselves as independent evangelical movements aligned in many cases with fraternal movements in the United States. The United States itself became so totally captivated by war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the idea of a war on terror, that it proved incapable of generating
creative responses to the changing dynamics in Africa. The vacuum that it did not fill, the missing support of governmental structures of the state system, China rushed in to fill in its stead.

China has been able to move very fast. This is because it has the cash – much of it derived from its trade imbalance with America. America has run out of cash, like the French and British before them. What African governments want are big cost items – roads, stadiums, power plants, that are necessary to revitalize their nations and which also provide immense opportunities for “a large cut of the money.” These big ticket items were once provided by Western aid but they have since significantly degraded through mismanagement, lack of maintenance and the excess stress of increasing population demand.

Current Chinese thinking is that China can significantly displace the West by providing desperately needed aid in the reconstruction of African infrastructure and in the development of African industry without interference in the prevailing systems of African governance. In return, those in political power are rewarding the Chinese with access to African resources and expanded markets for Chinese goods and services.

In addition, one cannot discount longer-term Chinese strategic thinking in terms of gaining an influential presence on the African continent. Lastly, there are Chinese ambitions to obtain significant economic opportunity for large numbers of Chinese to permanently settle in Africa on purchased agricultural land and through local business markets.

The permanent migration of Chinese today is actually fulfilling Sir Francis Galton’s suggestion that Chinese civilization be brought to Africa. In this sense their movement does not represent a “clash” with the West or America. To the contrary. Precisely as the West, in the face of increased globalization and international economic interdependence, is retreating not only from Africa but from a strict interpretation of the rules of the Westphalian State System, the Chinese have become the most influential champions of that traditional Westphalian system’s continuation.

**Challenges to Sustained Chinese Success in Africa**

Why do the Chinese believe that they will succeed, and be able to sustain their achievements, when the past experience of the West -- including even Asian participants such as the Indian immigrant populations -- has been otherwise?

After all, it has been repeatedly demonstrated, with exceptions such as Botswana and South Africa, that once African controllers have gotten what they have wanted, or have they decided they want more than they are going to get, they are willing to pull the plug on foreign participating populations. They then retreat back to their internal African
dynamics, taking with them both their share of the benefits received and the repossessed benefits of the non-Africans.

The Chinese seem to be proceeding on the presumptions of past Chinese civilization. That is, they aver that hard work, family unity and close-knit Chinese community ties can withstand and endure the occasional onslaughts of opposition that the expansion of Chinese populations have long experienced in a variety of situations. In addition, present Chinese expansion in Africa largely supports state-managed capitalism and is in harmony with official Chinese beliefs that governments can, in the end, overcome popular and individual resistance.

On the other hand, because the Chinese propping up of African governments is accompanied by a massive introduction of Chinese themselves, and because it is taking the form of the insertion of large numbers of Chinese into the most fundamental aspects of Africa’s internal cash economy, a clash between the three residual African civilizations and Chinese culture is probably in the process of brewing. It will likely foam over at some time in the future.

The first likely clash between the Chinese and the Africans will be either when Chinese cash begins to dries up or when the Chinese begin to edge out excessively the non-elite Africans from their niches. Precisely because of the extensive spread of Chinese ambitions, they risk becoming the force behind the coalescence of discontentment across a wide spectrum of African society: business people, peasants, the unemployed, labor, civil servants, middle class professionals, religious groups, tribes, clans, unemployed youth, the disenfranchised uneducated, and still functioning traditional groups.

At the same time, when such a clash occurs, it will inevitably be limited in time and space. Eventually a new accommodation will be reached. With this, the real “clash of civilization” will then begin. It will be between Africa civilizations themselves. In fact, elements of it are already occurring in Somalia, Nigeria, Congo and most recently Mali.

**Religion and the Clash of African Civilizations**

The real and coming clash between African civilizations will be between the traditionalists, who are continuing to drag their nations back to the Africa of personal power, and modern Africans, who wish to join the new global civilization but cannot do so until Africa civilization recreates itself in ways that are harmonious with that aspiration.

The challenge is, how do you create a new civilization? For Africa, simply building a new structure on the old foundations is not an option. From all perspectives, economic,
social, spiritual, political, organizational etc., the old structures have lost their foundational integrities.

Here that we might take seriously Toynbee’s conclusion that: “new spiritual insights allow for the birth of a new religion and ultimately a new civilization.”24 As we have seen, this has been the case in the past in Africa, with Animism, Islam and Christianity. However, today, these three faiths in Africa have themselves largely become cash religions. Animism is used to destroy traditional communities and establish new control over resources. Islam is on the payroll of Islamic fundamentalist politics. Christianity is increasingly evangelistic “pay as you go” entertainment and solace.

Nor can these failing religions be replaced by unsustainable Western neo-classical economic materialism, which produces enormous individual capacities at the expense of social solidarity. Nor can they be replaced by Chinese neo-capitalist Confucianism, which squashes the capacities of individuals, especially in groups, whenever they attempt dynamic experimental alternatives to party-approved ways. These propositions may temporarily serve for select modern sectors, as in South Africa and Kenya, but not for the majority of Africans who are struggling with social disintegration, massive urbanization, lost of dignity, lack of opportunity, and absence of purpose.

As a Baha’i, I first discovered the Baha’i Faith in Africa when I was intellectually attracted to it precisely because it seemed so suited for what is needed by both Africa and the world. Toynbee, himself, has been cited as saying that the Baha’i Faith might be "the world religion of the future." 25 But while my belief is an expression of faith, and Toynbee’s belief is an expression of thought, Toynbee’s analysis of the role religion per se has played in the genesis of civilizations of the past is a conclusion from fact. As such, we would seem to be on fairly sturdy grounds in believing that religion may likely be an important element in how future civilization unfolds in Africa, China, America and the world.

Conclusion: Preparations for a New Civilization

The Chinese would be wise to remember the past massacres of overseas Chinese tied to grievances concerning perceived economic exploitation. The West might be wise to begin thinking of the potential need for international intervention when potentially diverse political and armed conflict explodes. A wise pre-emptive response would be to take actions that support the development of a new robust system of international economic and political cooperation, based on foundational principles of fairness for all parties.
Perhaps this would make possible a future civilization, one that will emerge not from clash and conflict but from a willed positive common journey for all humanity. To pray for this to happen is easy. For it to become a global reality is the real challenge of today and tomorrow.

Bibliography


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NOTES

1 Toynbee, Arnold: 1972, p15
5 Arab-Ogly, E. A. 1979…the moving force in a civilization’s development. The “creative minority,” …, by responding successfully to various historical challenges, is able to carry the “inert majority” along with it. The nature of these challenges and responses determines the distinctive features of a civilization, among which are its hierarchy of social values and the philosophical views it holds on the meaning of life. Once a creative elite…proves incapable of solving the social or historical problems …it becomes a dominant minority, seeking to impose its will by force rather than through accepted authority. At that point the alienated mass of the population …together with the barbarian periphery…eventually destroys a civilization—if the civilization is not first destroyed as a result of some major military defeat or natural catastrophe. In endeavoring to introduce in his conception of history the element of progressive development, Toynbee remarked on the progress of mankind in spiritual perfection, envisaging its religious evolution from primitive animistic beliefs through universal religions to a single syncretic religion in the future.
6 Galton, 1973
7 Politzer, Malia 2012
8 Toynbee, 1974, p.358
9 Toynbee, 1974, p 364
10 Lavan, G 1955 p. 94 “The Gold Coast, originally a collecting base and shipping point for the slave trade, is one of the oldest imperialist possessions in Africa. The colony, happily, was never settled by white colonists. Until the early part of this century, this part of Africa was considered “the white man’s grave” because of the prevalence of terrible tropical fevers. Thus after the slave trade had ended, the colony saw only a relative handful of British traders, administrators, missionaries, mining engineers, etc. For this blessing it has been suggested that one of the first acts of the government, when full independence is achieved, be the erection of statues to the Anopheles and Aedes Aegypti mosquitoes – the respective bearers of malaria and yellow fever.”
11 Thus the development of the triangle trade between Europe, Africa, and North America and back to Europe rather than back and forth from Europe to Africa direct.
Maxim invented the actual modern machine gun in 1885, the year of the Berlin Conference. The prototype of the machine gun was the Gatling gun, invented in 1861.

Hilaire Belloc, 1898 p 41

Jeal, T 1973. Tim Jeal's biography of Livingston provides a riveting example of the extent to which Christian belief drove both the minds and actions of Europeans. Jeal documents how Livingston actually recognized the positive aspects and communal as well as individual satisfaction derived from traditional Africa society and believed that these had to be destroyed in order to bring recognition of the need for salvation to Africans.

Luggard, 1965 pp129-130


After surrendering to the realities of no longer being able to compete as Empire, France tried to create interdependencies through a cooperative currency (cash) -the CFA - and has now fallen back to providing life support to subsidizing outposts of French civilization and promoting continuation of the French language – with Francophone Africa representing a large percentage of the world’s French speakers.

Examples of such onslaughts have been the reaction to Chinese expansion into Tibet, and the slaughter of Chinese communities in Indonesia in 1740, under Dutch rule, and in 1998 under Indonesian rule.

Butterworth, J, p.44