

The Friendship between China and Rwanda

In this year, we remembered the 62nd Anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China. This was done by the people of China led by the Communist Party. Since then, China has supported the newly independent African Nations to the achievement of their own development.

Rwanda is among these beneficiaries and now we are celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Rwanda.

These started on November 12th, 1971, only after a decade of Rwandese independence from Belgium. From that moment until now, this friendship resulted in different initiatives conducted bilaterally such as in education, health, culture and economic sectors among others. Throughout these 40 years, China proved to be a good partner in the Rwandese development even in the darkest days of the Rwandan history: the 1994 genocide. After this tragedy, Rwanda needed to be rebuilt in all different areas as its economy was heavily affected along with a widespread loss of life. Here, China had shown that a friend in need is a friend indeed.

To understand deeply this friendship, here is a story of a Rwandese girl named NSHUTI. She was born in 1983 in the former KIBUNGO Province (now Eastern Province). She was born at KIBUNGO Hospital (built by the Chinese Government) and was the 4th in a family of 7. All her elder sisters died at birth because their mother used to give birth at home as there were no enough hospitals at that time. Her mother used to tell her story in simple words: "Thanks to the Chinese, I'm now a mother!"

Beginning with the health sector, since 1980, Chinese Government has now built two district hospitals: KIBUNGO and MASAKA. The latter was completed in this 2011. On average, during 30 years, medical teams from China have treated 470,000 patients either at KIBUNGO Hospital (such is the case of NSHUTI) or in different other programmes aimed at the improvement of the health care facilities in Rwanda. Moreover, we would like to emphasize on the ongoing training of local healthcare providers by Chinese medical teams that are renewed every 2 years.

Whoever says health must think about education, that is why the Chinese Government has also offered many scholarships to Rwandan students in different fields. During the Academic Year 2011-2012, 35 students were admitted to study in China. These followed the footsteps of many other Rwandese students who went in China in previous years. Two schools were built in the Sino-African Cooperation programme: one in Gatsibo, Eastern Province with 300 students and another one in Rulindo, Northern Province, reserved for girls' education.

As a wing of education, the culture of the two countries was not left behind. That is why, due to the increasing will of Rwandans to know Chinese language, there have been special programmes such as the Confucius institutes in Rwanda with more than 30 small classes teaching more than 600 local people.

In the agriculture sector, each year about a hundred Rwandans are invited to visit China and gain a technology-based agricultural experience, especially in the rice and mushroom culture.

For a country like Rwanda, which relies mostly on the agricultural manpower (more than 90% of Rwandans being involved in agriculture), it has still many to learn from the Chinese experience. That is why Chinese experts come regularly to share their knowledge and skills with Rwandese farmers. For this purpose, in this year, the Agriculture Technology Demonstration Center in HUYE has so far offered courses for 168 local peasants. Again, Rwandans will always remember that the Chinese engineers were the first to start rice culture in NYABUGOGO valley.

Since 1971, China's grants to Rwanda reached 170 million USD. Particularly, after 2004, the total grant is about 115 million USD, with 39 projects across Rwanda. Moreover, trade between the two countries doubled to \$ 76.4 million in the first half of 2011 compared with the same period of 2010. Also, it is estimated that about 4,700 items from Rwanda had reached the Chinese market.

In early September 2011, China gave Rwanda \$15.7 million to boost trade between the two countries. It was said that Rwanda would receive half the amount as a grant and the remaining 50 million yuan as a five-year interest free loan.

All these were possible due to the Rwandese Government hard work to facilitate and attract foreign investors through its Rwanda Development Board (RDB). The latter sent a delegation in 2010 whose mission was to explain the benefits of investing in Rwanda to Chinese entrepreneurs. Moreover, China is also one of the few countries where RDB has an office, in Shenzhen, for the same purpose of attracting and facilitating Chinese investors. Rwandans should be proud of their Government for its strong will to maintain a secure environment for investment. Here we are glad to mention the ongoing construction of the New Century Hotel. This is being done by a Chinese Company based in Hong Kong. This has invested \$ 60 millions in this building site.

Rwandans are engaged not only in the building of bridges of confidence and mutual understanding but also they are committed in the support of China in many international fora especially on her just One-China policy. From the Rwandese history, the best lesson so far learnt is that 'united we stand and divided we fall'.

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". This saying has served as the principle in China-Africa cooperation as it was once said by H.E.Mr. Shu Zhan, the Chinese Ambassador to Rwanda. The same applies for the Rwandan people who strongly believe that Rwanda will not rely on foreign aid rather will attract foreign investors. In this purpose, China has for long time aimed at the national development programme. The MASHYUZA Cement Industry, built on support of the Chinese Government, is playing a key role in the rebuilding of Rwanda. The same has proven to be true in the ICT sector wherein the Chinese Company of Star Media invested \$29 million in Rwanda. It helped create many jobs and attracted more than 30,000 customers.

As we talk about cement, everyone might think about many Chinese construction companies working in Rwanda. Here we mention RXB, CCECC, BCEG, Top International Engineering Corporation to name a few. These have contributed a lot in the reconstruction of Rwanda particularly after the 1994 genocide. Apart from this, many building sites are turning into favorable milieu for bilateral cultural exchange. Rwandese workers are being sent to China for training and when they return back they do not only share with their counterparts technical skills but they help spread the knowledge of Chinese language and culture as well. On the other hand, Chinese workers learn Kinyarwanda in their different workplace.

Back to NSHUTI's life, her mother's story raised in her a strong interest for the Chinese language. She could spend hours with the Chinese workers at the hospital to learn the language. Today she is quite fluent. Her mother, unfortunately, died in the 1994 genocide with his husband who was a social worker at KIBUNGO Hospital. NSHUTI, who was then 11-year-old struggled to help her 2 younger brothers survive. Fortunately, all three pursued their education and recently NSHUTI won a scholarship in China and is now studying electrical engineering courses in one of the Chinese universities.

Rwanda is now looking forward to the achievement of its goals set for the Vision 2020. China is looking forward for its platinum jubilee (70 years) of its foundation. Both Rwanda and China will be looking forward to the coming of the year 2020 where we will be celebrating the golden jubilee (50 years) of establishment of stable diplomatic relations between the two countries. From now to then, we hope much to be done.

It is impossible to describe in details a 40-year-long friendship in 3 pages. Otherwise, it could take another 40 years. Moreover, I am not sure we could find enough papers. However, I believe that the simple comparison below will summarize it.

The friendship between Rwanda and China can somehow be described as a love between two hearts: Rwanda is nicknamed the "Heart of Africa", the same for China which is the heart of Asia and in the upcoming years might be the economic heart of the world if we consider its fastest economic growth and social change.

Before we conclude, in order to understand the strength of this friendship, let us reflect on these popular expressions which used to be common in China since the ancient time of the Qing Dynasty. These are: "Those who win popular support will eventually win all." And "All under the heaven belong to the same family" or "All men are brothers within the four seas." Hence we can say that the 40 years of bilateral relations are a sign of, not only simple friendship, but a strong brotherhood between Peoples of the two countries.

I once asked NSHUTI what was her definition of 'friendship'. She answered that friendship is a form of interpersonal relationship generally considered to be closer than association. This is true if you read her life story which summarizes alone the fruits of this 40-year-long friendship between China and Rwanda.

Long live RWANDA, long live CHINA and may this friendship last forever!

Author: **Paterne MIZERO**

Tel: +250 788 22 10 70 or +250 728 22 10 70

Email: paterne.mizero@gmail.com or paternezo@yahoo.fr

PO Box 2035 Kigali Rwanda

Student at the National University of RWANDA

Faculty of Medicine, Department of General Medicine, Class of Doctorate III

PO Box 117 Huye, RWANDA

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Note: NSHUTI's story is inspired from my daily experience of signs of this friendship as a medical student.