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GLOBALIZATION AND SOCIO-POLITICAL REFORMS IN PEOPLES' REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Abstract

This study investigates the socio-political reforms in China which is orchestrated by the development of globalization and its accelerating impact on Chinese society. It focuses primarily on the background to China's ascendance in globalization and the ways the economic reforms and restructuring is driving the country's growth and development in every sector, and also discusses the impact of social change and political reforms in Chinese globalization. Considering the potential for further change, this research work debates whether Chinese government will become more serious about protecting human rights and creating a transparent legal system. Bicycle framework of analysis which indicates that Chinese economy is stable as long as it is on the move was utilized. Historical literature review was used to explain the various literary perspectives of different scholars on Chinese ascendance to globalization. The research work concluded by recommending that China should allow globalization to impact her politics, by opening up the political space for participation of the people.

Keywords: Globalization, Reforms, Development, Economic Change, Information technology

Introduction

You are in your sitting room trying to articulate your itinerary for the day. In front of you is your plasma television that is made in South Korea and you are shocked by the CNN news that another earthquake has hit Japan. While you are still contemplating this, your phone rings and you pick up your Nokia phone that is made in Finland and your brother is on the phone from London, telling you he had wired some money to you via Western Union, to enable you pay for the Spanish tiles for his building. You pick up yourself, start your Japanese Honda Accord and head to the bank. If you experience such daily existence, Rourke (2008) contends that you are experiencing globalization.

Many writers believe that globalization is late 20th Century affair especially of the 1980s and 1990s occasioned by the development of productive forces and advances of science and technology especially the revolution in transportation and information technology

(Peixin, 2003). Aja (2002) contends that it was the changing lines of imperialism in the 1980s that gave impetus to globalization when highly industrialized states targeted one another for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and universal banking and financing.

Be that as it may, we posit that even if globalization is a late 20th century affair, its genesis goes much further. Some locate it in Adam Smith's pioneering work – *The Wealth of Nations*, which was published in 1776, the same year America won her war of independence. The book had a fundamental effect on the political economy of the emergent United States of America. In the work, Smith contends that economic activities should be left in the hands of private entrepreneurs and governments should least intervene in this process. He asked for trade liberalization across international frontiers. David Ricardo, another 18th century economist argues that international trade should be anchored on the principle of comparative advantage in which case a country produces goods and services in which it has comparative advantage and exchange same with goods and services of other countries in which it would have been cheaper to import them than produce them. He contends that the outcome will be a win-win situation.

The United States imbibed the tenets and wisdom of Adam Smith and David Ricardo's thoughts as did some other countries but with bottlenecks placed here and there for various reasons. Some did to protect their infant industries while some did, especially the third world countries, to regulate the prices of their raw materials. Rapid growth in international trade was however also checkmated by the level of development of transportation and technology. All these were to change in the 1980s and 1990s. What with the revolution in transport, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The Concept Globalization

There is still no acceptable definition of the term "globalization". This is often the lot of social science concepts but that notwithstanding, we can grasp the meaning of globalization from the various definitions put forward by different scholars.

Globalization is embedded in the opening up of the world space and integrating same into a village in which ideas, values, goods, banking and finance, science and technology, foreign investment and markets, have a common playing ground. The concept of globalization is unarguably one of the most significant concepts for some decades now. The concept has invaded public space as well as social sciences. Globalization connotes an attempt or a process by which the world becomes more integrated leading to a global economy (Uduma, Madueke and Nwosu, 2018).

Globalization is a term used to describe the growing interconnectedness of the world. Broadly speaking, the term globalization connotes the deepening of social, economic and cultural interactions among countries of the world (Muhammad, 2013). It is the integration of economic and societies through gross capital, finances and people (Rangarayan, 2003). Globalization is economic interdependence. It has to do with the expansion of world trade,

foreign direct and portfolio investment and currency exchange (Iheonu and Madueke 2018).

The most important aspects of economic globalization are the breaking down of national economic barriers; the international spread of trade, financial and production activities and the growing power of transnational corporations and international financial institutions (Khor,2000). Gracia (1998) in Aja (2002) sees globalization as changes in how we organize production vis-à-vis the general dismantling of trade barriers and giving vent to free mobility of financial and productive capital. This will include technological development in the area of information and electronic services which has been the driving force of the process that results in global production, distribution and consumption. This general dismantling of trade barriers and free mobility of finance and production capital plus rapid technology development in both information and electronics services help in integrating the world. Oyejide (1998) agrees with this when he posited that:

Globalization refers to the increase integration across countries, of markets for goods, services and capital. It implies in turn accelerated expansion of economic activities globally and sharp increase in the movement of tangible and intangible goods across national and regional boundaries. With that movement, individual countries are becoming more closely integrated into the global economy.

Because of this integration in which states are opening their borders with little or no economic barriers and restrictions, some scholars argue that state will wither away. Cohn (2008), notes that Kenichi Ohmae in his book, *The End of the Nation-State*, asserts that, "Traditional nation states have become unnatural, even impossible, business units in global economy". Ohmae argues further that when we have a borderless world and there is no more state interferences in the conduct of global business Multinational Corporation's, (MNC) reasons and decisions and consumers choices will result in the rational allocation of global resources. At this point of course, MNCs would have lost their national identities and regional global markets would have replaced national economies. Cohn (2008: 383) and Garner *et al* (2009) do not agree that globalization is leading to a borderless world. They think that this is an extreme view. They rather contend that globalization even though it leads to openness and economic integration affects states and regions differently as it threatens the state's autonomy in some ways but at the same time gives the state some new roles, it does not stop it from making policy choices crucial to it. Be that as it may, we may sum up this section of our discourse by agreeing with Thomas Friedman in Kegley (2009) that:

Globalization is the integration of markets, finance, and technology in a way that shrinks the world from a size medium to a size small. Globalization enables each of us, wherever we live, to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and

cheaper than ever before and at the same time allow the world to reach into each of us further, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before.

All this ability to reach farther, faster, deeper and cheaper is underscored by the innovation in transportation system and in information and communication technology.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Our framework of analysis in this work is the Bicycle Theory. It is actually a theory used in analyzing regionalism and integration. It has no particular postulator or propounder per se but it is used as Ballaam and Dillman (2011:307) state to explain the merging of European Economic Community (EEC), European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and European Atomic Energy Commission (EURATOM) into European Commission which resulted in the expansion of the political agenda of Europe.

The theory uses the bicycle as an analogy in the European integration in that a bicycle is stable as long as it is on the move. When once a bicycle stops, it falls. So in the case of Europe, Ballaam and Dillman quoted Walter Hallstein, the first president of the European Commission, as saying that European unity could only be sustained if European states would keep on striving for an ever closer union. The important thing here is to continue moving and never attempting to stop. We apply this to China. China was a country shrouded in feudalism and ethnocentrism. For long it refused to open up to the international community both politically and economically, a situation that almost reached a xenophobic stage during the reign of Mao Zedong. In his days, Mao Zedong followed the Soviet Communist model of economics and later changed to a five-year plan of economic strategy known as Self Reliance which did not do much to lift China out of economic quagmire. But following his death, the new set of leaders, Deng Xiaoping and his allies, consolidated their powers and charted a new course which according to Sodaro (2008) "called an end to the political campaigns and ideological oriented policies of the past in favour of economic modernization".

China has seen the gains of opening its economics to the outside world and the importance of interdependence. China will continue to benefit from globalization as long as it keep opening up her economic and It is hoped that future crop of leaders will not attempt to stop this upsurge for some morbid ethnocentric consideration.

Background to China's Ascendance in Globalization

Our study of China could well start from the Chou dynasty period (1122BC – 211BC). This period which lasted for nine centuries could be divided into three segments. The first, the period of the Feudal Order (1122BC and 771BC) which boasted the establishment of the dynasty that lasted for 351 years until it was defeated by insurgent feudal lords. The second era (771BC to 483BC) was known as the Spring and Autumn period. It was during this period that China developed a system of independent states, the type seen in Italy in

the 15th and 16th centuries. The third era was known as the period of the “Warring States” (483BC to 211 BC). This was a period of political conflict and competition which eventually led to the destruction of the Chou dynasty system (Holsti, 1995). During this system, China developed in isolation from the rest of the world.

The Chou dynasty was followed by the Qin dynasty (221BC – 206BC). After it, came the Han Dynasty during which the rulers of China embarked on a period of territorial expansion and laid the groundwork for the institutional structures whose basic pattern endured for a long time (Sodaro, 2008). As centuries followed one another, dynasties followed one another without any emergence of imperial administration. State institutions stayed authoritarian while the civil society remained inactive as China’s political culture was essentially predicated on Confucianism comes from the teachings of Confucius (551BC – 479BC) which imbued China with ethical principles of imperial rule which underlined the importance of hierarchy in moral leadership and the need of authority in political and social relations.

China’s march to nationhood was disrupted in the 17th century when invaders from Manchuria attacked her in 1644, overthrowing the government and capturing Peking, now known as Beijing. The new rulers from Manchuria, who were not ethnic Chinese, established a new dynasty and fortified their hold in government which Sodaro termed as system of bureaucratic authoritarianism and judicious combination of militarily power. Things were going fine up to the 18th century when Britain arrived on the scene.

Everything was changed in 1793, when the leader of British Trade Mission, Lord Macartney, called on the Emperor to discuss trade. The first bell of trouble rang when Macartney refused to bow before the king as was customary. This was seen by Chinese as an affront. British arrival led to the decline of imperial China occasioned by defeats in the hands of invaders from abroad, discontents with imperial rule at home and explosion of population which China was grappling with. All this led to political disintegration.

By the start of the 19th century, British were already in control of tea trade in China, especially in the Southern Coastal Region of Guangdong. A greater blow was dealt on China when Britain started importing Opium from India and selling same at substantial profit to Chinese people leading to drug addiction among the Chinese. British official did that in order to raise capital to finance their purchases. The Chinese authorities challenged this and the Opium war of 1839 began. It ended with the defeat of the Chinese which led to ceding of Hong Kong to Britain. Further defeat in 1860 forced the Chinese to open their doors more to foreign penetration. All these led to heighten Chinese Xenophobia.

Things did not let up for China. In 1894-95, Japan attacked and defeated China and took over the Chinese island of Taiwan. Effort by the dowager empress, that is, the widow of the Chinese emperor, to retake Taiwan ended in failure helping foreigners to consolidate their hold on China. China was down and needed to get up and about. A debate ensued on which way forward. Some preferred a total break with Chinese past which was

anchored on Confucianism which valued harmony over competition, stability over change, and difference and obedience to authority over individual freedom. Those of this view wanted a complete replacement of Chinese's ways of life with values and technology from the West. Others, who also agreed on the needed change, did not want a wholesome negation of Chinese traditional values but on the balancing of Chinese values as the ethical foundation and Western ways for practical purposes (Sodaro, 2008:657). After years of intense debate, those who wanted Western culture and technology won but their victory did not last as the conservatives led by the dowager empress ruling on behalf of her young son uprooted the reformers, regained control and returned China to the status quo that was a distant from the modern world.

This however did not last as a Chinese army garrison went on mutiny in October, 1911 leading to movements in the Chinese provinces demanding independence. Sun Yat-sen, an intellectual with reformist bent, was proclaimed president by the revolutionaries' intent on a republic as against Yuan Shih-Kai who took office as Prime Minister Intent on strong personal rule (Waston, 1981). In February, 1912 Pu Yi, now aged six and on whose behalf the dowager empress ruled was persuaded to abdicate the throne and the imperial officials ruling on behalf of the child emperor reached an agreement with Sun Yat-sen on the dissolution of the monarchy which led to the establishing of the Republic of China (Waston 1981; Sodaro 2008).

Though Sun Yat-sen encouraged Pu Yi to abdicate the throne, Sun Yat-sen could not fully take control of China as Yuan Shih-kai another strong force had proclaimed himself Prime Minister in 1911 while Sun Yat-sen was declared president by the revolutionaries. It went smoothly for a while but with Yuan's death in 1916 a vacuum was created which Sun Yat-sen could not fully occupy and a hand full of Chinese turned to Marxism and Russia for guidance (Waston, 1981). Sun Yat-sen played along and Russia started to play a big role in China and the Koumintang, a radical party took strong hold. In 1925, Sun Yat-sen died and was succeeded by Chiang Kai-shek. He became very powerful and moved northward, occupied Nanking and his nationalist troops, seized foreigners' properties especially those of Britain and the United States. Chiang who really did not like communism later purged China of communism but before long the communists regrouped under Mao Zedong, made a very strong comeback and Chiang's troops were routed and they ran into the Chinese Island of Formosa also known as Taiwan. The communists let them be and Zedong became the new leader of communist China.

Socio-Political Reforms in Chinese Globalization

Mao Zedong's idea was to stay communist and essentially ethnocentric but with his death in 1976, his policy of Cultural Revolution and ethnocentrism suffered a setback as his main successor Deng Xiaoping moved towards capitalism by attracting foreign trade and investment in 1978. It was this period that China started debating the proper balance between central planning and market mechanism for regulating the economy. From this

period, China's move toward market openness and integration and thus her movement into globalization had begun.

It started with the dismantling of the communes which was perhaps the most prominent symbol of the Maoist approach to economic development and the creation of special economic zone along the coast and "open cities" to encourage increased foreign trade (Sodaro, 2008). By the 1980s, the private sector which has been absent in the Chinese economy started to emerge and by 1990s it has exploded on the scene. This trend was to go on to the extent that while there were about 10,000 privately owned firms in China in 1990 which employed about 2.1 percent of industrial staff by 2008 there were more than a hundred million people employed by the firms (Sodaro, 2008).

China has had an extraordinary rapid growth and the per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) doubled between 1978 and 1988 and in fact averaged a growth rate of 10% per year between 1988 and 2005. In terms of volume of foreign trade and investment, Sodaro (2008) report that China has had a tremendous growth of less than \$30 billion in 1980 to almost \$1.3 trillion in 2004. A mega giant leap indeed. The Chinese factories have upgraded and increasingly having the ability to respond quickly to market demands. With all these, there is no way the quality of life of the people would not have changed for the better. And indeed it has as most Chinese standard of living is now higher than ever before. We have noted that in the economic front that China has done well. Socially, it has also done well to the extent that there have been meaningful changes in the sphere of legal, education, sports, etc.

Legal reforms began in 1978. The need for legal reform in China was three fold. The first was the need to establish legitimacy by correcting past wrongs. Almond *et al* (2008) note that China after the death of Mao saw the need to investigate and reverse verdicts of dubious legality issued during the Cultural Revolution. Secondly, Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping and other leaders wanted to restore public order and stability after years of chaos and uncertainty and again to show their commitment to system building as against arbitrary political rule which had been in place. The third strong reason for legal reform had to do with China's rising integration to international economic trend and globalization. In 1997, China amended its criminal law to take account of changes in the Chinese economy which according to Almond *et al* (2008) have created opportunities for economic crimes unimaginable in 1979.

The educational system has witnessed important changes. Education during Mao's time was designed to build communist values which by the 1980s were at odds with the priority of economic growth (Sodaro, 2008). Prior to the death of Mao in 1976, Chinese school curriculum was laden with revolutionary studies but in 2006, on instructions from top party and government departments, universities across the length and breadth of the country reduced the seven compulsory courses on political ideology and party history to four. This, according to Sodaro, was the first major curricular change in twenty five years.

We can also see a lot of social changes in the consumption pattern of China. Rourke (2008) gave a catalogue of reasons to support this. He states that in contrast to what obtained in China before the impact of China's globalization has now seen children in China disturb their parents to take them to see Mickey Mouse at the Hong Kong Disneyland. Kentucky fried chicken and McDonald's have over 1700 and 800 outlets respectively in China even when cheeseburgers at a price \$0.60 is too expensive for most Chinese workers. When it comes to music taste, many Chinese are turning to hard rock which is essentially Anglo-American. In sports, the access to foreign television programmes now seen in Chinese stations allow Chinese watch National Basketball Association (NBA) and other games. Chinese have been mesmerized in the exploits of Chicago Bulls, great Michael Jordan, who they call the space flier. All we have said in this sub-section is as results of globalization throwing open the doors to China or is it the other way round? But how has China's politics fared in the face of globalization? One can only say that it has not followed as swiftly as others if indeed it has started the journey at all. The Chinese political landscape is almost still where Mao Zedong left it.

Dickson (2008) in Sodaro (2008) started the discourse on China's politics by recounting what happened in China in 1989. He told the story of a young Chinese man who on the morning of June 5, blocked a line of tanks heading to the Chinese capital, Beijing. The young man was holding nothing but a shopping bag and stood in front of the first tank in the line. If the tank moves one way to avoid him he would also move in that direction. This drama continued for some moment before the young man's friends came and remove him from harm's way. The accompanying photo of this event was captioned: Young man defies tanks as Chinese Authorities crack down on the pro-democracy demonstration in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Almond *et al* (2008), while discussing the same issue, also accompanied it with the same photo with the caption: In 1989, ordinarily Chinese participated in the largest spontaneous protest movement the communists had ever faced as long protester shows defiance of regime violence in his intransigent confrontation with a Chinese tank. The issue at stake was that the policy of glasnost (1985 – 89) that is openness, which Mikhail Gorbachev introduced in the USSR (1985 – 89), ushered in a wave of democracy that blew across the world. A cross section of Chinese people who have wallowed under the authoritarian communist regime wanted to get into the democratization process.

Chinese were happy with the economic reforms that were taking place in China but were not satisfied with the political reforms that were hardly getting off the ground. In the middle of the 1980s, many people especially the academics became rather frustrated by the slow pace of political reforms. There were students' demonstration in 1986 which was cracked down and the General Secretary, Hu Yaobang forced to resign and accept responsibility for the demonstration which the Chinese leaders feared might lead to instability. Hu Yaobang's death in April, 1989 started the largest demonstration which

post 1949 Chinese Communist revolution had ever witnessed. The demonstrators called for more fundamental changes in China's political system and the removal of Deng Xiaoping the Chinese leader. The whole struggle ended with Chinese leaders, imposing martial laws in the country that led to the tragic death of thousands of Chinese. The Chinese leaders were afraid that such popular demonstration if left unchecked could make the people grow wings and this will erode their power. The carnage of the crackdown returned China politically back to the Mao Zedong era.

Conclusion

China's history has been a history of struggle. Chinese have struggled with feudal lords, monarchical authorities, foreign domination of both Japan and Britain, struggled between the Nationalist and the Communist. But from the 1949 revolution, China has marched steadily out of the woods economically. Things rapidly changed in the post Mao regimes and China embarked on economic and social reforms that have led her to the top bracket of international economics and globalization. But sadly China has lagged behind in political development. Even Russia is ahead of China in political change. It is only hoped that she will find a way of factoring herself into political change in the scheme of things.

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Uduma, D; Madueke, O and Nwosu, C. O. (2018). Globalization and Nigeria economic security 2012-2016. *Journal of Political Science and Leadership Research* ISSN 2504-8821 Vol. 4 No. 3 2018
www.iiardpub.org

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