

The People's Republic of China and FAPRA: Catalysts for Theory Building in Africa's Public Relations

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Abstract

Africa is experiencing an unusually high economic interest from the People's Republic of China, whose government has invested billions of dollars in schools, clinics, roads, railways, factories, and oil wells on the continent; has canceled more than \$1.36 billion in debts owed to it by 33 African nations; and has pledged to provide Africa with \$5 billion in preferential loans and credits through 2009. Its top party officials traverse the continent, seeking to develop business relationships and to reinforce others. While such efforts help place Africa on the cusp of significant economic growth, they also boost the programs and activities of the Nairobi, Kenya-based Federation of African Public Relations Associations (FAPRA), and an umbrella body of all national public relations associations in Africa and a consultant to African governments and to the African Union. FAPRA has launched a 5-year action plan to improve the stature and social relevance of the public relations practice, largely through enhancing its efforts to professionalize it. Both China and FAPRA are, in essence, collaborating to create environments conducive to enhancing the practice in Africa, and to laying a foundation for an expansive view of public relations research—one that questions grand narratives, defines concepts, challenges orthodoxies, measures variables, and determines program outcomes or effects. And researchers and practitioners work together in creative ways to improve the practice. This article argues that questions and concepts are, in themselves, opportunities for a much-needed theory building in Africa's public relations. It, therefore, outlines 4 propositions as a template for such theory building, based on a 4-concept research agenda: culture, good governance and rule of law, economic freedom, and FAPRA's integrated programs and activities outlined in its 5-year action plan.

The return of China ... to global economic prominence in the twenty-first century is likely to reshape global politics and society. The overwhelming dominance of the West, which lasted half a millennium, is probably passé. We should view these developments not only with awe, but with anticipation. ([Sachs, 2005](#)Sachs, J. D. 2005. *The end of poverty: Economic possibilities of our time*, New York: Penguin. [[Google Scholar](#)], p. 187)

We want to work in partnership with the international community, but we believe that it must be a partnership based on mutual respect and mutual accountability. (Former [Namibian Prime Minister Geingob, 2006](#)Geingob, H. 2006. "Democracy in Africa". In *Democracy rising: Assessing the global challenges*, Edited by: Muñoz, H.55–60. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. [[Google Scholar](#)], p. 56)

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