

Africa-Asia Connection in the Global Context: The Pursuit of Solidarity for Peace and Social Progress¹

Introduction

In the first section of this address, I provide a background of my connection with Asia. The second section deals with the historical context of African-Asian collaborations in the global struggle for freedom. The third section focuses on the African-Asian connection as a global alliance for world peace and the development of African and Asian countries, with Pan-African perspectives and a special reference to W. E. B. DuBois and Kwame Nkrumah. Concluding remarks will follow.

I would like to first acknowledge Mzee Mwalimu Ali Mazrui whose Institute of Global Cultural Studies is hosting this Conference with the Department of African and African-American Studies at Penn State University and the Department of Africana Studies, Binghamton University; the Local Organizing Committee, co-chaired by Lisa Yun and Michael O. West; We thank Professor Edward Kannyo, NYASA President, Professor Seifudein Adem, NYASA President-Elect, the Members of the NYASA Board, including Mwalimu Abdul Nanji, Professor Locksley Edmondson, Professor Thomas Nyquist and Dr. Corinne Nyquist. Our appreciation goes to our Cornell colleagues of the Africana Studies and Research Center. Finally, we want to thank our children – Disashi, Enongo and Lushima who, through books, cartoons and art including “Animés” introduced us to a different side of the Japanese culture, and whose youthful innocence, intense curiosity,

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wondrous spirit and creativity made us appreciate many dimensions of the Japanese physical and social landscape, culture and specificities across the islands and various localities while we were traveling together in 2003 to give lectures and seminars at different institutions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank our colleagues and friends in Asia, especially Japan, who have provided us with spaces for critical reflection and interactions.

The Committee that made this decision clearly acknowledged that Professor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo and I have autonomous voices as scholars. For this special occasion, we will complement each other in sharing reflective remarks that express our collective and profound gratitude to all of you.

I will be discussing Africa through a Pan-African perspective within a global context. My address is partially drawn from various talks that I gave on other occasions. The first one was my presentation in an Africana Studies Colloquium series.² The second was delivered at the Center for African Studies at the University of Ghana (Legon) on the invitation of Professor Anne Adams, who was the Director of

the Dubois Center in Accra at that time.³ Another presentation was made on the occasion of the Celebration of Ghana’s Independence (1957) organized by the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell in 2007.⁴ This topic is very much appropriate for this occasion as the theme of the Conference is: “Global-Africa, Global-Asia: Africa and Asia in the Age of Globalization”.

Personal and Professional Journey of my Asian Connection

My curiosity about Asia and its connection to Africa dates many years back. While I was a student in France in the 1970s, one of my favorite magazines was called *Afrique-Asie*, which was more progressive in comparison to *Jeune Afrique*, for instance. At the time, the historical context in Africa was characterized by post-independence aspirations, ongoing struggle for the liberation African countries still colonized by Portugal and generally in southern Africa, continued vigilant engagement of historic organizations such as *Federation des Étudiants d’Afrique Noire en France* (FEANF). In this context, global and historic figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ho Chi Min and Chairman Mao constituted references in any developing African critical mind because of their articulation of the fight for freedom against colonial and any form of imperial interests and domination.

Though I had Asian classmates, friends and students from different countries and

whom I met in North American institutions of higher learning, it was only about fifteen years ago that I had opportunities to have direct experience in Asia.

My first trip to Asia took place when I attended the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (China) and the NGO Forum held in Wairau (China). With a more profound and sustained connection to an Asian context, I then developed an interest in Asian education in the late 1990s. In June 1998, I was invited “as an expert on restructuring and reforming of Higher Education” to participate in an “International Seminar on Higher Education Reform for China”. Although due to specific factors I did not pursue it, for me the invitation alone was significant.

A few months later in the same year (1998), at a time of global preparation for the 21st Century, I was invited, with the Honorable Harry Sawyer of Ghana, to serve on “the advisory panel of the Forum on ‘International Cooperation in Education for the 21st Century: Africa and Japan’” that was organized by the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE) at Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan. We had a responsibility to provide a critical assessment of Japanese educational assistance to Africa. While we were diplomatic and celebrated past successes regarding Japan-Africa cooperation, we also took our responsibility seriously toward the African countries and people by making constructive criticism of aspects that needed improvement or new forms and strategies for more productive cooperation between Japan and Africa in the specific education sector. In fact, we were expected to do exactly that.

In 2002, I was awarded a fellowship for foreign education experts by the Japanese Ministry of Education. Subsequently, in 2003 I was Visiting Professor at the Center for International Cooperation in Education (CICE) at Hiroshima University. Since then, I have also contributed to several projects and programs, serving, for instance, as a keynote speaker at the Japan Education Forum (JEF),⁵ seminars and lectures in various institutions of higher learning across Japan, and various meetings at the United Nations University in Tokyo.

Among many other activities in recent years, I have also served as an adviser to the ongoing “Africa-Asia University Dia-

logue for Basic Education Development” project. Through this project, I have had the opportunity to meet and fruitfully interact with Asians from various countries and institutions that have been working with African counterparts. For instance, the first phase of this project⁶ included African participants from: University of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Addis Ababa University (Ethiopia), Bahir Dar University (Ethiopia), University of Cape Coast (Ghana), University of Education, Winneba (Ghana), Kenyatta University (Kenya), University of Antananarivo (Madagascar), University of Malawi (Malawi), Abdou Moumouni University (Niger), University of Lagos (Nigeria), Bayero University (Nigeria), University of Pretoria (South Africa), University of Dar es Salam (Tanzania), Mzumbe University (Tanzania), Makerere University (Uganda), Kyambogo University (Uganda), University of Zambia (Zambia). The Asian participants in different capacities were from: National University of Educational Planning and Administration (India), Indonesia University of Education (Indonesia), Hiroshima University (Japan), Kobe University (Japan), Nagoya University (Japan), Naruto University of Education (Japan), Osaka University (Japan), Tokyo Gakugei University (Japan), Waseda University (Japan), Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia), Chiang Mai University (Thailand), Vietnam National University, Hanoi (Vietnam). I served as co-guest editor, with Professor Jandhyala Tilak (Head of the Department of Educational Finance at the National University of Educational Planning and Administration-NUEPA) in New Delhi (India), for the special issues of the *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, published by CICE, that were devoted to the first series of publication of the studies conducted in the first phase of this project.

As a member of the World Academy of Art and Science, I attended its 2008 General Assembly that was held in Hyderabad (India) on the theme “Anthropocene Crisis: Perils and Possibilities of the 21st Century” during which I presented a paper entitled “Higher Knowledge and Global Good: Reconceptualizing and Envisioning Higher Education in Africa for Shared and Enhanced Humanity”. This gave me another opportunity for enriching interaction in an Asian context.

These engagements with Asians and in Asian contexts have provided me an opportunity to enrich my general under-

standing of Asia and new perspectives with a focus on education, in my humble efforts to contribute, through scholarly and policy works, to social progress in Africa. The next section of my address deals with the broader African engagement in world politics and the synergy of efforts toward the establishment of African-Asian peace and development front.

African-Asian Solidarity Efforts in the First Half of the 20th Century

In recent history, Asian countries and people were the object of conquest and domination by the same Western European countries that oppressed people of Africa and the African forced into the historic Diaspora of the Trans-Atlantic enslavement.

The Afro-Asian relationship started to take shape between the two World Wars. In 1924, a group of Africans and Asians called the Anti-Imperialist League was formed in Europe and became the Association of Oppressed Peoples (AOP), which met in Brussels in February 1927. This brought together 175 delegates from 37 countries and territories of the times. Given its goal and the composition of the participants, it has been referred to as the precursor of “Afro-Asian solidarity, the forerunner of the conference at Bandung”. The participants included Nehru of India, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, Muhammad Hatta of Indonesia, Madame Sun Yat-sen of China and Léopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal.

In the United States, debates in the same period, between the two World Wars, focused on two major dualist articulations: Orientalism and Eurocentric race theory, on the one hand, and Bolshevism and anticommunism on the other. In these polar representations of the world, actual and potential forces were driven by conflicts and wars. The Bandung Conference from the 18th to the 24th of April 1955 was appropriately characterized as “A Milestone in the Africa Asia alliance”.

In April 1954, an initial proposal was made by the Indonesian Government for the organization of an Asian-African conference. In December of the same year, Prime Ministers of five Asian countries: Burma (now Myanmar), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), India, Indonesia and Pakistan held a conference in Bogor (Indonesia). At that meeting they reached an agreement to serve as co-conveners of an Asian-African conference. The consensus was to jointly call

the conference that the five countries had proposed. Following further discussions, a year later, the historic African-Asian meeting was held. In his address, Professor Lumumba-Kasongo extensively discusses the Bandung Conference. Given the focus of my address, it is important to note that for different reasons, neither DuBois nor Nkrumah, attended the Bandung Conference.

DuBois was prevented from attending the conference as his passport was confiscated by the government of the United States. However, he managed to have two powerful messages delivered: 1) a message of solidarity or “the Greetings” to the conference organizers and participants, and 2) a statement on “The Declaration of Independence” of African countries. Both messages were read to the conference and “were met with warm applause by the delegates” (DuBois 1982:236). In his Greetings, he stated:

We wish you well and bid you stand staunch and fast for peace and freedom, for an Africa and Asia equal with and independent of Europe and America, standing on its own feet, governing themselves as they decide, ... and establishing and conducting their own industrial systems as they see fit and not as British or American command (DuBois 1982:236).

In his Declaration of Independence of Africa, he wrote:

The people of Africa, black and white, brown and yellow, have the right to freedom and self-government, to food and shelter, education and health. ... Africa is for the Africans; its land and labor; its natural wealth and resources; its mountains, lakes and rivers; its cultures and its soul. ... Let the white world keep its missionaries at home to teach the Golden Rule to its corporate thieves. ... Peace on earth; no more war. ... All Hail Africa. (DuBois 1982:236-237).

As mentioned earlier, Nkrumah did not attend the Bandung Conference either; but in his case, it was because he could not travel as Head of State as the Gold Coast had not yet acquired its autonomy. However, the Gold Coast was represented by a three-member delegation headed by Kojo Botsio (member of Legislative Assembly). Despite its small size, the delegation of the Gold Coast, that stood just two years before the independence of the country, made a substantive contribution

and lasting impact. Indeed, in terms of the clarity and strength of the political position, Ghana was a key and powerful representative of Africa.

PanAfrican Foundation and Asian Connection

In the beginning of the 20th Century, the early years of organized efforts toward Afro-Asian collaboration coincided with the same period when the lives and histories of the two giants W. E. B. DuBois and Kwame Nkrumah started to converge. This convergence started from the United States to Europe and back to the African continent while they intensified their respective and collective struggle for freedom, justice and peace as a pre-requisite for social progress for the Africans and oppressed people everywhere.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* written in 1903, DuBois (1969) made one of his most famous observations: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to lighter races of men [sic] in Asia and Africa, in America and the island sea” (DuBois 1969:54). This examination had a meaning not only in the context of the, then racially segregated, United States but also globally because colonialism was essentially built on racism. It became significant in the global context and the search for alliance among the African and Asian People. It was framed as an alliance of the Black/Brown and the Yellow (as the Asians were referred to at the time).

DuBois and Nkrumah met in the United States where Nkrumah spent ten years, from 1935 to 1945, primarily as a student. This period includes the entire duration of the World War II (WWII), an essentially European war for which Africans, African Americans, and the people of African descent elsewhere fought for liberty and freedom that they were not allowed to enjoy in Africa still firmly under colonial rule and the United States still governed by Jim Crow laws, and islands in the West Indies still controlled by European old slave and colonial powers. This experience also coincided with the organization of the 5th 1945 Pan-African Congress, which took place in Manchester (United Kingdom) and in which both DuBois and Nkrumah played prominent roles as President and Secretary, respectively. Given their respective ideologies and the actual power of the dominant system, they both strongly articulated the need for a global partnership that would

provide an alternative to the alliance of Western Europe and its extension in the Americas. Indeed, both DuBois and Nkrumah were seeking an alliance that could tilt the global system toward mutual respect, an appreciation of, and commitment to, justice and peace as *sine qua non* for social progress.

Among the numerous undertakings that DuBois either initiated, or to which he significantly contributed, in April 1950, five years after the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he established and was elected the chairperson of the Peace Information Center that was set up for the purpose of collecting and disseminating information on the international peace movement. One of the specific objectives of the center was to prevent any future use, by any nation in the world, of atomic weapons.

The goal and targeted beneficiaries of the work in which DuBois was engaged transcended ideological differences, ignored national borders and crossed color lines. His passion then, as before and later in his life journey, was to work toward a world of justice and peace. However, in the McCarthy era of terror, less than a year after the creation of the Peace Information Center, in February 1951, he was indicted under the Foreign Agents Registration Act that was adopted shortly before WWII, in 1938. He was tried as “an agent of a foreign principal”. This is the context in which he was prevented from attending the Bandung Conference. He was later acquitted.

DuBois travelled extensively across the globe. The Asian continent was one of the regions to which he traveled widely. However, he was not just an ordinary traveler. Indeed, he critically read during his voyages. Deliberately, but also pushed by the politics of the Cold War and the persistently racialized politics of increasingly conservative domination of the United States with far-reaching implications for the world, he became more and more a leftist radical. He intensified his travels to Asia, with a purpose, focusing on China where he observed the achievements and great potentials, at home and globally, and possibilities in cooperation with Africa. He argued that, given the global system of skewed power distribution along racial lines, the oppressed people must unite. He stated with great passion and hope: “Come to China, Africa, and look around” (DuBois 1968:407).

DuBois was still traveling to Asia in his 90s. As he recalled: "When in Peking, my 91st birthday was given national celebration. I pled for the unity of China and Africa ..." He went on to articulate some of the highlights of the day by adding that on this occasion, he was offered the opportunity "to speak to the people of China and Africa and, through them, to the world. Hail, then, and farewell, dwelling places of yellow and black races. Hail human kind" (DuBois 1968:405).

In a context when Nkrumah was discussing the Congo crisis, and the disposition of the East-West relations which were perceived as doomed and leading inevitably toward armed conflict, Nkrumah stated, as written in his book entitled *I Speak Freedom* (pp. 280-281): "The Afro-Asian nations, if they act together, might prove strong enough to be a decisive force for peace in the world."

Ghana under Nkrumah remained active in the Afro-Asian group at the United Nations. By a terrible irony, three years after DuBois' passing, Nkrumah was on his way to China when he lost power to the first Ghanaian military coup d'état that took place on February 24th 1966. During the journey and when he landed in Beijing, he was unaware of the coup. As a basic courtesy and sign of respect for his dignity, he was received on his arrival with full honors before the Chinese authorities brought the news to him. That was perhaps a sign of the changes to come in African and Asian countries internally, regionally and on the global scale and the promise of an alternative global alliance for peace and justice.

Concluding Remarks

Times have changed since the middle of 20th Century. Asian countries of yesterday and the confident and hopeful Africa at the time of the first independence celebrations, of which Ghana of Nkrumah had a particular Pan-African and global significance, have gone through different trajectories.

Had the Afro-Asian group been successful, what would the world be today and what would the state of African states and people be? No one will ever be able to answer these questions. The New Asian-African Strategic Partnership (NAASP),

reviving the spirit of African-Asian solidarity and cooperation, is being articulated in a fundamentally new era.

DuBois' life journey was linked to Africa within the global world. By accident, some of the dates in his long life coincided with some events of significance for the African people. Born in 1868, the year he graduated from high school in 1884 coincided with the beginning of the 1884/85 Berlin Conference at which the European partitioned Africa; he graduated with a BA from Fisk in 1888, the date when, finally, Brazil abolished slavery. In 1961, upon the invitation of Nkrumah, he moved to Ghana and in 1963 he became a citizen of Ghana. The same year, he passed away, at home on the African soil.

The year 1963 was also when the Pan-African vision and project vanished. Indeed, it was a turning point of missed opportunity in shaping Africa's fate and future, at the creation of OAU (Organization of African Unity). The progressive and Pan-African position that was promoted by the Casablanca group in which Nkrumah played a prominent role was defeated by the Monrovia group that opted for a conservative position that facilitated the continued neo-colonial framework in the relations between African states within the artificial borders and between Africa and the West and the rest of the world.

That turning point has had far-reaching and entrenched legacies on why, half a century after the process of independence started, African countries are still struggling amidst old and new development challenges, while their Asian counterparts have evolved into major regional and world political and/or economic powers to reckon with. The lack of progress since then has had implications in terms of the actual bargaining power that African countries have, and can create, in establishing their relationship with Asian countries of various sizes and power ranging from the emerging economies to the giant that is China.

With a renewed and clear vision along with the political will, African countries now have the possibility to guide in rekindling a version of the African-Asian alliance in a relatively strong position, and with bargaining power to move toward social progress.

Notes

1. This article is a text of the address I delivered as recipient of the 2010 Distinguished Africanist Award. Because of time factor, only a very brief summary of this address was actually delivered at the award ceremony on March 27, 2010, at SUNY Binghamton, Binghamton (New York).
2. "Fusionist Philosophy and Praxis in Japanese Education: A Basis for Reflection on a Pan-African Vision of Education for Social Progress", paper presented at Africana Studies Colloquium, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, October 2003.
3. Presentation on "DuBois, Nkrumah, and their Asian Connections in the Struggle for Global Justice and Peace" co-sponsored by the DuBois Center in Accra and the Center for African Studies of the University of Ghana at Legon, Accra, Ghana, and held at the Center for African Studies in March 2007.
4. My talk was entitled: "Kwame Nkrumah, W. E. B. DuBois, and the Africa-Asia Connections: In Search of Global Partnership for an Alternative World Vision, Peace, and Social Development", was given at the co-convened Symposium on "Stages in Black Emancipation and the Renewal of PanAfrican Consciousness: Abolition of "Slave Trade" (1807) and Celebration of Ghana's Independence (1957)" organized at the Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, Africana Studies and research Center, November 2007.
5. Keynote address entitled "International Educational Cooperation and the Expectation for Japan's Contribution" presented at the annual conference of the Japan Education Forum JEF IV), jointly organized by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Center for the Study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE) of Hiroshima University and the Center for International Cooperation in Educational Development of the University of Tsukuba and co-sponsored by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), Tokyo, Japan, February 2007.
6. The second phase with new sets of participants from African and Asian countries and institutions is underway.

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