

An Exploration of China's Cross-Cultural Communication Practices with African Youth from the Perspective of Youth Empowerment Theory

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ABSTRACT : With the steady enhancement of China's overall national strength, the country has sought to elevate its soft power in ways commensurate with its growing influence, with communication constituting a major focal point of this effort. Meanwhile, China-Africa relations have become increasingly close. This study centers on African youth as key actors in China's external communication, aiming to provide a new perspective for improving China's outreach to Africa. Drawing on empowerment theory and integrating youth studies with communication research, the paper reviews the core concepts of communicative empowerment, offers a profile of African youth as a social group, and ultimately identifies "dialogue," "self-help," and "other-help" as crucial directions for enhancing the effectiveness of China's communication with African youth, as well as essential indicators for evaluating such communicative outcomes.

Keywords - Empowerment Theory, Cross-Cultural Communication, China, Africa, Youth

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China has placed renewed emphasis on strengthening the top-level design and strategic planning of its external communication, with the goal of constructing a strategic communication system distinctive to the Chinese context. This institutional push reflects China's aspiration to enhance its international communication influence, the cultural appeal of Chinese civilization, the affinity of its national image, the persuasiveness of Chinese discourse, and its capacity to shape global public opinion. These efforts unfold against a geopolitical backdrop marked by the accelerating rise of the Global South, within which China-Africa relations have evolved into a prominent exemplar of new-type international relations. Within this broader strategic landscape, cultivating African publics' recognition of and emotional resonance with Chinese culture has become essential for advancing the long-term stability and sustainable development of China-Africa cooperation.

A critical, yet often underexamined, constituency in this process is African youth. Africa possesses the youngest demographic structure globally, with over 400 million individuals between the ages of 15 and 35.[1] This demographic reality renders African youth not only central agents of sociocultural change on the continent, but also indispensable participants in China's efforts to expand its cultural presence and communicative reach in Africa. In this sense, effective engagement with African youth represents more than a tactical communication initiative; it constitutes a strategic investment in the future trajectory of China-Africa relations and, more broadly, the cooperative prospects of the Global South. Understanding how China can enhance its cross-cultural communication with this demographic, therefore, holds significant theoretical and practical implications for the study of global communication, intercultural engagement, and South-South cooperation.

II. EMPOWERMENT THEORY: FROM YOUTH STUDIES TO COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

2.1 Empowerment Theory

2.1.1 Defining Empowerment Theory

The origins of empowerment theory are rooted in the social movements and critical intellectual currents of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Due to its practical and problem-oriented nature, empowerment naturally became a concept widely adopted by multiple disciplines and diverse social actors. Nevertheless,

academic definitions of empowerment remain somewhat vague. Based on this, the following section reviews the development of the theory and the major scholarly contributions to its formulation.

As the saying goes, “where there is oppression, there is resistance.” In response to power imbalances, the term empowerment first emerged during the social movements of the 1950s [2] and became embedded in the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the self-help movement, and the political awareness movements of the 1960s and 1970s [3][4]. Groups that considered themselves “disempowered” in society demanded empowerment through various social movements. At this stage, empowerment functioned primarily as a mobilizing slogan, emphasizing marginalized groups’ struggle for rights and self-determination. It is worth noting that among these movements, the independence campaigns led by African colonies were also an important component of the global empowerment movements. Africa, as a continent that had long suffered oppression, became closely linked to empowerment from the very beginning; and in the face of contemporary Western dominance in economic, cultural, political, and media spheres, Africa’s struggles for empowerment continue today.

The widespread rise of empowerment movements soon attracted scholarly attention. From the 1980s onward, numerous scholars attempted to explain and theorize empowerment from diverse disciplinary perspectives. Fields such as community development, management studies, psychology, education, economics, and social work all contributed to interpretations of empowerment. [5] Rappaport defined empowerment as “the process by which individuals, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives.” [6] Rappaport’s major contribution lies in his emphasis on empowerment as a process. Mosedale further advanced the view that empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a final outcome, arguing that people cannot reach an absolute state of being empowered. She also stressed that empowerment requires empowered subjects to express their own claims, possess determination and agency, and occupy disadvantaged or powerless positions. [7] However, some scholars highlight its outcome dimension, emphasizing increased autonomy, decision-making power, and freedom. [8] While gaining such empowering outcomes for marginalized groups may appear to involve dividing up a finite “power pie,” Murrell argues that power is not a limited “commodity”; instead, empowerment can generate new forms of power. [9]

In sum, despite ongoing debates regarding the definition of empowerment, this paper argues that its core revolves around the acquisition and creation of power. The aim is to help individuals and groups who are disempowered—yet possess legitimate claims and the determination to pursue their goals—obtain or generate power. From a process perspective, they acquire more legitimate power than in previous stages; from an outcome perspective, they gain stronger control over their lives and related affairs.

2.1.2 Defining Communicative Empowerment Theory

Although empowerment in different contexts shares the same underlying goal, the specific methods and approaches vary, resulting in diverse analytical frameworks across disciplines. In communication studies, interaction is regarded as the key mechanism of empowerment. Rogers conceptualizes empowerment as “a communication process that often emerges through interactions among members of small groups,” arguing that individuals without power can gain a sense of collective strength and acquire their own agency through group communication. [10] Based on this perspective, traditional mass media—such as print media and radio—due to their filtered, one-directional, and non-interactive nature, tend instead to intensify the distrust felt by marginalized groups. This, to some extent, explains the current ineffectiveness of China’s communication with African youth. China’s communication strategies have lacked clear targeting and have often relied on traditional mass-media formats when addressing African youth, causing such messages to disappear from their field of attention. Through interviews with over one hundred African students studying in China, the author found that - even though they are willing to pursue education in China and possess relatively high levels of knowledge - none of them follow or engage with any Chinese media propaganda.

However, the emergence of new media has broken this impasse. New media provide every user with a convenient space for expression and communication, enabling anyone to hold a “microphone” at low cost. As it rapidly spreads to middle- and lower-income groups, new media have profoundly reshaped people’s daily lifestyles, behavioral patterns, and modes of social connection. New media technologies thus have the potential to actively facilitate the participatory communication processes advocated by empowerment theory. [11]

Liang Yi and Liu Hua introduced the concept of “Internet empowerment,” arguing that “the Internet cannot grant rights; rather, it enables the expression or realization of civic rights due to its technological features and communicative advantages.” [12] Additionally, both Huang Yueqin and Fang Lingli emphasize that when the public uses new media technologies to produce, disseminate, and manage content, they experience an enhanced sense of participation, meaningful connection, and self-efficacy through interactive communication processes. These processes constitute a mediated practice through which individuals realize information sharing, identity construction, collective consciousness, social solidarity, community bonding, or the pursuit of interests. [13][14] Tye and colleagues, through their study of grassroots movements in Malaysia, further reveal the important role

of social media in empowering citizens, enabling them to facilitate and coordinate collective action that drives community-level change. [15]

Despite the many ways in which new media—particularly self-media—align with empowerment theory, they also present risks that may further disempower marginalized groups seeking empowerment. First, the digital divide produces unequal empowerment: the empowering effects of new media are far from universal, and substantial disparities exist across regions, classes, age groups, and educational levels in terms of media access and usage capabilities. This may further widen existing social inequalities. Second, stigmatization and online violence persist. New media merely provide platforms for communication but do not automatically improve the public image of vulnerable groups or generate empathy and support. When marginalized groups voice their concerns online, they may face stigmatization, misunderstanding, or cyberattacks from dominant discourses, rendering the empowerment process risky and unpredictable. Finally, empowerment theory emphasizes “self-help,” yet communicative empowerment also depends on “other-help.” In addition to Zhang Bo’s observation that external forces are needed to “apply pressure from the outside to encourage subjects to participate in the empowerment process,” [16] marginalized groups seeking empowerment must also develop skills in self-narration, receive assistance in shaping their narratives, and rely on supportive dissemination from influential mainstream content creators.

2.2 Youth Empowerment Theory

2.2.1 Defining Youth Empowerment Theory

Under ideal circumstances, society should be able to achieve a smooth transfer of power across generations—namely from the elderly, to the middle-aged, and then to the youth. However, in reality, multiple factors such as demographic imbalance, disparities in education, and the influence of traditional norms often lead to generational discontinuity in power. This phenomenon is reflected in various dimensions of societies across the world. Politically, it manifests in the tensions between younger factions and veteran political elites—for instance, the dissatisfaction of younger members of the U.S. House of Representatives toward Nancy Pelosi’s long-standing hold on the speakership. Economically, in many countries—especially within Africa—youth face a lack of employment opportunities. Culturally, traditional mainstream culture often misinterprets or even disparages emerging youth cultures. Yet ultimately, the world belongs to the youth. If societies continue to neglect the power and agency of younger generations, the intergenerational transfer of authority becomes impossible, resulting in power discontinuity or structural imbalance.

Academic discussions on youth empowerment have largely focused on methodological concerns. Some scholars argue that the core elements of youth empowerment are power, participation, and education. [17] Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, an influential advocate of youth empowerment, emphasized that society must enhance youth consciousness through education to achieve social justice and equitable access to economic resources. [18] Similar to the “self-help + other-help” model in communicative empowerment theory, some scholars contend that youth agency alone is insufficient. They argue that youth empowerment requires collective action to transform society. [19] This perspective defines empowerment as the capacity to change organizational and societal norms, values, perceptions, policies, and structures. The framework of Critical Youth Empowerment Theory emerged from analyses of four different empowerment models: the Adolescent Empowerment Cycle [20], the Youth Development and Empowerment Programme Model [21], the Transactional Partnering Model [22], and the Empowerment Education Model [23]. [24] This paper does not elaborate on the specific content of these four models. Instead, drawing on the literature, it provides an overall summary of Critical Youth Empowerment Theory as follows:

- a) Society must recognize youth as an important resource.
- b) Youth should be supported in forming positive social connections, maintaining power-sharing relationships with middle-aged and older groups, who play more supervisory and leadership roles.
- c) Youth must be adequately prepared to participate in social activities—particularly through education that equips them with the skills and knowledge necessary for governance and development.
- d) Youth should be provided with meaningful activities through which they can enhance communication and managerial abilities in practice.
- e) Youth demands should be taken seriously, and positive affirmation of their efforts should be offered to strengthen youths’ self-esteem.

2.2.2 Defining Youth Communicative Empowerment Theory

Youth communicative empowerment theory builds upon general empowerment theory by identifying “youth” as the primary target group and “communication” as the primary means of empowerment. This categorization is not arbitrary; rather, it is grounded in the intrinsic characteristics of empowerment theory itself. Although empowerment exhibits certain universal features across domains, its definitions, methods of application, and intended objectives vary significantly across disciplines. The present study focuses on the

central question of how China can empower African youth through cross-cultural communication in order to enhance China's communicative capacity, national image, and international discourse power.

To achieve this aim, the article seeks to address two interconnected issues: (1) How to empower China's communicative capacity by strengthening communication with African youth as a distinct social group, and (2) How to empower African youth within the field of international communication so as to cultivate a cohort of young Africans who understand China, appreciate China, and feel positively toward China. Together, these two dimensions constitute the youth communicative empowerment theory applied in this study.

Through an examination of relevant theories, several strategies emerge for achieving the above goals:

a) Emphasizing dialogue.

Building on existing external communication efforts—which have traditionally relied heavily on mass media—greater emphasis should be placed on co-communication between Chinese and African youth. Both online and offline platforms should be used to facilitate sustained dialogue and exchange between the two groups.

b) Emphasizing other-help.

When African youth are positioned as the subjects of empowerment, Chinese media—as the “other”—should recognize the importance of African youth, offer more positive attention to help maintain their public image, and encourage their self-help by affirming their agency and reinforcing their confidence. Conversely, when Chinese media serve as the subjects of empowerment, more actors should be encouraged to participate in communication with Africa, including African youth themselves who can communicate China to their peers and help shape China's image within African societies.

c) Emphasizing development.

Mainstream media can disseminate narratives highlighting the success stories of Chinese youth. Non-mainstream media can directly transmit skills that support personal development—such as practical life skills and soft skills (e.g., cooking, organization), learning strategies, communication techniques, and methods of critical thinking.

d) Emphasizing new power.

Communication is fundamentally a process of information transmission. International communication can provide African youth with additional development opportunities by transmitting unique and useful information—such as encouraging joint entrepreneurial ventures among Chinese and African youth.

e) Emphasizing commonality.

By promoting shared values, traditions, and collaborative themes between Chinese and African youth, communication can help strengthen mutual affinity and foster a sense of belonging.

III. GROUP CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN YOUTH

The Chinese government has already recognized the need for targeted communication. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that “we must adopt precise communication approaches tailored to different regions, countries, and audience groups, and promote the globalized, regionalized, and segmented expression of China's stories and China's voice.” [25] Nevertheless, academic research still lacks studies focusing on specific regions and specific populations. The present article deliberately identifies Africa as the target region and youth as the target population for deep-rooted reasons. As the rise of the Global South continues to accelerate, Africa's strategic importance within China's major-country diplomacy has become increasingly prominent. Africa will constitute a key focus of both China's diplomatic priorities and its international communication efforts in the future. Therefore, shaping a positive national image in Africa is of utmost importance. International communication toward Africa must adopt segmented and audience-centered approaches—while maintaining overall coherence, it must avoid imposing a single uniform model across all contexts. Africa has the youngest demographic structure in the world, with more than 400 million people between the ages of 15 and 35. [26] Thus, African youth function as a critical nexus within China's overall communication strategy toward Africa. Winning the support of African youth means winning the next generation of Africa; it signifies securing the future of China's communication with Africa as well as the future of China-Africa cooperation.

However, research still lacks a clear “profile” or “mapping” of African youth as a social group. Without such a “map,” communication efforts risk losing direction. Therefore, this section examines the general characteristics of African youth. It must be noted that Africa is a vast continent encompassing 55 countries and regions, composed of highly diverse ethnic groups, traditions, and uneven levels of development. For this reason, the following analysis can only summarize the common characteristics of African youth at a general and conceptual level. It is hoped that future research can probe more deeply into specific country-level contexts.

3.1 Severe Employment Challenges

In China, arguments such as “the demographic dividend has been an important driver of rapid economic growth since the reform and opening-up” [27] and “for a long time, China's large population and

labor force have been among the major engines of national economic growth” [28] are widely accepted. However, in Africa, population growth often triggers concern. Some scholars predict that within less than three generations, Africa’s population will account for over 40% of the world’s youth population; by 2050, African youth will constitute one-quarter of the global labor force. [29] At the same time, according to data published by the International Labour Organization in 2023 (ILO Statistics, 2023), approximately 72 million young people in Africa are unemployed. Although this number is already alarming, the unemployment rate alone cannot fully or accurately reflect the scale and quality of employment in a given region. For Africa, the real employment situation is far more severe, manifested in widespread underemployment, the dominance of informal work, and particularly harsh employment conditions for youth (as well as women). [30] Unemployment inevitably leads to low income. In fact, African education systems have been continuously developing and improving. Nevertheless, despite increasing numbers of young people completing secondary education and even entering university, the mismatch between educational systems and labor markets prevents many African youth from securing employment. They are forced into the oversaturated informal economy or become informal workers within the formal sector. [31] Seventy-two percent of African youth live on less than two dollars a day. [32]

Yet for survival, African youth must still find ways—sometimes desperately—to earn a livelihood. Under such economic conditions, many African youth tend to take life as it comes, seeking opportunities whenever possible, and often relying on “luck.” This environment shapes a tendency toward present-oriented behavior, reducing the likelihood of long-term planning aimed at broader goals. Such tendencies are particularly visible among youth engaged in street vending, cross-border trade and smuggling, planning irregular migration to South Africa or Europe, becoming involved in criminal networks as scammers, traffickers, or gang members, or forming intimate relationships with wealthy individuals to obtain money, gifts, and fashionable goods, sometimes using sexual relationships as a livelihood strategy—or becoming social media influencers. [33] Although African youth appear to have many “options,” these informal—and often risky—forms of work, which may involve violations of law or personal safety, generate deep frustration and dissatisfaction among them.

3.2 Political Disempowerment

African youth are marginalized in the labor market, and this marginalization is equally unavoidable in the realm of political participation. Even when young people manage to participate in politics, they are often confined to peripheral roles—such as enforcers, thugs, bodyguards, or youth-wing members—performing functions far removed from the core of political power. In most cases, young people who aspire to enter mainstream politics are either pushed out by senior politicians who control resources and patronage networks, or they are left waiting indefinitely for a chance to succeed them. [34] The majority of young Africans are “disempowered,” excluded from major socioeconomic institutions and political processes. Regardless of class background, many young people are unable to form or support a household, assume full adult responsibilities, or gain access to the resources typically associated with adulthood. [35] In traditional African societies, there once existed a structured process—supported by well-developed rituals and social norms—through which youth could attain adult status and thereby gain a legitimate position in economic and political life. However, these traditional systems collapsed rapidly, and newly established institutions failed to fill the resulting void. This has undoubtedly produced a profound sense of loss among African youth.

3.3 Key Actors in Collective Movements

Economic and political disempowerment has largely positioned African youth as the driving force of collective movements. Aware of their structural marginalization and distrustful of the state’s willingness and capacity to address their concerns [36], youth develop a shared sense of identity and critical consciousness, enabling them to challenge established orders [37][38]. Scholars further note that high youth population ratios and persistently elevated fertility rates may affect security, particularly the incidence of violent events [39]. Collective movements include both nonviolent actions, such as peaceful protests and strikes, and violent mobilizations.

In nonviolent domains, African youth engage through civil society organizations, popular culture, online social networks, and political demonstrations [40]. Youth-led protests are increasingly organized, transitioning from fragmented socio-political actions to coordinated street mobilizations that attempt to translate immediate demands into broader political ideals [41]. In violent contexts, youth—deprived of power and unable to generate it—often assume roles in political violence, ethnic militias, opportunistic defectors within terrorist networks, or as instruments for militia leaders to prosecute conflicts [42]. Movements such as the April 6 Movement (participating in the 2011 revolution against Mubarak), the Black Bloc (resisting the Muslim Brotherhood), and Football Ultras (involved in football-related violence) are predominantly youth-led [43].

Yet, whether in violent or nonviolent movements, African youth frequently serve as political “instruments,” marginalized once they are no longer useful ; In Mozambique, youth street protests ousted the

government, but formal party politics supplanted broad street coalitions, sidelining young activists [44]. Evidence suggests that the relationship between youth and older political actors is exploitative: older actors provide neither sufficient “youth programs” to cultivate capacities nor adequate recognition or respect, treating youth primarily as political leverage.

These dynamics indicate that sustained economic and political disempowerment compels African youth to lead mass movements and voice demands, yet they remain marginalized, perpetuating a vicious cycle. This reinforces the empowerment theory discussed in Part II: beyond youth “self-help,” systemic “other-help” is essential to foster a robust and sustainable political framework.

3.4 Challenges to Cultural and Identity Formation

Entrenched interest groups are unwilling to relinquish their domains of control, thereby constraining the social space available to youth. This limits young people’s opportunities to develop unique strategies to confront challenges, reconstruct their values, and form identities, often relegating them to mere spectators of their own developmental trajectories [45]. In short, when social institutions neglect youth and youth do not perceive themselves as full members of society, an identity crisis emerges. While earlier discussion highlighted that shared experiences of neglect can generate a collective sense of identity, this identity is often contingent upon unjust policies or triggering events. Once such policies are rescinded or events are perceived as concluded, this identity gradually loses cohesion, and youth are frequently instrumentalized by politicians without genuinely holding power.

African youth identity is further shaped by cultural factors. It reflects the interplay between traditional and Westernized modern, African and colonial influences. Youth must navigate a complex landscape of coexisting, often competing, local and foreign cultural symbols, institutions, social ideologies, knowledge systems, and value frameworks [46]. The legacy of colonialism has undeniably left deep imprints, producing significant distortions in African youth cultural and identity formation. This manifests in two ways: first, the belief that colonial cultures are inherently superior to indigenous ones, influencing domains such as religion, education, dress, and social interaction; second, the perception of colonial developmental models as ideal templates for political, economic, and security systems [47]. Consequently, colonized populations lost much of their African heritage, with even the educated elite living, thinking, and acting within Western ideological frameworks [48]. Beyond colonial culture, globalization and the advent of new media pose additional challenges to African youth identity. Globalization fosters cross-cultural blending worldwide, while new technologies and social media accelerate intercultural exchange, transcending national boundaries and generating hybrid global traditions [49]. However, globalization has not produced a unified political or economic identity [50]; instead, it undermines national identity and reinforces Western cultural hegemony [51]. Moreover, globalization encroaches upon local cultural spaces [52], generating generational divides [53]. Collectively, these processes demonstrate that the legacy of colonial culture, combined with globalization and new media proliferation, has facilitated a “double invasion” of Western culture upon African cultural identity.

3.5 Complex Attitudes Toward China

On one hand, African youth acknowledge China’s positive role. They recognize that China-Africa cooperation contributes to Africa’s development. According to the 2022 Africa Youth Survey published by the Ichikowitz Family Foundation on June 13, 2022 [54], China (76%) surpassed the United States (72%) as the country perceived by African youth to have the most positive impact on the continent. This figure increased to 82% in the 2024 Africa Youth Survey [55]. African states generally welcome the rising influence of China in Africa, regarding China as an important partner in advancing Africa’s development and as an effective counterbalance to Western influence [56].

On the other hand, the African context and international environment reveal recurring anti-Chinese sentiment in the course of China-Africa cooperation. Both traditional media and social media contribute to this discourse, shaping African perceptions of China-Africa relations and cooperation. Western media dominate the African information space, often emphasizing conflictual narratives over the friendly China-Africa stories highlighted by Chinese media [57]. For example, British newspapers tend to frame Western actors positively while portraying China’s presence in Africa negatively, homogenizing China and Chinese individuals engaged in various activities across the continent [58]. Scholars have also noted that some Africans perceive China as influencing Africa’s bulk commodity exports, threatening industrial production, and flooding African markets with cheap Chinese goods, which perpetuates dependence on natural resources and may permanently undermine Africa’s manufacturing sector [59]. Without a robust manufacturing base, employment opportunities are limited. By this logic, African youth may partially attribute their difficulties in securing employment to China’s influence.

IV. CHINA'S COMMUNICATION WITH AFRICAN YOUTH THROUGH THE LENS OF YOUTH COMMUNICATIVE EMPOWERMENT THEORY

Currently, there is a lack of concrete, quantitative data and a systematic set of evaluation metrics for communication targeting African youth. Many youth development programs themselves lack clearly defined, measurable objectives and outcome assessment criteria, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness—a challenge that is particularly pronounced in China's communication initiatives directed at African youth. This section outlines which indicators should be included in an evaluation system. Beyond traditional metrics, it also proposes additional feasible approaches, serving as reflections on China's youth-focused communication under the theoretical framework of youth communication empowerment.

4.1 Interaction Indicators

Thanks to the emergence and development of new technologies and social media, digital diplomacy has become feasible. In recent years, digital diplomacy has been regarded as an important component for international media to adapt agenda-setting, expand their online presence, and establish, engage, and maintain relationships with foreign audiences [60]. However, scholars comparing 1,200 posts from CGTN Africa and BBC Africa on Facebook found that CGTN Africa rarely interacts with its audience [61]. As noted above, the core of communication empowerment theory is dialogue, yet African youth commonly face political and economic disempowerment. A communication model that emphasizes broadcasting over dialogue can create an insurmountable gap in China-Africa exchanges, fostering negative perceptions of Chinese media and China as arrogant, reinforcing African youth's sense of marginalization, and ultimately undermining China's communication efforts targeting African youth.

In practice, China has made efforts in this regard. Initiatives such as the "Chinese Youth Volunteers in Africa" program, the China-Africa Youth Union, and the China-Africa Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition have achieved certain successes. However, the communication effects of these projects are primarily manifested as unstructured, interpersonal "soft" influences rather than systematic information dissemination. They tend to be short-term and non-continuous, and once the activities conclude, a figurative barrier arises between Chinese and African youth engagement.

Therefore, "interaction" should be incorporated as a key indicator for evaluating China's communication targeting African youth, promoting the establishment of a structured interaction system within China's communication framework. This system should include both official and civil channels, encompassing state media publicity, university faculty and students, technical personnel, and other stakeholders to establish broad and profound exchanges. Simultaneously, Chinese social media platforms should be encouraged to open channels for China-Africa youth communication, leveraging the Internet's ability to transcend time and space to facilitate sustainable and effective youth-focused communication between China and Africa.

4.2 Self-Help Indicators

Strictly speaking, Chinese media constitute the "Other" from the perspective of African youth, and therefore, in a strict sense, Chinese media cannot directly realize self-help indicators for African youth. In this section, self-help indicators refer to the proportion of content produced by African youth published on Chinese media—that is, encouraging African youth to tell their own stories, which may or may not relate to China. African youth constitute the main force in collective movements partly due to their continued economic and political disempowerment and identity confusion, and partly due to a lack of broader platforms for expression and catharsis. Chinese media and social platforms can provide a more open and free space for African youth to articulate their perspectives.

In this process, Chinese media and social platforms assume the role of the "older generation" in youth empowerment theory, providing youth with positive social connections, sharing "communication power" with African youth, recognizing their demands, and affirming their agency, thereby strengthening youth self-esteem. This dynamic fosters constructive interaction between Chinese communication initiatives and African youth. At the same time, Chinese media expand their communication reach through African youth contributions, attracting wider readership. Unlike African politicians, who often instrumentalize youth, Chinese media genuinely share power, earning a positive reputation.

Importantly, Chinese media face limitations in sustaining youth-targeted communication due to constrained content themes and finite material. Allowing African youth to contribute content not only enriches Chinese media material and provides insights into African youth perspectives, but also establishes a form of dialogue in terms of "communication content," enhancing mutual understanding and interaction.

4.3 Other-Help Indicators

Part II has already demonstrated that dialogue and self-help alone cannot fully achieve empowerment; external assistance is also essential. It can be argued that dialogue, self-help, and external assistance are all indispensable in this challenging process of empowerment. Therefore, beyond the individual indicators of these three dimensions, there is a need for joint indicators reflecting their interaction, which will not be elaborated here. Regarding external assistance, this paper posits that China's communication system can provide youth

with meaningful activities that enhance practical communication and management skills, while also offering education in relevant knowledge and competencies.

The establishment of a communication system should not be limited to media practitioners; all Chinese individuals, institutions, and enterprises represent China's image. China can further deepen China-Africa youth cooperation, creating more shared experiences and opportunities to exchange them. More importantly, these activities can provide training in technical skills, life skills, entrepreneurial skills, innovation skills, and management skills, as well as platforms to test or demonstrate these skills. The "China-Africa Fresh Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition" has already achieved certain success, and other initiatives should follow suit. Ultimately, producing tangible collaborative outcomes demonstrates that, under China's external assistance, African youth, together with Chinese youth, have created "new power" to achieve empowerment — this constitutes the most effective form of communication. At the same time, communication content becomes more focused on China-Africa youth cooperation and exchange, with mainstream broad reporting serving as a complementary tool.

V. CONCLUSION

Through a review of the literature, this study finds that the core of communication empowerment theory is "dialogue," while the core of youth empowerment theory lies in "self-help" and "external assistance." Building on the theoretical foundation of youth communication empowerment, the paper summarizes several feasible strategies for communication targeting African youth, including emphasizing dialogue, external assistance, development, new power, and commonality. The study also provides an overarching profile of African youth, highlighting their economic and political marginalization, role as the main force in collective movements, cultural and identity confusion, and complex attitudes toward China. Ultimately, the paper argues that dialogue, self-help, and external assistance are central to China's communication with African youth and can serve as key indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives. Practical recommendations are also proposed. The conclusion emphasizes the main findings, draws insights from the results, and discusses their implications for future research and practice. However, this study does not construct an interactive framework model for the three indicators of dialogue, self-help, and external assistance, nor does it provide in-depth, country-specific analyses of African youth. These gaps suggest avenues for further scholarly investigation.

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