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## **Yiwu Mode and Sino-African Relations\***

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### **Abstract:**

During the last thirty years of China's Reform and Opening up policy implementation, the basic structures and express forms of Sino-African relations have changed silently. In these changes, the arresting one is, along with the boosting of the economics and business, investment symbiosis of the two sides, the actors of Sino--African relations have shifted from governments to officials and the ordinary people. In the process of "grassroots" evolvement, Yiwu, a small city which located in the middle of Zhejiang province, has developed into an important bridge between China and Africa, which serves as a window manifesting the new trend of the Sino-African relations. Yiwu Mode, as a distinctive developmental mode, not only brought rich wealth and fame to Yiwu around the world, but also pushed the relations of China and Africa into an all-directional stage.

**Key Words:** Yiwu Mode, Sino-African Relations, Structure and Form, Grass-Root Trend

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During the past one or two decades, the Chinese, who traveled to small towns or remote areas in Africa, have found that in Africa, many local people might not know the names of big cities of China such as Beijing, Shanghai or Hangzhou, but they are likely to have heard “Yiwu” which is associated countless ties with their daily lives and “Yiwu Market” where there is rich attractive business opportunities and wealth. In the past 20 years, Yiwu has evolved into the world’s famous International trade market, and more and more Africans and Arabs began to know China through Yiwu which is known as the “International trade City”. When thousands of African traders and Chinese businessmen come and go between Yiwu of China and tirelessly trade thousands of kinds of commodity between China and Africa year after year, and when more and more Chinese and African businessmen go deep into the local life of each other’s country, Yiwu has become a new tie and new bridge of China-Africa non-governmental exchanges.

Yiwu Mode as a good case in the development studies, shows a successful development model in China and even in the world. It takes the advantages of the markets’ aggregation function, develops trade business mainly in the form of commodity exchanges, keeps accumulating capital, and then broaden the scale. It causes the business capital to flow to the industry and city’s infrastructure construction, making the co-development of markets, industries, and the city, pushing towards the local business to the process of industrialization, internationalization and urbanization.

Yiwu also extends the relationship between China and Africa to a wider realm because of its prosperous international trade activities, especially Sino-African business activities. Large scale exchanges of goods and personnel between China and Africa, making both sides know each other better, witnessing the people-to-people contacts which is a more important part of Sino-African relations.

With this process representative of Yiwu Mode, the contemporary Sino-African relations which started from 1960s gradually develop into the inland from the coast and diffuse into rural areas from cities, which make the growing China-Africa relations vigorous, and hence grow steadily. Therefore, China-Africa relations begin to have increasingly rich and substantive significance to the lives and concepts of ordinary people from both China and Africa. Of course, gradually Sino-African relations have encountered all sorts of “growing pains” and “development issues” in this process, and the Chinese government has begun to face increasingly complex challenges as how to adapt, serve and manage the localization and grass-roots trend of Sino-African relations.

## 1. BACKGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION AND ITS EARLY FEATURES

The contemporary China-Africa relations and their exchanges and cooperation have gone through 60 years and the 60-year China-Africa relations in general are linked with the historical

period advance of revival of the two sides. For China and Africa, the establishment and advance of the relations, to some extent, are the efforts made by the two parts to seek for their own development and international status in the world system. Both China and Africa countries have same basic objectives to achieve national recovery and rejuvenation, which are internal development and upgrade of international status under modern conditions, and they are also the driving force and basis to sustainably promote China-Africa cooperation.

As for the modern China, to achieve the renaissance of the nation, foremost it requires the unity and stability within the country. That is, in a peaceful and stable environment, under a strong national system, unite the strength of all the people, make the state get progressive development with the people's wisdom and national wealth. Although historically China has experienced many times of revitalization after troubled times, yet since the formation of the modern world system and the passive involvement in it, the historical conditions and external environment of China's revival are quite different from those previous revivals in past era of ancient China. Revitalization and development of modern China must explore its own path and opportunities in a western-led world system. As a part of the world system, China should reconstruct favorable external international relations through its own efforts. Especially today, as one of the developing countries and one of future world powers, China "needs to properly handle its relations with the outside world at different regional and global levels as major world powers and neighboring countries. China-Africa cooperation is at the global level in China's foreign relations and has a special foundation status."<sup>1</sup>

In modern times, China was invaded by foreign big powers, repeatedly experienced the wars and battles, leaving the nation weak and the people poor. When the PRC founded in 1949, the overall international environment was unfavorable and blocked to China. A series of wars as Korean War, Vietnam War, the military confrontation with Taiwan, and the hostility against the two military groups—the Soviet Union and the US left the new China in an extremely difficult international situation. In that historical period, how to break the blockade and gain development space and strategic partnership in the world system became the core problem, which addressed by the new China's diplomacy. Hence, in this contest, contacts with the distant African countries were built. Since 1960s, more than 50 countries in the African continent gained their independence. These young countries appeared in the international arena and brought opportunities and hope to China who urgently needed to open international development space. Since the establishment of Sino-Egyptian relations in 1957 which opened the door of contemporary China-Africa relations, dozens of African countries have established diplomatic relations with China in the next two decades. There were many important and lively events fixed in the historical picture: Chairman Mao proposed the "three-worlds theory" while meeting the President Kaunda of Zambia, adding that China and Africa "belonged to the Third World; President Kaunda, who was elected one of the "five Africans moving China" in 2009,

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<sup>1</sup> Liu Hongwu: "China-Africa development cooperation and the reshaping of modern human civilization", *International Studies*, 2010, vol.05.

proposed the famous statement that China and Africa were “all weather friends”; in 1971, when “African friends carried China into the United Nations”, the African delegates danced impromptu in the UN General Assembly; still, the 1,860 km TAZARA railway; the Chinese medical teams with more than 20,000 people; the Beijing Summit of China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2006; the Chinese agricultural experts in the African villages; the Chinese construction workers in reconstruction of African livelihood projects and infrastructure projects, and so on.

For centuries China has been looking for friendly and win-win international partners, and it is proved that Africa can be relied on for support. The successful development of China-Africa relations achieved the strategic goal of China diplomacy at that time; China broke the blockade from hostile forces in the international arena and returned to the international community and became a permanent member of the United Nations, thus becoming the spokesman and protector for the interests of developing countries; and China’s international status got unprecedented upgrade.

## 2. YIWU MODE: THE WITNESS AND PUSHER OF “DOWN STEPPING” OF SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS

Since the establishment of China-Africa relations in 1960s, it has especially focused on the cooperation in the political field and the basic characteristics of the initial stage were political, national and central governmental dominant. However, since China began to implement reform and opening up policy, the foundation and driving force of China-Africa relations has significantly changed. We can see that China-Africa relations before 1980s was politically-led and high-level contacts between the leaders was the main form, while after 1980s China-Africa relations have entered a new historical stage, it began exchanges led by political, or high-level political official, gradually moved towards a new stage of government-civil cooperation and political-economic interaction. Trade and economic relations have become increasingly prosperous and non-governmental exchanges become progressively active, which inject new impetus to contemporary China-Africa cooperation, and hence the strategic foundation and development objectives of China-Africa relations will also be expanded.

In this important process of transformation, some increasingly international economic centers of towns in China’s eastern coast and local governments, markets and businessmen increasingly open to the outside world have become the propellers of changes. In the majority of villages in Zhejiang, there are full of Zhejiang industrial and commercial groups called “grass-roots Zhejiang businessmen”. Zhejiang has a long mercantile tradition and its local business is quite prospering. During the past 30 years, its unique tradition of private and open economy has promoted the formation of various forms of development modes as “grass-roots economy”, “private economy” and “county economy”, such as the “Wenzhou Mode”, “Yiwu Mode”, “Dongyang Mode” and so on. These modes are similar but not identical, becoming a strong

driving force promoting “Native Zhejiang” towards “Urban Zhejiang”.<sup>2</sup> Among these modes, “Yiwu Mode” has become increasingly closed with Africa. Due to its special role as the International Trade City, Yiwu becomes a special participant and witness of transformation of contemporary China-Africa relations, playing a positive role in promoting the form and structure transformation of Sino-African relations.

Yiwu is located in the middle of Zhejiang, occupying an area of 1,105 square kilometers. It is over a hundred km from the provincial capital Hangzhou, and 50 km from Jinhua. By the end of 2008, Yiwu had a local population of 0.7 million, and the immigrant population was more than double the local population and amounted to 1.4 million.

As for the administrative division, Yiwu is only a county-level city under Jinhua, but it becomes a famous region in China even among the world due to its developed business network: it’s International Trade City is the world’s largest commodity wholesale market, and for consecutive 20 years, its turnover has ranked the first in the major professional markets in China, being the first among county-level city in Zhejiang in terms of comprehensive competitiveness; Yiwu is the first city that foreign population exceeded its local population, and is also the only county-level city that can transact the entry and exit procedures in China; commodity of Yiwu has reached to 215 countries and regions worldwide, and there are over 13000 merchants of 100 countries and regions residing in Yiwu and dealing with international procurement, and there are 3000 foreign enterprises setting up representative offices in Yiwu , 440 thousand foreign traders come and by every year.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 30-year Reform and opening up, Yiwu, which was once a less developed county that was no-border, no-sea, without industrial base and lack of external supports, has grown as the world’s largest commodity market and ranked among the forefront of the nation’s hundred rich counties. In 2011, Yiwu’s GDP reached 72.61 billion Yuan, increased 10.5% on an annual basis. In the service industry, the total exchange of the markets is 67.79 billion Yuan in 2011, increased 9.1%, among which the amount of Yiwu Trade City is 51.51 billion Yuan, increased 13%. Its overall industrial output value is 141.1 billion Yuan, increased 20.2%, among which the large-scale industrial production value is 62.72 billion Yuan, increased 25.6%. Its export amount is 3.95 billion U.S. dollars, increased 26.5%. The intangible markets developing prosperous aggregated 55 thousands internet businessman and one hundred third party platform enterprises, pushing forward the exchange forms from traditional “three cash”: cash transaction, cash sale and cash spot to modern forms such as E-commerce, logistic distribution and delivery, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fei Xiaotong, LuoHnaxian: “Economic Modes of Villages and Towns”, Chongqing Press, 1988, p8.

<sup>3</sup> <http://zhejiang.acs.gov.cn/sites/zhejiang/con9.jsp?contentId=2508059785286>

<sup>4</sup> Resource from Yiwu Municipal Commission for Development and Reform: “ the performance on Yiwu plant national economy and social development in 2011 and the 2012 draft of plant national economy and social development” on the 14rd People’s Congress of Yiwu, 2012, 02, 14, [http://www.yw.gov.cn/zwbk/zxzx/hybd/201202/t20120227\\_397815.html](http://www.yw.gov.cn/zwbk/zxzx/hybd/201202/t20120227_397815.html)

The once “feather for sugar”<sup>5</sup> poor small county is now the remarkable world market. “Yiwu·China Commodity Index” was born in 2006, has now become an important global business index and a barometer of global commodity trading. “Yiwu Mode” is another typical representative of grass-roots economic growth in Zhejiang. It walks a path that brings the comprehensive and harmonious development of economy and society. It takes the commodity market as the core, the market operators as the main body and the Government’s macro-control as the guide, uses the function of markets’ initiative starting and accumulate gathering, buys and sells goods among the country even the world, and hence constructs and strengthen the city by means of flourishing commerce, meanwhile promotes industry by trades so as to industry and trade work together.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, studies on the “Yiwu Mode” mainly focus on economic field. However, the creation and development of the “Yiwu Mode” also has significance in promoting China-Africa relations. Today, a considerable part of Yiwu foreign traders are from African and the Middle East countries. An American scholar states from a negative perspective, “Yiwu did not direct high-end markets like Europe and America as people might thought, instead it was more and more involved in those underdeveloped low-end markets as the Middle East and Africa.”<sup>7</sup> However, it just because Yiwu adapted itself to the needs of developing countries as Asia and Africa that made it create a successful survival and development path. Yiwu market has countless business links with the continent of Africa. “If ordinary people in Africa were asked to list three names of place in China, Yiwu could not be missed. The reason why Yiwu has a special role in the hearts of Africans is simple: goods from this city is so all-inclusive and inexpensive that the general public in Africa, even those who are located in remote areas and come from poor families, can enjoy the modern industrial products and thus greatly enhance their quality of life.”<sup>8</sup>

As a successful mode integrating the domestic market and international market, Yiwu Mode joins the Chinese market with the international market, attracting a large number of merchants from Africa and Middle East. Through the window of Yiwu, foreigners, Africans in particular, begin to know China. If it could say that in the first 30 years from the founding of the new China to its reform and opening up, the China-Africa relations had a heart and the artery was set up, then it could say that the later three decades, China-Africa relations gradually grew with small arteries, capillary and peripheral nerve. Thanks to Yiwu, China-Africa relations slowly

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<sup>5</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese suffered by short of goods and materials, pedlars went to north and south China, wandered in the streets, exchanged chicken feather and other scrap things with sugar or rough straw paper to earn meagre profit. This “feather for sugar” first appeared in Yiwu, Zhejiang, although prohibited by the authority at that time, but grew hardiness, got accept at last because of its push function to the local economic development and played a big role to local social transformation.

<sup>6</sup> Bao Hongjun: “Yiwu Mode, studies and new interpretation framework.” *Zhejiang Academic Journal*, 2008, vol.5.

<sup>7</sup> Mark: “Break zero-win thought to win the future, the Yiwu Mode from a foreign scholar’s eye.” *21<sup>st</sup> Century Business Review*, 2008, vol.8.

<sup>8</sup> Zhu Haimiao, Zhu Xiaolei: “Yiwu links with Africa in countless ways”, *Africa*, 2011, vol.3.

grow as an increasingly plump flesh and blood of life. A growing number of African merchants are attracted by Yiwu and come to this city, amazingly finding out that they can not only purchase what they want here, but also can meet the manufacturers directly, eliminating the intermediate links and thus saving costs. China has exported quite many light industrial products to Africa, most of which are associated with Yiwu, and these products are mainly daily necessities, like the clothes and textile accessories, shoes, socks, kitchen and household appliances.

As an export-oriented economic development mode which takes government's macro control as the dominant, the marketing as the main body, "Yiwu Mode" has become the communication bridge between China and the international community during the past 20 years. As a shared platform of global commodity trade, Yiwu market also becomes the bridgehead of China's trade in Africa.

From the macroscopic view of Sino-African trades, in 2008, the trade volume of Sino-African is 106.8 billion U.S. dollars, among which China's export volume is 50.8 billion and imported volume from Africa is 56 billion. In 2009, although influenced by the international financial crisis, the volume of Sino-African trades decreased to 91.07 billion U.S. dollars, China became the largest trading partner to Africa. In 2010, with the recovery of world economy, the Sino-African trades appeared good developing situation, reached to 126.9 billion U.S. dollars.<sup>9</sup> In 2011, China-Africa trade volume broke 160 billion U.S. dollars, China keep being Africa's largest trading partner.<sup>10</sup>

Yiwu has an important position in the Sino-African trade relations. Since 2007, commodity from Yiwu market has reached 46 African countries and regions. In 2008, African countries accounted for three seats among the top ten exporters in Yiwu. The value of goods exported to Africa from Yiwu amounted 0.4 billion U.S. dollars in 2009,<sup>11</sup> and in 2010, the value amounted 0.32 billion.<sup>12</sup> In 2011, the export value of Yiwu to Africa is 0.398 billion U.S. dollars and in January 2012, the number is 45.92 million U.S. dollars.<sup>13</sup>

Yiwu, the small inland county, has a deep connection with African beyond people's imagination. If it could say that in the first 30 years of China-Africa relations, which was the early stage of political-leading and official exchanges, the exchanges between China and Africa were mainly political exchanges and the metropolis mode such as "Beijing – Nairobi" or "Beijing – Cairo", then it can say that today's China-Africa relations has another wider world,

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<sup>9</sup> Information Office of the State Council of PRC: "The trade cooperation between China and Africa" (2010) white book, 2010, 12-23, [http://www.gov.cn/zwqk/2010-12/23/content\\_1771638.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zwqk/2010-12/23/content_1771638.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Previews industry study institute: "Sino-African trades volume increased greatly in 2011", 2012-02-02 <http://www.qianzhan.com/industry/detail/174/20120202-579b094b9a333ece.html>

<sup>11</sup> Edit office of "Yiwu Index": "Yiwu commodity exported to Africa broke 0.4 billion U.S. dollars", *Jinhua Daily*, 2010-01-14

<sup>12</sup> "The export value to Africa in 2010", *Jinhua Daily*, 2011-03-03

<sup>13</sup> Interview note of Director Chen of Yiwu Foreign-Concerning Service Center, 2011, 03, 06

which may appear to be a local and grass-rooted exchange mode as “Yiwu-Wa (a small town in northern Ghana)”, “Yiwu-Meroe (a northern city in Sudan )” and “Yiwu-Buruku (a small town in central Nigeria). Yiwu’s links with African countries are mainly economic and trade activities, which makes the content of China-Africa relations richer and have substantive significance.

It can be found from the author’s tracking study of African traders in Yiwu that links between Yiwu and Africa which is similar to capillaries and nerve endings are close and vibrant. African traders in Yiwu begin to play another special role in China-Africa relations.

One Ghanaian businessman told us, “I came to Zhejiang to learn Chinese. When I arrived at Yiwu, I found I could stay here and provide services for the businessmen of my country. They come here to purchase goods, and I am in charge of taking them to the market and looking for manufacturers. I also have a storehouse where their goods are gathered and then loaded in containers and shipped back to Africa. Now my customers are from many African countries, and here they can buy all the goods they want. They trust me, and last year I handled a total of 1 million dollars business. All the goods were sent to Africa.”<sup>14</sup>

One businessman from Senegal told us, “I have been to China for seven years. I once had business in the US and Europe, but when I came to Yiwu, I decided to open my own company here. I do cloth business, and my factory is located here. All my goods are sent to my country and other African countries. My family is all in Yiwu, and they like China.”<sup>15</sup>

According to statistics, there were 20311 registered Africans in Yiwu in 2006, and in 2009 this number increased to 54050. In 2011 the African number in Yiwu is 68000, and counts 17% among the foreigners in Yiwu.<sup>16</sup> As to our interview of the Director of Yiwu Foreign-Concerning Service Center, which an organization under the leader by Yiwu Commercial Bureau, the African has built 36 companies in Yiwu, whose funds amounts to total 50 million US dollars. There are 369 representative offices of African companies in Yiwu, such as Egyptian companies, Sudan companies, Mali companies, Mauritanian companies, Nigeria companies and Niger companies.<sup>17</sup>

In the highway from Yiwu to Ningbo, Shanghai and Hangzhou, there are hundreds of thousands of vehicles loaded with goods, which will be loaded in containers at the port of these places and then be sent to the African continent.

In 2009, the Yiwu government made a request to the Zhejiang Provincial Government, asking

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<sup>14</sup> Interview note, 2010, 05, 06

<sup>15</sup> Interview note, 2011, 03, 10

<sup>16</sup> Resource from Entry-Exit Administration Bureau of Yiwu Public Security Bureau

<sup>17</sup> Interview note, Director Chen of Yiwu Foreign-Concerning Service Center, 2011, 03, 06



for setting up “African Exhibition Center” in the Imported Merchandise Hall of the International Trade City, importing and demonstrating marketable and authentic African products so as to help African enterprises, traders and products to expand the Chinese market and re-export trade and in this way enhance the reputation of African goods, and promote China-Africa economic and trade cooperation to a higher level. In November 2009, “Exhibition Center” as the initiative given by Chinese side to African countries was accepted in the Fourth Ministerial Conference of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Action Plan and was settled in Yiwu. Till 2010, Yiwu had formally established the “African Exhibition Center”, and had hosted three “African Commodities Exhibition” sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

Till March, 2012, there are 22 African countries have exhibition halls in Yiwu Trade City, among which 6 are African direct management, and 7 African exhibition halls are in the process of applying for. In the long run, the establishment of the “African Exhibition Center” in Yiwu promoted by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and constructed by Yiwu International Trade City will attract more African enterprises and merchants to Yiwu and engage in trades and business, hence promoting the economic and trade cooperation between Yiwu and Africa to develop longitudinally and motivating the market structure in Yiwu to transform from “buy and sell national goods” to “buy and sell global goods”. Just as the head of West Asian and African Affairs in the Ministry of Commerce emphasized, “The ‘Exhibition Center’ is a significant part of the strategy to China’s implementation of foreign trade diversification and an important initiative to promote and strengthen China-Africa economic and trade cooperation. Its establishment will play an active role in consolidating and developing China-Africa traditional friendship, improving and promoting the new situation in China-Africa trade development, as well as establishing new strategic Sino-African partnership.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. THE YIWU COMMERCE AND TRADE NETWORKS AND ITS PROMOTION TO SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS

In China’s diplomatic relations, Yiwu has never been emphasized or thought to need stressing. However, it is just because Yiwu have prosperous trade exchanges with Africa that it injects a more practical and substantive content to the long-term political elite exchanges in China-Africa relations, making the friendly relations between China and Africa benefit people on both sides, and in turn deepen and further promote the friendly relations between China and Africa.

#### **3.1 Yiwu Commerce and Trade Networks Constitutes the Platform Where Chinese and African People Directly Contact and Coexist**

A large number of African and Middle East merchants rush into Yiwu, making it gradually

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<sup>18</sup> Financial Report, *China Daily* 2010-10-20,  
[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqj/zgj/2010-10-20/content\\_1045852.html](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqj/zgj/2010-10-20/content_1045852.html)

transforms from a closed, culturally-single small town into a colorful and culturally-diverse international city. The world's largest "International Trade City" attracts many businessmen from North African countries, most of whom are Muslims. As they come and settle here, many Hui and Uyghur people in inland China are attracted and flow to Yiwu, and Islam and the mosque in Yiwu grow out of nothing and become very prosperous.

A news report in the Agence France Presse of November 2009 specially covered, "Yiwu of Zhejiang— Mosques, Chinese goods and Arabic Courses Re-create the Silk Road".<sup>19</sup> The mosque in Yiwu was transformed from a factory, but it accommodates thousands of Muslims all around the world, with more than 6000 worshipers. The worshiper number is among the top five in China, and sometimes even ranks the first. According to statistics, there are about 23000 Chinese and foreign Muslims in Yiwu, of whom about 70% are foreign Muslim, accounting for 16000 people, while Chinese Muslims are about 7000.<sup>20</sup> In various markets, busy streets and residential Muslim community, there are Muslim men and women everywhere wearing clothes with vivid symbol. On the signboards of big or small restaurants, shops and companies, Chinese, English and Arabic are common used. By early 2009, there were about 35 Muslim restaurants in Yiwu, among which 23 were opened by the foreign Muslims or both Chinese and foreign Muslims and now the numbers is keeping adding. The thriving development of Islam in Yiwu is the result of Muslims' cross-regional flow in the context of economic globalization, and more over the result of the development of Yiwu Mode in promoting China-Africa grass roots exchanges.

With the arrival of African Muslims, many inland provinces' Chinese Muslims followed their steps and came to Yiwu, and they dealt with the work related to African Muslim business activities. A majority of Muslims in Yiwu, in terms of the age structure, are middle-aged. They generally have a certain level of knowledge and Islamic teaching; apart from hard-working, they stress religious integrity. Most of them are engaged in intermediate trade, followed by processing and services, as well as a number of young Muslims deal with translation work of Arabian language.

Besides, Chinese and foreign Muslims in Yiwu have strong religious identity. As a cultural symbol, Muslim clothes manifest their religious identity, and different styles of Arabian robes and colorful scarves become the city's another fashion. Many inland China Muslims feel a more intense religious atmosphere than that in their born place. As the Muslim community and non-Muslims increasingly contact and interact, there appears the phenomenon of the individual convert to Islam, mainly due to the marriage especially for women, and thus transnational marriage is increasing in Yiwu. The developing situation of Muslims in Yiwu presents as fast growth, apparent foreign-related and large mobility. Compared with Muslims communities in the northwest, southwest and central region of China as well as those coming to China during

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<sup>19</sup> Xinhua Net, 2009, 11, 27. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-11/27/content\\_12548254.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-11/27/content_12548254.htm)

<sup>20</sup> Ma Enyu: "Yiwu, Muslims live together harmonious", *Chinese Social Science Today*, 2011, 01, 20.

the Tang and Song Dynasty, the Muslims groups in Yiwu are possessed of complex and international characteristics. In terms of the time Muslim immigrants entering, they were later than those in Guangzhou, but in terms of development speed, quantity, size, the cultural and social impact, Muslims in Yiwu are far more than those in Guangzhou, becoming a harmonious community where Chinese and foreign Muslims live in harmony.<sup>21</sup>

“I have been to Yiwu for 8 years, and here I met my Chinese wife. She voluntarily converted to Islam and helps me take care of business. I love China and Chinese culture and I take Yiwu as my second hometown. My children go to school here, and I might consider them to study in my country when they grow up. I go to the mosque every week, and it’s really good that the Chinese government provided us the Mosque venue.” One Egyptian businessman told us.<sup>22</sup>

“I was once an English teacher in a middle school in Lanxi (a county adjacent to Yiwu), where the children were very cute and very nice. I really miss those times. But now I’m too busy. I have a factory and also an import and export trade company, so I cannot go there as a teacher. This year I was elected as the representative of foreign guests in People’s Congress Meeting of the Municipal of Yiwu, and I was really honored.” One Ghanaian businessman talked.<sup>23</sup>

### **3.2 Yiwu Mode Promotes the Civilization Understanding and Exchanges between Chinese and African**

As the bridgehead for China-Africa trade and business activities and one of the most familiar Chinese cities for the African people, Yiwu not only shoulder the Sino-African economic and trade ties, but also the historical mission of mutual civilization understanding and exchanges between Chinese and African.

In Yiwu, because of the arrival of African merchants, there arise a large number of language schools, many local and foreign job seekers begin to learn English, Arabic, French and other languages in order to find better jobs. Meanwhile, many African young people also go to Chinese schools in Yiwu or Zhejiang Normal University in Jinhua to study Chinese. Language, as an important medium of cultural exchange, easily removes the gap between the Chinese and African in Yiwu. In the big or small markets in Yiwu and around the mosques, here and there we can see Chinese and African people communicate with each other.

“I am 14 years old, from Senegal. My parents speak a little Chinese, but I can speak fluent Chinese. I am self-taught. My brother, sister and I study in the international school. I like Chinese Kung Fu and Chinese songs, and my best friend is a Chinese, we are

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<sup>21</sup> Ma Enyu: “Walking into the Yiwu Muslim community”, *China Religion*, 2010, vol. 06

<sup>22</sup> Interview note, 2010,05,06

<sup>23</sup> Interview note, 2010,05,07

neighbors.” We were told by a cute boy whose family came from Senegal.<sup>24</sup>

Hedan, a girl from Somalia, have been in China for seven years, brought by her uncle who do business in China to study at the Zhejiang Normal University, spend six years in this university. Her Chinese is so good that gained the second prize in the contest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chinese Bridge in 2010. In her weblog, she wrote down: “in September 2005, I sailed seas and came to the poetry southern Chinese riverside town. Soon this place became my so loved second homeland. I have already integrated into the life on campus as my own home, I study here happily, experience the extensive and profound Chinese and Chinese culture.” In 2011, she was accepted by Zhejiang University as media studies Ph.D. candidate, keep study and work in her second hometown and be a brilliant flower of the Sino-African culture exchanges.

The Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College was founded in 1993, a famous college in Yiwu and attracts many African businessmen to study there. The college provides a wide range of education covering business management, computer science, civil engineering, modern secretarial literature, economics, etc. From 2007, the college began to accept foreign students, and to 2011, the foreign students already amount 220, from 53 African countries.<sup>25</sup> From the beginning, the foreign students came to study Chinese and now many of them change to other courses after grasping Chinese.

Moreover, the China-Africa Business College was established at the Zhejiang Normal University which located in Jinhua in 2010. It relies on the advantage of Yiwu’s unique links with Africa and the Institute of African studies of Zhejiang Normal University which is well known as a Chinese diplomatic think tank towards Africa as well. It aims to cultivate the international high-level MBA talents who are equipped with language advantage and practical commercial operational ability and adapt to Sino-African economic and trade activities.

The charm of African culture also attracts many ordinary Chinese people. In the African Museum at the Institute of African Studies of Zhejiang Normal University, visitors can experience the ancient charm and historical trace of the thousands of years’ African culture. The museum, being the first museum with African collection as the main content in China, has received more than 10000 Chinese and foreign visitors since its opening in October 2010. As for the major donors of the African Museum, these Chinese businessmen have strived for years in Africa and have strong interest in African history and culture.

The African food in Yiwu is also an important part in Sino-African cultural exchanges. The African food industry is corresponding with its religious beliefs and has typical characteristics of the African regions, that is, the North African food as the main diet in. The African restaurants in Yiwu are mainly located in Chouzhou North Road and Binwang business district and places around the African community. Most of these restaurants are Arabian restaurants

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<sup>24</sup> Interview note, 2011,03,25

<sup>25</sup> Interview note from Teacher Li of the international office of the Yiwu Industrial and Commercial College, 2012, 03, 06

with storefront and signboards, and their customers are mainly merchants from North African countries to the International Trade City, as well as those from the Horn of Africa region like Ethiopians and Somalis.

It can be said that the African restaurants are the first scene when Africans come to China, here they find their identities and deepen the identification. These African restaurants serve the authentic North African and Muslim dishes, like roast lamb, fried mutton with rice, fried chicken with rice, curry potato with diced mutton, noodles with mutton, so on and so forth. African food and elements concerning with African food are identity symbols for these African people. More significantly, once these Africans make friends with Chinese, and they would take their Chinese friends to the African restaurant and kindly invite them to enjoy African food in the African way, which are China-Africa cultural exchanges brought by food culture.

#### 4. “YIWU MODE” PROMOTES THE GOVERNMENT’S ADMINISTRATION AND SERVICE TOWARDS FOREIGNERS

The current China-Africa relations are moving forward as quickly as riding on the “bullet train”. There are more and more flights between Chinese cities and African cities. Chinese-funded companies set up factories in Africa and the African traders have actively mushroomed in the Chinese market; there are more and more African students in Chinese universities and African universities there appears special research centers of Chinese studies, meanwhile there establish Institutes of African studies in Chinese universities, and even African museums have been opened; In the market of Yiwu, the Egyptian businessman busy with his work and his Chinese wife taking care their children; on the Yiwu TV show there is a young man from Ghana fluently reading Chinese ancient poetry, all of these without exception illustrate that the rapid development of Sino-African relations and the relations have broad and far-reaching effects. Yiwu Mode has changed the form and content of Sino-African relations, while the development of Sino-African relations has changed both China and Africa, and meanwhile has changed many people’s world view.

Beyond doubt, in the process of rapid development of China-Africa relations, there encounter more and more challenges, including the collision of cultures, differences of ideas and habits, as well as the challenges of the management system of foreign population for China.

As for Yiwu, due to the active China-Africa economic and trade activities, large numbers of Africans stay in Yiwu, carrying out their economic activities or engaged in catering and service industries. The visa of Africans in Yiwu lasts 1 month to 1 year. They immigrate into China and challenge the existing system and service capabilities of management of foreigners.

Because China is not a nation of accepting immigrants, “immigration” itself has never been used in the state administration sectors, and it is replaced with “Foreigners in China”. In fact, however, So many people mainly from African countries come to Yiwu, reside China for a long or short term. The needs of their housing, employment, marriages with Chinese people, their

children's education, health and epidemic prevention, religion activities and others should be treated the same as management and service issues of immigrants in China.

“International experience shows that a country's economic take-off will bring a large number of immigrants into the country. After three decades of reform and opening up, China's economy and society is now undertaking new changes. In the future, people from abroad into China will no longer be limited to the high-level people as foreign businessmen and experts, and more and more low-end foreigners and workers will come to China to ‘earn their living’.”<sup>26</sup>

With the acceleration of globalization and the dramatic changes in the quantity, pattern and nature of international immigrants, immigration issue has gained the attention and wide ranges of discussion of international academic circle. The research perspective of immigration issues has expanded from the individuals to families, communities, from the importing and exporting country to the global; the research methods have been developed to multiple disciplines, such as political economy, history, sociology, demography and interdisciplinary research; and the research questions have more focused on immigration policies and labor market, migration and the challenges of globalization, migration management and protection of human rights and other aspects, which overall express the multi-dimensional thoughts of the international academic circle to the current immigration issues.

For a long time, China is a migrant-exporting country, and it has not had the experience of immigration management, neither the formation of a sound, scientific and effective immigration management system. At present, it is Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Foreign Affairs that take the main responsibility of the management of overseas immigrants, with a number of departments providing assistance. This kind of management system is horizontal, and thus the coordination is difficult and communication is poor, greatly lagged behind the development of the current situation, cannot well reflected “high degree of unity in central powers” in the organizational system and moreover there are no institutions scientifically setting each level and rationally allocating management powers. These institutional barriers restrict the development of immigration management, while, the growing number of Africans in China especially in Yiwu also require to face the current phenomenon of immigration. It urgently needs to form a scientific, mature and effective management model, which is based on national conditions, and can improve management mechanisms and management tools, and even necessary establish a special department in charge of immigration.

On the political consultative conference of Yiwu in 2009, a delegate proposed “Recommendations to Strengthen Management and Service of immigration people”, which stressed to actively respond to the management and service issues of the large-scale foreign population.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it can be seen that Yiwu has already begun to consider and discuss the

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<sup>26</sup> Kongbo, Che Xiaohui, Wanpan: “What Kind of immigrant policy China needs?” *Outlook Weekly*, 2009,12,02.

<sup>27</sup> Proposal Number 178 on Yiwu political consultative conference in 2009.

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management and service model of immigration.

Facing with increasing foreign trade, Yiwu government founded a special “international trade service center” to offer a “one stop adjective” convenient faster service platform for the foreigners dealing with the foreign trade business. The center founded in January, 2012, rolled government affairs service, foreign information consultation service and international exchanges into one, conforming seven departments and 98 foreign affairs service items, such as Yiwu Human Resources Bureau, Yiwu Commercial Bureau, Yiwu international and foreigners Office, Yiwu Industrial and Commercial Bureau, Yiwu National Security Bureau, Yiwu Civil Aeronautical Bureau and Yiwu Entry-Exit Administration Bureau. This center groups all the service items for foreigners under the administration authority of Yiwu government, offers more convenience and essential services for their staying and trading, is a groundbreaking measure in China.

The annual People’s Congress of Yiwu is the most important political conference in Yiwu. From 2003, the Congress has invited 10 foreigners every year as guest delegates to take part in it, and has a special symposium for them, one Deputy Mayor and one vice-chairman of the People’s Congress Standing Committee member and the leaders of the Public Security Bureau and Commercial Bureau meeting with the foreign traders face to face, asking for their suggestions and demands. The foreign trades welcome this measure and very happy to have the chance to offer advice, most of them are African businessmen. And the Yiwu international and foreigners Office has began “choosing honorary citizen” activity in order to encourage more foreigners to contribute Yiwu.

The success of Yiwu mode brings the prosperity of Sino-African economic and trades activities and promotes the down-step development of China-Africa relations. With these measures, Yiwu government and relevant departments are thinking policies on the exist increasing African businessmen, offering steps to attract, service and manage the Africans according to international development of Yiwu. It is possible that Yiwu may use its brains because of the important Sino-African trade and personnel exchanges, first explore the management practices of foreigners which adapt to China’s conditions, and positively replies the management mechanism and the construction of laws and regulations of foreigners in China in the context of rapid and hot grass-roots and down-shep development of Sino-African relations.

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