

# **China's Cooperation with Africa, and Especially South Africa, in Education and Training. A Special Relationship and a Different Approach to Aid?<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

The paper studies the modalities which are used by China in its human resource cooperation with Africa in general, and where relevant with South Africa in particular. It covers the human resource dimensions of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), pledges, paying particular attention to the latest round of commitments from the November 2009 Ministerial Conference in Egypt; it reviews the short and long term capacity building programmes for Africans in China; it considers the unique role of the Confucius Institutes in Africa, as well as the stand-alone education or training projects outside the FOCAC framework; and it briefly comments on enterprise-based training in Chinese firms. This discussion of China's educational aid modalities is embedded in a wider consideration of how China's approaches differ from the current preoccupations of traditional donors about aid harmonisation and country ownership.

## **Introduction**

This paper is concerned with what is different about China's cooperation in education and training in Africa. This is a period when for a variety of reasons there is a growing awareness of the role of the variously named emerging donors, new actors in development aid, non-traditional donors, non-DAC donors, and even new drivers in development. Many of these terms are not particularly suitable, as the so-called new or emerging actors have often been providing assistance for many decades, e.g. China, India and South Korea. Our interest is in interrogating in what sense these actors are special or different from traditional donors. The very question underlines the challenge of such a pursuit, as it implies that there may be some common behavior by the traditional development partners, whether bilateral or multilateral. However, there remain major

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<sup>1</sup> This paper derives in part from four weeks spent in South Africa between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2010. Over 50 interviews were carried out by Kenneth and Pravina King with individuals in universities, ministries, development agencies and think tanks. The research on which this article is based is supported by the Leverhulme Trust; it is part of a larger study of China as a re-emerging education donor in Africa. The views in this article are the author's and may not be attributed to the Leverhulme Trust.

<sup>2</sup> The Network for Policy Research, Review and Advice on Education and Training (NORRAG) publishes an aid policy bulletin twice a year, termed NORRAG NEWS (See [www.norrag.org](http://www.norrag.org)).

differences amongst the established aid donors after decades of attention to coordination and harmonization. Many donors still prefer project aid even though the case for program-based or sector wide approaches (SWAPs) has been made for 15 years and more. This would include Japan, Germany and the USA; and in many other cases, agencies that claim to prefer sector wide approaches still find themselves with a substantial number of projects. Equally in respect of support to particular subsectors, it remains true, 20 years after Jomtien and 10 years after Dakar, with their focus and priority on basic education, that some donors, e.g. France and Germany, commit as much as 70% of their educational aid to post-basic, while others, e.g. The Netherlands and the USA, direct over 60% of their education aid to basic education (UNESCO, 2010: 229).<sup>3</sup> Thus Western donors, not to mention Japan, are different from each other despite declarations such as Rome and Paris on the increased harmonization, coherence and effectiveness of development aid.

But Africa, too, is different. Country contexts, cultures and economies all differ, and not least in the ownership of their development policy and in their degree of aid dependence.

In looking, therefore, at what the non-traditional actors are doing in respect of education and training, there is not a common standard against which they can easily be measured, not a common recipient context in Africa. In focusing now on China's education and training aid to Africa, we shall seek to explore if there are any instruments, modalities or allocative mechanisms that are particular to China. In so doing, we shall note the pan-African dimension of China's aid,<sup>4</sup> but focus more on a set of five different countries, giving some particular attention, within those, to South Africa-China relations in education and training. We shall find that there are many aspects of this latter relationship which perhaps make it exceptional.

We shall emphasize that though China has relations with almost all African countries, there are particularities in their relationship with each. There is a pan-African framework via the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), but there is also still the strong bilateralism that underlines the importance of understanding the way China has chosen to work with any particular country.

## **Background on the exceptionalism of South Africa vis-à-vis China**

Of the five countries selected as part of this research (the others are Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya), South Africa stands out. It is the only one of the five that has historically had a resident population of Chinese going back long before the more recent migration of Chinese to many countries in Africa (Yap and Man, 1996). Unlike the other four countries whose diplomatic relations with the Peoples' Republic are longstanding,

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<sup>3</sup> These percentages have become less meaningful as donors, e.g. the UK, in response to sector wide priorities, have left unspecified as much as 50% of their educational aid.

<sup>4</sup> China has chosen to have diplomatic relations with no less than 49 of the 53 African countries, as only four countries in the continent still recognize Taiwan.

South Africa had relations with Taiwan from 1976, and only switched to diplomatic relations with China in 1998. Over the 12 years since then there has been intense cooperation. Despite not being an oil exporter, South Africa's two-way trade with China has reached 16 billion dollars. China's much quoted preference for symmetrical, win-win cooperation between equals, rather than aid relations, is illustrated by its partnership with South Africa. A bi-national commission between the two countries was established in 2000; and there are now over 50 cooperation agreements in nuclear energy, science and technology, as well as in culture, education and tourism. The importance of scientific cooperation is signalled by the presence of a Science and Technology Counsellor, the only one in the whole of Africa, apart from Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

South Africa also has one of the only Education Counsellors in the whole continent, again apart from Egypt. The presence of these education counsellors points, not to aid relations, but to countries where historically significant numbers of students from China could be found, and is therefore a commentary on the quality and attraction of the universities in South Africa rather than on the numbers of South Africans seeking university education in China.

South Africa is also unusual in being one of the only African countries to be in the process of setting up a development cooperation agency (South African Development Partnership Agency [SADPA]); this will in due course take the place of the African Renaissance Fund. Thus South Africa will, like China, be in the business of providing aid funds to poorer countries at the same time as continuing to receive development assistance from external agencies. The latter will not however constitute more than 1% of gross national income.

A further area in which South Africa is different from other African countries in its relations with China is that apart from the community of Chinese South Africans who have been here for a long time, South Africa also has the largest number of new Chinese residents on the continent.<sup>6</sup> As elsewhere in Africa, it is difficult to know with any precision the number of these economic migrants but the total is widely said to be around 300,000; and some estimates reach half a million.

Intriguingly, when Taiwan was linked diplomatically to South Africa, its migrant population reached a total of 30,000 in the eighties and early nineties, a key element of them being industrialists responsible for setting up factories in the remoter parts of South Africa. Taiwanese numbers have since declined dramatically, and are now around 6,000 (Park, 2008: 166).

A last dimension on which South Africa is special is that it has become the source

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<sup>5</sup> Science and Technology Counselors at the country level are widespread in China's embassies in Europe, North America, East and South Asia.

<sup>6</sup> Part of the uniqueness of China-South Africa relations is that the Chinese residents prior to 1998 have been declared 'black' because of the history of discrimination against them, and they thus have access to the support of Black Economic Empowerment, while the majority of more recent migrants are classified as Chinese.

of a great deal of the knowledge about what China is doing in all parts of Africa. The Centre for Chinese Studies started in the University of Stellenbosch in 2004, as the first and still the only Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS) in Africa. It has covered a great deal of China's engagement in Africa over the past 6 years including, for instance, on infrastructure development, the relevance of Chinese agricultural technology for Africa, China's aid modalities in Africa, patterns of Chinese investment, aid and trade in specific countries, and, most recently, an evaluation up to 2009 of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation which for the last ten years has been the key umbrella mechanism for China's engagement with the whole of Africa. Apart from this commissioned research, there have been academic articles, but also very valuable for scholars following China-Africa developments have been the Centre's weekly *China Briefing*, and its almost 56 issues of *China Monitor* ([www.ccs.org.za](http://www.ccs.org.za)).

Following the move of its first director, Martyn Davies, from CCS to the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) of the University of Pretoria in late 2009, there has developed a further South African source of regular China-Africa information and analysis through the launch of the China Africa Network (CAN) and the *China Africa Business Weekly* (from March 2010) as well as the monthly *China Africa Focus*. This new network has a much more explicit business focus than the CCS, and it intends 'to facilitate and promote the competitiveness of African private sectors and economies vis-a-vis their engagement with China' (China Africa Network, March 2010).

These special factors in the positioning of China in South Africa make it very different from other countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, and Cameroon which have been analysed in this research (King, 2009a, 2010; Nordtveit, 2010). China is in some ways both less and more visible in South Africa than in many other countries of the continent. It is not responsible, for example, for any of the massive stadia erected for the FIFA World Cup of June/July 2010, nor is it responsible for driving highways through the great cities and the countryside of South Africa as is so evident in, say, Ethiopia. Nor is the purchase by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China of 20% of the Standard Bank of South Africa, for more than 5 billion dollars, particularly visible to ordinary South Africans.

Perhaps increasingly evident is the opening of Chinese supermarkets and China Town malls in cities and large towns, and even in small rural villages, the Chinese general store is becoming commonplace. China's new embassy, the largest in Pretoria, opened in April 2010. It dwarfs that of India which is often called the other 'Asian Driver' along with China.

What do any of these special factors imply for China's role in education and training in South Africa? For the almost 20 years since the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Mandela, South Africa has prided itself on the strong ownership of its policies in education and training. This is reminiscent of India in the same sector (Colclough and De, 2010). Hence it is understood that any external aid in the education and training sector should fall in line with existing country policies.

When it comes to the main modalities of China's cooperation in education and

training, such as the long-term scholarships and short-term training, it should not be surprising that these are not as salient items of competition in South Africa as in countries such as Kenya or Ethiopia. Equally, as mentioned above, there is as much or even more interest in Chinese students coming to study in South Africa as the other way round. This is, as we have said, a commentary on the quality of the key universities in South Africa in the eyes of the majority of non-white South Africans and overseas Chinese students, rather than any criticism of Chinese universities.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, when it comes to the introduction of Confucius Institutes in South Africa, there would appear, in some situations, to have been some more questions raised about their role, ideology and positioning in university settings in South Africa than have been raised elsewhere on the continent.

On the FOCAC pledges from the great Beijing summit of November 2006, it would seem that two of the items, the 100 rural schools and the 300 young volunteers, were not seen as particularly relevant to South Africa. But in the case of the latest November 2009 FOCAC Ministerial Conference in Sharm el Shaikh, Egypt, the targets seem particularly germane to South Africa. Indeed it might be argued that the very pledges of China-Africa science and technology partnerships are in a real sense already in place in South Africa, as was referred to above. It might be claimed that the existing model of scientific cooperation between South Africa and China has become the very modality proposed for the whole of Africa in some of the new pledges from FOCAC 2009 (Ni and Wang, 2009). However, the China-South Africa collaboration seems to be much more of a genuinely symmetrical partnership than an aid relationship. If the same kind of partnership in science and technology is to be attempted in many of the other countries of Africa, with their weaker scientific and tertiary institutions, it may involve more of an aid mechanism than a regular, symmetrical partnership amongst equals.

In what follows, we shall review in more detail some of these key dimensions of China's human resources collaboration with South Africa and with Africa more generally. There are also a number of bilateral human resource projects which China has undertaken with South Africa, outside of the 2006 FOCAC framework, as well as one or two projects, such as the aquaculture technology demonstration centre, that fall more directly within the FOCAC framework from the Beijing Summit.

But we shall need to review China's support to education and training within the specific context of how South Africa regards development assistance more generally. Equally, we shall need to consider how South Africa with its unique history of receiving support for the struggle during the apartheid era views the continuation of support in the era of majority rule. Ultimately, as we have seen in other countries like Kenya and Ethiopia, the attitudes of South Africans towards study in China, or learning Mandarin, are influenced by the perceptions of China as a global power, as well as by the more local

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<sup>7</sup> See Cyranowski (2010) for a recent debate about the quality of Chinese universities in the eyes of South Africans.

perceptions of China as an investor in South Africa, and as its main trading partner.

During the long era of apartheid, ordinary South Africans were effectively cut off from what was happening more generally in the continent, as well as from the opportunities to study abroad, except when they left their own country as refugees or joined the freedom struggle. South African industry was built up behind a wall of enforced protection through international sanctions. The progressive removal of industrial protection from the time of majority rule in 1994 has been associated in the public mind with the loss of South African jobs. Cheaper Chinese imports are intimately linked to this loss of manufacturing jobs, especially in textiles, but also more generally. The South African trade union movement has witnessed the dramatic effects of the removal of protection from South African jobs and South African firms. It has therefore developed a view of China as more of a threat to South African training opportunities than as a source of new training provision in China. Hence the offer by China to support vocational training in South Africa cannot be separated in some quarters from the perceived threat to training and jobs which is associated with Chinese trade and investment. Here is a concluding comment from the CCS review of the FOCAC process in Africa up to 2009: ‘Labour issues comprise the foremost challenge in terms of the long term effects of Chinese aid and the presence of Chinese companies in African countries’ (CCS, 2010: 188).

### **Detailed review of China’s modalities for cooperation in education and training**

We shall now in more detail analyse the modalities which are used by China in its human resource cooperation with Africa in general, and where relevant with South Africa. We shall cover 1) the human resource dimensions of the FOCAC pledges, paying particular attention to the latest round of commitments from the November 2009 Ministerial Conference in Egypt; 2) the short and long term capacity building of Africans in China; 3) the role of the Confucius Institutes in Africa; 4) stand-alone education or training projects outside the FOCAC framework; 5) enterprise-based training in Chinese firms.

### **The latest human resource FOCAC commitments to Africa for 2010-2012**

China is unique amongst donors in having a mechanism, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, that deals with virtually the whole of Africa. Unlike many traditional donors such as France and Britain, it does not cooperate principally with a special subset of countries with historic, linguistic, geographic or economic ties with the donor country. Also, China seeks historically to avoid these FOCAC engagements appearing like aid or development assistance. Rather they are presented as elements of a joint agreement between two partners, ‘featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchanges’ (FOCAC 2009b: para. 1.2). China

would argue, like Japan, that its cooperation is basically in the response mode. Both countries have substantial bilateral discussions therefore at the country level, leading to country programmes, but they also have continent-wide agreements through the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) and FOCAC. Indeed it could be claimed that the very clear three year target orientation of the FOCAC process has influenced TICAD, leading to its also engaging in very active follow-up measures on the implementation of pledges.

Be that as it may, the FOCAC action plan for Africa is not an accumulation of a whole series of individual country plans but a framework that has maintained a rather similar pattern over several FOCAC triennia since its inception in 2000: there is, first of all, political cooperation, then cooperation in international affairs, and economic cooperation, followed by 'cooperation in the field of development' and finally 'cultural and people to people exchanges and cooperation'. Human resources development falls under cooperation in development, and a good deal of the education and training measures can be found there. But it is also worth noting that items like the training of 2000 agricultural technicians and the sending of 50 agricultural technology teams to Africa fall under Economic Cooperation. Equally, the 'China-Africa joint research and exchange plan to strengthen cooperation and exchanges between scholars and think tanks' falls under the people to people exchanges and cooperation. This is probably best explained as the FOCAC process drawing together the many different plans of various sectoral ministries in China.

The specifically education pledges build on the format of the previous commitments, with an increase in long term Chinese government scholarships to 5,500 by 2012; a pledge to help with teacher and head teacher training (1500); and a new 20+20 cooperation plan for more intensive one-to-one cooperation between 20 Chinese universities or vocational colleges and 20 African counterparts. Intriguingly, the 100 rural schools of the previous plan (2007-2009) have turned into 50 China-Africa friendship schools for the next triennium. By contrast, there is a pledge to develop Masters in Publication Administration (MPA) training of 200 middle and high level administrative personnel in programmes in China. Finally, in the 'education' section, there is a strong commitment to continue to develop Confucius institutes, increase scholarships to African teachers of Chinese, and a redoubling of efforts to raise the capacity of African teachers of Chinese. Under human resources development, but not education, there is the continued commitment to the massive short term training of what FOCAC used to call 'professionals' – now just 20,000 'people from different sectors in Africa'.

One of the biggest additions to the FOCAC pledges in the present agenda is the strengthened commitment to science and technology cooperation. This now includes the launch of a China-Africa science and technology partnership plan, the execution by China of 100 joint research and demonstration projects, and the invitation to 100 African 'postdoctors' to conduct scientific research in China.

Similarly in the field of medical cooperation, where the Chinese had built 30

hospitals and 30 malaria treatment centres in the previous triennium, they are now proposing medical equipment, the training of 3000 doctors, nurses and administrative personnel, as well as contributing US\$1.5 million to support the New Partnership for Africa's Development's (NEPAD) nurse training and maternity projects.

How are we to characterise this set of very varied pledges in terms of China's aid modalities and approaches, or in terms of the leverage these offers might have on the recipient countries? First, we can say safely say that this agenda does not mirror the EFA priorities of Jomtien and Dakar, and though FOCAC 2009 notes the urgent task of achieving the MDGs, it sees the obligation of the developed countries in particular to deliver here on their earlier pledges. Second, although FOCAC is not a bilateral commitment but a Pan-African one, it will very explicitly be executed by Chinese universities or vocational colleges, think tanks, scientists, agricultural technologists or language teachers, as well as medical personnel. In other words, thirdly, Chinese expertise is central to the execution of these elements of the FOCAC agenda, just as elsewhere on the agenda, Chinese firms and Chinese entrepreneurs are seen as critical. In point of fact, this emphasis on China's experts and expertise parallels Japan's very strong commitment to using its own technical assistance for and in Africa.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of whether FOCAC's focus is at the basic education and training level or at the post-basic, the sheer numbers of short term trainees (20,000); China Scholarships (5,500); doctors and nurse training (3000), agricultural technicians (2,000) not to mention the postdocs, NEPAD trainees and others, come to a figure of well over 30,000 African personnel at the post-basic level. How precisely these very specific categories get decided upon jointly when there are 49 African partners, and one non-African partner, China, is not well-known, or much researched,<sup>9</sup> but, as we have said above, it becomes more complicated when it is recalled that the FOCAC agenda also includes the priorities of the multiple Chinese Ministries of Commerce, Foreign Affairs, Culture, Education, Science & Technology, Agriculture, and Medicine, to mention just a few.

The priority setting and the translation into a consensus document for FOCAC are a substantial diplomatic achievement. But the allocative challenge of distributing all these varied offers across an enormous variety of African contexts must be huge, and involve staff in many Chinese and African ministries, host universities in China, as well as both the political and economic & commercial branches of all of China's African embassies. Some sense of the sheer scale of the activities associated with the FOCAC process can be gathered from a brief look at the summary FOCAC document on 'Implementation of the follow-up actions of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' which was presented at the end of the 3 year period 2007-2009 (FOCAC, 2009a).

It should be remembered also that unlike many of the more established agencies such as DFID and USAID which have professional cadres associated with gender,

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<sup>8</sup> For a comparison of the similarities of Chinese and Japanese cooperation approaches, see King (2007) *China's aid to Africa: a view from China and Japan*.

<sup>9</sup> But see King (2009b) *China's cooperation with Africa: meeting the FOCAC targets*.



environment, education, social development, and governance, China has not developed these groups of professionals. It will be recalled that across the whole of Africa, China only has two Education Counsellors and two Science and Technology Counsellors, and their responsibilities have been focused on just two countries. Again, Japan has been more like China, relying on generalists and a very small number of professionals until a relatively recent attempt to develop more professional communities of practice within JICA.<sup>10</sup>

### **Locating and categorising the unique<sup>11</sup> and dramatic case of the Confucius Institutes**

It has been commonplace to position the rise in the last six years of the Confucius Institutes as something parallel to the British Council, Goethe Institutes, or Alliance Française – as another form of cultural diplomacy. There are however very significant differences, and not least the claim by China that the spread of Confucius Institutes should be demand-driven, and not the object of a particular FOCAC numerical target. This is expressed as ‘the principle of the foreign party taking precedence whilst the Chinese party plays the role of providing assistance’ (<http://english.hanban.org/hbsm.php>). Hence we have the outcome that there are 56 CIs in the USA and just 23 in the whole of Africa. This spread world-wide does make the CI seem parallel, in a small way, to the British Council and other cultural bodies, which are often associated as much with their countries’ Foreign Office as they are with development aid. But what may make the Confucius Institutes exceptional as a mechanism and as an approach is that they are not located on the main streets of the world’s capital cities and regional capitals, but rather in the heart of their major universities.<sup>12</sup> Thus in the UK, the CIs can be found in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and in the Universities of Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, Nottingham and Sheffield, to mention just a few. Similarly, they can be found in the University of Nairobi, Rhodes University, and University of Cairo, and a further twenty sites in Africa. As their principal focus is the promotion of Mandarin, and Chinese culture, it should not be surprising that their parent body, Han Ban, the Confucius Institute Headquarters, should be a public body affiliated to the Ministry of Education.

Like the British Council at a certain point in its history, there are many varieties of scholarships linked to Chinese language improvement from Han Ban; these can be both long and short term, and in addition there has been a recent development of a three week

<sup>10</sup> See King and McGrath (2004) *Knowledge for Development?* – for an account of this process in JICA.

<sup>11</sup> None of the other obvious BRICS nations, such as India, Brazil or Russia, has sought to promote its major national language in the way that China has done. Nor has Japan done so during its economic ascendancy, perhaps not least because it did so unsuccessfully during the 1930s in its military expansion in South East Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>12</sup> There are five CI models, of which the partnerships between the foreign and Chinese universities, and between Chinese and foreign secondary schools (the Confucius Classroom) are the best known. But there are also CI partnerships possible between foreign NGOs and a Chinese university, between foreign and Chinese governments, and between enterprises and universities. See further <http://english.hanban.org/hbsm.php>

summer ‘camp’ which has been bringing groups of Chinese language learners from a whole series of different universities and secondary schools to spend time in China. The sheer range of opportunities from Confucius Institute Scholarships to short-term language exposure is very considerable. [Even from one institute in the University of Nairobi there were about 40 opportunities to go to China in 2009/2010, while in another, the University of Rhodes, there were opportunities for 26 first and second year students of Chinese to go to China in 2010.) Taken over the whole of the 282 Confucius Institutes and 272 Confucius Classrooms, worldwide, the total number of training opportunities in China must be very large indeed.

A further distinguishing modality of the Confucius Institute and Classroom is that each of these bodies overseas is formally linked to an appropriate university or secondary school in China. This partnership then provides the source of the Chinese co-director of the Confucius Institutes in Africa as well as of the regular and volunteer teachers of Chinese to go to the African university. The Chinese partner can also become the host for the different scholarship and other language visitors to China. This crucial school and university partnership arrangement provides an attractive modality for a world that is increasingly keen to develop on-going links with Chinese educational institutions.

As to locating the Confucius Institute as a particular cooperation modality, there are clearly problems with identifying it as a form of official development assistance (ODA), for the good reason that more than 50% of the support from China is going to so-called developed countries (94 Confucius Institutes are in Europe and 60 are in USA and Canada). Yet all Confucius currently receive a generous annual subsidy for their work, apart from receiving language teachers and volunteers. Furthermore, it is clear that there is scope for the Confucius Institute to become a mechanism for widening the inter-university cooperation beyond language to include Chinese studies and culture. It will be interesting to see if in certain university settings, this may develop into larger Centres for Chinese Studies.

This raises the further question of the character of the additionality associated with the Confucius Institute. There are broadly two modalities: in the case where the CI arrives in a University such as Rhodes or Nairobi where has been no previous teaching of Chinese language or culture, the CI has been responsible for introducing the study of Chinese at the degree level into the university system. On the other hand, when the CI is invited to a university which already has the teaching of Chinese embedded in its degree system, as for example in Stellenbosch, Edinburgh or in London, then the CI may well play a role in strengthening that provision, but becomes principally identified with a range of non-credit bearing offerings, both for regular students who want additional support, but also for a whole range of extra-mural students. It can also be responsible for seminars and special lectures relating to China.

At the more general level, the CI movement may be classified as a form of soft power, or cultural diplomacy, but those terms do not do justice to the demand side of the CI equation. The CIs are not so much creating the demand for Chinese language learning

but are responding to a widespread vocational interest in many countries for acquiring expertise in Chinese. And this interest is of course inseparable from the very visible presence of Chinese enterprise, industry and commerce in so many different countries, especially in Africa.

### **China's stand-alone education and training projects in Africa, outside the FOCAC framework**

Thus far we have looked briefly at two large-scale frameworks within African countries which have been supported educationally. The FOCAC framework has operated as a uniquely pan-African modality for relating to Africa, and within that, there have been a series of HRD, cultural, education and training commitments offered to, and agreed with, the whole of Africa, excepting the 4 countries maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Countries may differ in the extent they may be able to profit from these FOCAC offers, and that may be determined by their economic status, as well as by the visibility and impact of China's wider presence in the country.

In contrast, the Confucius Institute framework, though mentioned in the later FOCAC agreements, is very much wider than Africa; indeed only a 12<sup>th</sup> of the worldwide CIs are in Africa, and only four of the Confucius Classrooms.

Apart from these frameworks, China has continued to give considerable attention to its bilateral commitments to African countries, and in fact there has been a long tradition of very senior politicians visiting Africa annually for much of the last 20 years. Typically, this has been the Chinese foreign minister, and in January 2010, Yang Jiechi commented: 'At the beginning of every year, China's foreign minister visits Africa. This is a good tradition that dates back 20 years' ([www.focac.org/eng/zfgx/zzjw/t650173.htm](http://www.focac.org/eng/zfgx/zzjw/t650173.htm)). This year he covered Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Algeria and Morocco. And regularly these bilateral visits end in both sides signing off on a series of bilateral agreements. Of course, these non-FOCAC bilateral commitments cover a wide range of areas, but again like Japan they tend to be driven by the priorities of the African partners.

It should not therefore be surprising that African partner governments have tended to prioritise development projects that have proved difficult to secure from other traditional agency sources, such as infrastructure, and especially roads, dams, power projects, stadia. By contrast, many OECD donors have been ready to support elements that are central to the delivery of the MDGs, including basic education, and basic health care. This is not to say that human resource development projects, including formal education, have not figured on China's cooperation agenda with Africa. But unlike DFID, for instance, it is certainly not allocating £10 million sterling a year to basic education as DFID is in Kenya and Ghana. Rather, it is responding to countries that have made specific education initiatives a priority. Hence in Ethiopia which has been focusing on both basic and higher education in recent years, few traditional donors are competing to fund tertiary education. Hence, China has been responsible for building, equipping and staffing the large Ethio-

China Polytechnic College in the capital. Similarly in Malawi, China has recently agreed to construct a new Science University as one of five major development projects signed after Malawi signed up to diplomatic relations with the PRC instead of Taiwan. In a further project supporting NEPAD's education and training project, China has agreed to fund the development of a clinical master's degree for nurse training in five African countries.

South Africa offers an intriguing illustration of how the allocative mechanisms for deciding on an education and training project can work out in practice, following the offer of substantial development assistance by the Chinese President in his visit to South Africa in early 2007. This may be particularly complicated when the offer of assistance comes from a partner that is not dictating what its money should be spent on, and when there is a receiving partner that could be characterised as not aid-dependent, and which has had a tradition of looking critically at all offers of development aid, especially in the field of education.<sup>13</sup> The result was that project moved from the request for a new technical college to the renovation of several established colleges. But South Africa, for some of the reasons alluded to earlier, wanted to be sure that, to the extent possible, the materials and the human resources deployed on the project would be sourced within South Africa. The outcome, however, has been that a full three years after the rather generous offer of assistance, there has been very little action on the moneys offered. Whatever the pros and cons of the lengthy delay, this episode suggests that at least in this particular example, there has so far been little evidence of the aid funds being used in a way that is complementary or additional to national funding. They have not been used at all!

### **Chinese enterprise in Africa as a major source of capacity building?**

For a country that does not conceptualise ODA as completely separate from many of the other dimensions of China's presence in Africa, it is important at least briefly to acknowledge that many if not most of China's major investments in Africa also have an HRD component. While it is important, therefore, to note the quite explicit HRD targets as we have done earlier in analysing the FOCAC process, it is also important to recognise that many of the largest Chinese investments in Africa have a crucially important capacity-building element. This is true both of China's private sector investments, as well as those carried out by state-owned enterprises. Whether these investments are in telecoms, roads, railways, construction or water development, there are major capacity building components. Sometimes these are quite explicit as in the training of several thousand telecom engineers in ZTE's massive project across the whole of Ethiopia, and sometimes the new skills are learnt on the job without the target numbers being pre-specified in the project documents. But what is critical in these training processes are the differential training policies adopted by the different African governments. Clearly, these can have a

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<sup>13</sup> See King (1999).

major impact on the training regime adopted by the Chinese contractors. Where countries are concerned about the long-term sustainability of the infrastructure project, there may be a different approach to capacity building than when a government, perhaps for political reasons, just wants a project finished in the fastest possible time.

There are other aspects of enterprise-based training that need at least to be acknowledged even if they cannot be elaborated here. There is a very widespread admiration in Africa for the productivity and culture of hard work of Chinese skilled workers and technicians. There is also a recognition that unlike many Western experts, the Chinese still largely follow one of the eight principles of foreign aid enunciated in the early 1960s in Africa by Zhou Enlai:

The experts dispatched by China to help in construction in the recipient countries will have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country. The Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands or enjoy any special amenities. (China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000)

Again, there is a similarity in this strain of Chinese thinking about expertise to the way that Japanese aid archetypically projects their many experts as being 'in the paddy-field' rather than in advisory offices next to the minister. Brautigam's critical analysis of the many allegations about China's 'hordes of experts' and her experienced assessment of China's 'capacity building' in Africa broadly confirm that while there are some very significant differences from Western donors in the way that China does its aid, capacity building and technology transfer, 'the Chinese have not yet figured out how to build capacity or really transfer their skills' (Brautigam, 2009: 161).

## **Concluding reflections**

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from this brief discussion of some of the apparent modalities of Chinese aid to the human resources sector. The principal difficulty in doing so is that the Chinese don't discuss openly options for the allocation and use of educational aid. There is not an accessible account of the trade-offs of investing in basic education versus secondary or higher as there has been in the West for decades. As far as I know, there is nothing resembling an education sector policy for aid of the kind that has been widespread in the West for 40 years. This is crucially important to emphasise and underline again and again. Education cooperation is not perceived as a stand-alone sector. And although we have sought to comment on whether those 'HRD' elements of the FOCAC agreements are on balance more tilted towards higher education than basic, this is ultimately a somewhat artificial exercise. The FOCAC agreements should not be broken down into the well-worn sectors or sub-sectors associated with Western donors, any more than should China's African policy of 2006 (China, 2006) be mined for what is said, in two paragraphs, about cooperation in human resources development and education.

Ultimately all the many elements of China's cooperation with Africa are inseparable from the political, economic and trade engagements with Africa. Discussions of the kind that take place in the aid chapter of the recent EFA Global Monitoring Reports, which are a good deal to do with allocation **within** the education sector, are a world away from China's view of HRD as a completely integral element of development policy and politics, whether in the West of China or in Africa.

Consequently, it should not be surprising that China does not spend much time thinking about whether its educational aid could be better harmonised with and be more complementary to that of other education donors. It may still be useful to sort out, as we have tried to do, some of what constitutes HRD in China's engagement with Africa, and what is special about its relations with South Africa. There are clearly some complex allocation challenges in determining how some 20,000 short term training awards, for instance, should be distributed across 49 African countries, but that will not be so much of an HRD discussion as one that takes place at a much higher political and strategic level.

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