

# China's Higher Education Partnership with Africa

## As a Tool of Public Diplomacy of the People's Republic of China

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**Abstract**—Education cooperation is perceived as a key element to boosting the comprehensive partnership between China, the world's largest developing country, and Africa, the continent with largest number of developing countries. The article highlights the main elements of China's investment in human resource development on the African continent. It includes assessments of several long-and short-term training programs, the 20 plus 20 scheme, and the Confucius Institutes. In particular, the article highlights the importance of public diplomacy to China. The article affirms that the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) plays an indispensable role in China-Africa collaboration, which includes educational cooperation between the countries and represents a new model of South-South multilateral relations. The author calls upon China and African countries to broaden cooperation in the sphere of education.

**Keywords**—*Forum on China-Africa Cooperation; the 20 plus 20 scheme; Confucius Institutes; public diplomacy*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian relations can easily deepen the confidence between states, and often do. Alongside economic, military, and political power, the influence of states depends on their cultural power, which can be described as a tool of public diplomacy. In its classical definition, soft power — “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion” — is cultivated through relations with allies, including economic and cultural exchanges with other countries [3].

China is the most active and heavily funded country using such public diplomacy today. Public Diplomacy is the communication with foreign states to establish a dialogue whose purpose is to inform and to influence. Understanding the importance of creating the desired country image abroad, such public diplomacy is not new for the Chinese Communist Party. Chinese Party members have long understood the value of creating a positive image abroad and the power of good foreign press, examples of which can be seen throughout recent Chinese history. For instance, in the mid-1930s, the Party invited the American journalist Edgar Snow to report on the civil war in China. His book, *Red Star Over China*, depicted Mao Zedong as a hero. Moreover, this book was a success abroad. Later, in the early 1970's, China

made attempts to end China's international isolation by “ping-pong diplomacy”. Deng Xiaoping's “open-door policy” was very effective in attracting foreign attention, especially among foreign businessmen and tourists. One famous quotation characterizes Deng Xiaoping's policy: “It doesn't matter if the cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice”.

It is no secret that China tries to do business around the world; this is particularly noticeable in Africa. The Chinese abroad play a big role in promoting Chinese culture as well as lobbying for their political interests. The Chinese have been conducting a review of their investment policy in Africa recently. The cultivation of education cooperation with Africa is an important part of the Sino-African comprehensive partnership, which can be seen as common development. Moreover it creates a positive image of China and influences the formation of international agendas. It is important to highlight the fact that one of the principle priorities for the African states is human resources development. In this regard, it is significant that one of the first points in China's African Policy, dated 2006, is two-way learning. Specifically, this means learning from each other and seeking common development. China and Africa will learn from and draw upon each other's experience in governance and development, strengthening their exchange and cooperation in education, science, culture and health [1].

The first China White Paper on Foreign Aid, dated 2011, headlined that China had consolidated friendly relations, and economic and trade cooperation, with other developing countries, promoted South-South cooperation, and contributed to the common development of mankind.

It should be noted, that the White Paper on China's Foreign Aid, dated 2011, and the 2013 White Paper on China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation illustrate its emphasis on skills development and education assistance, in addition to “human resources development and educational cooperation with Africa” as a single concept.

With this understanding, it is now possible to examine briefly the main principles used by the Chinese Communist Party with the aim of extending African's educational potential through cooperation. It should be noted that mutual learning and benefits are important aspects of the

collaboration. At the same time, many African states seek a partner that, unlike the West, does not mandate democracy and transparency.

## II. THE ROLE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Public Diplomacy as a term was first coined in 1965 by Dean Edmund A. Gullion of Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Public Diplomacy is the communication with foreign public bodies in order to establish a dialogue to inform and influence.

Public Diplomacy is an important element of promoting China's diplomacy in the 21st century. Educational cooperation is one of the most significant channels and vehicles of China's public diplomacy; it is also a way to build confidence between states. In July 2009, Secretary-General of the People's Republic of China, Hu Jintao, made a speech on Chinese public diplomacy at the conference of Ambassadors, which stressed the role of public diplomacy on the Chinese government's agenda. Public diplomacy goals were outlined during the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in the last month of 2012. The most important point includes: creating a strong social base among young people, making cultural industry a mainstay of the national economy, and strengthening the social cultural base [8].

To demonstrate that the Chinese Party cares more and more about increasing public diplomacy inside China, it is important to note that, in the 21st century, China is increasing the number of events aimed at improving the image of the country. Among these events can be mentioned the 2008 Olympic Games, the 2010 Shanghai EXPO, and the 2014 Nanjing Universiade, as well as the 2014 Shanghai meeting and APEC. The objective of China's public diplomacy is to rebrand China as a peaceful, global country.

Sino-African educational cooperation is making a significant contribution to help African countries achieve their objectives. Education partnership is a means of creating a positive image of the state abroad, stimulating sympathy for the country, and improving intergovernmental cooperation on a global scale.

## III. THE ROLE OF THE FORUM ON CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION IN EXPANDING MUTUAL EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was established in 2000, with the first Ministerial Meeting taking place in Beijing. FOCAC is the first multilateral consultative platform for cooperation between China and African states; it covers various aspects of politics, society, culture, education, trade, and the economy. The education sector is represented as an integral part of the "Cooperation on Social Development" within the Forum framework. FOCAC ministerial conferences are held every three years and their results have had a meaningful impact on bilateral and multilateral cooperation between China and Africa.

The First Ministerial Conference's commitments include granting more scholarships to students from Africa to study

in China, sending Chinese teachers to Africa, and establishing communications between universities.

The Second Ministerial Conference, taking place in Ethiopia in 2003, covered cooperation on the development of human resources, which included the training of 10,000 African personnel.

The Third Ministerial Conference and the Beijing Summit's commitments embrace the following provisions: build 100 rural school in Africa; increase the number of Chinese scholarships for African students from 2,000 per year to 4,000 per year; train 15,000 African professionals; open 23 Confucius Institutes or classrooms in 16 African countries [2].

The Fourth Ministerial Conference, which was held in Egypt in 2009, covered cooperation in science and technology, building 50 China-Africa friendship schools, training 1,500 school principals and teachers, and increasing the number of Chinese scholarships to 5,500 by 2012. China-Africa science and technology partnerships and China-Africa joint research and exchange programs were launched as a result of the conference. A significant event in the development of educational ties between countries was the implementation of a new 20+20 scheme to create one-to-one cooperation between 20 Chinese universities or colleges and 20 African counterparts. Although it may seem that Africa's universities were not prestigious enough to attract Chinese students, the twenty African higher educational establishments which elected to join the 20+20 scheme, were in the top 100 African higher educational institutions, which included the most prestigious African universities, such as Cairo University, the University of Pretoria, and Stellenbosch University [6].

Sino-African cooperation complies with the idea of mutual learning. There is an old Chinese saying, "Qu Chang Bu Duan", which means "To enhance each other, we learn from each other". The other significant aspect of such partnerships is that they are seen as long-term.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference took place in Beijing in 2012. "Soft power" mechanisms such as increased China-Africa people-to-people and cultural exchanges were highly emphasised. China's investment in Africa is having a positive impact on research. The African Talents Program, which was implemented at the 5th Ministerial Conference and operated from 2012 to 2015, trained 30,000 African professionals in various sectors, offering 18,000 government scholarships [4].

The Sixth Ministerial Conference was held in Johannesburg in 2015. At the last FOCAC summit, Xi Jinping, Secretary-General of the Chinese Communist Party, announced "10 major plans" to boost cooperation between the partners over the following three years. The Chinese side will establish a number of regional vocational education centres, and offer 2,000 degree education opportunities in China and 30,000 government scholarships to these countries. Chinese President Xi added that the Chinese side will train African states' senior professionals in government

administration and national development through the South-South Cooperation and Development Institute [5].

To summarize:

First, The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation is the main inter-governmental platform for comprehensive China-Africa collaboration in many fields. It is important to note that, since 2000, China has developed a Pan-African mechanism, FOCAC, to address Africa as a whole. It is presented as an element of South-South cooperation based on equality and mutual trust. China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and respects African countries' independent choices for development, cultural exchange, economic win-win cooperation, and African integration. Therefore, the idea of mutual development leads to the approach emphasizing bilateral cooperation in the realm of education.

Second, FOCAC's programs are not limited to trade, economic cooperation, or development aid, but also include communication between people, such as think tanks.

Third, the Forum's educational agenda has developed from government scholarships, human resources development, academic exchanges and research projects, teaching Chinese as a second language, distant education, mutual recognition of academic qualifications, etc.

Fourth, FOCAC has become more diversified and comprehensive. Consequently, the Forum international influence is also growing. Therefore, it is a platform for promoting China-Africa relations in the coming decades.

Fifth, education did not become all-important until very recently, when cooperation in the sphere of education was perceived to be the key to the reliable development of Sino-African large-scale cooperation under the Forum framework.

Sixth, within the framework of FOCAC, China tries to share its experience with Africa on how to achieve growth and development by focusing on human resources, capital, and infrastructure.

#### IV. CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AS A TOOL OF CHINA'S PUBLIC DIPLOMACY STRATEGY

Language conveys culture. The promotion of language for the sake of spreading culture is not unique to our time. There can be no doubt that China is now a powerful force on the African continent. The Chinese Government pursues the strategy of "going global and inviting in". Moreover, China's aid programs to Africa are based on the principles of sustainability and mutual benefits. Accordingly, China is holding many cultural programmes, such as cultural weeks and years between China and foreign countries, competitions between Chinese-speaking foreigners, and Confucius Institutes classes. Confucius Institutes are non-profit educational organizations promoting teaching of the Chinese language outside China, and cultural exchanges between China and other states. Another goal is spreading the "correct" understanding of China.

In 2002, the Chinese started to promote Mandarin Chinese abroad. In 2004, the Office of Chinese Language

Council International (Hanban) began to establish Confucius Institutes abroad to promote teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, and to further cooperation in educational and cultural fields. The first Confucius Institute was established in the capital of South Korea in late 2004 and, since then, it has expanded worldwide. One of the main reasons increasing numbers of people are learning Mandarin is explained by China's economic rise and modernization. It is important to note that Confucius Institutes' courses are not limited to teaching Chinese; they also promote Chinese culture. The Confucius Institutes are a vital part of China's public diplomacy and an effective method of making the world better understand China. Another key point is linked with the fact that (by late 2016) China has already opened more than 500 Confucius Institutes around the world, and the number of Confucius Classrooms has reached 1,000. Overall, African countries' Confucius Institutes are doing as the Hanban suggests, because Hanban is the main player in promoting the Chinese language abroad.

Certainly, those activities help Chinese culture become global. The Confucius Institute is one of the foremost elements in China's public diplomacy. This cultural diplomacy creates the bridge of friendship between China and other cultures. A Chinese member of the standing committee, Li Changchun, said that the Confucius Institutes are "an important channel to glorify Chinese culture, help Chinese culture spread around the world", which is "part of China's foreign propaganda strategy" [7]. Every year, increasing numbers of foreigners come to China to learn the Chinese language, Chinese culture, and traditional medicine. In essence, those activities are the result of the Chinese public diplomacy program.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Having briefly examined some of the modalities of the China's higher education partnership with Africa, it is important to note that the China-Africa partnership grows increasingly stronger year by year. Sino-African relations have progressed significantly in bilateral and multilateral cooperation thanks to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation which was established in 2000. Success of such projects as FOCAC, the 20+20 scheme, and cooperation under the Confucius Institute framework have formed the basis for further development of bilateral and multilateral relations. Therefore, China's share in the Africa market of education services in the coming years will continue growing.

It is also important to recognize that Chinese opinions about their need for "soft power in Africa" is discussed increasingly openly. The China Daily newspaper (in February 2012) reported about the Director of African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, He Wenping's, speech: "It is not mission impossible for China to increase its influence in Africa on the ideological front, and there exist plenty of opportunities for China to achieve this" [8].

There have been many impressive achievements. The China-Africa education cooperation has produced tens of thousands of Chinese and Africans professional through the FOCAC training program. However, student mobility

between China and Africa is still primarily “one way”, so it is important to increase African education potential in the eye of Chinese students. Moreover, currently, top African students still choose Western universities for overseas study. Additionally, most of the African elite have received a Western education. Looking back on China-African cooperation, it seems that China’s investment successes in soft projects is still limited when compared to its hard projects. China should also learn from the European countries and the USA how to increase their influence in Africa. Even so, it is not an impossible mission for China. Chinese and African sides share a high degree of agreement on human rights and sovereignty, so the Chinese government can hold frank in-depth dialogues with African counterparts and, from this base, improve other areas of collaboration.

It is also quite important to stress that China’s support of Africa is based on mutual respect. Historically, China did not practice influencing events on the African continent. The Chinese follow the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Therefore, China is keen on deepening relations with African countries. The Chinese seeks partnership, mutual benefits, and long-term relations. Normally, Chinese assistance to African countries is demand-driven but, overall, it can be predicted that the two sides will continue their dialogue and their belief that the deepening of China’s engagement with Africa countries will be realized in the long term. The Chinese influence and cooperation is helping shape the future of the African continent.

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