

# China in Africa: A New Lens on Development Cooperation, with a focus on human resources.<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper is a preliminary attempt at engaging with the discourse of China's growing involvement with Africa. China's emerging language of development cooperation has long historical roots but appears to be based on different assumptions from those currently held by many Western development agencies. China seems to avoid the complexities and asymmetries of donor-recipient relations by positioning itself as a developing country, and one which recognises poverty within its own borders. Instead, China presents its relations with Africa in essentially bilateral terms, but in ways that focus on the mutuality and two-way benefits that accrue to both sides. This strong sense of bilateralism is illustrated with components from China's current range of modalities for educational cooperation.

**Keywords:** China-Africa relations; Millennium Development Goals; Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers; poverty; growth; donors; recipients; partnership; bilateral relations; harmonisation; conditionality; educational collaboration.

Our starting point is that an understanding of the nature of China's emerging aid philosophy would be helped by a characterization of China's historical involvement in external assistance that does not start from an assumption that Western aid modalities and conditionalities are the norm.<sup>3</sup> A second working assumption is that China's role in Africa cannot satisfactorily be explained solely in terms of a search for natural resources, and for market access, but needs to take account of China's growing personnel presence<sup>4</sup> in Africa, and its involvement in multiple forms of bilateral cooperation.

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<sup>3</sup> To date, He Wenping's article on "All weather friend": the evolution of China's African policy' (2005) provides a useful periodisation of China's historical involvement with Africa.

<sup>4</sup> New research by Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, building on their present work (2006) in Africa, should add greatly to our knowledge of the Chinese diaspora in Africa.

The paper approaches China's aid or development cooperation particularly from the perspective of education, or more broadly human resource development. Thus the illustrations are drawn from the education sector, and are related to the capacity building aspects of China's growing re-engagement with Africa. They may nevertheless have a resonance with approaches in other sectors, such as health. The focus is therefore primarily on the pattern of China's external cooperation with Africa rather than on its role as a continuing recipient itself of development assistance. However, there are elements of China's role as an aid recipient that have a direct bearing on its own approach to development assistance. These particularly relate to China's need for continuing assistance with its poorest provinces, notably in the West, and its characterisation of the nature of poverty within its borders.

We shall seek, first, to understand something of the language or discourse in which international cooperation is discussed by China. This is not just a technical question, for example, of China's preferring to use the word 'cooperation' rather than 'aid' in describing the two-way interactions between a whole continent and a country. But language is crucially important for projecting the appropriate image of this important relationship with Africa. In particular, the language currently is not that of Western aid agencies or of the Japanese, with their focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), on poverty reduction and on good governance. Second, and closely linked to the issue of language is the question of what China's assistance consists of. Are there identifiable projects and programmes in the aid envelope, and how are these located in particular African countries? In other words, what is the content of this educational cooperation? Thirdly, there are issues about the current and future direction of China's development assistance. At present, the pattern of China's cooperation has an overwhelmingly bilateral feel to it, but is there any indication that China will increasingly be drawn into harmony with the dominant Western discourse about aid effectiveness, and into engaging with what the West likes to think of as the global development agenda?<sup>5</sup>

### **China's Development Discourse**

We are fortunate that the subject of China-Africa relations is being discussed shortly after the appearance of *China's African Policy* on 12th January 2006. Of course as that document (China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006), and other commentators such as He Wenping (2005) have made abundantly clear, China's African policies go back a very long way, as do its policies on foreign aid. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, reinforced in the African Policy, go back 50 years to the joint communiqué between Zhou En-lai and Nehru, while the 'Eight Principles Governing Foreign aid' were first outlined by Zhou En-lai during his visit to Ghana and Mali in the early 1960s.<sup>6</sup>

In one way, the existence of and continued reference by China today to these early policy statements on international relations with Africa and Asia may be taken to

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<sup>5</sup> On the construction of the global development agenda see King 2004; 2005.

<sup>6</sup> There is a very often a strong focus on the lengthy history of cooperation between individual countries in Africa and China, as evidenced for example in the ceremonies in Cairo during Premier Wen Jiabao's visit of June 2006 to celebrate the anniversary of no less than 50 years of cooperation between the two countries, [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/18/content\\_619542.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/18/content_619542.htm)

underline the point that China has had a series of policies towards Africa that long predate the Millennium Summit of 2000 (which led to the MDGs)<sup>7</sup> or the West's insistence on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process for the majority of poorer countries. These early policies, reinforced today, do not constitute an aid relationship, of a donor and its recipients. Rather, according to the Beijing Declaration of 2000, produced by the first ministerial meeting of the China-Africa Forum on Cooperation, they emphasise South-South cooperation and symmetry:

We also emphasise that China and African countries are developing countries with common fundamental interests; and believe that close consultation between the two sides on international affairs is of great importance to consolidating the solidarity among developing countries and facilitating the establishment of a new international order. (China, People's Republic of 2000: 2)

And yet there is much in China's recent development discourse which, at first blush, sounds very similar to the West's engagement with development. For instance, the initial impression given by the Director General of the Department of Foreign Aid in his analysis of 'China's Aid to Foreign Countries in 2003' (Wang 2004)<sup>8</sup> might be of an aid agenda not dissimilar to Western countries: there is a discussion of the increase of China's emergency humanitarian aid, demonstrating its image 'as a responsible major power' (ibid. 78); there is the reference to China's debt remission for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC); there is an acknowledgement of the priority for human resource development, capacity building and sustainable development; and even a recognition of the need for improved aid effectiveness. But a closer look suggests a somewhat different stance, and one that seeks to avoid the language of Western and Japanese agencies.

If we take for example the poverty reduction discourse which in its more recent agency incarnation<sup>9</sup> led to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process in the mid to late 1990s, there is not much evidence that this poverty-based approach is widely used by China's policy makers. 'Poverty reduction' and 'the poor' are not terms that even appear in *China's African Policy*. But this is not because China does not use these terms. It certainly does. But it uses them to emphasise its solidarity with the developing world. Very frequently China projects itself as merely the largest of the developing nations and as a country that shares a common poverty with many others. Here is a recent example:

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<sup>7</sup> It is often thought that the MDGs were agreed at the Summit; the truth is that they were finalised after the Heads of State had left the UN. What was agreed was the Millennium Declaration rather than the MDGs (see King 2004).

<sup>8</sup> A statement by the Director General of the Department has become a regular feature of the *China Commerce Yearbook*.

<sup>9</sup> There was an earlier agency interest in pro-poor development; the Labour government in the UK in the 1970s introduced a White Paper on 'More help to the poorest' (Ministry of Overseas Development 1975), and McNamara was responsible likewise for bringing basic needs and a pro-poor focus into the World Bank in the very early 1970s.

China is a member of the developing countries, and its aid to other developing countries is a kind of help 'among poor friends'<sup>10</sup> and constitutes no burden for their economic development. (Wang 2004: 79)

An additional reason why China may avoid the language of the PRSP process is that it recognises the widespread feeling in Sub-Saharan Africa that this process has been, arguably, imposed by the Western donors on many financially weak and dependent states, and is perceived as a conditionality for further aid dialogue. Thus its avoidance of the routine linking of poverty reduction and development derives from its wider concern to distance itself from the discourse of aid conditionality<sup>11</sup>, and particularly from projecting itself in the role of a donor in discussion with poor recipients. In other words, the poverty discourse sits uneasily with its decades of emphasising solidarity, mutuality and equality amongst nations:

In the last 50 years, there have been some changes for China's African policy concerning the economic relations; but one thing has never changed, namely, China has always stressed that countries, big or small, rich or poor, strong or weak, be treated as equals, and has persisted in non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries...(Li 2005: 9).

Thus, the fact that the country has had in Beijing a new International Poverty Reduction Centre in China (IPRCC) since May 2005 does not necessarily mean that 'China's growing international role is harnessed for poverty reduction', as DFID's *China: Country assistance plan* (2006: 12) may expect.<sup>12</sup> The Centre, a joint initiative of the UNDP, the State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development (LGOP) and the Ministry of Commerce, may have an explicit agenda for exchanging experience on poverty reduction, especially the Chinese experience, worldwide, and serving to push forward the realising of the Millennium Development Goals (People's Daily 2004); but it is still clearly too early to say whether the Centre, as a UNDP China 'flagship project' will constitute more of a coordination point for understanding China's own successful experiences in poverty

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase 'amongst poor friends' goes back a long way; it was often stated by Zhou En-lai during his tour of Asian and African countries in late 1963 - early 1964 that 'mutual economic assistance among the Asian and African countries was the kind of assistance between poor friends who were in the same boat pulling oars together' (China 2000). Intriguingly, in August 2000 the then Chinese foreign minister commented that the long history of 'Japan-China economic cooperation cannot be easily compared to the support China extends to third countries, which has been going on ever since the People's Republic of China was founded under a policy devised by President Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai and which is in the nature of so-called South-South cooperation or "cooperation among poor friends"'. [www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/fmv0008/meet\\_4.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/fmv0008/meet_4.html)

<sup>11</sup> Thus, at the beginning of premier Wen Jiabao's June 2006 Africa trip, there was the following from *China Daily*: "China has been offering no-strings-attached financial and technical aid to the most needy in Africa," said an editorial in the paper. "It has been encouraging the African countries to develop their economy through trade and investment in infrastructure and social institutions, without dictating terms for political and economic reforms", [allafrica.com/stories/200606210303.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/200606210303.html)

<sup>12</sup> The Centre originated from the Global Conference on Scaling up Poverty Reduction held in Shanghai in May 2004, but the Memorandum of Understanding amongst the three parties was not signed till a year later.

reduction than for making poverty-based aid a central element in China's own international cooperation policies.<sup>13</sup>

There can be little doubting the scale of China's own national initiatives in poverty reduction, but unlike some of the language of the PRSPs, China's poverty reduction practice is closely integrated into its growth strategy. Thus Zhang Lei, Managing Director of the IPRCC, talks of the need to 'maintain the momentum of sustained economic growth, promote industrialisation and urbanisation to set an economic basis for rural poverty reduction' (Zhang 2006: 13). The discourse on poverty reduction is inseparable from China's integrated strategies for sustained economic growth.

The national discussion about the numbers of the poor in China may be one aspect of this larger discussion about the scale and significance of poverty in the world. Thus, according to the Chinese measurement of poverty, the total number of the poor had fallen from 250 million to 23.6 million (2.5% of the population) by 2005 (Liu 2006); but development agencies in China such as DFID, UNDP and the World Bank continue to refer to there being 135 million on \$1 a day and no less than 500 million on under \$2 a day (DFID 2006: 3).<sup>14</sup> We shall note below that something of this contrast in estimates of the seriousness of poverty is paralleled in other countries where China or other agencies are present.

The situation with China's support for and identification with the MDGs may be similar. At one level, of course, the MDGs are accepted by the Chinese government. China cooperates in the UNDP's programme whereby countries carry out annual joint assessments of their MDG status (MOFA/UNDP 2005). It is often said, however, that China has its own sustainable development goals which are captured by the term 'Xiao Kang'; indeed the UNDP has argued 'that there exists a rare correspondence between the MDGs and "Xiao Kang", as both of them represent a "people's agenda", and focus on the kind of development that makes a visible, measurable difference in the lives of people' (Malik 2005).<sup>15</sup> Despite this talk of the MDGs being a 'people's agenda', there may well be a perception in certain policy quarters in China as there is in policy circles in Africa that the MDGs, like the International Development Targets (IDTs) before them, were very much a creation of Northern bilateral agencies in the

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<sup>13</sup> For instance in the first international training seminar of the IPRCC, the focus was on 'Best practices in poverty reduction in China', December 2005; and the paper on 'China's international cooperation in the area of poverty reduction' by Ou Qingping was not on China's external activities in the sphere of poverty but about external assistance to poverty reduction in China itself.

<sup>14</sup> By contrast with the dollar a day (\$370 a year), the relative poverty line in China is \$108 (RMB 865) and the absolute poverty line \$76 (RMB 625)

<sup>15</sup> Although 'xiao kang' is currently translated as 'harmonious society', it is far from being the minimalist conception of well-being associated with the MDGs. According to a Chinese government source, an all-round 'Xiao Kang' society has three dimensions: (1) Per capita GDP exceeds 3,000 US\$ (prices in year 2000), similar to the per capita GDP standard of mid-income countries. (2) All-round means all the aspects of society, such as economy, politics and culture; it will be an orderly society with a relatively mature socialist democracy and legal system. (3) The urban-rural gap and regional disparity will be much reduced; the urban population will exceed 50 percent; most people will live a more affluent life. (Zeng Peiyan 2002). I am indebted to Jiang Kai of HKU and Peking University and Liu Haifang of the Institute of West Asian and African Studies for discussion of poverty concepts in China.

OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), and of the UN system. Despite the UN Millennium Project (2005) and the Millennium Summit of September 2005, the MDGs are arguably still not widely owned by developing countries, or are not seen as an appropriate national goal.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to say that MDGs are not referred to. But there is no reference to them at all in the Beijing Declaration, which is understandable giving the timing.<sup>17</sup> Neither are the IDTs mentioned which had been in agency currency since 1996. The MDGs are certainly referred to once in *China's African Policy*, in a single paragraph on multilateral cooperation. But it is quite clear that the real emphasis in this key paragraph is more to do with privileging developing countries and their trade opportunities in the currently inequitable and unrepresentative international financial system than it is with harmonising China's policy with the multilateral agencies around the MDGs. It bears quoting in full for this reason:

China is ready to enhance consultation and coordination with Africa within multilateral trade systems and financial institutions and work together to urge the UN and other international organisations to pay more attention to the question of economic development, promote South-South cooperation, push forward the establishment of a just and rational multilateral trade system and make the voices of developing countries heard in the decision-making of international financial affairs. It will step up cooperation with other countries and international organisations to support the development of Africa and help realise Millennium Development Goals in Africa. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006: 7)

This is a long way from the position of Britain's DFID that 'Poverty reduction and the MDGs are central DFID priorities' (Levesque May 2006), a position that is reinforced by DFID's legal agreement with the Treasury to deliver on the MDGs. It also seems far away from Japan whose *Official Development Assistance White Paper* of 2005 dedicates a whole first part to Japan's efforts toward achieving the MDGs. But there is a further reason that the MDGs are not so central to China, and that may derive from its perception that the MDGs are not critical to economic development. The MDGs may well seem to be focused on a series of minimalist social targets, and they seem a long way from the large and small infrastructure projects that are associated with much of China's international cooperation activities. The latter seem much more in line with what UNCTAD terms the crucial 'productive capacities' that need to be built in the developing world, if the social sectors are to be sustainably supported. Interestingly, Japan which also puts the MDGs in the foreground of its ODA policy actually believes that the MDGs are insufficiently oriented towards infrastructure and other investments, without which the Goals are unsustainable (Japan 2005).

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<sup>16</sup> For example in Ghana, 'Aside from this, government has gone beyond the MDGs and set educational targets that are more related to the manpower needs of a future middle-income Ghana than simply to the fundamental human right of our children to receive at least a basic-level of education from the society' (Ghana Government 2005: 1). Thanks to Robert Palmer for this reference.

<sup>17</sup> The Beijing Declaration was published just a month after the Millennium Summit of September 2000.

### **China's bilateralism**

But perhaps the fundamental reason why China's aid doesn't neatly fall into the discourse of poverty reduction or the MDGs is that it is based on a whole series of bilateral agreements. This bilateralism is the real text of the Director General's statement about China's foreign aid, referred to above. It is a message that is much more salient than the occasional reference to the MDGs. China's aid is precisely about the signing of bilateral agreements with so many different individual countries, and it is this language of what specifically has been delivered, built and inaugurated that is the stuff of the Director General's annual report. Here are some typical bilateral aid statements:

In 2003, China signed 206 aid agreements with 105 countries and organisations, and undertook another 45 aid complete plant projects in 35 countries...

China also undertook 43 technical cooperation projects in 30 countries and by the end of 2003, 71 China-aided complete plant projects had been in progress. 57 nations received 89 batches of general goods from China...

As well as these, the Chinese government hosted 58 training courses on government administration, management and technological application, attracting 480 participants from 107 countries. (Wang 2004: 77)

This strong bilateral approach is powerfully illustrated in President Hu Jintao's April 2006 Africa trip. The official account of each of the visits to Morocco, Nigeria and Kenya gives the exact length of the cooperation between China and each country, stressing the 'deepening bilateral traditional friendship', and commenting on the range of bilateral agreements by sector. The same is true of the June 2006 trip of Premier Wen Jiabao to no less than 7 more African countries (Egypt, Ghana, Republic of Congo, Angola, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda). Again, the premier and the Chinese news media present the intensity of the bilateral relations in language that would probably not be used by other bilateral donors;<sup>18</sup> thus, for Tanzania, the Premier stressed that the two countries have trusted, supported and cooperated with each other; that the visit will explore new areas and ways of mutually beneficial cooperation; and that it will add 'new impetus to the brother-like friendship between China and Tanzania' (*China Daily* 23.6.2006).<sup>19</sup>

This intensely bilateral approach to international relations is nowhere more obvious than on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng)).<sup>20</sup> For each of the many countries with which China has diplomatic relations, there is first the exact date on which formal relations were established (e.g. October 6<sup>th</sup> 1949 with North Korea, one of the earliest countries to have such a relationship), and an exact and detailed account of 'Bilateral Political Relations' from that time to the present. For instance, South Africa has no less than 5.5 detailed pages in small print of

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Premier Wen Jiabao in the Republic of Congo: 'Wen walked in the classroom and talked with the students cordially. He then stepped on the platform, wrote down a famous Chinese saying which means "A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near" and explained it carefully to the students.' [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wshd/t259241.htm](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wshd/t259241.htm)

<sup>19</sup> See further: [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/23/content\\_624016.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/23/content_624016.htm)

<sup>20</sup> In fact the detail given on African states is much more than on many other countries.

bilateral high level visits in both directions. This is followed by a second section which is on 'Trade Relations and Economic and Technical Cooperation', and this provides an account of the main areas of trade and also an exact statement of exports and imports. A third section details the 'Exchanges in the fields of Culture, Science and Technology' which can range from artists, to sport, traditional medicines to tourism, and from media, to citizens' groups and city exchanges. A fourth section covers 'Military Exchanges and Security' and lastly there is a listing of 'Important agreements and documents'.<sup>21</sup> This pattern is followed in greater or lesser detail for all of the countries in Africa with which China has diplomatic links, and even with one or two that have had links with Taiwan; the same is done for Asia, Latin America and elsewhere.

In his June 2006 visit to Ghana, Premier Wen Jiabao followed very much this framework as he laid out the essence of bilateral cooperation:

To this end, both sides should make efforts in the following four aspects. First, high-level exchanges and all levels of friendly contact should be kept closer to continue mutual support on major issues involving national interest of the two countries. Second, cooperation should be expanded in the areas of infrastructure, telecommunications, textile, agriculture and fishery to tap potential and conduct all forms of economic and trade cooperation. Third, exchanges and cooperation should be improved in the fields of health, culture, education and tourism. Fourth, cooperation should be reinforced in international affairs to jointly safeguard rights and interests of developing nations. ([fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wshd/t259101.htm](http://fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/wshd/t259101.htm))

The result is the presentation of a person-to-person and people-to-people form of bilateralism across a whole range of the two countries' interactions with each other, over a considerable period of time.<sup>22</sup> This pattern for thinking about bilateral cooperation in these several spheres is nowhere captured more effectively than in President Hu Jintao's speech entitled 'Work Together to Forge a New Type of China-Africa Strategic Partnership, which was delivered on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2006 to a joint session of Nigeria's National Assembly. Despite its call for a new type of relationship, President Hu's Five Point Proposal covered almost the same points that have been traditional to the form of China's bilateralism covered on the web of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is also worth remarking that the President makes no reference in this speech to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); rather the key Strategic Partnership is bilateral.

It is interesting to contrast this with the Department of International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom. For each of the countries with which DFID has aid relations there is a similar matrix to that used by China ([www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa)). First there is an Economic and Political Summary, which usually gives, at the start, a statement about the poverty status of the country, e.g. 'Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world. 80% of the

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<sup>21</sup> Surprisingly, the section on culture and education is sometimes combined with military affairs.

<sup>22</sup> The Ministry of Commerce also carries detail considerable detail of bilateral cooperation on its website, [english.mofcom.gov.cn/](http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/)

population of 77 million, lives on less than \$2 a day' or, in the case of Kenya ' Kenya is **one of the poorest countries in Africa** with more than 55% of the population living below the poverty line' (emphasis in the original).<sup>23</sup> The second section is always on the country's track record on the Millennium Development Goals, picking out particular issues. A third section is on DFID's work in the particular country. There is very little evidence of person to person contact on the DFID country profiles.

The profiles of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK do maintain something more of this bilateral personal/people-to-people dimension ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)); after a series of sections on geography, history, politics, human rights, economy, development and international relations, there is finally a section on the country's relations with the UK which documents the inward and outward movements of key individuals, but with nothing like the detail of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### **The Content of China's Bilateral Cooperation in Human Resource Development**

We have given already an indication of the intensely person-to-person, and people-to-people character of China's relations with individual Africa states. We turn now to consider something of the character of China-Africa Cooperation in Education. In respect of the subject of culture and education, it is worth noting that it is culture in its widest sense that is one of the five poles of China's engagement with other countries, not merely formal education and training. Indeed it is not entirely clear whether the different forms of China-Africa Education Cooperation all fall within the Exchanges in the fields of Culture, Science and Technology, or some take place under the heading of economic and technical cooperation. It may well be that the sheer complexity and spread of ministerial responsibility in China for what some agencies would call the aid budget make it difficult to cover all the different components in a single bilateral profile. In *China's African Policy* something of the range of potential sectoral collaboration in training is evident from the fact that there is not only the possibility of human resource development cooperation in education, but there is also science and technology cooperation, cultural exchanges, medical and health cooperation, media cooperation, administration cooperation and others, all of which have training possibilities.

Be that as it may, it is certainly intriguing that in the country profiles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, education and training which would figure very prominently in JICA or, in earlier days, in ODA<sup>24</sup> or DFID's account of its technical cooperation seem to take a second place to a range of cultural, artistic, tourism and media exchanges.<sup>25</sup> We can only speculate at the moment on the reasons for this, but in the presentation of Exchanges in the fields of Culture, Science and Technology, it is possible to illustrate a great deal of the bilateral exchange in the media, arts, culture and sport as a two-way, symmetrical activity, whereas the provision of training courses and scholarships to which we now turn is much harder to present as a form of

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<sup>23</sup> Although a similar pattern is found for example with Tanzania ('**one of the continent's poorest nations**'), there are exceptions: 'Ghana is considered an 'island of peace and stability' in the West Africa Sub-Region', [www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/ghana.asp](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/africa/ghana.asp)

<sup>24</sup> The Overseas Development Administration was the previous name for what is now DFID.

<sup>25</sup> For example, after two detailed pages of extremely detailed cultural and other exchanges for South Africa, there is a single line: 'In 2001, there were 31 South African students studying in China' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC).

mutual two-way cooperation. China looks much more like the ‘donor’ when it comes to the field of training, as opposed to one developing country cooperating on an equal basis with others.<sup>26</sup>

By contrast, the Ministry of Commerce’s *Yearbook* gives a much fuller account of human resource development cooperation through what is called, rather charmingly, ‘inviting home and going abroad’. We have analysed elsewhere the distinction that is used between courses targeted at African officials, as compared to those which are termed technical training (King 2006: 6-7). But it is clear that under this Ministry great importance is attached to working with African countries on human resource development. Even though the bulk of the training referred to is in fields of technology, administration and management, there is no indication of whether it is related to particular projects supported by China, or whether these are courses that are genuinely open to individual candidates recruited by Chinese embassies from ministries in country.

The same is true of the despatch of Chinese experts to developing countries. There is some indication that this form of technical assistance is ‘upon their request’ from developing countries, presumably with the support of the local embassies.

We have not yet done a detailed analysis of the range of courses that African trainees attend, whether in country, in the region or in China, nor have we done the same for those experts going out on a request basis to the developing world. But there is certainly a strong orientation towards economics, management and administration, as well as a whole range of technological courses being attended by African trainees. Just as English language expertise once played a very important role in ODA/DFID’s despatch of experts from the UK, the same seems to be the case with Chinese language for China. However, it is heartening to note that not everyone being sent out is on Chinese language or on what ODA used to term ‘development-related disciplines’.<sup>27</sup> The Director General of Foreign Aid’s annual report for 2003 points to the despatch of experts on bamboo weaving in Guinea, and on embroidery in Mali (Wang op. cit. 78-79).

Returning to the content of China-Africa cooperation in the field of education, it may prove useful to analyse the categories China itself uses to disaggregate its coverage of this sector. A useful source of this perception, at least from the perspective of the Ministry of Education, can be found in the volume that celebrated the Second Ministerial Conference, held in conjunction with the Forum on China-Africa Educational Cooperation (Ministry of Education 2003).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note in He Wenping (2006) the following: ‘China-Africa educational cooperation should be mutually beneficial and should involve two-way exchanges rather than just one-way forward. Comparing the number of African students studying in China, Chinese students studying in Africa is extremely low.’(p.8)

<sup>27</sup> ‘Development disciplines’ often excluded trainees studying history, culture, sociology, and even politics.

<sup>28</sup> A parallel and more detailed academic account of China-Africa Education Cooperation, following most of the same categories, is available in a volume from Lu and Luo, Peking University Press, 2005 (in Chinese).

A first thing that might be said about this celebratory volume is that it conspicuously captures a key feature of people-to-people bilateralism, in that there are photographs (or accounts of joint activities) of Chinese and of Africans on almost every page. It is reminiscent, on a much grander scale, of the book that Britain's Overseas Development Administration (ODA) prepared for the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990 (ODA 1990). There, too, British expertise could be seen in British projects with local partners on almost every page. [With the change in UK aid policy with the new Labour Government from 1997, the emphasis began to shift to DFID supporting the agreed policies of the different partner governments rather than its own projects; the first education policy paper of the new Labour government did not have single British face on view.]

An initial section of the China-Africa volume presents the role of 'high level educational exchanges'. The language is important, as we noted above, for its representation of two-way cooperation rather than a donor-recipient relation. This mutuality is very marked in the text, with an account of no less than a hundred educational delegations going to Africa and more than ninety delegations going from Africa to China. The intended spirit of mutual learning is well caught in President Hu Jintao's words: 'The different civilisations can learn from each other through communication so as to enrich and develop themselves respectively in this way' (Ministry of Education 2003: 9). In many cases, these high level delegations led to the signing of bilateral educational agreements.

A second section of the China volume focuses on 'Exchanges of Students'. The term exchanges is, again, important for its intended emphasis that China can learn from Africa, as well as the other way round. Here, as already mentioned, it is more difficult to maintain the mutuality. The text is principally about the increasing numbers of African students (1646) making up over a quarter of the scholarships provided by the Chinese government at that time.<sup>29</sup> Most of the section is about Africa-in-China, but there are a couple of important pages under the deliberately cooperative title of 'African countries training professionals for China' which give evidence of Chinese students with local scholars in South Africa, and with their advisors in Zambia. The other examples are of Chinese scholars such as Lu Ting'en, of Peking University, doing research in Africa.

A further significant dimension of China-Africa relations is a series of 'cooperative educational programmes'. These have a much more institutional development character than the individual student exchanges, though it is clear that a number of the students in China are linked to these institutional agreements. These links programmes, from between 1986 and 2003, had joined some 20 Chinese universities with almost 30 African universities in 19 African countries. At least in terms of coverage, this activity puts China firmly into the category of countries, like Sweden, Norway, Netherlands and the UK, that run significant programmes of inter-university

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<sup>29</sup> The calculation of overseas student numbers is notoriously problematic because of short and long term training, and the responsibility of different bodies for their recruitment. The MOFCOM 2005 Yearbook gives total overseas participants in China as 4355, while the Ministry of Education (2005) gives the figure of 4950 for 2001. The Second Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in December 2003 committed itself to 10,000 additional African students in 3 years, - a pledge which has apparently been fulfilled, [www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/Second/t105886.htm](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/Second/t105886.htm)

collaboration. Several of these Chinese inter-university projects have become well-known within the recipient countries, for example, in Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Kenya, and Burundi. In several of these, there is clearly a substantial element of high level equipment involved in the cooperation, for example, agricultural products processing in Felix Houphouet Boigny University in Ivory Coast, and a greenhouse vegetable laboratory in Egerton University in Kenya. And this is also likely to have been true of the collaboration between some of the more technological and vocational projects, for example Tianjin University of Technology and Education and the training of vocational educators in Ethiopia. Quite closely connected to these linkage programme have been a series of seminars and workshops, mostly organised in China, at the partner universities.

Another vital dimension of China's education cooperation with Africa is teachers. Again, there is an overlap with the tertiary education links programme, but it is also seen as a separate category. Quite a number of these teachers are involved in Chinese language teaching, and presumably will be drawn into the work of the Confucius Institutes as they expand from the first foundation in Nairobi, launched in December 2005, and partnered by the University of Nairobi.<sup>30</sup> It is important to note He Wenping's concern at the increasing difficulty of teacher recruitment, as standards of living and salaries continue to rise in China (2006: 7). It may well be that some such mechanism as Japan's Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) or Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) may be necessary if the momentum of cooperation is to be maintained, to meet the likely demand.<sup>31</sup>

A last area of significance covered by the range of modalities in the volume on *China Africa Education Cooperation* is related to the vital task of building up expertise on Africa within China itself. Just as Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the early 1960s recognised that the independence of much of Africa would create a new kind of demand for area studies expertise within the UK, and Japan likewise a little later, as its bilateral aid budget rose substantially, established institutes of development studies in some of its leading universities, so China also initiated the Institute of Asian and African Studies in 1961, and in 1963 Peking and Fudan Universities were selected for the study of socialist and capitalist countries in Africa respectively (Li Anshan 2005: 4). But with the more recent development in the intensity of China-Africa relations, a second round of research centres has been identified which are expected to work on Africa projects as well as on the analysis of educational cooperation:

China's Ministry of Education has started the process of establishing a number of Education Aid Centres for Africa and Asia with special characteristics and advantages, turning them into bases to implement projects on China-Africa cooperation in the field of education (Ministry of Education 2003: preface).

Amongst this most recent crop of centres, there is the Yunnan University Centre for Afro-Asian Studies (1999) and the African Studies Centre at Shanghai Normal

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<sup>30</sup> A further 15 Confucius Institutes are planned for the continent according to the Sino-African Education Minister Forum, 29.11.05.

<sup>31</sup> There are for example 67 JOCVs in China alone, many of them teaching Japanese (JICA 2005: 34).

University (2000); then China's first Research Centre for African Education was established in Zhejiang Normal University in 2003, followed by another first, the Education Aid Centre for Africa and Asia, at Tianjin University of Technology and Education in 2003<sup>32</sup> (Ibid. 106-117).

These centres have already been active in some of the cooperative educational programmes discussed above; and specifically in the study of education, Tianjin University has added to its brief an African Vocational Education Research Centre in April 2005, which is directly involved in analysis and technical assistance in support of skills development in Ethiopia (He Wenping 2006: 6), while Zhejiang Normal has already displayed its interest in basic education in Africa. What seems likely, if patterns elsewhere in the world are anything to go by, is that if indeed a volunteer service overseas from China is formalised,<sup>33</sup> then like the VSO, the Peace Corps (USA) and the JOCV, many returnees from volunteering would turn to the area studies institutes to systematise their practical insights through masters and higher degrees.

This summary of the modalities chosen by the Government and the Ministry of Education to illustrate its growing involvement with education cooperation in Africa has not of course happened by chance.<sup>34</sup> But, in general, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has been a key mechanism for giving weight and legitimacy to the range of cooperative endeavours in different sectors, including education. Since 2000, there have been two major fora and both of these have paid substantial attention to human resources development. There will be a third Forum in November 2006, at the heads of government level.<sup>35</sup> But there has also been a specifically Education Forum, termed the Sino-African Education Minister Forum. The first of these meetings was piggy-backed on to the UNESCO High Level Group on Education for All in November 2005 in Beijing, and obviously took advantage of African ministers attending the UNESCO meeting.

It is intriguing however to see how much wider were the agreements coming out of the China-Africa Education Minister Forum, through the Beijing Declaration,<sup>36</sup> than the Final Communiqué from the High Level Group. While naturally the High Level Group was preoccupied with basic education, the 17 Ministers at the pre-meeting of the China-Africa Education Forum emphasised the key role of information and communications technology (ICT), the need for prudent vocational education policies, the crucial role of higher education to meet economic development demands, and in a possibly critical reference to the poverty focus of many of the donors, they declared that 'The relevance of education to economic development is more significant in the

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<sup>32</sup> A close parallel in East Asia might be the Centre for the Study of International Cooperation in Education (CICE) in Hiroshima University, which started in the late 1996.

<sup>33</sup> See He Wenping (2006: 8) on the government's encouragement to volunteer in Africa.

<sup>34</sup> With China-Africa inter-university cooperation, many of the agreements go back to the early 1990s.

<sup>35</sup> There are parallels to this kind of forum both in the Francophone world and with the Commonwealth Education Ministers and Heads of Government Conferences, as well as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD).

<sup>36</sup> Not to be confused with the Beijing Declaration of 2000 which emerged from the first summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

process of pursuing economic development and eliminating poverty' (Beijing Declaration 2005).

### **The Complexity of the Donor Discourse and Challenge to China of Harmonisation**

Western donors and Japan have recognised the extent of China's involvement in Africa, not just in connection with directly profitable resources such as oil, but also in much more demanding and even high-risk infrastructural projects such as the \$1billion soft loan to repair Nigerian railways, or the reconstruction of the Benguela railway in Angola. They have also noted the range of China's agricultural and medical personnel in the continent, and the increasing number of opportunities for African professionals to acquire further training in China. In this situation, there is a strong interest by several OECD countries, including Japan and the UK, to see if China's growing engagement with Africa can be harmonised around the Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction strategies. In other words, there is an anxiety that China not undermine the progress that is thought to have been made in Africa in recent years. Doubtless something of this concern lay behind the invitation by the British Government to Ji Peiding to serve as a Commissioner on the Commission for Africa. Such an approach is also confirmed in DFID's Country assistance plan for China, where one of the priority areas for DFID's programming is 'Engagement with China on international development issues'. This includes:

- integrating a development/poverty perspective into the increasing and significant interaction between other UK government departments and China;
- informing DFID's policies at the centre and at country level to ensure that China's growing international role is harnessed for poverty reduction;
- working on a limited number of critical areas of direct relevance to the achievement of global MDG targets...(DFID 2006: 14)

Another process which DAC donors would wish to see China progressively engage with is captured in the *Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness: ownership, harmonisation, alignment, results and mutual accountability* (OECD 2005). This looks to a situation where increasingly donors and partners harmonise their aid activities in ways which cohere with 12 indicators of aid effectiveness. Much of this document synthesises the present state of the art in the long-running donor discourse about getting the partner into the driver's seat, to use to that overworked metaphor, or in the words of the *Paris Declaration*, moving 'From Donorship to Ownership' (OECD DAC 2006: 53). But of course we have said enough in this short paper to make it obvious that the Chinese don't perceive themselves as donors, nor does their language of bilateralism work with the framework of donor and partner obligations that runs right through the *Paris Declaration*. One of China's most frequently used words to describe its approach to its African initiatives is 'mutual' or 'mutually' (used almost 20 times in the 11 pages of *China's African Policy*). Their widespread use of the term 'win-win' diplomacy,<sup>37</sup> as another way of confirming the two-way benefits of cooperation is much more accessible than the pages of carefully defined indicators of 'alignment', 'harmonisation' and 'mutual accountability'.

On the very sensitive issue of conditionality, China's stance is extremely well-known. Provided a country accepts the one-China policy, 'China has been developing

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<sup>37</sup> See Bezlova (2006) on Wen Jiabao's 'Win-Win' strategy for Africa.

relations with Africa under principles of mutual benefit and non-interference in Africa's internal affairs' to quote from Premier Wen Jiabao's June 2006 trip to the Congo. The language of 'no-strings-attached financial and technical aid to the most needy in Africa', or of 'encouraging the African countries to develop their economy through trade and investment in infrastructure and social institutions, without dictating terms for political and economic reforms' contrasts powerfully and simply with the extraordinary complexity of the *Paris Declaration's* wording on conditionality:

- Draw conditions, whenever possible, from a partner's national development strategy or its annual review of progress in implementing this strategy. Other conditions would be included only when a sound justification exists and would be undertaken transparently and in close consultation with other donors and stakeholders.
- Link funding to a single framework of conditions and/or a manageable set of indicators derived from the national development strategy. This does not mean that all donors have identical conditions, but that each donor's conditions should be derived from a common streamlined framework aimed at achieving lasting results. (OECD 2005, Paragraph 16)

In respect, finally, of China's support to the UN, and its global agenda associated with the MDGs and poverty reduction, it may well be assumed by Western donors that president Hu Jintao endorsed these very items in his speech at the UN Millennium Review Summit in September 2005. It is entirely possible to deduce such an endorsement from his speech: 'The most immediate and pressing task we face now is to strengthen international cooperation on development, narrow the North-South gap and ensure the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).' But his speech can also be read as saying that the 'question of development is far from being resolved', that a fifth of the world population remains in abject poverty and that the international financial environment for developing countries needs to be reformed to give more weight to the developing world. There is also no mention in his speech of the common pattern of PRSP-centred development planning for poor countries, and there is a very strong affirmation that the roadmap to 'successful development lies in a country's independent choice of the path and mode of development suited to its national conditions'.

His speech certainly does also suggest that 'the international community should give top priority to poverty reduction in its overall effort to boost international cooperation on development'. And he was able to point to the creation of the International Poverty Reduction Centre in Beijing a few months earlier in May 2005. But his speech with its very title of 'Promote universal development to achieve common prosperity' is also very much growth-oriented, as he presents his vision for 'the world's largest developing country':

We will continue to concentrate on economic development and make higher living standards of the people the fundamental objective of development. We will pursue a development path featuring greater productivity, prosperous life and a sound eco-system and build a resources-efficient and environment-friendly society....China will engage in equal-footed cooperation with the rest

of the world to promote a situation where countries can share their successes all as winners (Hu Jintao 2005)

Doubtless this could be called poverty reduction, but it certainly sounds much more alluring.

Nothing conclusive can, of course, be deduced from a single speech that covers so many bases, but there has recently been a great deal of consistency in Beijing's presentation of its motives for being in Africa over a period of some 50 years. Beijing sees itself as an 'all-weather friend' that has stood by Africa over the long-term.<sup>38</sup> It does not see itself as exporting 'our own values and development models to Africa' (Wen 2006). This is clearly an implicit criticism of the West, the UN and the International Financial Institutions which are widely felt in Africa to have continually changed their positions and priorities on the continent. Rightly or wrongly, the West is perceived as constantly measuring Africa, and indeed the rest of the world, against standards, targets and goals which are claimed to be global, but which have too often been basically generated in the West, like the International Development Targets of the OECD DAC. China can present itself, by contrast, as not a part of the donor community that is judging whether African countries are 'on track' or 'off track' to meet the Millennium Development Goals, through such mechanisms as the Global Monitoring Reports. Even the Commission for Africa, which in so many ways looked at Africa afresh, and identified the important priority of many items like investing in infrastructure which have been downplayed by the West for years, still ended up making what many African policy makers may well regard as a value judgment: that Africa's 'weak capacity' was at the heart of its development problems.<sup>39</sup>

Compared to the West with its series of changing judgments about Africa's capacity, corruption, and governance, China's message about its win-win bilateralism could have been taken from any of the reports in the official media on either the president's or the premier's visits to Africa of April and June 2006, and is quite uncomplicated. Here is a typical example from Uganda, the last country of Wen's 7-nation tour:

Uganda welcomed the issuance of China's African Policy and expressed its appreciation of China's readiness to establish and develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchanges.  
([china.org.cn/english/2006/Jun/172647.htm](http://china.org.cn/english/2006/Jun/172647.htm))

Returning in conclusion to specifically educational issues, a similar case could be made for China's educational aid agenda being more open than has been the approach of many bilateral and multilateral agencies over the last 15 and more years. This contrast in styles was particularly evident, as we have seen, in the difference between

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<sup>38</sup> See He Wenping "'All Weather friend": the evolution of China's African policy' (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Weak capacity is a major problem in most African countries. All tiers of government are affected, and the problem is growing in urban areas, ..... 'Commission for Africa 2005: 137; or 'Tackling the huge need for capacity strengthening will have major knock-on effects for all the other areas of our report, whether by increasing security and the rule of law, reducing corruption, improving service delivery and the operating environment for business, or reducing the constraints which have limited government's ability to absorb higher levels of development assistance' Ibid: 136.

the agenda of the UNESCO High Level Group in Beijing in 2005 with its obvious focus on basic education, and just a day earlier in Beijing, the 17 African Ministers of Education agreeing with their Chinese counterparts a set of priorities that covered the whole of education, including both vocational and higher education. But this contrast could also be pursued in the range of higher education development projects with which China has been identified, and through the wide range of technical assistance training that has been on offer.

Before, therefore, reaching a judgment on aid harmonization that China is simply out of step with the West by strategically downplaying corruption and human rights abuses in Africa, for its own political and economic ends, a great deal more needs to be known than is at present about how China's aid is actually negotiated, delivered and perceived by its African partners.

### **Concluding Issues**

We have argued that China has sought to present itself as being in a distinctive kind of relationship with Africa. The character of that special relationship has changed over time, as China's own politics and economy have changed. But Nyerere's claim of more than 30 years ago that the Chinese 'have never at any point suggested that we should change any of our policies – internal or external',<sup>40</sup> may well have a resonance today as leader after leader in Africa negotiate a whole series of two-way agreements with their Chinese visitors.<sup>41</sup>

This paper has been concerned to analyse China's discourse about its way of working in Africa, and to illustrate that from the sphere of education. In a next stage, it will be vital to understand the nature of the partnership from within a particular university link, a training scheme, a research project or a resource base. Many countries have wrestled with the challenge of maintaining symmetrical partnerships when the financing is primarily on one side. Whether China's intensely bilateral form of cooperation with its search for mutuality, respect of political and cultural diversity, and its expectation that agreements should benefit both sides economically can survive a closer analysis of policy-in-practice must remain an open question for the moment.

But it is some commentary on what has been achieved thus far that no less than 44 heads of state from Africa<sup>42</sup> have already agreed to come to the next Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in November 2006 in Beijing. By that time, China's relationships with Africa will have been exposed to a good deal more intensive academic and policy scrutiny.<sup>43</sup> Doubtless, the authorities are right to be 'confident that the

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted by Sautman (2006) from Nyerere's *Freedom and Development* (1974)

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Wen Jiabao's comments in Uganda in June 2006: 'We do not seek to export our own values and development models to Africa', [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/23/content\\_623960.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/23/content_623960.htm)

<sup>42</sup> China has diplomatic relations with 47 countries in Africa.

<sup>43</sup> Amongst a series of conference taking place between June and November 2006 there are the following: Institute of Public Policy Research, 'The Role of China in Africa' 28<sup>th</sup> June, London; 'A Chinese Scramble? The politics of contemporary China-Africa relations' 12-13 July, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge; 'China in Africa: Charting the future' Royal African Society & South African Institute of International Affairs, October (TBC), Johannesburg; 'China-Africa links' 11-12 November, Centre for Transnational Relations,

summit ... will be a successful historical gathering that highlights solidarity and practical cooperation and takes China-Africa friendship and cooperation under the new circumstances to a higher level.’<sup>44</sup> But hopefully, also by that time, much more will be known about the particularity of the architecture of cooperation, its funding, implementation, and impact, which have obviously been responsible, in part, for such a ready response to the invitation to Beijing.

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