

CHINA'S AMBITIOUS TRAINING AID FOR AFRICA:¹ IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MAINLAND – AND FOR HONG KONG?²

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As part of its pledge at the great Beijing Africa Summit of 3-5 November 2006 to double the size of its assistance to African countries by 2009, and in recognition of 'the importance of education as the foundation and key to achieving sustainable social and economic development', the Chinese Government decided to:

- Help African countries set up 100 rural schools in the next three years;
- Expand the Chinese Young Volunteers Serving Africa Programme to 300 over the next 3 years;
- Increase the number of Chinese government scholarships to African students from the current 2,000 per year to 4,000 per year by 2009;
- Provide annual training for a number of educational officials as well as heads and leading teachers of universities, primary, secondary and vocational schools in Africa;
- Establish Confucius Institutes in African countries to meet their needs in the teaching of the Chinese language and encourage the teaching of African languages in relevant Chinese universities and colleges. (Beijing Action Plan, 2007-2009: 14, 17)

These are only the most education-related elements of the Action Plan, since the focus of this paper is on the education sector, but there are many other aspects of the Action Plan which have implications for training, for example, as a result of the commitments to medical aid, infrastructure development, and support to science and technology, information and much else.

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Unlike the ‘empty promises’ of most G8 nations in the year after they committed themselves to doubling aid to Africa (Sachs, 2007:15), China’s track record on delivering on its training pledges since the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was founded in 2000 has been exemplary. Thus, its commitment to training education officials above is part of a promise to train no less than 15,000 African professionals in the 3 years before the Cairo FOCAC Summit in 2009. But it has had no difficulty in training more than 10,000 Africans in short-term courses in the previous triennium (2004-6), according to its own statistics (Beijing Action Plan, 2006: 12).

In the present paper, the purpose is to explore what is known about these commitments almost 6 months after the Summit. The aim is not so much to monitor any progress on the pledges – it is much too early for that. Rather, it is to analyse how these aid promises fit into China’s wider discourse on development cooperation. For a country that is hesitant about presenting itself as a ‘donor’, these education pledges certainly sound like a list of substantial aid commitments. But China’s particular cooperation credentials are not only long-standing; they have the added legitimacy of having been laid down by Zhou Enlai during his visits to Mali and Ghana in late 1963 and early 1964.³ His eight principles of foreign aid have stood the test of time very well.

They are based, firstly, on the assumption that China is not so much a donor as a poor friend pulling on the oars with other poor friends, in the same boat. The principles insist on mutual benefit, and not on one-way alms-giving, as if to a beggar. They talk of the crucial need to respect the sovereignty of the recipient, and of the need not to attach any conditions. The assistance should not place a burden on the recipient, or make them dependent, but rather should allow the recipient rapidly to get results, build income and accumulate capital. If technical assistance is required, then there should be no special privileges for the Chinese experts; they should have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country.

In other words, how will this training aid support China’s public view of itself as a developing country helping, to the extent possible, other developing countries, through South-South cooperation? Will it be delivered in ways that are any different from the training aid of other long-term training providers like Japan, Britain or Australia? Can training aid really be a two-sided symmetrical arrangement that avoids China being the donor and Africa the recipient? The Action Plan certainly stresses the mutuality of cooperation (the commonest phrase being ‘The two sides agreed that...’), and there is

³ On the website of the Beijing Summit, there is information on each of the 48 African states with which China has diplomatic relations. For these countries there is available detail on the actual date on which China started its official relationship, as well as some basic social, economic and political information. For each of these African countries, there is mentioned the current total of their bilateral trade with China. This is very different from other donors such as the UK whose profiles of developing countries tend to stress the relative poverty of the particular state. Thus Ethiopia ‘contains one of the largest concentrations of poor people on the planet’ and ‘Kenya is one of the poorest countries in Africa, with 52% of the population living below the poverty line’. Even in China it is said that ‘almost 500 million people live on less than \$2/day.’ See DFID (www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/allcountries.asp?view=region)

plenty evidence of how their mutually beneficial cooperation will ‘advance the new type of strategic partnership between China and Africa’ (Action Plan, 2006:). This is particularly evident in the spheres of political and economic cooperation, but also in trade, business and investment cooperation, and of course in ‘energy cooperation’. But despite the plentiful use of the key word ‘mutual’, it may appear at least in the areas of science, technology and education that China will be taking the lead role of technology transfer. See the contrast between mutual cooperation and technology transfer in the following paragraph:

The two sides agreed to promote cooperation in the development, application and transfer of technologies in accordance with the principle of mutual respect, mutual learning and mutual benefit. China will continue to provide training courses of practical technologies and carry out demonstration projects of technical assistance for extending China’s scientific and technological achievements and applicable technologies in Africa. (Action Plan, 2006: 8)

We shall accordingly examine the particular challenge of China’s maintaining its distinctive approach to aid in general when it comes to the delivery of training aid. The paper will lay out some of the methodological challenges of analysing this aspect of China’s development assistance, since there may well be an opportunity to monitor in much greater detail the development of China’s role as a donor over the next two years.⁴ As far as training aid to Africa is concerned, it will involve selectively analysing how the greatly expanded commitments to African trainees are to be accommodated within dramatically expanded higher education and training environments in China. For instance, by the end of the three years of the current FOCAC commitments, in 2009, there will be more African students coming to China in one year than had come to China in the 47 years between 1949 and 1996 (Gillespie, 2001: 247-9).

As this lecture is being given in Hong Kong, in the Comparative Education Research Centre of HKU, the occasion will be taken to ask what implications there might be for Hong Kong’s higher education and training institutions from this major rise in the Mainland’s training commitments. Should not the 9 universities in Hong Kong, the 9 Institutes for Vocational Education of its Vocational Training Council, and its many other training institutions, be participating in delivering this dramatic increase in China’s international aid to Africa, despite the ‘one country, two systems’ settlement between the Mainland and Hong Kong? As the Mainland’s universities continue their rapid process of internationalisation, as a result of the strategic commitments of China’s leadership, in the last six months, not just with Africa, but with ASEAN, Japan, India, Pakistan and South Korea, are the universities and colleges of Hong Kong (and also Macau) going to be on-lookers from the side-lines?

We therefore use the topic to look at the direction of internationalisation within Hong Kong’s institutions of higher education. We also assess whether on the other aspects of

⁴ Kenneth King and Bjorn Nordtveit have applied to the Competitive Earmarked Research Grants (CERG) to examine China’s education projects in Africa, as well as aspects of its training aid, over the period August 2007-July 2009.

China's Beijing Summit commitments, for instance to volunteering and teaching in Africa, Hong Kong's students and staff will not be able to contribute. It is very evident that there is a very developed volunteering spirit within Hong Kong, but whether that spirit can be associated with the Mainland's plans for developing a volunteer corps for Africa is still very much an open question.

African students and trainees on the Mainland and in Hong Kong

African students have been coming to China, at least in the modern period, from the first few Egyptian students who came just over 50 years ago in January 1956 (He, 2006). The numbers gradually increased, though there was a setback during the early years of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. In the 1970s, there were 648, in the 1980s 2245, and in the 1990s 5569. In 2001 there were 1224 African students in China, and at the time of the Great Beijing Summit in November 2006, there were 2000. It was this last figure that Hu Jintao undertook to double to no less than 4000 a year by 2009, as we noted at the beginning of this paper.

The Chinese leadership has a sharp sense of history when it comes to the analysis of China-Africa relations; hence its celebrations in 2006 of 50 years of training aid to Africa. It must also be assumed that there is some current awareness of the weaknesses in training that were clearly associated with the first great projects in Africa, such as the TanZam Railway (Snow, 1988: 163-5). Indeed, this may be evident in the fact that over the period that China has dramatically expanded its investment in Africa, in trade, business, infrastructure and energy, it has also expanded its support to training. Since FOCAC was established in 2000, the African Human Resource Development Foundation (AHRDF) was also founded, and led directly to the support of general and vocational education and professional training, both short and long-term. (It will be fascinating in due course to research the policy origins of the AHRDF, to see if it is explicitly related to China's massive expansion of investment in the last seven and more years.)

As to whether there has been anything distinctively Chinese about the rapid increase in training aid in these years, it is too early to say. Very little research or writing has been done on the particularity of China's training aid to Africa. But it has involved university-to-university collaboration for about 10 years, and, at least in the education sector, it has led to the setting up of 'resource bases' in China for the research and promotion of vocational education, higher education, educational administration and distance education.⁵ Such university centres for research on different aspects of education, explicitly in Africa, must be unique in the history of area studies, and deserve to be watched closely. They appear to be promoting what can be learnt from China in these different sub-sectors, and there is some discussion of 'a China brand', for example in the vocational schools being built by China in Ethiopia. But this does not seem to be a straightforward transfer of technology; it also involves some kind of a solidarity relationship in which China and Africa collaborate to work out the best way of improving vocational education and training (King, 2007b: 2).

⁵ For detail on what these resource bases have already been doing, see *Proceedings of Sino-African Education Minister Forum* (2005), part 4 (In Chinese).

Over this same period, up to 2006, a total of more than 10,000 African professionals have been trained, largely in short-term courses. Again, there has been little discussion, at least in English, of the mechanisms and modalities that have been used. But it must be assumed that the Chinese embassies in Africa have worked with the respective sectoral ministries in Africa and in China. The few examples of such courses that have been noted, as part of the author's preliminary research, involve small group of 15-20 relatively high level African leaders, policy-makers and academics. And they clearly do involve a substantial exposure to what could be called relevant good practice in China. Like all such courses, they are very labour intensive for the organisers, and of course if the organisers are universities, such activities do not readily translate into research and publication. But, as we said last year (King, 2006), there remain many unanswered questions about the shape and scope of this short course modality. How much of it is project-related, and linked directly to the many infrastructure projects of the Chinese? How much is related to the priorities of sectoral ministries in Africa? Clearly a great deal of training takes place directly in Africa, in many of the different infrastructure, engineering and development sites (King 2006b: 9-10).

When it comes to the distribution of the 10,000 African professionals trained in the previous round (2004-6), or the 15,000 to be trained in the current round (2007-9), we don't yet know if this is organised through a whole series of invitations to universities and other training centres to undertake this task, or whether it is the result of competitive bidding which seems to be the case with the allocation of the degree programmes for Africa. Obviously if bodies in Hong Kong such as the Vocational Training Council and its many professional institutes were even to be considered for such work, the financing mechanism used at present would need to be clear. But what does seem to emerge from very preliminary investigation is that there is not a strong profit motive operating in the delivery of short courses, as there would be in the case of the UK over the last 25 years.

By contrast when it comes to distribution of the new African scholarship places for degrees, which are set to double over the next three years from 2,000 a year in 2006 to 4,000 a year by 2009, it would appear to be organised through competitive bidding amongst China's top universities. Many of these are part of the 211 group (the 21st century top 100 universities), but in total there seem to be about 120 universities that are eligible to bid. Not all of these are national universities; some are provincial but with good reputations. It is expected that some leading universities will get 100 as their quota, and others perhaps 20 or 30. The bodies concerned are the Chinese Embassies in Africa, the relevant African ministries and universities, the China Scholarship Council, and the Ministry of Education in Beijing.

Unlike Hong Kong universities where the non-local students receiving a studentship have to pay their fees and accommodation from their award, it would seem that the government allocates the funding for fees and accommodation directly to the university, and also an amount for a monthly living allowance. This latter ranges, reportedly, from 800 yuan for undergraduates a month, to 1000 for masters, and 1400 for doctoral students. If these figures are accurate, then they would seem to be much higher than

locally supported Chinese students would receive.⁶ What we currently do not yet know is what the total financial package for each of these African scholarship students consists of. But it is a total that it will be critical to know if any case were to be made for Hong Kong universities' participation in this dramatically expanding scheme of African scholarships.

What can be said with certainty is that the Mainland package will be a great deal less than the costs for international⁷ students pursuing degrees in Hong Kong. Here in Hong Kong, the fee for international students at undergraduate level will be HK\$80,000 in 2007-8 and will be HK\$100,000 the following year. If accommodation and living costs are added to the 80,000, the total will not be much short of 130,000, or 150,000 in a year's time. By contrast the fee for masters and doctoral students is almost half of that for the undergraduates, at HK\$42,100. In the case of HKU, there will be, for the first time from 2007-8, scholarship support (from donations) available on a competitive basis for international students at the undergraduate level, while at research post-graduate level, the University Grants Council makes studentships available which can be used on a full or partial basis with other matching funds to attract international students.

It would be useful to be able to compare what the currently differing funding regimes imply for African students in the Mainland and in Hong Kong. We have already said that the government scheme for African scholarships had produced a situation where there were apparently 2000 African students on the Mainland in 2006. It should not be thought that these are the only African students studying in China. Again, there has been little research on self-supporting African students on the Mainland, but there certainly are some, especially in the richer Eastern Provinces. For instance in one provincial university, there are no less than 30 African students, all of them fee-paying, as their parents are in business in places like the huge market-place of Yiwu, and their children go to the local university.

This single example is an interesting straw in the wind for what may be a much wider trend, of African parents deliberately selecting Chinese universities for their children for reasons of business. Their children will then be fluent in Chinese, and better able to carry on with their parents' trade or business. This may be an illustration that underlines the fact that over these last 50 years of African students coming to China, there has been a shift from a situation where in the 1960s and 1970s, China, like Russia, was probably very much the second or third choice for good students from Africa. Now, it may well be the case that China has become the preferred destination for certain categories of student. Of course, as with all universities, there will big differences by discipline; thus Peking University which probably has the largest number of international students on the Mainland, finds them in Schools or Departments of Humanities and Social Sciences, such as Departments of Chinese Language and Literature, History, Philosophy, and School of

⁶ In one provincial university monthly allowance for government-supported Chinese students was 80 yuan for undergraduates, and 250 for masters students.

⁷ The preferred term in Hong Kong for international students is 'non-local'. This covers Mainland students, students from other parts of Asia, and students from the rest of the world. In the UGC statistics, these non-local students cover both the degree students and the shorter term exchange students.

International Studies, Law, and Political Sciences. Interestingly, there are virtually no international students in Peking's Graduate School of Education.

In the Universities of Hong Kong, by contrast, despite the fact that there is an African Studies Group, and that faculty carry out research and consultancy in Africa in several different disciplines, from linguistics, to law, from education to politics, and from architecture to philosophy and history, there is a very small number of students from Africa. There are just three in HKUST, a handful in CUHK, and ten in HKU; it is not yet known if there are any African students in the others. Indeed it looks as if there may be more African students in the single provincial university we mentioned (and all 30 fee-paying) than the total number of Africans in Hong Kong's 9 universities.

What could be done about this? At the moment officials and academics in Africa applying through the local embassies for Chinese government long-term scholarships or for short-term training courses will not find the 9 universities of Hong Kong (or 6 in Macau) listed in the China Scholarship Council's (CSC) extensive listing of possible recipient universities in each of the Mainland's provinces and autonomous regions (including Tibet!). Yet, just as there appears to be a strong interest in the former Portuguese African countries in attending the universities of Macau, so it could be anticipated that African member institutions of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) would be attracted to send their students to the universities in Hong Kong.⁸ In a sense, it could be argued that many Hong Kong universities have, since 1997, lost the advantages of their membership of the global ACU with its 500 member universities,⁹ but have not yet replaced this with full membership of China's very large university constituency.

It is worth making the point that African student numbers are not the only category that is very small in Hong Kong's universities though they frequently describe themselves as global or international players. If the three categories of 'non-local' students are considered (Mainland; other Asia; and rest of the world), then the very great majority of all non-local students are from the Mainland. On the other hand, currently (in 2005/06), HKU and CUHK, for instance (according to the UGC's statistics), only have 0.6% (63) and 0.2% (18) of their entire student bodies on degree courses coming from the rest of the world, including Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and the majority of OECD countries.¹⁰ Thus, active participation in the Mainland's hugely expanded Scholarship programme could increase student numbers in Hong Kong not just from Africa but from many other parts of the world.

⁸ Interestingly, HKU is targeting several of the current or former Commonwealth countries of Asia for its international undergraduate programme, e.g. Malaysia, Singapore, India and Pakistan.

⁹ It is not widely known that HKU, CUHK and the OUHK all took out the option before 1997 of retaining their membership of the ACU. Which they still maintain, even though they cannot benefit from the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme.

¹⁰ Intriguingly, the OECD countries that don't come for degree courses are the major contributors to the short term international exchange programme which draws in some 700 students a year to HKU.

Of course, the costs (both fees and subsistence) of studying in the Mainland and in Hong Kong are, we have said, very different, and thus the package offered by the CSC to government scholarship students is certain to be lower than the standard studentship and accommodation costs related to Hong Kong's universities. But if there was a genuine desire to participate in the Mainland's dramatically expanding programme of training aid, there could be ways that the difference could be made up by Hong Kong universities' much higher levels of private donations. This source has already helped many Mainland students attend Hong Kong universities.

Any participation in the Mainland's training programme for Africa will require high level political agreement between the two systems. But the reasons for pursuing it seriously are that a whole range of additional benefits are likely to be secured, beyond the extra international students. The value-added in becoming involved in the new training aid, however, is that Mainland universities have begun to find that they are securing new government research money, and doctoral funding for their own staff and students to build their capacity on Africa, through fieldwork. In other words, the corollary of the African student presence may be the building up of development research capacity, just as happened in Japan with their development studies centres some 15 years ago. African studies centres which have been present on the Mainland from a very early period will certainly profit. Thus the Centre of African Studies in Shanghai Normal University currently has no African students, but should be able to develop its research and doctoral capacity if trends elsewhere in the Mainland are duplicated.

Internationalising teaching and volunteering – an aid contribution?

There is a further spin-off of the commitments to Africa and that looks like being a development of international volunteering, and the rapid expansion of Chinese language teaching world-wide, but including in Africa. The links between bilateral development assistance and the rise of a volunteer corps has been evident with VSO in the UK, the Peace Corps in the USA, and CUSO and JICA in Canada and Japan respectively.¹¹ In many cases, the young people exposed to the developing world through a spell of service have then gone into development agencies, NGOs and foreign affairs, or into the teaching of development studies. This may also be part of the thinking behind the launch of the Young Volunteers Serving Africa Programme at the Beijing Summit in November 2006. Here too it would be a pity if Hong Kong, with its tradition of voluntary service, including in the poorer provinces of the Mainland, could not participate in what could become a national programme of international voluntary service, going beyond Africa where it was initiated to many other regions.

The emergence of the Confucius Institutes are another window of opportunity where internationally minded young people may get their first taste of teaching in a different social and political context. Unlike Japan, whose massive bilateral aid programme had no

¹¹ Voluntary Service Overseas emerged in 1958; Canadian University Service Overseas in 1961; the Peace Corps through J.F. Kennedy also 1961; and Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers in 1965.

associated initiative for teaching Japanese world-wide,¹² the Confucius Institutes, paralleling French and British programmes,¹³ are expected to rise to some 500 institutions by 2010 from 145 today, and the number of Chinese language learners from 30 million today to 100 million in 2010.¹⁴ Here Hong Kong with its 7 million Cantonese speakers may start at a slight disadvantage over many of the other Mainland provinces, but there is plenty evidence of Hong Kong's teachers interest in service on the Mainland. It would certainly be a pity if they were not able to join the ranks of China's Mainland teachers working in fields as diverse as Kenya, Egypt, South Africa and Cameroon, not to mention Scotland, Russia, and USA (and 45 other countries).

Institutional implications of China's training aid

We have suggested that the recent emphasis on China's training aid is intimately connected to the wide range of China's bilateral development assistance, not only to 48 countries in Africa, but more generally. Without the massive investments in infrastructure, agriculture, information and energy, there might well not be a programme of training on this scale. We have noted that the training commitments are for both short and long term courses and degrees. Over the next three years, they will be responsible for the training of 15,000 professionals from the Continent, and some 10,000 to 12,000 degree students. Only Japan currently has a bilateral training programme of this magnitude (with 8,000 short-term trainees per year). Thus the two Asian giants have both demonstrated a strong commitment to the role of people in development. This marks them off from Western donors who have shrunk their training programmes and their technical assistance personnel serving overseas.¹⁵

Another distinctive feature of the two countries is the institutional spread of their aid programmes across many ministries. Neither country has a single aid ministry like Britain's DFID, or a single department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as Sweden's Sida. Instead, the responsibility for development assistance appears to be spread across ministries, even if the Ministry of Commerce in China, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan retain a key role in policy-making.

This provides quite a challenge to researching aid policy since there will be a good deal of information on China's rapidly expanding aid programme that will not be accessible through the Department for Foreign Aid of the Ministry of Commerce, or through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in Tokyo. The different dimensions of China's training aid, and its natural links to teaching and volunteering, as well as to numerous projects in the field, mean that a research strategy will need to be fashioned that can accommodate complexity.

¹² Japan's hesitation in promoting Japanese probably goes back to the role of Japanese in its own imperial project in the 1930s.

¹³ The Alliance Francaise founded in 1883 can now be found in 135 countries; the British Council founded in 1934 can be found in 109 countries.

¹⁴ See the foundation of the Confucius Institute Headquarters in Beijing on April 9th 2007 (www.china.org.cn/english/photo/206586.htm).

¹⁵ For a discussion of similarities between the two nations in their aid policies, see King, 2007a.

We have urged that Hong Kong authorities rapidly explore ways in which its leading training institutions can become involved in this exciting and ambitious programme of assistance to Africa, as well as some of its teachers and young volunteers. For the Comparative Education Research Centre that has supported some of this preliminary research on China's aid relations with Africa, it would be highly appropriate if it could develop a comparative advantage with other HK centres of expertise on China as a knowledge base on aid policy that China and other development partners could draw upon.

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