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Revisiting China's Africa policies and educational promises: Towards a global convergence of development in the post-2015 era?

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Comparing China's 2006 and 2015 Africa policies, this article reveals how China's political discourse has become more confident, practical, and depoliticised. In particular, this paper shows how education is allocated, promised, and embedded in China's 'shared' agenda, which is centred on development co-operation and mutual learning. It then reflects on the extent to which China may move towards traditional donors. This paper concludes that, despite fragmented convergences in the discourse and an increased recognition of a Chinese model, China maintains its distinctive role and position in the post-2015 era.

Keywords: China, Africa, education, aid, convergence, development

Introduction

Propelled by the initiation of economic reforms in the late 1970s, creation of a socialist market economy in the 1990s, and a 'new strategic win-win relationship' with Africa since 2000, the rise of China has influenced the orthodox model of development regionally and internationally. In the realm of international development, China is assuming the status of a 'reginal power', 'world power', and an 'emerging donor'. China has also challenged the discourse and practices of 'traditional donors', which are predominantly developed countries in Europe and North America and are mainly members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (Woods, 2008; He 2009; Welle-Strand 2010; Brautigam 2011a).

This paper reflects on China's position in post-2015 international development from an international political economic (IPE) perspective which explores the tensions and interaction between 'state' and 'market' actors (Gilpin 1987; Strange 1988) and focuses on economic globalisation and its structural effects. More specifically, the IPE perspective investigates how economic globalisation has shaped national policy and global governance, including World Bank/IMF-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the donor-recipient relationship they have created (Verger, Novelli, and Altinyelken 2018). From this perspective, there are three political economic reasons for this reflection. First, the traditional donor-recipient relationship centred around the achievements of a Rostovian 'development' and a process of developing countries 'catching up' to developed ones has not been fundamentally altered under the changing aid architectures. Second, neoliberal globalisation and its impact on international agendas and national policies does not appear to have lessened; on the contrary, it continues to occur through various forms, becoming more complex upon entering different types of society. Third, there is a limited acceptance of

'alternative' development models in the international agenda, such as the United Nation's (UN) Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, which suggested South-South co-operation as a 'complement, not a substitute, to North-South cooperation' (United Nations 2015a, 28). Although strengthened a donor status in its second foreign aid white paper (Ministry of Commerce of People's Republic of China 2014), China still stands out of the DAC, the aid of which is officially indicated in and monitored by the global targets of development initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Therefore, by looking at China's African policies and its educational promise, this paper examines whether the rise of China is conforming to the dominant trends in international development today. In doing so, this paper argues that although China uses a more 'convergent' language in regard to its targets and promises in recent policies, it has a unique position and utilises a fundamentally different logic to define 'aid' and achieve development. Education, especially tertiary educational activities for human resource development, plays a key role in China's 'shared' and 'learning together' development agenda.

This study conducts a qualitative documentary analysis (Scott 1990) on chosen policy texts openly published on the official websites of the Chinese government, 'either to understand their substantive content or to illuminate deeper meanings which may be revealed by their style and coverage' (Ritchie 2003, 35). The key documents examined are: (1) China's Africa policies published in 2006 and 2015 and (2) action plans from Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) series. This study examines both the content and discursive features of the chosen texts. Bearing in mind that content analysis 'varies with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher and the problem being studied' (Weber 1990), this study looks at broader power

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relations beyond the content, thereby transferring a critical approach to its documentary analysis. This approach is also based on the nature of the IPE perspective employed in this study, given its interest in global norms and the position of nation states in applying these norms. This theoretical perspective is associated with methods such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Blommaert 2005, 21). Therefore, at the content level, this study examines the changing policy structures, principles, co-operation areas, and educational targets in the chosen texts. At the discourse level, it borrows CDA technique which views language 'as a form of social practice and focuses on the ways social and political domination is reproduced by text and talk' (Fairclough 1995), paying particular attention to style, position, and historical context of the discourse.

Policy 1 to 2: Moving from a declaration to an action plan

In December 2015, the Chinese government released its second Africa Policy and its sixth three-year Action Plan on China-Africa Co-operation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China [FMPRC] 2015a). With the exception of some media discussion, there has been little systematic analysis of China's transition from its 2006 policy (FMPRC 2006) (hereinafter, Policy 1), which was released over a decade ago, to its 2015 policy (hereinafter, Policy 2). Where Policy 1 declared 'what China plans to do' at the beginning of twenty-first century, Policy 2 describes 'what China has done and will do' in the post-2015 era. Moreover, in comparison to Policy 1, Policy 2 is longer and more detailed. Table 1 provides a comparison of the two policies based on three dimensions: events (internal and external context), discourse, and content.

[Table 1 near here]

Table 1 shows that both policies were released at turning points in domestic and global politics. Policy 1 was released at a time when international aid was being

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questioned and after the transition from the Washington to Post-Washington Consensus as a result of the major criticisms of World Bank/IMF's reform (Robertson et al. 2007). The radical economic 'recommendations' based on the top-down Washington Consensus were gradually replaced by those of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which represented a more participatory and bottom-up model of development (Robertson et al. 2007). The UN's eight MDGs provided potential space for 'a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty' (United Nations, n.d.). Although not new to Africa, China was an 'emerging donor' that provided aid differently to 'traditional donors'. As such, China's active engagement with African countries and its declared desire for a 'strategic win-win relationship' with the continent aroused significant concern in the international community (Alden 2005, 2007; Owen and Melville 2005; King 2006; Zafar 2007). This became more remarkable after the 2006 Beijing Summit, when the Chinese government invited 48 African leaders to Beijing for the third FOCAC and officially adopted 'win-win' as its Africa strategy (FOCAC 2006a).

Countries across the developing world, particularly in Africa, failed to reach the poverty reduction targets set by the MDGs (Lomazzi Borisch and Laaser 2014; UN, 2015b). Meanwhile, China held FOCAC every three years since 2000, the forums becoming increasingly influential in international society (King 2006; Naidu 2007; Cooke 2009; Taylor 2006, 2010). Held in 2006, the third FOCAC 'conformed to a major Chinese policy statement on Africa in the form of a white paper'—that is, Policy 1. Suggesting 'a wide menu of possible future Sino-African initiatives', it was founded 'on an encouraging and optimistic forecast for Africa, thus providing a positive framework for Sino-African interaction' (Shelton and Paruk 2008, 111). Two-year Action Plans have been released after every forum. These Action Plans have consistently promised different types of Chinese aid and co-operation in multiple

African regions. This includes, for instance, the rapidly growing number of government university scholarships granted to African students. While this has received significant interest, including positive feedback from African recipients (Dong and Chapman, 2008; Nordtveit, 2011; Yuan 2013, 2014), it has also been subject to criticisms, for example, findings on how the positive perception can only represent Africa's elitists (Sautman and Yan 2009). Following the release of the SDGs in 2015, the Chinese government announced its second Africa policy, through which it sought to establish 'multi-faceted exchanges and cooperation' and a 'comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership' with Africa.

Further indications of China's shifting development policies can be obtained at the textual level, although some text remains the same in both policies. In Policy 2, 'co-operative' terms are repeatedly used and words such as 'co-operation', 'mutual', 'shared', and 'friendly/friendship' are used frequently. One of the key features of the discourse is the use of the term 'aid': neither policy uses this term very often. Indeed, the term was used only twice in Policy 2 and once in Policy 1. In contrast, the word 'co-operation' appeared 161 times in Policy 2 and 78 times in Policy 1. When inferring the meaning of 'aid', the policies use the term 'assistance' rather than 'aid'. The term 'aid' is typically defined as 'money, food, etc. that is sent to help countries in difficult situations (such as economic aid)' (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary n.d., 32), while 'assistance' is defined more generally as 'help or support' (79). For instance, there are 'aid agencies' but no 'assistance agencies'. It could be argued that China consciously chose to use 'assistance' to ensure that the relationship between the helper and the helped is loosely constructed. However, within an aid relationship, there is a clear and systematic donor-recipient hierarchy with targets, measurements, and techniques attached. In fact, aid and assistance are the same word in Chinese language:

'*Yuan Zhu*' (援助). The character '*yuan*' (援) means 'to pull with the hand', 'rescue' or 'save', 'promote', or 'hold', while '*zhu*' (助) means to 'help' or 'assist'. The character '*yuan*' (援) is contains the character for 'hand' (on the left), while '*zhu*' (助) contains the character for 'strength, effort' (on its right). Thus, the translation of '*yuanzhu*', which does not contain any connotation of the Western concept of 'foreign aid', seems closer to the English term 'assistance'. This indicates China's intent to distinguish its conception of the term 'aid' from that of the West: China's African policy is not an 'aid' policy. The relationship reflected in the text is one based on mutual benefit and co-operation.

In terms of the content, Policy 2 (approximately 8,700 words) is much longer than Policy 1 (approximately 3,300 words). The content regarding China-Africa co-operation was increased from four areas in Policy 1 to seven in Policy 2 (Table 1). Moreover, 'development co-operation' and 'people-to-people exchanges' became new key terms. Policy 2 is much more detailed and elaborate, as Wekesa (2015) notes, 'it begins to lose a strict policy feel as it draws on and incorporates elements of the FOCAC Declaration and Action Plan'. For instance, in the areas of education and human resource co-operation (Policy 2, Part III, 4.3), Policy 2 provides details on tertiary and vocational education co-operation, including the specific programmes like the 'African talent programs', '20+20 Co-operation plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education', and 'China-Africa Think Tanks 10+10 Partnership Plan' (Policy 2, Part III, 4.3, 5.4).

Both Policy 1 and 2 contain a section on the general principles and values of the China-Africa relationship (Part 3 of Policy 1 and Part 2 of Policy 2). Policy 1 contains a brief declaration of the general principles—such as 'mutual benefit' and 'common development'—and places an emphasis on the 'one China principle'. It is worth noting

that Policy 2 introduced a value system entitled '*Yi Li Guan*' (义利观) (Policy 2, Part II) comprising a four-word principal: 'sincerity' (*zhen*, 真), 'practical results' (*shi*, 实), 'affinity' (*qin*, 亲), and 'good faith' (*cheng*, 诚). Confucian philosophy explains '*yi*' as justice, the moral principle of social activities and human relationships. '*Li*' denotes the utilitarian side of human activities related to interests and benefits (Li 2015).

Confucianism argues that the balance of moral principles and utilitarian pursuits is critical to society, although the value of justice should be prioritised over the seeking of benefits (Jia 2016). This is clearly reflected in Policy 2: 'While valuing friendship and justice as well as shared interests, China places more importance on the former'. This is consistent with China's preference for the term 'assistance' over 'aid', as the former may express a more humanitarian and moral meaning. Moreover, the official English version of Policy 2 translates '*Yi Li Guan*' into 'friendship, justice and shared interest', not simply 'justice' and interest'. These principles are highlighted in Sino-Africa relations, which are based on a fraternal relation and oriented towards common pursuits (Yuan 2011; King 2013; Niu 2013; Cheng and Taylor 2017). Further textual evidence includes the frequency of the terms 'share/shared/sharing' in Policy 2. 'Shared interest' seems closely connected with shared experience, shared development tasks, and a shared future. All mentions of the word 'sharing', which appear 11 times in Policy 2, are related to 'experience sharing', 'knowledge sharing', or 'intelligence sharing'. This sets a distinctive foundation for the role of education, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Two principles are particularly noteworthy within this value system: the principle of 'practical results' ('*Shi*'), which aims to achieve efficient results and focuses on 'real actions and results'; and 'affinity' ('*Qin*'), which emphasises 'harmony', 'mutual understanding', and 'people-to-people' connections. While Policy 1

constitutes a typical declaration written in a diplomatic tone (government to government), Policy 2 is a more practical document that attempts to demonstrate how China will implement its diplomatic principles, especially in relation to the African public. This value foundation emphasises a sharing process based on mutual needs. As King (2013, 149) has discussed, in contrast to other traditional donors, such as Japan and Korea, China cannot provide a prescription for 'successful experience' because it has yet to be successful. However, China has described its 'shared parallel challenges' with Africa.

Policy 2 lays out a results-based value system targeting specific exchanges and co-operation with Africa in various areas. Indeed, the value section of Policy 2 notes that, 'it will strengthen coordination and cooperation with other countries as well as international and regional organizations based on the "Africa-proposed, Africa-agreed and Africa-led" principle and with an active, open and inclusive attitude' (Policy 2, Part II). This reminds us of the term 'donor logic' (Steiner-Khamsi 2008; Yuan 2014). Steiner-Khamsi (2008) indicates how the logic of some lenders may seem 'illogical' to recipients. Similarly, Cammack (2007) has suggested that recipient governments should be driven by the needs and desires of their people, not donors. Interestingly, this description matches some key words in China's policy, including: 'two sides', 'mutual', and 'people'. This co-operation/exchange-oriented donor logic is deeply underscored in Policy 2.

With less rhetoric, Policy 2 focuses more on the implementation of China's promises. Policy 1 emphasises the 'role' and 'position' of China through terms such as 'rejuvenation' and 'emancipation', which do not appear in Policy 2. In contrast, Policy 2 reports China's successes over the past decade and presents an action plan for its aspirations in accordance with the more detailed FOCAC pledges.

Two points emerge based on these features. First, Policy 2 has a more determined and confident discourse. On the one hand, the policy highlights the role of China in the current global political economy: 'the world's second largest economy' and 'an active player in the current international system that has helped build it and contributed to it'. This was not emphasised in Policy 1. On another hand, compared with Policy 1, which describes the close 'relationship' between China and Africa, Policy 2 provides a clearer argument regarding the need to sustain such a relationship and a plan for how to do so in the future. Meanwhile, Policy 2 underscores the common pursuit of development to realise both the 'Chinese dream' and 'African dream', thus creating a 'shared future' (the Chinese version describes this more vividly as a 'community of common destiny'). Therefore, this confidence is not just about China's strategy in Africa, but the extent to which China-Africa co-operation will contribute to the development of both.

Second, China plays the role of the 'actor' rather than 'declarer' in Policy 2. The policy provides more details on co-operation plans, particularly 'economic and trade co-operation', 'development co-operation', and 'cultural and people-to-people co-operation'. In contrast, Policy 1 did not have a section on 'development co-operation'. Moreover, Policy 2 made far more promises regarding 'development'. These promises are more technical, practical, and achievable than those only briefly outlined in Policy 1. China's aid program has been criticised for a lack of transparency, technical framework, and professional agencies (Grimm et al. 2011; Yuan 2011; cited by King, 2013, 151; Carter 2017). Arguably, Policy 2 represents a more 'professional' attempt to create an effective policy, one with reduced political and ideological rhetoric. Although it has yet to follow the example of Western donors in terms of aid delivery and

evaluation, China has switched to a more action-based approach to demonstrate its strengthened commitment to international development since Policy 1.

Education: A key player in 'development co-operation'

Arguably, Policy 2 is a new 'version' of Policy 1. Indeed, the Chinese government did not make any fundamental changes to its principles, especially in terms of the two-way assistance relationship. Rather, it adjusted its policy style by improving the practicalities, while making it more detailed and strategic. While traditional donors focus on monitoring practices, these policy developments reflect China's emphasis on two-way knowledge and experience exchange within its practices, which are based on shared history, as well as a 'shared progress' and 'shared future' between parties. This has been reinforced in both Policy 1 and 2. Indeed, Policy 1 outlines the following priorities:

> […] 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, strengthen exchange and cooperation in education, science, culture and health. Supporting African countries' efforts to enhance capacity building, China will work together with Africa in the exploration of the road of sustainable development. (Policy 1, Part III)

This principle is also embedded in China's political non-interference position as outlined in Policy 2, which stresses that China is sharing in the development process rather than intervening in or prescribing it:

> [China] stands ready to exchange governance experience with African countries on the basis of equality and voluntarism, and promote mutual understanding and acceptance of and learning from each other's political system and development

path. China has always sincerely supported Africa's development. (Policy 2, Part II)

The statement above was included under 'Sincerity', which underscores mutual trust and support and is part of Policy 2's *Yi Li Guan* value system (Table 1). As such, this two-way experience sharing process is strengthened in a more formal way and linked to other three principles, such as 'practical results'. Education is becoming more meaningful in this context of 'mutual learning' (Niu and Liu 2016, 281). This is unique in two respects. First, this differs from allocating 'education' under Education for All (EFA) or SDGs in the current 'deterritorialisation of the education policy process' (Verger 2014, 14). Second, this differs from a focus on formal or primary education (e.g. Universal Primary Education); rather, it includes a broad range of educational activities and education at different levels.

Although such studies remain limited, researchers have examined the history, approaches, modalities, philosophy, and mechanisms of China's educational aid/co-operation, revealing similar findings concerning its distinctive characteristics (Li 2006; Li 2007; Hui 2007; He 2007; King 2007, 2010; Nordveit 2010; Niu 2009, 2013; Yuan 2011, 2014, 2015; Niu and Liu 2016). Analysing the discourse on 'education' in China's Africa policy, this section verifies some extant notions regarding how Chinese educational promises cannot be examined in the same way as the education targets of international agendas.

In Policy 2, 'Education' and educational actions are detailed in a section entitled 'Development co-operation', and embedded in promises regarding human resource development (HRD), poverty alleviation experience sharing, science and technology co-operation, and so on (Policy 2, Part III, 4). Development co-operation is not listed in the four areas of co-operation in Policy 1 (Table 1). However in Policy 2, it constitutes a

separate section parallel to co-operation in political, economics/trade, and cultural areas, which may indicate a depoliticised conceptualisation of 'development'. This seems slightly different from China's image in pursuing educational initiatives for friendship and win-win relations (Nordveit 2010). Based on its non-conditional declaration, it has even less of a cultural and political mission. (However, arguably, it is difficult to treat these factors separately in terms of their actual effects and mechanisms). As stated at the beginning of the 'Development co-operation' section:

> China's assistance will be primarily used in the areas of human resources development, infrastructure, medical care and health […] with the aim to help African countries alleviate poverty, improve people's livelihoods and build up capacity for independent development. (Policy 2, Part III, 4.1)

Knowledge, skills, and experience sharing are highlighted in this section. Defined as a key factor in HRD, education inevitably plays a key role here. This greatly exceeds formal education. Despite being specifically stated in the sub-section on 'cooperation in education and HRD', educational activities like experience exchange activities conducted by 'academic institutions' and 'joint research centres' in science and technology also appear in the other sub-sections.

It is worth noting that the Chinese government did not place 'education' under 'Cultural and people-to-people exchanges' in Policy 2. Further details regarding the changing 'locations' of education in FOCAC action plans are observed in Table 2.

[Table 2 near here]

The 2006 FOCAC plan emphasised education as a contributor to 'social development', reflecting a development view based on economic growth and 'people', while focusing on the need to 'put people first' in development processes (World Bank 2018). The 2012 plan also frequently mentions education, particularly 'Human resource

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development' and 'Science and technology co-operation and knowledge sharing', both of which are subsections of 'Co-operation in the field of development' (similarly located in Policy 2). The promises outlined in both subsections were to be achieved through various actions in higher education, such as co-operation and agreements between research centres. Both the 2015 and most recent 2018 Action Plans include education in 'Social development co-operation' (FMPRC 2015, 2018).

This may be interpreted as follows. First, education does not only contribute to economic development, but also seems to be the key justification of development because of its contributions to 'people'. According to the 2015 FOCAC declaration, the exchange of education is aimed at 'deepening the understanding and friendship between the peoples of China and Africa' (FOCAC 2015b, Item 25.3). Second, to further distinguish between 'educational co-operation' and pure cultural activities that may focus on expressing political and ideological values, current policies (from 2015) have re-allocated 'education' to 'social development co-operation' once again. This may indicate that education has a more neutral position within China's current development policy, highlighting the connections between education, people, society, and development in a more internationally acceptable way.

However, China does not only follow the 'social development' defined by international institutions, which promotes social inclusion by improving participatory levels in society (UNESCO 2018). Indeed, there is little in China's promises to evidence an address of social inequalities, inclusion, or how education can contribute to these issues. While the 2015 plan mentions 'persons with disabilities' and 'gender equality' in its people-to-people promise (FOCAC Action Plan, 2015, Items 5.4.6 and 5.4.8), the discourse generally places greater emphasis on 'independent and sustainable development' (i.e. how people can use their own methods and capacities to develop

their countries) rather than 'social inclusion' (i.e. including all people in development). This is also evident in China's growing focus on human resource training in education co-operation (Li and April 2013).

In terms of the educational co-operation approaches stated in the policies, there is a growing emphasis on tertiary education and vocational training. This includes an increasing number of Chinese government scholarships and the provision of training in the form of seminars and workshops, with 50,000 scholarships and 50,000 training opportunities promised in the 2018 Beijing Action Plan (2019–2021) (FMPRC 2018). This also involves enhanced university co-operation through '20+20 Co-operation Plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education', which links 'twenty universities or colleges in Africa with counterparts in China', including top ranked Chinese and African universities (King 2014; Yuan 2015).

China is not the first country to strengthen the role of higher education in public diplomacy as a means of boosting its soft power. Indeed, the US did this a long time ago. A practice reflected by the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who asserted, 'I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here' (Nye 2005, 13). However, the knowledge transformation coming from China contains a markedly Chinese 'experience', which seems to be the most attractive part of its educational partnership (Brautigam 2011b). Unlike prescriptive recommendations such as the Washington Consensus (Williamson 2004) and the successful experiences of developed countries, Chinese experience contains both successful and failed lessons. In the background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015 Reilly (2015: 6) quoted a Chinese expert that, 'China is not really promoting its own approach, but naturally Chinese experts and officials prioritise programs and issues which they think will be useful for developing countries.'

The Chinese way of 'boosting productivity and the associated emphasis on rapid and large investments in human and physical capital', as Diop (2015) has argued, is attractive to both Africa itself and international institutions such as the World Bank, which has been systematically working on African development for decades. African leaders are keen to learn from China on how to organise the trade policy, to 'move from low to middle income status', to educate their children in 'skills and areas that pay off in just a couple years' and compare these to Western economic practices (Sautman and Yan 2007, 80). According to Obiorah (2007, 38),

> For many among Africa's ruled who are physically and intellectually exhausted by two decades of economic 'reform' supposedly adopted by African governments but driven by Western governments, donors and the IFIs [International Financial Institutions], China represents hope that another world is possible in which bread comes before the freedom to vote.

Similarly, Makundi et al. (2017) revealed that the trainees in their sample were largely positive about their Chinese training experiences in terms of performance and overall quality, and that a large proportion of participants 'favoured the Chinese training over the Western options'. Interestingly, some of the key words used by participants in regard to their Chinese training—such as 'relevant', 'practical', and 'modern'—match China's values and principles as stated in Policy 2.

As another step forward in China's focus on higher education, Policy 2 and the latest FOCAC have pledged the country's desire to be more professional in its provision of educational development. This is consistent with the general tone of Policy 2. The first indication of this 'professionalism' was China's promise to improve both the *quantity* (which has been achieved according to China's 2014 Foreign Aid white paper) and *quality* of education, especially concerning training programmes. Further evidence is evident in both the 2009 Action Plan, which 'pay[s] special attention to raising the

quality of such training', and 2012 Action Plan, which 'take[s] measures to improve the content and quality of the training programs'.

The second indication is the involvement of an increasing number of renowned universities, as noted earlier. Yuan (2013) has demonstrated that some African students who studied in China on Chinese government scholarships in the twenty-first century experienced several problems, including assessment, the language barrier, and cultural integration. Recent policies and action plans appear to respond to these 'quality' issues. Moreover, academic co-operation and development studies among higher education institutions and think tanks have been greatly enhanced under recent policy framework (FOCAC 2012, 2015). Meanwhile, the promise of improved quality remains rather vague in comparison to the clear improvements in quantity. Educational co-operation is still regarded as pragmatism rather than professionalism (Niu and Liu 2016). Similarly, Luedi's recent article (2018) reveals issues such as the managing of English-speaking classes and lax standard of African students, noting that 'utility trumps quality'. As such, solid evidence and the perceptions of current African students in China are required to verify whether the promise of improve quality has been achieved.

Moreover, China has its own allocation regarding basic education and higher education, and this is related to how the official documents define 'aid' and 'co-operation'. The Chinese government appears to classify basic education assistance— such as school donations and construction—as 'aid', while university scholarships and vocational training constitute 'co-operation'. China's 2014 Foreign Aid white paper clearly demonstrates that the country's educational aid includes the 'construction and maintenance of primary and secondary schools'. However, while still mentioned and promised in earlier action plans, recent FOCAC plans (2012, 2015, 2018) do not highlight China's contributions at the basic education level. Indeed, the word 'school'

does not even appear in the 2006 or 2015 Africa Policies. It seems that 'donation' is excluded from a co-operation-oriented policy. This shows that China is clarifying its relationship with Africa (noting that the 2014 white paper is about aid rather than 'Sino-Africa' relations) and where to focus on education in its co-operation with Africa.

Arguably, it is not the allocation of education in social development discourse that is distinctive, but the rationale of embedding education and training as an essential aspect of two-way but independent development. Moreover, it is not China's approach of providing 'education' that is distinctive, but the 'experience' shared through educational activities. Not simply an area of co-operation in China's Africa policy, education is embedded in many places in China's experience sharing agenda. According to Xu (2007, 1), these education promises are 'practical, interactive, independent, systematic and integrated'. Current policies are clearly focused on tertiary education and training: while there is little indication of how to co-operate towards the goal of EFA, there is about how many professionals will be trained in the future. This is in line with Policy 2's vision of learning together and experience sharing. However, in an effort to improve its professionalism, China's promises have concentrated on the practical details, including: the allocation of 'education' under 'development' rather than economic/cultural/political co-operation plans, and linking education to terms such as 'poverty reduction' and 'capacity building', which rarely appeared in Policy 1. This may be regarded as converging towards the traditional donor group, which has a clearer 'technocratic framework' of aid (Kothari 2005, 443). The next section summarises some key points of such a 'convergence'.

China's position: Towards a global convergence?

This section examines to what extent China's current position may move towards a

global convergence. It is far more difficult to examine and compare the actual practice without empirical evidence and large-scale evaluation; however, it is possible to examine whether there is a convergent tendency between China and traditional donors from the analysis of China's policies above.

Political science defines the concept of convergence as 'the tendency of societies to grow more alike, to develop similarities in structures, processes and performances' (Kerr 1983, 3). Convergence is also related to influence, competition, and intervention. In terms of the global political economy, convergence is not always a two-way process of 'becoming alike', usually by moving towards one another. Rather, it is typically a one-way process of 'catching up' with 'norms' and 'best practice'. This is increasingly related to the assumption that reginal and global convergence will occur as a result of the force of single market logic, which has influenced 'a number of policy areas and political processes' (Bennett 1991). In education studies, convergence is frequently mentioned in discussions of policy borrowing and transfer. The IPE perspective examines such convergence among societies as various types of influence rather than simple borrowing and learning. Such studies regard it is a process of transmitting 'particular views of education and educational reform, basically instrumental and market oriented, to national contexts' (Verger, Novelli, and Altinyelken 2018, 14). However, within this transmission, the key players—such as the international organisations—'express divergent and even rivalling education agendas' like the knowledge economy and EFA (Verger, Novelli, and Altinyelken 2018). Therefore, while this paper views traditional donors as one group due to their shared view of Western modernisation as both a 'theory and prescription' of development (Dale 1982; Robertson et al. 2007), there are still divergences among these donors.

Moreover, this paper does not to advance any global convergence or that globalisation can produce convergence. On the contrary, it agrees that 'globalisation is not a homogeneous process' (Dale 1999). It is also critical of the standardisation and hierarchies within certain policy convergences. This paper accepts the transformationalists' view of 'uncertainties', which allow us think about the possibilities of the new roles, models, and relationships produced by globalisation and their effects on the current 'norms' (Held et al. 1999). As Giddens has noted, the outcome of globalisation is 'not necessarily, or even usually, a generalised set of changes acting in a uniform direction, but consists in mutually opposed tendencies' (cited by Held et al. 1999, 44; Berry et al. 2014, 388).

This raises the question of whether there any possibility or evidence indicating that China, as an 'emerging donor', and traditional donors are 'becoming alike'. In considering the possibilities of 'becoming alike', Nordtveit's (2009) study has concluded that China and the Western growth-based development and education paradigm are getting similar since China's economic opening up from 1980s. Peerenboom (2014, 651) questions whether there is a global convergence on a new development model for developing countries—that is, a 'post-Washington, Post-Beijing Consensus'. He argues that the China model of economic growth may need to be adjusted due to its focus on state-led investment, while the Western model is moving in a less radical economic direction in the post-Washington Consensus era. Peerenboom (2014, 670) concludes that: 'there is growing support for a middle way, between the invisible hand of the neoliberal WC and the too heavy hand of the government in China and other East Asian developmental state'. Although the picture is remains very vague, Peerenboom does consider some 'middle way' requiring two or more powers moving towards each other.

Similarly, King (2013, 165) has questioned the 'distinctiveness, but the beginning of convergence'. Highlighting China's distinctive status in common development, King (2013) discusses China's co-operative agenda in Africa with developed countries such as the UK and Japan; tripartite collaboration, such as the UNESCO-China-Africa university leaders meeting; as well as China's opening-up to other agencies. Nonetheless, he concludes, 'in terms of whether China's approach towards aid has begun to converge more with those of traditional DAC donors, there is little in what we have reviewed […] that would indicate a significant change' (King 2003, 171).

Examining the changes between Policy 1 and Policy 2 and the educational discourse of FOCAC promises reveals some 'fragmented' signs of a so-called convergence, including the changing tone (de-politicisation) of China's Africa policies and its action-based policy discourse. These signs indicate that China may be moving towards a more 'Western' manner of policy delivery and practice planning. More specifically, there is a growing discourse of 'development' in Chinese policy, including: adding a section on 'development co-operation', looking at 'all-round development', placing education in the 'social development' category, as well as encouraging knowledge exchange on development at various levels and via different approaches. Development is not only a process or target but a key word and a central agenda in China's current policies. As an essential part of a 'learning together' development policy centred on economic growth, education has been relocated and reprioritised: on par with culture and health in Policy 1, education is an indispensable part of 'development co-operation' in Policy 2. This allocation has also been emphasised in the recent FOCAC plans.

Moreover, the aim of China's development policy has become 'poverty reduction'. This was mentioned for the first time in Policy 2, where it appeared 15 times. Policy 2 also highlights that China's contribution to poverty reduction is 'sharing and popularizing the [Chinese] experience in poverty alleviation', as well as supporting 'African countries in enhancing their capability of *independent* poverty alleviation and development' (Policy 2, 4.4). It is worth noting that, although having added features of post-Washington Consensus agenda to its new policy, China uses the word 'independent' in front of 'poverty alleviation' and 'development' in most cases.

I argue that the aforementioned features represent China's harmonised position in international development rather than a clear convergence. These features did not change the nature of China's distinctiveness, which is partly rooted in its unique history. China as a developing country that is still a recipient, has never colonised other countries and was never colonised; and has never been attached to Western theories of modernity, instead findings its own route to modernisation following the founding of the People's Republic of China. Although not defined as colonisation, the foreign intervention and imperialism by both western powers and Japan have deeply influenced the discourse on 'independent' development in China's foreign policy. These historical experiences have 'created [China's] determination to achieve parity with foreign powers (Moutford 2017). Principles such 'mutual benefit' and 'help recipient countries develop independence and self-reliance' were formally announced as early as in 1964, during Premier Zhou's tour in Ghana and Mali (Chin and Frolic 2007, 4). The contemporary experience as a recipient country 'influenced their thinking about how countries can use aid and development finance for mutual benefit' (Brautigam 2011b, 16) and also helped China learn the importance of HRD from Japan's ODA (Niu and Liu 2016).

While China may show some similarity to the patterns or approaches of the West in terms of its aid discourse and practice, it does not show a similar position in terms of influencing or persuading others in the process of national and global development. Dale (1999) identifies different types of 'external effects' on national policies including imposition, harmonisation, dissemination, and standardisation. From the policy texts, it is difficult to see China exerting any of these influences because it does not engage in educational policy implementation in African countries (e.g. nothing similar to PISA or Bologna Process). In other words, China currently sees development in a more systematic and strategic way, but may not develop a model—Chinese or Western—as a prescription for international development (Liu 2008). This is clearly evident in the aforementioned value system, which is a combination of China's contemporary and traditional philosophies. This 'non-modelling' stance is clearer in China's position paper on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (FMPRC 2015b). While this position paper did not deny any principle of the MDGs or SDGs and highlighted China as 'the first developing country to achieve the poverty eradication goal ahead of the MDGs deadline', it declared the need for 'diversity' and 'justice' in international development and called for a 'fair, inclusive, and sustainable set of shared development aspirations'. As this paper notes,

> [China respects] diversity in development models. It is important to recognize the different national realities and the level of development among countries and support their choice of development strategies, models, and paths most suited to their respective conditions [and] adhere to the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities". Countries need to make development their common objective, and — based on their capabilities—achieve their own development and participate in global development cooperation in their own ways. (FMPRC 2015b)

China's educational promises and practices have been consistent with the aforementioned position. Although seeking to achieve poverty reduction, China has its own focus on tertiary and vocational training, as well as key areas of knowledge, skills, and personnel for development rather than promising Education for All or Universal Primary Education to African countries (Niu and Liu 2016).

It may be also necessary to consider the other direction—that is, whether the West is moving towards China. Despite studies that demonstrate interests on what lessons the West can learn from China's engagement in Africa (Brautigam 2011b), there is little policy evidence showing the traditional donors are addressing or borrowing any Chinese approach or model in their international agendas. However, Brautigam (2011b: 16) did make a strong conclusion and even a warning on the need of a 'better understanding' of China and countries like China in Africa, and a re-consideration on their policy about China:

> [O]nce we have that understanding, we may be better positioned to accept the recommendations of thoughtful African officials like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala [(2006)]: "China should be left alone to forge its unique partnership with African countries and the West must simply learn to compete."

King (2013: 171) has noted evidence of 'traditional partners moving towards China', quoting some ideas from a symposium report by the Oxford University China-Africa Network in 2012, recognising that 'China's approach to economic growth and development assistance is currently impacting development thinking and practice of traditional Western donors'. As King published before the release of SDGs and China's second Africa Policy (2015), signs from the SDGs may be explored to extend King's argument. MDGs have had a strong 'donor' tone regarding aid and aid monitoring. Goal 8 (United Nations 2000) on 'global partnership for development' mainly focused on

ODA countries' responsibilities rather than on defining and constructing a partnership between the global North and South. Based on MDGs, SDGs have developed certain considerations regarding global partnerships. As King (2017) notes regarding SDGs:

> [T]he word 'international' appears no less than 20 times in the text of the 19 goals […] The spirit of internationalism runs throughout the SDG agreement, even if the whole process is based on an assumption of national implementation.

More specifically, in Target 4 of the goal to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', 4B and 4C targeted scholarships and teacher training for developing countries, making particular mention of 'international co-operation' in teacher training in developing countries. It also aimed to 'substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries' (United Nations 2018). However, the indicator for 4B, stated in 4B.1 as 'volume of official development assistance [ODA] flows for scholarships by sector and type of study', still looks at the traditional donors' contribution only (United Nations 2018). However, China's engagement and its dedication to increasing the number of training programmes and university scholarships have actually responded well to this target. As such, SDGs may show an increasing encouragement on a two-way collaboration rather than one-way prescription. However, while 'co-operation' is easy in theory, the actual calculation for the evaluation, balance of power, distribution of resources, and the division of responsibilities may be the real challenges given the difficulty of altering the existing donor-recipient hierarchy.

Conclusion

This paper concludes by highlighting two main points. First, China is trying to consolidate its position and be more active through an updated version of policy

discourse that represents both the (a) current international agenda on development and poverty reduction; and (b) its own understanding on the foundation of international development—that is, the 'shared' past, present ,and future. This brings a wide range of educational activities to an essential place in order to achieve development through 'learning from one another'. While there are some indications that the SDGs are encouraging international co-operation, details of co-operation remain vague. It is difficult to find clear evidence in the policy discourse to show that both the North and South (e.g. DAC donors and China) are moving towards each other in terms of their actions. Second, China has a special position on education. However, while devoting increasing effort to educational aid and co-operation, it is not shaping education policies globally. Instead, China's focus is on self-enhancement and exchanging its 'indigenous solution' to economic development via education (Li 2008, 34).

Neither the Washington Consensus, which promotes a globalised neoliberalism, nor the Beijing consensus (Ramo 2004), which is based on a pragmatic and flexible 'Chinese socialist economy', are globally accepted today. If convergence is defined as agreement on one specific model of development, then there remains no convergence in this matter. However, it can be concluded that, using a convergent approach and technique, China brings its experience and logic of development to the current international agenda at a time when the country's distinctiveness is becoming increasingly recognised. Therefore, if there is an aspect of mutual influence in terms of convergence (i.e. not moving towards a middle point, but influencing one another in a more in-depth way), China may produce new insights regarding what convergence means in and to context of international development context and how to pursue it.

As Robertson (2018) concludes, global transformation is not creating effects like a 'steamroller'. On the contrary, 'it is the complex reworking, re/bordering and

re/ordering of education spaces to include a range of scales of action' (Robertson 2018, 52). Traditional aid and the power imbalance that it creates between donor and recipient countries has been rooted in the developing world since the end of the Second World War to the Post-Washington Consensus. As such, it will not be easy to accommodate China's influence, especially when China is only sharing experience while still exploring solutions to development. It is important to be recognise that every nation state can historicise and position itself in a unique way whilst connecting itself to others based on such diversity. Therefore, a convergent model may not be as essential as a convergent attitude towards incorporating diverse voices and solutions in the realm of international development.

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Table 1: A Comparison of China's 2006 and 2015 African Policies

		China's 2006 Africa Policy	China's 2015 Africa Policy
Events		3rd FOCAC (Beijing Summit)	6th FOCAC (Johannesburg summit)
		Global: from WC to post-WC, PRSPs, MDGs	Global: from MDGs to SDGs, 'new circumstances'
Discourse	Text	• Frequently using 'co-operation', 'mutual', 'shared', 'friendly'/'friendship' • Using term 'assistance' rather than 'aid'	
		3300+ words 'peace/peaceful' ('Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'), 'present to the world…', 'role', 'position'	8700+ words 'further clarify...and expound the new vision…', 'multi-faceted exchanges and co-operation', 'comprehensive', 'capacity building'
	Style	Declaration (more rhetoric)	Report, action plan

Content	Principles	• Sincerity • Friendship and equality mutual benefit • Reciprocity and common prosperity • Mutual support and close coordination • Learning from one another and seeking common development	• Value of 'friendship, justice and shared interest' • Principles of sincerity • Practical results, affinity, and good faith (*zhen*, *shi*, *qin*, *cheng*: 真，实，亲，诚)
	Co-operation areas	Four areas: (1) Political field (2) Economic field (3) Education/science/culture/health/social aspects (4) Peace and security	Seven areas: (1) Political (mutual trust) (2) International affairs (3) Economics and trade (4) Development co-operation (including education) (5) Cultural and people-to-people exchanges (6) Peace and security

			(7) Consular services, immigration, judicial, and police areas.

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2006; 2015a)

Table 2. Allocations of 'Education' in China's FOCAC action plans

FOCAC Action Plans	Allocation of 'Education'	Emphasis of role
2006	Co-operation in social development	Development and people
2009	Co-operation in the field of development	Economic development
2012	Culture and people-to-people exchange and co-operation	Culture and people
2015	Social development co-operation	Development and people
2018	Social development co-operation	Development and people

(FOCAC 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2018)