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Monographic Section

China soft power and cultural diplomacy. The educational engagement in Africa

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Abstract. The concept of soft power has recently become more integrated in China's diplomatic strategy and foreign policy: this work discusses the "Soft Power with Chinese characteristics" and is polarized on the application in African countries. The realm of higher education represents the focus of China's most systematically planned soft power policy and cultural diplomacy; this is evident in Africa where Beijing has committed to the development of human resources. The paper aims to examine the China's use of the soft power and cultural diplomacy and, specifically, the investment in education and human resource development in Africa. It discusses the main aspects of China's education aid ranging from: (1) Confucius Institutes (C.I.), which are providing language and culture-related training in host countries; (2) longer term scholarships and short-term training (3) school construction and stand-alone education projects and, more in general, the development of capacity building for the structural transformation C.I. appears similar to other cultural institutes then, in order to better understand the importance of this soft power instrument, the inter-related dimensions of a network communication approach have been examined. China claims partnership is at the heart of its higher education cooperation with Africa and, if this seems most obvious in the Confucius Institute, several of other modalities rely upon a Chinese partner to deliver staffing, local or overseas training, and/or administration. From this point of view, based on bilateral consultations and dialogs on equal footing, the China-Africa educational exchange and cooperation seems to satisfy the demands of Africa in educational development.

Keywords: China, soft power, cultural diplomacy, education, human resources.

INTRODUCTION

Using soft power has progressively become very important in order to improve Beijing's international interests. China's utilization of hard power only is insufficient if it wishes to be an active player on the international stage. Country has employed various tools of soft power's sources including

Chinese culture, language, arts, aids, trades and investments to promote its influences abroad. China's interest in using soft power comes from its demanding national interests; these include trying to secure a peaceful environment for its economic growth, to accommodate for its increasing energy needs, and to minimize the influence of other powers, particularly the United States.

Since the end of the Cold War, the expanding of relations between China and Africa seems to be the most important dynamic in the foreign policy of the continent. The implications of Beijing's renewed engagement with Africa is a process of deep significance such as has been shown by the unprecedented interest among the media, academic quarters, governments and international organizations as well ; it has had just one previous episode when the Premier Zhou Enlai promoted an African political meeting in 1963-64. The strategic partnership with Africa appears as very powerful in terms of prosperity through 'win-win' cooperation, nevertheless, many people; see it as a threat more than a cooperation looking forward mutual benefits.

China's investment aims at establish and accelerate infrastructure for African culture and innovation: according to the China Investment Global Tracker¹ investments and contracts in sub-Saharan Africa have reached an amount of \$299 billion from 2005 to 2018, and in 2018, during the FOCAC² meeting in 2018, Chinese president Xi Jinping vowed to invest a further \$60 billion into African nations. If the continent can successfully navigate the issues raised by Chinese neo-colonial ambitions such as the fear of "debt trap" diplomacy, with \$130 billion in loans from China to African nations since 2000, they will be able to ascend from this trajectory into global power

In addition to the economic interests, there are also some important issues behind China's investment in African nations. From the political point of view, it aims at discouraging them from recognizing Taiwan as an independent country (Brautigam, 2009; Eisenman & Kurlantzick, 2006; Lengauer, 2011; Lum et al., 2009). China is known for not requiring any political conditions to its aid except for the accepting the One-China policy. Therefore, it does not aid countries recognizing Taiwan as a sovereign state (Brautigam, 2009; Lengauer, 2011). Then, in a strategically perspective, China also use foreign assistance to be supported within the international organization; since Africa has a large voting part within the United Nations if that countries vote with China it will make more easy to achieve foreign policy goals.

China's investments in African nations run along two lines: investment in visible infrastructure and investment in education (Ding, 2008; Provost & Harris, 2013; Thompson, 2005; Tingting, 2014; Yang, 2015) and scholarships for university study in China have also been an important component assistance in the projection of China's soft power. Similarly, Confucius Institute (CI) is also often referred to as China's soft power investment in African countries (Bodomo, 2009; Ding, 2008; Kragelund, 2008; Lengauer, 2011; Liang, 2012; Nye, 2012a, 2012b).

SOFT POWER, DIPLOMACY AND THE CULTURAL ATTRACTION

The nature of power changes over the times and, the real unprecedented challenge would have been to manage the transition to a new geopolitics based on global interdependence, while the vision of a multipolar world would progressively establish itself. According to Joseph Nye in his famous book entitled *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990), the managing of Soft Power assures that others want the desired results, coopting people rather than force them. In other words, it is a valuable tool for managing international and political relations without resorting coercive measures, rather using intangible tools such as ideology, culture and institutions; it is, in short, the power that is obtained through cultural attractiveness and ideological fascination and the possibilities; it offers to pilot relations between states through inculturation attempts capable of affecting the

¹ CGIT is the only comprehensive public data set covering China's global investment. <https://www.aci.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>

² FOCAC , Forum on Africa and China cooperation, (中非合作论坛, Zhōng fēi hézuò lùntán) . it is a think tank to discuss investments in Africa on the basis of equal consultation with the involved African countries. <https://www.focac.org/eng/>

socio-political systems of other countries (Li Lin & Leng Hongtao, 2017). And, if regimes use force to impose themselves on the world, democratic countries should use this instrument as a key method in the management of political affairs; soft power not only has the ability to persuade and guide, but it also holds the power of cultural fascination and attractive becoming an indispensable component for the affirmation of a country in the period of globalization. Then, the soft power policies are mainly based on three resources: culture, political values and the content of foreign policies as well. Culture, as a superstructure, plays an important role in the contact countries. (Nye, 2005) Therefore, it represents the foundation of soft power but also its most powerful penetration tool; if a culture aims at running attraction, it must be advanced and keeps up with social progress.

The value system propagated by a country influences its foreign policy and, in summary, relations with other states; so, it happens that a power can be more or less seductive according to its political ideals, which represent the reflection of a nation in the world and a subject of international recognition. Western countries are bearers of the ideals of liberal democracy and, although the system has undeniable flaws, it represents a model for many countries in the world to aspire to.

Another concept closely related to the Soft Power is Cultural diplomacy: it is the set of activities undertaken directly or in collaboration with the diplomatic authorities of a state, aimed at promoting foreign policy through the promotion of cultural exchanges. It is an important part of contemporary diplomacy, which includes the promotion and diffusion of the national language of the sending state into the receiving state, supporting and maintaining contacts with expatriate communities and promoting the political and cultural values of the sending country. However, the overall structure and intensity of diplomatic and cultural activities may vary, depending on the state and its foreign policy priorities and ambitions. (Nisbett, 2016).

“Cultural diplomacy” it is a relatively new expression but a very ancient tool to manage international relations. Normally, the meaning of the word “diplomacy” has been limited to the relations between governments, but in the past fifty years diplomacy is supposed to expand its target group to include public organizations and, to some extent, even media, private companies that are commercially interesting and civil society in the host country (Bound et al. 2007). According to the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy,³ the final goal is to promote peace and stability through relationships; in this way C.D begins an important alternative to international relations based on strength. Then, these kinds of activities carried out by appointed institutions which intend to promote the cultural features of the country and, the response of local authorities, the media and the number of visitors during the initiatives, also points out the failure or success of a policy. Finally, the objectives of peace and stability could be considered the very ambitious goals of Cultural Diplomacy: after all, the role of diplomacy has always been to preserve and to keep the peace. Academic research has constantly been concerned with making distinctions between cultural diplomacy and soft power as they are both, closely associated with cultural relations, public diplomacy, cultural imperialism and propaganda (Rawnsley, 2017).

There is certainly a profound intertwining of cultural diplomacy, cultural relations, soft power and public diplomacy; however, this intertwining seems to be more pertinent to the processes than to the objectives. Ultimately, it can be said that if the soft power of a country aims at standing out, the goal of cultural diplomacy is reaching out; nevertheless, the boundary separating the two concept is a fine line and, sometimes, the fields could fit each other.

During his keynote speech at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. President Hu Jintao for the first time stressed the need to enhance Chinese culture as the country’s “soft power” (软实力, Ruǎn shíli) to keep its unity: «We must enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people’s basic cultural rights and interests». He also has proposed some highlights in order to affirm Chinese culture as an unfailing driving force for the nation and, among these «... to vigorously develop the cultural industry, launch major projects to lead the industry as a whole, speed up the development of cultural industry bases and clusters of cultural industries with regional features, nurture key enterprises and strategic investors, create a thriving cultural market and enhance the industry’s international competitiveness» and «... to step up the development».

³ <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en>

SOFT POWER WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Discussions about soft power really took off in China in the mid-2000s. As the issue moved beyond academic explorations of Nye's theory and Chinese theorists expanded the original conceptual framework to formulate soft power with Chinese characteristics, it captured the attention not only of China's leadership but also of the public.⁴

The topic is currently hot as, the theory seems to resonate with some traditional Chinese concepts; for most Chinese scholars first translated and discussed Nye's theory the main concept that power flowed from the perceived success of institutions shaped by virtues, fits well with the Confucian ideal of leadership by moral elites (德治天下, dé zhì tiānxià). Hence, the soft power theory helped Chinese intellectuals who were trying to grasp what China could do to increase its cultural attractiveness. First of all, the idea of soft power can arguably be traced back to Mencius, who said that «right causes gain support, while unright causes do not» (得道多助, 失道寡助, dédào duō zhù, shīdào guǎ zhù). Then, Chinese strategists, Daoist thought and Confucian thinkers all recognize that power can be derived through benevolence (仁, Ren), righteousness (義, Yi), propriety (禮, Li), wisdom (智, Zhi) and trust (信, Xin) that are the five Confucian principles of good governance such as a right society.⁵

So, Chinese scholars remark that soft power ideas are deeply embedded in Chinese theory and praxis and the notion of realizing goals through attraction can be traced thousands of years back in Chinese philosophy (Chou, 2014; Huang & Ding, 2006; Ding, 2008).

This ethical justification is very important for the policy makers and, more in general, for the Chinese thought as it always tries to renew the ancient pivotal teachings by linking the past to the present.

Nevertheless, two main schools have emerged around which the discourse on China's soft power is centered. The mainstream view, held by China's leading sociologists and philosophers, is that the core of soft power is culture, echoing the opinion first expressed by Wang Huning.⁶

Since the introduction to China in the 1990s, the "soft power" concept was closely linked to "culture", which could possibly explain the distinctive importance that "cultural factors" enjoy in the Chinese discourse: so cultural soft power tackles the challenges of modernization by placing emphasis on cultural safety and national image construction through exemplarity.

However, it is not difficult to understand this idea if we consider that in Chinese tradition, culture has always been and, strongly remains, the main pillar of a civilized society. The 12th five-year plan for 2011-15, approved at the National People's Congress session on March 14, includes a massive expansion of the media, publishing, movie, animation, television series and performance sectors for export. According to the Ministry of Finance the government planned to invest 171 billion yuan in 2015 with the aim to improve culture, sports and media sectors as, they retain, the world needs to know about Chinese culture, a development which will help boost the country's attractiveness, and capacity to use 'soft power' to increase its influence on the global stage. (SCMP, 2011). Culture plays a role in constructing national psychology, forming national character, forming national tradition, and shaping national spirit.

⁴ The focus on the importance of soft power liven up a major debate both inside and outside of academia. e.g.: A popular CCTV series *The rise of great nations* (大国崛起 Da guo jueqi), reportedly commissioned by China's leadership, ran in 2006. The series was greatly acclaimed, introduced various new features also in terms of visual presentation, and immediately attracted a huge audience. More: Gotelind Mueller, "Documentary, World History, and National Power in the PRC- Global Rise in Chinese Eyes", Taylor&Francis 2013.

⁵ The five most important ideal ethics. Generally, they interpret the basic moral standards of being human beings. Ren, referring to kind and generosity, teaches people to be caring, thoughtful and selfless. Yi tells us that when others are in troubles, we should help them out of the problems, so we should have the ability to distinguish the right and wrong. Being polite and respectful is li. Zhi explains wise person, who deliberate and understand daily life. Xin is belief, trust and innocence. More: Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online.s.v. *Chinese Philosophy: Confucianism*, by Donald M. Borchert, http://resource.library.utoronto.ca/a-z/more_info.cfm?id=441936

⁶ Known as «the Chinese Kissinger», Professor Wang is the theorist who has most influenced leadership in Beijing over the past 30 years, from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao. He is said to be one of the architects of Xi's "Chinese dream".

The minority view, held by some international relations experts, does not deny the importance of culture but focuses instead on how soft-power resources are used concluding that political and economic power are at the core of soft power: more broadly, it is fair to say that China's soft power heavily relies on its economic influence. The only common denominator for all Chinese intellectuals remains a demand for a concept of soft power with Chinese characteristics, insisting on the importance to distinguish the soft power theory originating from the "American discourse", such as to enhance a Chinese soft power by developing a theory taking in account the local traditions and needs. (Zhao, Li & Cai, 2011).

The culture school has had the greatest impact on policymaking: China's leadership has embraced the central role of culture in the exercise of soft power and the concept of "soft power" has been redefined as "cultural soft power" in the Chinese context. It strives to foster the exchange of views and ideas, promote knowledge of other cultures, and build bridges between communities. Ultimately, it seeks to promote a positive vision of cultural diversity, highlighting it as a source of innovation, dialogue and peace. However, it would be a mistake to believe that building a positive image based on strong cultural identity is only important in international relations; the fundamental reason why the Chinese nation has strong cohesion and centripetal force is the sense of self-identification of cultural psychology and the sense of cultural belonging beyond the region.

Cultural security represents a matter of national security. The survival and development of a country are inseparable from the nourishment of culture and, especially when dealing with the relationship between countries, cultural interests must be considered; then, in this way, it becomes a powerful attractor in the international arena and, in the world, it projects an image of strong identity without showing muscles. Concluding, we can say that China's interest in using soft power comes from its demanding national interests; these include trying to assure a peaceful environment for the economic growth, to adapt for its increasing energy needs, and to stem the influence of other powers.

Then, with the aim to promote own culture, a set of tools, including the Chinese language as well as traditional and popular cultures are widely implemented as charming instruments to wield and project China's soft power. Cultural diplomacy is also viewed as an effective way to promote an understanding of China's ideals, support Chinese economic goals and enhance Chinese national security in subtle, wide-ranging, and sustainable ways. However, when observed from a narrower cultural perspective, it is hard to separate China's strategies of attraction from its economic power: few countries have the financial resources to be able to open cultural centers across the globe, to promote exchange towards mutual understanding and, more in general to invest so much funds in the field of culture. Currently, China has more than 500 Confucius Institutes and classes around the world; although some have been closed following concerns of meddling with academic freedom on university campuses, most developing countries welcome them, especially considering that, they teach an increasingly useful language, while also offering scholarships to study in China.

MEASURING CHINESE SOFT POWER

Culture, ideology and institutions are not measurable in the same way military and economic resources are.

Therefore, while the soft power concept currently widely accepted and used, understanding its practical application remains difficult. Evaluation and measurement may be hard due to the number of influencing factors also because soft power efforts can bring results only in a long distance time. However, a number of international ratings evolved during the past several years (e.g. Soft Power 30); at the same time, such rankings have several weaknesses if we discuss about China. First, they represent the western point of view focused on the parameters important for western policymakers overlooking important characteristics for non-western cultures. (Chang & Nagy, 2016). They also may be subjective due to financial reasons. Besides that, while some of the ratings aim to evaluate resources or assets of nations' soft power, other focus on results like influence or reputation. Evaluation of instruments used to enhance a country's soft power and their effectiveness is important and, in many cases, even significant resources of soft power do not guarantee strong positions in this context. Comparing certain countries'

positions in different ratings helps to understand a country's standing in terms of soft power, identify strong sides and analyze whether a state's soft power potential transforms into the desired outcomes. For example, attractiveness can be assessed through the various tools of analysis and by quantitative method used to investigate the results of specific initiative, (e.g. an increase in cultural tourism). Nevertheless, if we expect evaluations to be able to offer accurate data in an area of such high complexity then we are expecting too much. However, the rich tradition of evaluation studies in the fields of public policy, combined with studies coming from different disciplines and new digital tools should provide an excellent basis for insights into policy outcomes. (Singh & MacDonald, 2018).

Most of China's appeal resides in its successful story, especially in the eyes of developing countries. Moreover, in forty years of reforms, over 850 million people have been brought beyond the poverty line (World Bank, 2019) and this data has a lot of importance in the international image;

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is an obvious example of China's soft power. It made clear that Beijing government has been able to provide assistance in various forms because of its economic capabilities.

Even in this case, reactions have been mixed and, however, is too early evaluating the world response. Also taking in account the growing, strong tension strategy implemented by U.S, it can be argued that countries benefiting from China's assistance will not forget the deed. In order to fight coronavirus pandemic in Africa, tens of thousands of test kits and protective suits have been delivered across continent in the last months. In the same time, on June 17, 2020. Xi Jinping chairs the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity against COVID-19 delivering an important keynote speech in order to improve further cooperation. Particularly, Beijing's commitment is not only to continue in supporting continent' response to pandemic emergency, but also to cancel the debt of relevant African countries in the form of interest-free government loans that are due to mature, by the end of 2020, within the FOCAC framework (Xinhua,2020).

THE CHINESE SOFT POWER IN AFRICA

Chinese policy makers have emphasized the peaceful nature of China's rise by offering free aid and infrastructural development to developing nations, respecting the sovereignty of others, opposition to superpower hegemony, advocacy of level playing field in interstate relations and focus on multiculturalism.

China is taking good steps for its projection of cultural power and influence beyond its borders. It is found that the movement of intense cultural and intellectual engagement between multiple actors inside and outside the country is to make others understand what China is and what the world really means to China: «Harmony is most precious» (和为贵, Hé wéi guì), Beijing insists.⁷ It lays stress on international cooperation while addressing the issue. Nevertheless, following its phenomenal economic growth over the past few decades, most of China's appeal resides in this successful story, especially in the eyes of developing countries and it is undeniable that the China has been able to provide assistance in various forms because of its economic capabilities

Beijing's political cultural charming action in Africa has made China a major player on the continent and, the source of the success in China's African policy is sometimes seen in China's political and economic attractiveness. On the other side, China has done many efforts in order to build a positive image targeted to the audience in Africa, especially to promote a win-win (双赢, shuāngyíng) approach aiming to reach mutual economic benefits from cooperation. However, soft power is about dynamic relationships between an agent and the subject of attraction. Hence, the general growth of Chinese soft power and its success depends on not only whether China can show at the best own image to African countries, but also whether African countries are willing to get this. What motivates increased relations between China and African countries are the interests in natural resources, nevertheless the assumption of Chinese neocolonialism could be a mistake. Relations between the countries are very far from to be two polarized positions and, I suggest that reality is somewhere in the middle, with the potential for deeper mutually beneficial relationships coexisting with some level of exploitation.

⁷ Harmony serves an important role in promoting the goals of Confucio (551–479 BC) social and political philosophy,

CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES

The connection between teaching Chinese as a foreign language and the role of China on the international stage has grown in importance since 2004 when the Confucius Institutes (孔子学院, Kǒngzǐ Xuéyuàn) programme was launched and, the first one was established in Nairobi in 2005. Funded by the Chinese government these institutes are targeted to offer Chinese language and cultural programming to the public. For the African countries, the initiative seems to be a good chance in order to enhance their university degrees and to increase the job market. Usually, the rise of the Confucius Institutes over the last years has been seen as a form of cultural diplomacy, such as the British Council, Goethe Institute or Alliance Française initiatives around the world. Nevertheless, there are important differences between these programs and the Confucius Institutes; In Africa, China's insistence the spread of Confucius Institutes is not demand-driven, rather an object of a particular FOCAC target. This means that the foreign party takes the precedence whilst the Chinese party plays the role of providing assistance. In other words, unlike other training modalities, China does not have a target for Confucius Institutes expansion in Africa. According to the Chinese Language Council by June 2019, China has established 53 Confucius Institutes and 41 Confucius Classrooms in 44 African countries, making them important platforms for African students to learn Chinese language. The first Confucius Institute was established at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, in December 2005, has enrolled more than 15,000 students over the past 14 years (Hanban, 2019). One of the main differences that distinguish the Confucius Institutes from the other foreign cultural and language institutions is the approach: they are not located on the main streets of the world's national and regional capitals, but rather in the heart of their major universities. In Africa they have been established in the University of Nairobi, Rhodes University, the University of Cairo and a further thirty African sites. As their principal focus is the promotion of Mandarin and Chinese culture, C.I. are public bodies affiliated with the Ministry of Education such as their parent body, Hanban, the Chinese Language Council and Confucius Institute Headquarters.

The initiative may be classified as a form of soft power, or cultural diplomacy, but those terms seem to be restrictive as they are they are responding to a widespread vocational interest, evident in many countries, in acquiring Chinese linguistic and cultural expertise instead of creating the demand. Nevertheless, this demand also represents a visible effect of the Chinese presence in the enterprises, industries and business affairs and their appreciation of workers with Chinese language skills. (Nordtveit, 2006). The main educational function of the C.I. is the promotion of Mandarin and Chinese culture also in order to work towards a better image of China around the world. Institutes offer short and long-term programs in Chinese, international Chinese language examinations, and Chinese culture courses and many extracurricular activities such as film screenings, art exhibitions or sports and they occasionally consult firms and individuals interested in China. All this is supposed to make Chinese a global language and to encourage trade and investment between the Chinese and the host economy

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

One area of cooperation that has seen a dramatic increase since the previous FOCAC is China's investments in human capital and professional training and Beijing announced higher targets for government-sponsored training opportunities for Africans in China.

Since the mid-1990s, China has been supporting the capacity building for the developing countries expanding training programs for officials. This also has been done thanks to a wide range of investments in longer and short term Another concept closely related to the Soft Power is scholarship: for example, from 2010 to 2012, China has trained a 27,318 officials and technical personnel from 54 countries and regions in Africa in the fields of public management, energy, health, social security, and manufacturing (Omoruyi et al., 2018). During the Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Beijing launched *African Talents Program* to train 30,000 African professionals in various sectors (Eisenman & Heginbotham, 2018)

In 2006 at the third FOCAC meeting Beijing launched the training support for 15.000 African professionals in China such as their respective countries: including short and long term courses it also involved educational professionals from all levels, The 2009 FOCAC meeting again increased investments aiming to reach up to 30.000 African professionals from various sectors (FOCAC 2006, FOCAC 2009, King 2007b). One example are the training sessions of the International Poverty Reduction Center ⁸ focusing on China's poverty reduction experiences for civil servants of developing countries.

No doubts that Beijing has been extremely proactive in the efforts to improve the education in Africa. China has made it a key pillar of its engagement and, thousands of African students are going to China supported by affordable tuition and generous scholarships.

Differently from traditional aid, China has focused efforts on scholarships for higher education, TVET, training program and language education rather than basic education related aiming at EFA (Education for All) or the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) goals.

Another difference between China aids and others donors in education is that they are not based on the direct financial investment but appear as products and services, nevertheless they are also oriented to a win-win cooperation and reciprocity approach.

Finally, the education assistance seems to be closely related to the general aid framework for social and economic development of beneficiaries than for education itself. (King, 2010).

According to the Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS), in 2014 the country has become the second most popular destination for African students studying abroad, after France Most of those heading to Chinese universities hail from Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Morocco, Eritrea and Cameroon.

At the FOCAC 2018's Xi announced the goal of training 1,000 Africans, hosting 50,000 workshops (in areas as diverse as party politics, sports medicine, agriculture, etc.), awarding 50,000 government scholarships, a big increase from 30,000 in 2015, and sponsoring 2,000 student exchanges (Xinhua, 2018)

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

By school construction, Beijing aimed to look towards EFA Agenda and the MDGs.

Since 2007 to 2009, Chinese government has built 207 rural schools in Africa (Niu, 2014a). According to The White Paper on China's Foreign Aid 2014 that outlines China's official aid policies, principles and practices, China has committed its pledge with building 150 primary and secondary schools in Africa

While in the preface the document notes China's position as a developing country, the White Paper states that the country's foreign aid represents part of its efforts to fulfil its international responsibilities, and in particular: «from 2010 to 2012, China continuously intensified its efforts of foreign assistance in education by way of constructing and maintaining school buildings, providing teaching facilities, training teachers, offering more government scholarships for foreign students to study in China, and assisting with the development of vocational and technical education, for the purpose of helping other developing countries improve their educational level and support their balanced and equitable development in education». (Information Office of the State Council, China, 2014).

In a first phase China's completes and delivers projects based on the request from beneficiaries; China leads surveys and provides feedback relating to the plans submitted by beneficiary. Then, after construction has been completed, the African partner is in charge for the school management. (Yuan, 2011). This kind of aid represents an approach in order to reach mutual benefits, on the other side, prevents corruption, and funds waste. Finally, the approach contributes to make more visible the educational cooperation and the donor country as well.

Besides primary schools, China also built schools for both, vocational training and higher education. They helped Ethiopia to build the EthioChina Polytechnic College (ECPC) between 2005 and 2007. China also has

⁸ IPRCC - founded by the government in cooperation with UNDP <http://www.iprcc.org> (中国国际扶贫中心, Zhōngguó guójì fúpín zhōngxīn)

been responsible for the construction of a new Fendell campus of the University of Liberia, a Science and Technology University for Malawi which was just opened to students in 2013 (King, 2013).

CONCLUSION

A country's soft power is heavily dependent upon its global image and international prestige. In the case of China, the central government has developed top-down strategies for enhancing soft power, which in conjunction with public diplomacy, are designed to cultivate a positive international image of the country but, the intangibility of soft power qualities, make it difficult to measure in terms of efficacy.

It is not easy to draw a complete political and economic framework of Chinese educational investments in Africa, however should be taken into account that China's support for Africa has a long history and cannot be included just in the narrow concepts of cultural diplomacy and soft power. China is engaged in a special South-South cooperation where education and the higher level of education plays a significant role in boosting the sustainability of China-Africa relations.

Universities as platforms are connecting vocational training, formal higher education, academic research and think tanks from the two sides together, transferring China's development lesson to Africa. Overall, these various cooperation programs seem to be a signal a determination to take the relationship between China and Africa beyond the purely commercial level. Beijing has an Africa aid program since the 1950s when Egypt was the first African recipient of aid from China, in 1956. Every country in Africa, with the exception of Swaziland, has been a beneficiary of Chinese aids. Chad, Burkina Faso, and The Gambia, have switched their foreign policy recognizing Beijing instead of Chinese Taipei (Brautigam 2008, p. 12-13). Much of the world considers Beijing an imperialist threat and its politics in Africa a form of neo-colonialism; nevertheless, despite to the country rising Beijing still supports and promotes the *Eight Principles for China's Aid to Foreign Countries* stated by Zhou Enlai in 1964 :

1. The Chinese Government always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries. It never regards such aid as a kind of unilateral alms but as something mutual.
2. In providing aid to other countries, the Chinese Government strictly respects the sovereignty of the recipient countries, and never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges.
3. China provides economic aid in the form of interest-free or low-interest loans and extends the time limit for repayment when necessary to lighten the burden of the recipient countries as far as possible.
4. In providing aid to other countries, the purpose of the Chinese Government is not to make the recipient countries dependent on China but to help them embark systematically on the road of self-reliance and independent economic development.
5. The Chinese Government tries its best to help the recipient countries build projects, which require less investment while yielding quicker results, so that the recipient governments may increase their income, and accumulate capital.
6. The Chinese Government provides the best-quality equipment and material of its own manufacture at international market prices. If the equipment and material provided by the Chinese Government are not up to the agreed specifications and quality, the Chinese Government undertakes to replace them.
7. In providing any technical assistance, the Chinese Government will see to it that the personnel of the recipient country fully master such technique.

8. The experts dispatched by China to help in construction in the recipient countries will have the same standard of living as the experts of the recipient country. The Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands or enjoy any special amenities. (Zhou Enlai, 1964)

That core concepts are largely reclaimed in the *China's African Policy White Paper* of 2006 that has enhanced and consolidated China's strategic vision for in Sino Africa relations.

1. Sincerity, friendship and equality. *China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, respects African countries' independent choice of the road of development and supports African countries' efforts to grow stronger through unity.*
2. Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity. *China supports African countries' endeavor for economic development and nation building, carries out cooperation in various forms in the economic and social development, and promotes common prosperity of China and Africa.*
3. Mutual support and close coordination. *China will strengthen cooperation with Africa in the United Nations and other multilateral systems by supporting each other's just demand and reasonable propositions and continue to appeal to the international community to give more attention to questions concerning peace and development in Africa.*
4. 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 exchanges and cooperation in education, science, culture and health.* (Information Office of the State Council, 2006)

China's policy objectives makes clear that the main goal in increasing cooperation with Africa is rooted in a "win-win" approach enhancing Chinese investment opportunities and, in the same time, brings economic opportunity to Africans without interfering in the internal affairs. Of course, this kind of approach is extensively adopted in the education: for example, learning Chinese language should be perceived just a tool to improve business and economic relationship between with China and Africa more than a form of enculturation. In the same time, the vocational training initiative represents a tool focused on the improvement of the local capacity building than an exploitation of labour force. Moreover, cooperative connection in education have been developed under the FOCAC leading and based on shared benefits and interests; such educational cooperation would help Africa nations to break away from globally marginalization and promote education as well as inclusive and sustainable development.

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