

NEW IDEAS AND NEW PATHS OF CHINA-AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION COOPERATION IN THE NEW ERA

“TAKE THE ‘20+20 COOPERATION PLAN FOR CHINESE AND AFRICAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION’ AS AN EXAMPLE”

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Abstract:

Education is recognized as a key driver in promoting the integration of civilizations and cultural innovation. Therefore, China and Africa need to strengthen and optimize bilateral cooperation on higher education for mutual understanding, reshaping the educational ideas and exploring new paths in practice amid the changes of times. Higher education institutions from both sides ought to change their ideas, reconsider and evaluate the significance and value of cooperation with each other, focus on the practical problems in the process of their respective development and concrete cooperation, and propose new solutions especially to form a new mode of deep interaction with social forces.

Keywords: China-Africa Higher Education Cooperation; the 20+20 Cooperation Plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education; New Ideas; New Paths.

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Introduction

Under the current situation of the ever-changing international political order and the ever-deepening economic gap between the North and the South, China dedicates itself to forming a new civilization by integrating Eastern and Western ones. In 2013, China put forward the Belt and Road Initiative, which has been widely recognized by African countries over the past decade. By 2023, 52 African countries with diplomatic ties with China and the African Union Commission have signed agreements on cooperation under the initiative. Both China and Africa have injected strong impetus into bilateral cooperation by jointly promoting the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Besides, in line with the changes of the international situation, China has proposed the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative successively. These three initiatives, imbued with unique Chinese wisdom, embody different ways of thinking between the East and the West, and will help the world develop toward a better direction.

How to enhance communication between different civilizations and integrate their ways of thinking? Education is recognized as a key driver in promoting the integration of civilizations and realizing cultural innovation. Therefore, China and Africa need to strengthen and optimize bilateral cooperation on higher education for mutual understanding, reshape the educational ideas and explore new paths in practice amid the changes of times.

I. Implementation of the 20+20 Cooperation Plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education

After the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in 2000, communication on higher education between the two sides has been transformed from “one-way aid” to “all-round two-way exchange and cooperation system”¹, in which the 20+20 Cooperation Plan for Chinese and African Institutions of Higher Education (referred to as “the 20+20 Cooperation Plan” hereafter) is considered as the representative sample. The 20+20 Cooperation Plan was launched in 2010, as a concrete program to implement the Sharm El Sheikh Action Plan (2010-2012) proposed at the 4th Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Egypt. Yuan Guiren, former Minister of Chinese Ministry of Education, said at the UNESCO-Africa-China University Presidents’ Seminar held in November 2011 in Paris that the 20+20 Cooperation Plan would promote close partnerships between Chinese and African higher education institutions.

The 20+20 Cooperation Plan works in “one-to-one” partnerships between 20 Chinese and 20 African higher education institutions from 17 African countries (see Table 1), involving arts, science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, minerals, textiles, physics, biology, languages, vocational education and other professional fields. It is annually declared, reviewed, and approved, and various forms of cooperation are carried out under the plan, such as skills training (including advanced seminars), degree and non-degree education for international students, personnel exchange visits, joint publishing (translation), cooperation in running schools, conducting scientific research and holding international conferences. Although those forms are conventional in international higher education exchanges and cooperation, the 20+20 Cooperation Plan presents its own advantages and characteristics. First, it is a “one-to-one” cooperation between Chinese and African higher education institutions; second, those institutions keep long-term cooperative partnerships; third, they have cooperated to produce a number of successive, in-depth and concrete outcomes.

Table 1 List of “One-to-One” Partnership Institutions in the 20+20 Cooperation Plan²

	Chinese Institution (Province/City)	African Institution (Country)
1	Peking University (Beijing)	Cairo University (Egypt)
2	Beijing Language and Culture University (Beijing)	Suez Canal University (Egypt)
3	Beijing International Studies University (Beijing)	Mohammed V University (Morocco)
4	University of International Business and Economics (Beijing)	University of Carthage (Tunis)
5	China Agricultural University (Beijing)	Higher Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine of Faranah (Guinea)
6	China University of Geosciences (Beijing)	University of Namibia (Namibia)
7	East China Normal University (Shanghai)	University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)
8	Shanghai Normal University (Shanghai)	University of Botswana (Botswana)
9	Donghua University (Shanghai)	Moi University (Kenya)
10	Nanjing Agricultural University (Jiangsu)	Egerton University (Kenya)
11	Southeast University (Jiangsu)	University of Zambia (Zambia)
12	Suzhou University (Jiangsu)	University of Lagos (Nigeria)
13	Yangzhou University (Jiangsu)	University of Khartoum (Sudan)
14	Jilin University (Jilin)	University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe)
15	Northeast Normal University (Jilin)	University of Pretoria (South Africa)
16	Hunan University (Hunan)	Stellenbosch University (South Africa)
17	Xiangtan University (Hunan)	Makerere University (Uganda)
18	Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Tianjin)	University of Ghana (Ghana)
19	Tianjin University of Technology and Education (Tianjin)	Ethiopia-China TVET Institute (Ethiopia)
20	Zhejiang Normal University (Zhejiang)	University of Yaoundé I (Cameroon)

II. Outcomes of the 20+20 Cooperation Plan

Over the past 13 years, ever since the 20+20 Cooperation Plan was launched, the Chinese and African higher education institutions have conducted closer exchanges and deepened mutual trust through “one-to-one” partnerships, resulting in win-win and even multi-win outcomes.

II. 1. Promoting the Chinese Higher education institutions to Go Global and Internationalizing China’s Higher Education.

Internationalization, the basic attribute of higher education institutions, features “bringing in” and “going global”³. Therefore, it is not a one-way process, but comprises attempts to realize mutual communication or exchange, which is largely oriented and regulated by the government⁴. Through the 20+20 Cooperation Plan, Yangzhou University and the University of Khartoum, Shanghai Normal University and the University of Botswana jointly established the “Chinese Studies” major. It aims to train African “China hands” who can understand China’s development process and governance experience, and is regarded as an innovation for Chinese higher education institutions to go global. It is also worth noting that from the perspective of building a closer China-Africa community with a shared future, the significance of the joint construction of the “Chinese studies” also goes beyond the functions of other practical disciplines.

Another example is that East China Normal University and University of Dar es Salaam cooperated to establish the UDSM-ECNU Workstation in 2018. By integrating the superior resources of the two universities, the workstation has co-compiled a number of book manuscripts, such as *Historical Manuscripts of Ancient Sino-African Relations*, and *Selected Works of Julius*

Kambarage Nyerere. This collaboration has significantly contributed to the internationalization of their “World History” disciplines.

II.2. Providing African Higher Education Institutions with Different Ways to Explore the Independent Development Paths of African Countries

The sense and capacity of independence are the core capabilities required by any individual, organization and country, and they are particularly important for African countries. Through cooperation with Chinese ones, African higher education institutions have gradually turned their attention to the governance experience and reform models of developing countries, and African intellectual elites have focused more on their countries’ own development issues. Therefore, the 20+20 Cooperation Plan provides them with different ways to explore independent development paths for African countries. For example, the experimental cooperation between China Agricultural University and the Higher Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine of Faranah on six maize varieties has doubled the local maize yield in just three years, effectively improving the level of agricultural discipline of the institute.

II.3. Bringing in Social Resources

The 20+20 Cooperation Plan not only enables Chinese and African higher education institutions partnered with each other, but also facilitates the involvement of companies, international organizations, governments, media, and other social resources in their cooperation. There are some prominent examples, such as the cooperation between China University of Geosciences (Beijing) and the University of Namibia, which has brought in the investment of the Geological Survey of Namibia, China National Nuclear Corporation, Jiangxi Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources and other government departments and companies; and the cooperation between Nanjing Agricultural University and Egerton University, which has been funded by the World Bank, the East Africa Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. In short, these social resources not only improve the quality of “one-to-one” cooperation, but also bring benefits to the local societies.

III. New Ideas and New Paths of Chinese and African Cooperation on Higher Education

The 20+20 Cooperation Plan needs to be upgraded with the times, as the influence of many cooperative items and outcomes is within a limited scope of the two sides. There is a need to both carry out educational exchanges and cooperation between China and Africa at a higher technical level for enhancing its influence, and to bring in more social resources for raising its public awareness. In short, to achieve higher-quality “one-to-one” cooperation, Chinese and African higher education institutions require timely updating of educational ideas and continuous exploration of new paths.

III. 1. Chinese Higher Education Institutions Need to Adjust in the Following Two Aspects:

III.1.1. to Get Rid of Inertial Thinking

Chinese higher education institutions are used to and have long attached importance to carrying out in-depth exchanges and cooperation with Western ones, while communication with Africa higher education institutions has not yet been taken into prior consideration. However, when breaking free from inertial or habitual thinking, it can be found that “Africa is a continent full of magic”, and the exchanges and cooperation with African higher education institutions also “feed” the development of Chinese ones themselves. In the new era of China-Africa cooperation, the mission of internationalization requires Chinese higher education institutions to gain a renewed understanding and reinterpret the core concepts of human civilization and development based on their own knowledge and experience, and to further correct and re-construct the Western-centered knowledge and discourse system. That means, cooperation on higher education with Africa is an inevitable shift for China in its road of internationalization of higher education. Therefore, it is recommended that the Chinese higher education institutions include the 20+20 cooperation Plan and other cooperation programs of higher education with Africa into their central works, rather than just ordinary ones of international cooperation.

III.1.2 to Go beyond Traditional Fields and Breakthrough the Usual Educational Modes

Chinese higher education institutions have not yet developed into the “knowledge centers” of the society, as they are accustomed to programmatic cooperation in various forms and subjects within the existing higher education system, and those programs of international cooperation across national and regional boundaries are still carried out within the system. China and Africa are facing various development issues in their cooperation, so higher education institutions of the two sides are responsible for providing solutions, knowledge and technologies to address the issues. In this regard, China-Africa higher education cooperation should go beyond traditional fields and breakthrough the usual educational modes. It should focus on the practical problems in the process of their respective development and concrete cooperation, and propose new solutions, especially to form a new mode of in-depth interaction with social forces. Chinese higher education institutions can form multi-cooperative relations with African companies and associations to carry out personnel training by signing contracts, and unite with international organizations, NGOs and other parties to coordinate the implementation of joint research on specific programs and the construction of thematic databases.

III.2 African High Education Institutions Need to Increase Their Participation and Investment in Cooperation Programs.

According to the survey, Chinese higher education institutions providing educational consultations, guidance, training and funds to African institutions are the main content of the 20+20 Cooperation Plan, as many African higher education institutions lack a sufficient ability to digest, absorb, utilize and transform external resources, and to function well in the development of international society. Higher education in Africa underwent a transformation wrought by massive expansion, but the system still remained the world’s least developed⁵. Mr. Pierre Gomez, Minister of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Technology of Gambia, said at the opening ceremony of the 12th China-Africa Think Tanks Forum that Africa suffered from attritions, brain-drain, and poor training methods because of the failure of the education policies. Gambia has not built a responsive higher education system that could establish a strong competitive base for the country. These educational institutions whose foundations are laid today will be a driving force for progress and betterment around the world in the future. Therefore, collaboration between Africa

and China will seek to demonstrate the instrumental role that education can and must play in building strong societies.

In fact, the huge young population in Africa brings a demographic dividend that drives economic development, but it can't be generated in a vacuum. Whether Africa is able to undertake and function well in the fifth transition of production capacity in the world, is closely related to the realization of the goals of Africa's *2063 agenda*. Education, especially higher education, takes an unshirkable responsibility in achieving those goals, as higher education Institutions are "strong social and cultural organizations which are responsible for the transmission and creation of human cultural tradition", are "different from other social organization identity"⁶, and are "regarded as future decision-makers in society"⁷. Therefore, African higher education institutions should further strengthen their own capacity building in scientific research, optimize settings in disciplines, and cultivate suitable talents around the needs of social development. In addition, they can also turn their attention to the governance experience and reform models of the developing countries, and work together to explore a road of independent development and win-win cooperation.

Conclusion

To sum up, the "20+20 Cooperation Plan" provides a new educational idea and a new path for China-Africa higher education cooperation in the new era. It enables "one-to-one" partnership institutions to "bring each other in their countries" and "go global" together, thus promoting the internationalization of higher education of both sides, especially shifting the cooperatives partners from European and American institutions to institutions in developing countries. In fact, China-Africa higher education cooperation has always been in the process of continuous exploration and innovation, with programs like "Luban Workshop"⁸ and "China-Africa TVET Cooperation Program" set up to meet the needs of Africa's industrialization and development. Those programs have truly trained a large number of skilled workers and talents for Africa and contributed to the implementation of the *Agenda 2063*.

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