



Training abroad and technological capacity building: Analysing the role of Chinese training and scholarship programmes for Tanzanians



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ABSTRACT

The case study in this paper examines the contribution of scholarship programmes provided by the Chinese government in improving human capital in the fields of science, technology, and innovation in Tanzania. The case study constitutes a survey of 85 Tanzanians who have received training in China, and interviews with 13 individuals including some of the surveyed trainees, scholarship administrators, and other stakeholders. While critical comments were raised, the trainees in our sample were largely positive about the Chinese training experiences. Besides the direct transfer of skills and exposure to China's modernity, the indirect outcome of technology transfer has come about through the importation of equipment and technical literature. However efforts to transfer and apply acquired knowledge have been regularly impeded by structural barriers including cross-cultural communication problems, differences in attitude, and the fact that in several cases Tanzania does not have the capacity to absorb some of the advanced Chinese technologies taught in the courses. Two-way communication is needed in order to inform and adapt the Chinese government training programmes to the specific needs of the recipient African economies.

1. Introduction to the research questions

Over the past three decades, China has evolved into a major scholarship provider to Africans, at a competing threshold with the leading donor countries in this field including Japan, India, and Germany (King, 2014a). According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, the number of African students in China has grown 26-fold – from just under 2000 in 2003 to almost 50,000 in 2015 (Breeze and Moore, 2017). This has made China the second most popular destination for African students abroad after France and ahead of the US and UK (Breeze and Moore, 2017). The trend is partly explained by the Chinese government's targeted focus on African human resource and education development, for example through the African talents programme (Li, 2005). Scholarship awards are widely spread across the broad Sino-African development cooperation portfolio, notwithstanding the absence of an explicit Chinese government policy on training and educational assistance (King, 2014a). The Chinese government has steadily expanded training and education opportunities in Africa since the 2006's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (King, 2010). Over 10,000 mid to high-ranking African officials have been invited to China annually, to attend short seminars and academic training programmes (Tugendhat and

Alemu, 2016; Wenping, 2006). According to King, (2014a), China allocated over 90,000 training slots for African personnel between 2009 and 2015.

The Chinese government's official position on training and educational assistance emphasizes that 'better education is the basis of, and holds the key to, social stability and economic development', as stated in the FOCAC (2009) resolution. The philosophical views on win-win and non-hierarchical donor-recipient engagements are inherently central to the scholarship programmes, as with other components of Chinese development assistance (see e.g. Bodomo, 2014; King, 2014a). This rhetoric tends to favour the Chinese government's claims on reciprocity in development partnership, pointing also to inclusiveness and mutual benefits with the partner African countries (Anshan, 2007b). Practicalities in China's official position of rejecting the hierarchical donor-recipient relations, for instance in delivering the scholarships have received a mixture of support and views among scholars and commentators alike (Anshan, 2007a; Wenping, 2007; Naidu, 2007; Taylor, 2007). In one hand, the Chinese government has been commended for responding to Africa's technological and human capital challenges by providing the demanded training (King, 2013, 2015; Li, 2005).

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Scholars have also asserted the promotion of China's commercial, diplomatic and geopolitical ambitions in Africa along the Chinese scholarship awards (see e.g. King, 2013; Nye, 2005; Tugendhat and Alemu, 2016). The high-level treatment given to African beneficiaries of Chinese government scholarships are claimed to manifest China's soft power and influence (Sullivan, 1994). Similarly Chinese scholarship programmes are characterised by weak coordination, and competing interests of the agencies involved. A study by (King, 2013, 2014a), uncovered the parallel scholarship interventions by China's ministries of Commerce, Foreign Affairs, Culture, Education, Science and Technology, Agriculture and Health. Not only that these duplications contribute to fragmentation, the multiple scholarship awards are found to be weakly harmonized with other Chinese aid programmes. It is further argued that the triennial milestones of the FOCAC are incapable of representing the diverse challenges and priorities of more than 50 African Union member states (Bodomo, 2014). For individual African countries the unspecified FOCAC pledges remains a puzzle to their mid-term and long term planning, as they wait for the implementation (King, 2015).

China's scholarship and training programmes date back to the 1960s, although their visibility is rather recent and came to the fore particularly after the rolled-out plans and milestones of the FOCAC (Nordtveit, 2011; Varghese, 2008). Apart from a few early studies like Hevi (1964; cited in Bodomo, 2014), the literature on this topic is largely recent. The earlier literature was more focused on the philosophical and contextual background to the Chinese human resource development assistance to Africa (see Ferdjani, 2012; He, 2006; King, 2010, 2013; Nordtveit, 2011; Shao, 2012; Yu et al., 2014). The more recent research efforts on the Chinese scholarships have been broadened to include the assessment of socio-cultural life and experiences of African trainees in China (Dong and Chapman, 2008; King, 2010). The account of broader impacts of Chinese scholarship programme towards individual trainees and their home countries, however, is yet to capture the notable attention of scholars (Yuan, 2013).

This paper explores the extent to which Chinese scholarships have contributed to the building of technological capacity in Tanzania, during the ten-year period from 2005 to 2015. It seeks the answers to the following two research questions:

- i. What role have the scholarship and training awards played in the development of cooperation between China and Tanzania?
- ii. What can be learned from the impact of Chinese scholarship and training awards on individual trainees? How have they influenced human capacity building in science, technology, and innovation in Tanzania?

The paper is organized into five sections. After this introduction, the following section offers a brief review of the literature including the conceptual linkage between the international scholarships and technological capacity building, the Chinese literature on the scholarship-drive assistance to Africa and the tools used to examine the scholarship programmes. The evolution of engagements between China and Tanzania in the field of education, training and scholarships is also covered in the review. The third section investigates the methodological approaches used within the paper, including how respondents were selected, and tools used for collecting and analysing the data. In the fourth section the data are analysed, firstly through a descriptive analysis of respondents (particularly the surveyed Tanzanians who received training in China). This is then followed by a presentation of respondents' assessment of training received in China. Finally a review of the challenges and benefits of the training experiences in China is given. From the findings of the study, conclusions are drawn in the fifth section of the paper.

2. Background literature: towards technological capacity building through the Chinese training and scholarship programmes

2.1. The role of international training and scholarship programmes to technological capacity building

Across the literature, divergences are found in scholarly views on the contribution of international training and scholarships to the development of human capacity for science and technology in developing economies. Researchers who are in favour of international scholarship programmes pointed out the benefits in terms of knowledge diversification, and exposure of the trainees to international networks and alliances (Cuthbert et al., 2008; Li and Bray, 2007; Woodfield, 2009). International scholarship programmes are also claimed to induce knowledge transfer, as the recipients exchange expertise and experiences with their hosts, and also through the technology-upgrading literature and equipment carried home by trainees (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Kim, 1998). The training programmes at postgraduate level are often embedded with joint research undertakings, from which new innovations can be derived (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Jöns, 2009). International training opportunities are also hailed as a means of creating new and advanced technological systems in the trainees' home countries (Perna et al., 2014).

The criticism towards scholarship programmes is grounded on assumptions that they can lead to emigration and a brain drain through relocations of trainees into advanced donor countries (Tremblay, 2005). Moreover, the critics are also concerned about the higher per capita training costs of international scholarship, particularly in advanced economies (Banya and Elu, 2001), and the lost opportunity among recipient economies when the scholarship-related funds are entirely spent within donor countries (UNESCO, 2015). A study by Dreher et al. (2014) has also pointed out the lack of transparency and elite capture in the distribution of foreign scholarship opportunities. The conventional wisdom that scientific knowledge is universal has been counteracted by the technological gaps between advanced and developing economies which limits the application and adoption processes (Kim, 1998).

Donor countries including China, Australia and Germany are reported to expand their international training and scholarship awards in recent years (Cuthbert et al., 2008; King, 2013; Woodfield, 2009). Scholarship awards have gained popularity as a vehicle for building human capacity in the recipient developing countries, as they spread across various fields of study especially those relating to science and technology (Lancrin, 2004; Perna et al., 2014). Statistics show that during the year 2010 alone over US\$ 3.1 billion was spent on training and scholarship awards which accounted for about a quarter of the overall human resource development assistance from developed countries (UNESCO, 2012, 2015). The case-by-case variations in trade-offs between benefits and shortcomings towards the recipient economies justifies the importance of regular evaluation studies. Such studies not only facilitate the learning process but also assist in improving accountability (Baker et al., 1996). UNESCO's report have also signaled the level of pessimism within the international development community regarding the impacts of scholarship programmes, as the following quote suggests.

'There is little evidence that scholarships build knowledge and teaching capacity within beneficiary countries; often they are used as a means to see aid allocations return to the donor country' (UNESCO, 2015).

Training and scholarship programmes are increasingly evaluated by the awarding agencies as a part of the management routines, and also by academic research on various related fields such as human capital, the macroeconomic role of the public sector, or political philosophy (Perna et al., 2014). Along the same lines, training programmes are also increasingly exposed to the scrutiny of counterfactuals, value for money and harmonization with other interrelated development assistance programmes (Blundell et al., 1999; CSCUK, 2014). A recent meta-

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