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Does China's Aid in Africa Affect Traditional Donors?

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Abstract

China's role as an emerging aid provider and the concept of a social plan in Africa has led to polarised responses in the West. Several say that this "productivist" strategy is much less determined by the concepts of citizenship, legal, social rights, and much more regarding building functions. The purpose of this study is to examine whether the welfare and social policy ideas that characterize Chinese aid in Africa are influencing traditional donors and becoming global. The article utilised a qualitative study that has two main components. First, a comprehensive content analysis of over 50 key Sino-African, Chinese and Western policy documents from 2000 (since cooperation between Beijing and African countries first became institutionalised). Second, there were semi-structured interviews with Chinese, African and Western stakeholders in Addis Ababa, (Ethiopia), who was directly involved in the relationship between China and Africa and related development issues. The result of documentation and interview analyses show that there are currently significant differences between Chinese and Western approaches. China has made much stronger and more explicit links between development aid and economic activity than most Western donors. The aid is usually implemented through specific projects rather than broader programs or policies.

Keywords: Africa, China, OECD-DAC, South-South cooperation

Introduction

This article looks at whether the welfare, as well as social plan concepts that define Chinese aid in Africa, are affecting typical contributors and ending up being international. There is proof that the social measurements of China-African advancement participation step past the pro-poor redistributive standard presently promoted by Western benefactors (Urbina-Ferretjans and Surender 2013). However, little systematic attention has been given to considerate. China's role as a source of normative innovation in international social development, shows how does China help or normalise interpretations about the purpose of social policy in international development?

The current appearance of Chinese aid as well as welfare support in Africa became new area for research study of worldwide social policy, to an understanding of the methods which policy procedures and end results in developing nations are formed by globalization procedures (Anon 2009; Anon 2007; Gumede 2018). Just as the social aid arrangements in China are undergoing a profound change, socio-political engagement is outside the country's borders. Chinese participation on the African continent has expanded dramatically over the last years. Although China's trade and economic interests in the region have attracted the most attention, interest in Sino-African cooperation now includes development and social assistance. The Chinese government has invested $198 million in external aid in Africa in 1998. By 2007, the Chinese government had $1.4 billion in project assistance. China's foreign aid was estimated at $2.5 billion in 2009 (Samy 2010). Although the relationship between Sino and Africa is not a new phenomenon, this South-South cooperation is broader in scope and qualitatively different from the previous engagement (Asche 2009).

Chinese aid in Africa gives a new impetus to the study of global social policy to understand how political and globalisation processes (Anon 2009; Gumede 2018). In advanced welfare economies, analysis has traditionally focused the dynamics of social policy. The truth is that international organisations are a leading and comprehensive measurement of the social schedule in establishing nations is greatly undeniable. Because of this, it is more interesting how certain agencies understand and define development as a political problem, as their perspective forms the basis for their recommendations (Schemeil et al. 2013).

Literature review

Theoretical approach

It is well known that the current explosion in the number of public and private actors involved in international development issues has implications for the dissemination and outcome of political and social policies worldwide (Jean-Michel and Ray 2010). Using a constructivist framework, this analysis captures how the Chinese

government interprets its role and purpose as a global social actor alongside Western-oriented models and ideas. A constructivist approach views intersubjective knowledge and ideas as a constitutive effect on social reality and its evolution… [and] explains why people have certain norms, identities, and understandings of cause and effect, and thus the origin of interests (Hopf 1998).

Contrary to the theory of rational choice, constructivism considers not only policy analysis as a function of effectiveness or instrument choice, but as a result of a social discourse that uses language as a means of disseminating and institutionalising ideas (Hopf 1998). Language legitimises certain goals, actors and ideas and restricts the choice of alternative policy options. In this sense, language aligns political action with common purposes. It not only describes reality but also contributes to its design (Polat, 2011) and "discourse also becomes a source of change" (Hopf 1998). This research has attempted to analyse this discursive level through semi-structured interviews and policy documents. The approach has created the transformations within Chinese cooperation and the various factors that cause the dissemination of social policy ideas between China and traditional donors from the actors.

Development aid paradigms: western approaches of the poor to the development of developing countries

Since the 1940s, when western development aid was institutionalised in multilateral and bilateral fora, Western concepts of social policy and development have constantly been changing and changing. Until the 1970s, although Western authorities emphasised production, scientific evidence and major investment in infrastructure construction, the installation of electricity and technology (Golley 2011), poverty reduction was still an explicit goal of the political effort. A global pendulum of the neoliberal intellectual pendulum in the 1980s prompted major donor agencies to move from direct poverty reduction measures to broader economic strategies. The rules on the market economy, the repayment of the state and the use of private mechanisms and voluntary organisations for the allocation of social and social services were mainly required during this period. Washington's consensus policy mantra of privatisation, deregulation, and trade liberalisation prevailed over economic reforms that dominated public debt and inflation. The role of social policy has been considered financially insurmountable, socially stigmatising and ultimately undermining economic growth in general. It was argued that public social spending suppressed the informal mechanisms of social security and favoured perverse incentives and dependence on unsustainable distributions (Mooij 2009).

Nonetheless, because the late 1990s, the dominating viewpoint of destitution decrease methods in Western growth companies has moved in a different instruction, and some would undoubtedly say outstanding (Lacayo 2016), Especially the striking

was the fast increase of social protection on the growth program. The acknowledgement that social security is necessary to accomplishing growth, as well as financial development, has resulted in a new vocabulary of "for the poor" and "transformative" social plans (Gumede 2018). A new focus is put clearly on the battle against poverty and also the targeted positioning of socially interested treatments on the poorest.

Regardless of ideological fights within and between growth companies, a critical strategy highlighting threat monitoring as well as effectiveness and even campaigning for method stressing legal, social rights as well as social justice. There is some agreement that severe poverty, as well as inequality, need to resolve if growth targets are to be fulfilled clearly – which redistributive social security treatments are vital in this effort. Social pensions, conditional remittances, public investments in childcare and development programs for children, food aid and action programs are part of the new poor social policies (Ahmad 2013; Alexia Delclaux Gaytán de Ayala 2015; Duncan 2014). The OECD-DAC Forum, Poverty Reduction Network, underlines the new consensus that rapid and sustained poverty reduction requires poor poverty and the role of social policy for growth, especially in reducing and improving human capital can be overlooked (OECD 2009).

In this context, China's new approach to development is not least due to its tremendous achievements in fighting poverty within its borders and the need to understand what works. However, there is also the awareness that Chinese aid in Africa appears to be mediated under other normative conditions, institutional actors and political mechanisms than is traditional with traditional donors (Asche 2009). The Chinese approach seems to be rooted, above all, in a broader developmental development model, which is now characteristic of the social systems of some developing countries (Midgley 2005; Yeh 2018). Conceptually, between a liberal open economy and a centrally planned economy, this model undoubtedly offers a special fourth world of prosperity in development. Common features are low public spending – strong residual elements in programs; a central role for the family; a regulatory and useful purpose for the state; and limited commitment to the idea of wealth as a civil right (Knight 2014; Yeh 2018; Goodman et al. 1998).

Perhaps most importantly for our analysis, this fourth development regime has been characterised as a "Productivist" (Emery 2018), in which social policy is subordinate to the overarching economic goal of growth and is typically used as a tool to strengthen economic policy to reach the goal. Trends in the social sector in China have been very much in line with the classical development model in recent years, and interventions foreshadowed a productivist investment strategy, including the promotion of education and the promotion of entrepreneurship and the creation of entrepreneurship jobs.

Current trends in Western development institutions seem to be different, while disputes over the extent to which the Washington consensus is obsolete, an in-depth look at the political discourse of international aid agencies over the last decade shows

that Western donors have apparently gone beyond the brutal neoliberal provision of welfare and structural adjustment (Duncan 2014; Ahmad 2013; Pempel 2000) argue: The other side of the coin of the globalization of social policy is the socialization of world politics The main topics of the agenda at intergovernmental meetings are now essentially social (environmental) issues. There is clear evidence that the turn of the century represented a crucial moment for worldwide socio-political discourses and the emergence of a more holistic definition of development as a transformation process that far practice economic growth goes beyond. This new understanding of the determinants of development was most clearly expressed in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in the formal statements of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which argued that poverty reduction itself is the key to broader economic growth and several Professionals – weak targeted social policies. This understanding is different from what is currently supported by China, although the ultimate goals may be the same.

Therefore, the emergence of this new "South-South" dynamic attracts more interest (Lafargue 2009). In particular, the question was asked as to whether China, as an emerging world power, will gradually adapt to the dominant international development norms and ideas, or instead challenge the current systems and try to exert their influence on their transformation (Reilly 2012). Within Western discourse, there has been a tendency to gauge China's compliance with OECD hegemonic DAC standards, which is gradually becoming a normative (Mardell 2018; Reilly 2012). Traditional donors have made considerable efforts to involve China in institutionalised cooperation processes (Dreher et al, 2013). There is no doubt that mutual learning takes place and some elements of the Chinese development aid model have been influenced by the coexistence of Western models (Kjollesdal and Welle-Strand 2010). Although the opposite may be the case (Asche 2009; Saavedra 2007), a remarkably small empirical study has been conducted on China's potential influence on socio-political thinking and practices of traditional Western donors. Few scholars have examined China's role as a potential norm maker (Reilly 2012) or Game Changer (Economy 2010), which may influence and redefine dominating and legitimised norms.

China's rise as a new global actor and exporter of its approach in other developing countries has potential relevance to our theoretical understanding of global social policy, and many interesting questions arise. Is there a new and pronounced Chinese developmental approach now and does it affect the policies of traditional Western donors? If so, in which direction and why? Does it also challenge the traditional analysis of the conditions, processes and policies of social policy design in developing countries? What does it mean for analysis that has for decades highlighted Western institutions as an essential determinant of social policy in developing countries? To explore these issues, this study examines the ideas and activities of Chinese aid to the African continent and the possible spread of policies between powerful international development institutions.

Methodology

This qualitative study has two main components, both undertaken between 2017 and 2018. First, a comprehensive content analysis of over 50 key Sino-African, Chinese and Western policy documents from 2000 (since cooperation between Beijing and African countries first became institutionalised then). The texts include China's 2006 African Policy, and the four Political Declarations and five Action Plans produced in the five meetings of the Forum of China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) since its creation in 2000. The Western documents comprise national aid policies and policy statements on China–Africa cooperation from OECD-DAC members.

Second, there were semi-structured interviews with Chinese, African and Western stakeholders in Addis Ababa, (Ethiopia), who were directly involved in the relationship between China and Africa and related development issues. These included: civil servants, political advisors and representatives of various Chinese and Arica's diplomats, agencies, research centres and civil society organizations; African Ambassadors to AU (African Union) from nations officially working with China and represented in Addis Ababa; and bilateral and multilateral donors from the Western OECD-DAC, the EU Commission and UN agencies, development banks and international financial institutions in Addis Ababa.

Specific thematic guides were developed for each group of respondents, although the issues raised were similar across groups. The guides were semi-structured, although the questions were as broad and open as possible to enable dynamic and comprehensive learning about topics. The discussion aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of China's development assistance to Africa in Africa. political learning between Chinese and Western donors in support of social development; and China's influence on Western socio-political considerations and practices. In several cases, the information provided was classified as sensitive and confidentiality was requested. All respondents have ensured privacy. For this reason, a list of institutional connections is provided instead of the names of respondents.

All 49 African embassies with representatives in Addis Ababa and the Addis Ababa offices of OECD-DAC members were identified and systematically contacted. Nine African countries agreed to participate in the study. As with African respondents, the sample of OECD-DAC members participating in the survey was a self-selected group. Nineteen representatives from 12 country members said they had knowledge or interest in Sino-African cooperation and agreed to an interview.

The sample reflected broad interest and commitment to the topics. Some countries have already supported concrete Sino-African co-operation initiatives, while other countries have shown little tangible activity outside the general discussion.

All representatives and multilateral organisations were also systematically contacted and interviewed by representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, a development bank and an international financial institution. In each case, the representatives of the agency or the representatives of Sino-African, international development or South-South initiatives was interviewed.

The selection of Chinese respondents followed a different process. Unlike respondents from Africa and the West, not all potential respondents could be identified due to a lack of accessible information. The contact details of potential interviewees were in many cases not publicly available, and information was collected through a snowball method of personal and professional contacts as well as recommendations from other interviewees.

This article presents the results of interviews with Chinese, African and Western officials, with members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) as Western Representatives. The OECD-DAC was chosen for this first analysis as it plays a significant and essential role in coordinating aid policy and practice. Their member countries account for about 90% of the world's bilateral ODA (Official Development Assistance). It has probably achieved an earlier and higher profile of the role of social policy in a developmental context than its counterparts in Washington and the United Nations (Anon 2007). The 1997 Report on Progress Indicators and Development Goals were later adopted as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Necessary for this analysis is that China is not a member of the OECD-DAC, and members' reactions to China's development activities in Africa are known to be very different. Unlike China as an emerging development aid actor, throughout the article, the author refers to OECD-DAC respondents as traditional or Western donors. For reasons of confidentiality, individual DAC member states are identified only by country size.

Findings

Chinese and Western approach to social assistance: ideas, institutions and instruments

Documentation and interview analyses show that there are currently significant differences between Chinese and Western approaches. China has made much stronger and more explicit links between development aid and economic activity than most Western donors. The aid is usually implemented through specific projects rather than broader programs or policies. Unlike traditional donors, Chinese aid is usually provided in the form of Chinese workers who build roads or hospitals instead of providing financial resources. Although some attention is devoted to human

resource development and capacity building through scholarships and training, Beijing still prefers large infrastructure projects such as hospitals, government agencies, railways and power plants. By contrast, the current focus of much Western aid concerns poverty reduction and inequality (particularly gender inequality), better governance and institutional capacity building.

At the institutional level, while priority has been given to providing social assistance through bilateral mechanisms, the China-Africa Cooperation Forum has been created as a platform for collective consultation and dialogue between the Chinese Government and African countries and for formalising long-term relationships. While the added value of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) beyond its symbolism has been called into question (Du Plessis 2014), Chinese and African partners continue to use FOCAC summits to rethink current arrangements, identify new resources and modalities of cooperation, and negotiate new aid pledges.

Regarding political instruments, the author also found a disagreement between East and West. Targeted interventions in favour of the poor, such as transfer of cash, food or assets or targeted social services, are mostly non-existent in the Chinese aid packages in Africa, and most of the Chinese government's efforts do not support social policy support aimed at income poverty and social exclusion. The documents refer to the need to achieve a fairer and fairer international order, rather than taking targeted interventions aimed at disadvantaged groups. Therefore, development interventions are aimed at improving the social well-being of the entire population and not of individual members. By contrast, and with few exceptions, Western donor agencies are tackling the vulnerabilities of the poor and the poor by strengthening social assistance programs and facilities (Ahmad 2013).

However, even in the education and health sectors the author observes differences in approaches. Traditional donor activity is mostly guided by the MDGs of universal access to primary education; reduction of under-5 and maternal mortality rates; and the halting and reversal of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Interventions for the benefit of children and school seeking programs (Darrow 2012), or in health, to improve access to health services through more systems-wide solutions search Improved public health systems and free commission or health insurance schemes.

"… The focus is on universal coverage. Obtaining funds through the required upfront payment is the most efficient and equitable basis for increasing population coverage" (WHO 2010)

In contrast, China's educational assistance focuses more on tertiary education, such as the construction of universities and the granting of scholarships to African students to complete vocational and technical training at Chinese universities. Similarly, China directly provides healthcare services through the construction of hospitals, health centres and the provision of medical teams. While

the focus of Western donors appears to focus on a poverty-oriented approach that emphasises redistribution, equality, and human and social rights, China's strategy underlines instrumental motivations. "Health aid that is provided by MOH is around 80% for African countries. … Most health cooperation has focused at the implementation level rather than at the policy level. We have been sending medical teams according to agreements … and we are sending more doctors" (Government Official, Chinese Diplomat in Addis Ababa). Most importantly, the findings here show that China's engagement in Africa has changed the way in which social development issues are and how social policy is justified. Documents and interviews repeatedly show that China's aid, trade and investment for Africa are intertwined in an integrated package and cannot be easily separated. Respondents from AU not only argued that social and economic developments are inextricably linked, but that economic growth is a prerequisite for social progress. "The first stage should be economic development and later social development. If not, you do not have credibility" (Researcher and Policy Adviser, AU).

It was confident that economic development should be a priority in the development process and that further successes would follow, notably through rapid and unrivalled economic growth and poverty reduction in China itself. "With limited resources, you could not push forward all those sectors, economic, political, social … at the same time … or chaos will happen. That is the case in a lot of developing countries in Africa, Latin America, even Asian countries. … You can only do things one by one. You cannot do all the things at the same time" (Researcher and Policy Adviser, AU).

After all, unlike its western colleagues, Chinese policy supports the idea of unconditional development aid and is less concerned with promoting domestic policy change and promoting democracy in the recipient countries. In several documents most clearly stated in the Beijing Declaration (2000), diversity and respect for differences between nations are promoted. Countries that differ in social systems, development stages, historical and cultural backgrounds and values have the right to choose their approaches and models to promote and protect human rights in their own countries (Beijing Declaration 2000). Therefore, Beijing does not require political changes from the recipient states, and the approach allows recipients to implement their internal social policies "The Chinese mode of providing aid has a different nature from the West. … It is based on mutual help and South–South cooperation, no political conditions and respect for sovereignty. There is no interference in internal political affairs and aid is provided only at the request of the recipients based on mutual benefit and common interests" (African Development Bank). This condition is of crucial importance to both Chinese and African recipients, meaning that China is ready to work with an African country, regardless of internal governance or political conditions.

How far is China's model of aid to Africa impacting Western welfare and social policy ideas?

The traditional donors surveyed have recognised that China's influence at the institutional level is now crucial, affecting not only the national development aid agencies of the OECD-DAC members but also broader international bodies. Unexpectedly, many have welcomed China's influential role in current relief architecture as it has created a more balanced international order: "China is stronger than ever before. I am happy about it. I think we are having closer cooperation, in all topics. China is increasing its power, and the power of the US is decreasing. I think there are important changes in the aid architecture in the world" (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa). Interest in promoting cooperation with Sino-African engagement has been highlighted in several official documents and policy statements by the OECD-DAC. One example, the new OECD-DAC Enhanced Engagement initiative 10, aims to foster the direct and active participation of China and other emerging economies in the work of the Organization's principal organs, including in committees, regular economic surveys and compliance instruments OECD, integration into OECD statistical reporting and information systems and policy-specific peer reviews. Of course, the response of Western interviewees to Sino-African engagement was not uniform, and China's new presence in Africa did not appear to have a significant impact on some smaller bilateral agencies: "what China does is not much different for us as a donor than how we look at other big donors … it does not really change much except that there is an additional donor somehow" (OECD-DAC). Nevertheless, among OECD-DAC interviewees more generally, the common message was that China's expanding role in development assistance was registering an impact among their institutions and generating some reflection and reappraisal of their current practices and approaches: "I think it has raised some self-criticism among Western donors. Are we too slow? Are we putting too many conditions? Are we preparing our programmes too long so that the development goes ahead of the programmes? Chinese aid is known to be quick and that … has influenced the agenda" (OECD-DAC). Although they have been demonised as a new coloniser in many Western media and public debate (Anon 2008, 2017), respondents admitted that discussions about China in international organisations are becoming less polarised and differentiated. There was a pragmatic assumption that future development aid systems would undoubtedly include perspectives from the South and especially from China. Overall, this was considered positive: "… when we do a post-MDG review, Chinese views will be quite important. So, these emerging powers will take over the leadership. I would say that is a fantastic direction … you know if the MDGs were set in the year 2000, by the Europeans mostly, the post-MDGs framework and the targets associated should be set by the South" (OECD-DAC). The official

statement adopted at the fourth Top Level Efficiency Forum on Busan will likely continue, showing whether traditional donors are expressly prepared to cooperate (i.e. not be obliged) with developing countries in their aid operations. North-South cooperation agrees with policies and responsibilities). Nature, modalities and obligations that apply to South-South cooperation are different from North-South collaboration. … The principles, commitments and actions agreed in the Busan document are a voluntary reference for South-South partners.

Despite these attempts by the West to involve China in global cooperation, China is reluctant to participate fully. Following the Paris and Accra meetings, the Busan Forum should create a "Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation" aimed at building a common global front in support of "BRICs". However, the Chinese government, followed by Brazil and India, initially did not support this partnership and chose to stay out of the frame. China's reluctance to participate in a common framework has raised concerns in aid campaigns, which believe that this situation could undermine the current commitments to transparency, a rights-based approach and democratic ownership, and the legitimacy of the Parisian Consensus, which was adopted before the role of new donors, further weakens as China was obvious.

Despite firm promises and efforts to increase assistance, interviewees and documents indicated that aid has come to a halt in sub-Saharan Africa (Darrow 2012). Many forecasts predict that the effects of the global economic crisis after 2008 will increase pressure on Western institutions due to liquidity constraints, which are now being scrutinised to justify spending decisions by domestic voters. In this context, the crisis is paradoxically opening up new opportunities for China. Respondents noted that China's growing aid, trade and investment are of significant and symbolic importance to African countries, as many Western donors reduced their contributions to development assistance. Respondents also commented that the economic downturn had deprived the MDG framework as inadequate of meeting the challenges of the new international environment. In addition to the Chinese money, the new initiatives and orientations of China, as well as other cooperation initiatives of African countries supported by BRICS countries, are increasingly appreciated: "…the economic crisis has also created new opportunities for investment and the Chinese presence in Africa. It is more and more difficult for countries which are facing the crisis to have to live up to their engagements in the field of aid, so China, in this context, is even more appreciated" (OECD-DAC). In addition, interviewees reflected on the fact that the economic downturn had exposed the MDG framework as being inadequate to address the challenges of the new international environment.

In addition to Chinese money, the new initiatives and orientation of China as well as other cooperation initiatives supported by BRICS countries have also therefore become increasingly appreciated by African countries: "The global downturn has caused us to think twice about our results frameworks. … It is outdated.

… Now, everybody is looking to China. China is, you know, the 21st century success story. … Interestingly, I think the international crisis has given more legitimacy, more impetus, to South–South learning than ever before. It has created, you know, a real sense of legitimacy for China's role. Whether or not you call this the Beijing Consensus, I mean there is something very interesting happening here. It is very much the future" (OECD-DAC).

Regarding China's direct impact on the activities of Western donors, the primary example was the question of infrastructure and the balance between hardware (physical infrastructure and technology) and software (human development, skills and capacity building). According to many respondents, the fact that China is so actively involved in promoting infrastructure projects on the continent has led to discussions about the role of infrastructure, which is back on the agenda of Western donors: "It is probably fair to say that China's emphasis upon supporting infrastructure … as a driver of development, has caused organizations like X [development agency of OECD-DAC member] to re-evaluate the priority towards infrastructure … you can see it happening – this year there was an agreement for X to allocate quite considerable resources to this. … So, has X done this as a [direct] result of learning from China? Well, maybe that is debatable, but I think that no doubt, China has had an impact on the way organizations like X think about those type of things" (OECD-DAC).

Recent data on development spending support internal debates on the importance of the hardware development elements described here. The role of infrastructure through scepticism has led to a significant reduction in donor spending from almost 40% of total bilateral ODA over the period 1995/1996 to less than 20% in 2002–2003 (Rodrik 2007). However, gross disbursements of DDA economic infrastructure to all developing countries increased from $8.1 billion in 2005 to $14.8 billion in 2011 (current prices) (Darrow 2012). For example, the British government has recently doubled its aid spending on African economic infrastructure from $61.1 million in 2005 to $289 million in 2011 (OECD). A recent parliamentary report from the United Kingdom (18 March 2011) identifies the lack of functioning infrastructure as a constraint on growth. Foreign Minister of International Development (DFID) comments underscore support for infrastructure and growth as part of UK development aid strategy.

"We support developing countries as they identify and attempt to tackle the barriers to growth. This might mean … developing the physical infrastructure by which supplies, and goods can be transported, the communications infrastructure through which information can be disseminated" (UK development aid).

In many ways, the discussion on the role of infrastructure was just one aspect of a broader debate on the optimal relationship between economic and social policies. And here, too, the author found evidence of how China's own development experience and its role in Africa seemed to influence western thinking about the relationship between economic growth and development. Overall, most of the Chinese

experience in Africa was positive. Surprisingly, in the face of today's social protection strategies, some Western organisations have emphasised that they support China's priority on economic growth rather than social spending. The importance of investing in China's involvement in Africa has led traditional debtors to debates about development drivers, and the tensions between social investment and a perspective of social rights have been apparent.

Finally, regarding the conditionality of aid, it should be noted that Western responses to the Chinese approach were relatively relaxed and undisturbed. The Chinese model that aid should not be made conditional upon the recipient countries adopting policies or reforms was not considered a threat to Western development aid in Africa. More importantly, there is some evidence that the problem of conditionality has been re-examined under the new approach of China and translated into concrete changes in the practices of some Western institutions.

Discussion

It is striking that Chinese development aid policy is currently somewhat different from the political discourse of traditional Western donors in moving toward an expanded role for targeted, redistributive social spending for the poor. It is important not to overestimate the discrepancy as the Chinese approach to social development is not static, and China's ideas and practices are changing and evolving. It is undoubtedly true that China is increasingly attaching more importance development elements, such as capacity building, both domestically and internationally. Similarly, there is some evidence of the possibility that China's norms are changing as a result of increased interaction with Western institutions (e.g., China has sent delegates as observers to the DAC meetings) and therefore, some convergence in the future. Further research is needed to analyse to what extent a change is the result of increased political dialogue in China and the learning or outcome of China's own development experience.

However, despite this qualification, this study shows that China's understanding of the social dimensions of development differs from the current Western approach to tools and mechanisms, and perhaps more importantly, to the problem definition and objectives of social assistance. Beijing seems to be guided by a social development approach that creates stronger links between the economic and social dimensions of development. It is embedded in a rationale stating that poverty reduction and social development are ultimately ensured through productive activities that contribute to economic development and employment opportunities. Therefore, a separate and unique role for social policy is mostly superfluous. While it is true that other OECD-DAC members, such as Japan and South Korea, also sign an in-country development aid model in their capacity as OECD-DAC members,

they expressly support the organisation's principles and approach the ODA guide to others Developing countries (Urbina-Ferretjans and Surender 2013). However, China has not joined this donor group and its specificity is gaining importance as an alternative approach to international development assistance.

These studies indicate that China's approach to the African continent has a clear impact on Western ideas and activities at various levels, and that new discourses on socio-political support for Africa are emerging. Although this is still at a very early stage and the author is not suggesting an imminent radical paradigm shift, some of the OECD-DAC members seem to be somewhat receptive to the Chinese approach, and there are even signs that changes in thinking and behaviour are occurring are in progress in practice. It is striking that, as Kjollesdal and Welle-Strand (2010) has argued earlier, the process of transferring China from China to the West is less a direct attack and more a silent revolution. There was little evidence that traditional financiers felt that China was openly challenging their models or even trying to replace them. Instead, China merely provided an alternative approach to aid recipients, putting competitive pressure on the international aid system and forcing traditional donors to either justify or revise their approach.

Leading the way is a small group of pioneering countries that not only officially recognised and welcomed China's engagement in Africa but were the avant-garde in establishing formal cooperation with the Chinese government on African development issues. These nations are generally large and influential players on an international level and in most cases have a colonial past with Africa. The political dialogue included regular meetings with senior Chinese officials discussing general development issues. Cooperation has also been developed at technical or work level, using permanent committees, research studies and other capacity-building and knowledge-sharing initiatives. There is also an increasing number of concrete joint projects.

At the center, it may perhaps be the largest group of countries interested in exploring mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation with China, but which are still developing such mechanisms. These countries recently launched missions in Beijing to explore cooperation opportunities, including possible joint pilot initiatives. For this analysis, they have, above all, established active contacts with the pioneering Western donors in order to find out their institutional mechanisms and key areas of cooperation. On the path and development of pioneer donors, this group is now showing clear signs of setting up similar mechanisms.

Conclusion

This article examined whether social and socio-political ideas that characterize Chinese aid in Africa affect traditional donors and become global. There is evidence that the social dimension of Sino-African Development Cooperation goes

beyond the redistributive principle for the poor currently advocated by Western donors. This qualitative study comprises two main components, both of which were conducted between 2017 and 2018. First, a comprehensive content analysis of more than 50 key Sino-African, Chinese and Western policy documents from 2000 was used to record a data half-year. Structured elite interviews were conducted.

It seems China's influence was not uniform in the traditional donor community, but the actors take the lead, albeit relatively few, but are the most influential within the international development community and are carefully watched, followed and supported by OECD-DAC members. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the new developments initiated by the Agency's international pioneers are likely to be a new emerging trend. Since the conditions and processes of social policy design in developing countries are so closely linked with the ideas of international development institutions (if not predetermined), and a possible change in the direction of travel of the ideas and activities of this community requires close coordination analysis and evaluation.

At present, several voices in the West call for increased participation by China (and the emerging powers more generally) in multilateral development fora. However, it is necessary to dissolve the views of the different constituencies. Our research shows that the responses were not homogenous and that the implications between the OECD-DAC members that form a continuum are not consistent. However, it is possible to identify some clusters of countries by their openness to Sino-African engagement and their mode of political participation.

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