

Road of China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange with its own characteristics^{*}

MEI Xin-lin

(Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua Zhejiang 321004, China)

Abstract: Under the background of traditional friendship and cooperative exchange between China and Africa, Zhejiang Normal University (ZNU) endeavored to develop, improve and deepen the China-Africa cooperation, initiated a road of China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange with its own characteristics. This road, guided by China's national policy for China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange, is based on the human and regional advantage of Zhejiang Province and the overall capability of ZNU. Researches on the present African higher education and its development are the starting point of this road, the Base for Education Aid and Development of Ministry of Education, the key research base of humanitarian social science in Zhejiang Province (discipline of Higher Education), and the Center for African Education Studies of ZNU all serve as a support to depend upon.

Key words: China-Africa cooperation; educational exchange; base construction; characteristics

There has been a profound, traditional friendship and smooth cooperation between Africa and China. 600 years ago, ZHENG He, the world-famous Chinese navigator, reached Africa when he made voyages to the Western Seas. The 1950's of the 20th century saw the prelude of China-Africa educational exchange when the first wave of students from Egypt, Cameroon, Kenya and Uganda were sent abroad to study in China. A new stage of development between Africa and China started since the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation 2000. Zhejiang Normal University has been designated by Ministry of Education of China as one of its 4 Bases for Education Aid and Development (BEAD). By making full use of its own advantages, fruitful achievements have been accomplished through ZNU's decades-efforts to aid Africa and strengthen its ties with African countries in the field of education, which was unanimously extolled by African countries and highly appreciated by Ministry of Education, Ministry of Commerce, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Chinese government. Meanwhile, it provides the Chinese government with valuable experiences to further promote China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange.

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MEI Xin-lin (1958-), Ph.D. of Literature, professor, president of Zhejiang Normal University; research field: higher education management.

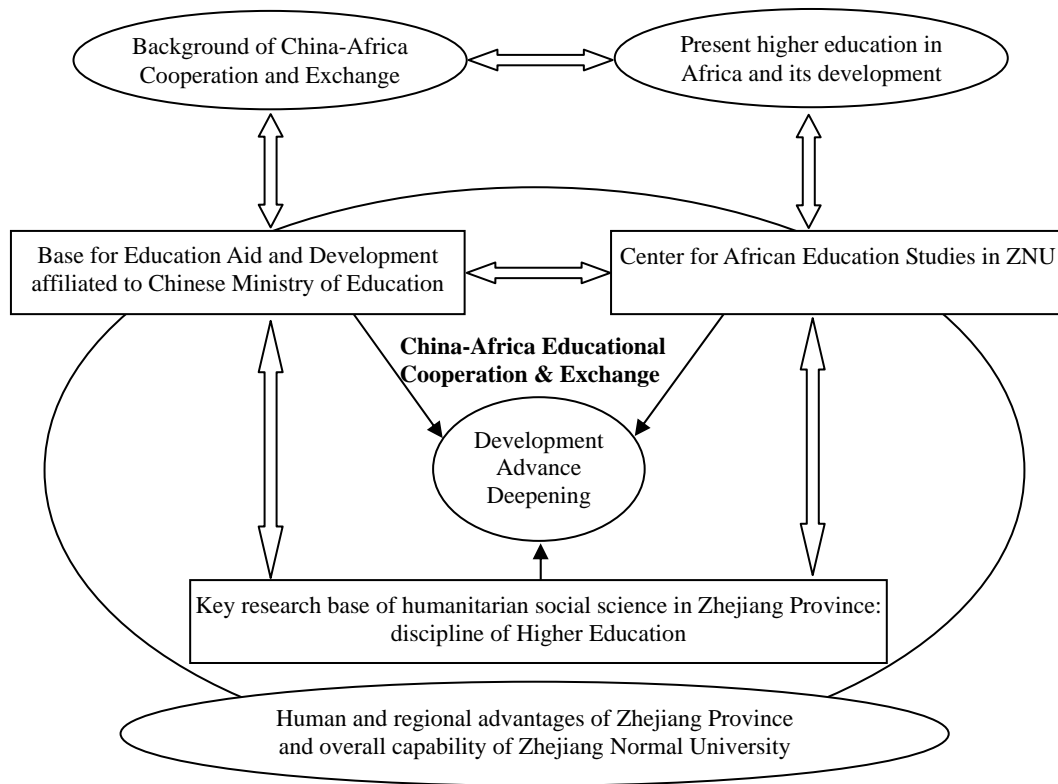


Figure 1 Africa-oriented programs in Zhejiang Normal University

1. Taking Its Own Advantages, ZNU Actively Develops China-Africa Educational Cooperation and Exchange

Zhejiang Province is situated in the southeastern coast of China. The Province is well known with its unique scenery, developed economy and culture together with a long tradition of part-time study, part-time farming to lay stress on education. It is regarded as an advanced province in China in terms of its proficiency and quality in education as well as its educational environment and resources. Designated as a provincial key university, ZNU is located at Jinhua city, which is known as a central city in the mid-western Zhejiang province. The main campus of the University covers an area of 530 acres with charming lakes and attractive hills. Since its establishment in 1956, the school has transformed from a teacher-training-oriented college into a comprehensive university with literature, sciences, and education as its backbone, plus multiple disciplines such as philosophy, economics, jurisdiction, history, engineering, and management. The University accumulated a profound wealth of educational and cultural experiences, which contribute to its motto “Wisdom with Virtue, Integrity with Innovation”. Favorable conditions and its overall capability lay a solid foundation for the University to carry on its educational cooperation and exchange programs with African countries.

As early as 1996, ZNU was assigned to be responsible for teaching and management of the Chinese Language Center in Cameroon, which is a long-term cooperative program of China with Africa. 5 teams with 8 teachers and 1 technician were sent from ZNU to the Center where over 600 trainees from about 20 African countries received training since its establishment. It remains the only Chinese language Center in central and western Africa. The educational circle in Cameroon praised the Center as “a model sample to demonstrate the

spirit of South-South cooperation.” In recognition of the special contribution of the Chinese teachers in promoting educational cooperation and strengthening friendship between China and Cameroon, 3 Chinese teachers from ZNU were awarded “Cameroon Gold Labor Medal” by the Cameroon government.

Since 2002, commissioned by Ministry of Education and Ministry of Commerce of China, ZNU has been responsible for 9 human resources training programs for African countries such as Seminar on Fundamental Education Management, Seminars on Higher Education Management and Seminars for university presidents. In 2004, as a follow-up program of the Seminars, a special training program on pre-school children education and management was launched for a delegation from Cameroon. Up to September 2005, 159 members from 38 African countries benefited from these programs, among which 37 were officials above the rank of vice-directors in Ministry of Education, 42 were University presidents and vice-presidents and 80 were other senior officials from Ministry of Education and other educational organizations. In addition, there have been inter-university cooperation agreements between ZNU and 20 African universities. A variety of effective cooperation and exchanges have been developed on the basis of equality and with the spirit of realism.

In 2005, at the closing ceremony of the Seminar for the Universities Presidents from African Francophone Countries, Mr. Lodjou, President of Lomé University of Togo, quoted Alain Peyrefitte, a French statesman’s words “when China wakes up, the world will tremble.” Then he continued with emotion, “Now China is perfectly awakened, but the world is not trembling at all.” His words vividly expressed his reflections and the change of his opinion toward China. In November of the same year, the China-Africa education Minister Forum was co-sponsored by China’s Ministry of Education, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Africa-oriented programs carried out by ZNU were highly valued and widely appreciated in the forum.

2. Reinforcing Base Construction to Promote China-Africa Educational Cooperation and Exchange

To promote the level of educational cooperation and exchange with Africa, ZNU set up a Center for African Education Studies in 2003, which boasted itself the first academic unit specializing in the research of African education in China. The center not only integrated the academic researchers for African education of the school, but also played the role as a platform for African educational cooperation. Through the field investigations and surveys in Africa conducted by ZNU visiting scholars, and through face-to-face dialogues between African officials, scholars and their Chinese counterparts in China, the center went deep into its study of the present educational development of African countries and its trend. Meanwhile, the Center started researches on a series of special topics and focused on the training of researchers and construction of academic teams. At present, in progress the Center has two research programs: “Higher Education in African Francophone Countries” and “Higher Education in African Anglophone Countries”, which were respectively authorized as key research topics by the Educational Department of Zhejiang Province and the national Ministry of Education. The Center was authorized by Hanban (the Office of Chinese Language Council International) to start editing a set of Chinese Language Textbooks for Africans. It has also started to enroll graduates for MA degrees in African education and has trusted Zhejiang University to enroll students for PhD degrees in that field.

In 2004, ZNU was approved by the national Ministry of Education as one of its 4 Bases for Education Aid and Development (BEAD), which contributed greatly to a wide arena for the university to develop educational cooperation and exchange with Africa. Since that year, ZNU has been entrusted by the Ministry of Commerce to

host human resources training programs for Africa. Based on the training programs and supported by its disciplines and specialties, ZNU focused on the field of “management and teachers’ training in higher education” to seek possibilities of educational cooperation and exchanges with African countries by means of seminars, exchanging students and visiting scholars. Up to now, the Base has set up relationships of cooperation and exchanges with nearly 50 universities and scientific institutes in over 20 countries and regions and has formed its own priority and feature. Meanwhile, due attention is paid to the coordination and division of work between the Center and the Base. The former lays stress on researches of African education, especially that of African higher education and its management; while the latter on hosting and carrying out the programs for African educational cooperation and exchanges. The Center provides the base with academic research backgrounds for its construction; while the base enriches the Center with basic academic sources. The two supplement each other, resulting in a beneficial mechanism.

To support the base construction in terms of disciplines, ZNU makes it a point to intensify the discipline of “Higher Education” which was approved in 2005 to be the Key Research Base for Human Social Science among Colleges and Universities in Zhejiang province. The discipline includes researches on comparative higher education, higher education management and policies, appraisal of higher education, higher vocational education, college curriculum and teaching. Professor XU Hui is the chief of the Discipline as well as Head of the research Base. He is a well-known pioneer scholar in the field of comparative higher education. In the Chinese academic circles, he enjoys high reputation for his fruitful achievements in research of the international higher education, and the reform and development of Chinese higher education as well. On August 29, 2006, Prof. XU Hui, as a chief expert, delivered a speech entitled “Trends of World Education Development and the Deepening of Reform in Chinese Educational System” to the top leaders of the Political Bureau of the CCP. In the past three years, the Base carried out two international cooperation programs, 8 programs at national or provincial level, and won 6 scientific research prizes at provincial or ministerial level, which provided wide and solid academic support for the construction of BEAD.

3. Making Plans for Future Development to Deepen China-Africa Educational Cooperation and Exchange in an All-round Way

In the forthcoming 5 years, according to “An Outline of the Eleventh 5-Year Development Program of ZNU”, the university will complete the following 10 tasks in priority so as to deepen China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange in an all-round way:

(1) Reinforce base construction and bring the comprehensive radiation function of the base into full play.

Guided by “China-Africa Educational Cooperation and Development Program” issued by the Ministry of Education, further intensify the construction of BEAD and fully play the role of its multiple-functions in the development of human resources, African education studies, and the development of the information base for human resources.

(2) Set up Confucius Institute and quicken steps of teaching Chinese language in Africa.

Set up a Confucius Institute on the basis of the Chinese Language Center in Cameroon. Quicken the tempo of Chinese language teaching in Africa by improving textbook development, teacher training and reinforcing teaching equipment.

(3) Organize seminars and cultivate educational personnel for African countries.

Organize seminars of different levels, and jointly cultivate African educational personnel including educational administration officials, university presidents, and principals of high school, primary schools and vocational schools as well as their backbone teachers.

(4) Expand foreign student program, accept more African students to study in China.

In addition to sending scholars to carry out research in Africa, ZNU will further tap its educational potentiality to educate more African youth, especially in BA and MA programs.

(5) Set up special funds for African scholars to visit ZNU.

Arrange special funds to help African scholars visit ZNU for lectures, advanced studies and researches.

(6) Dispatch scholars to Africa for lectures or for educational exchanges.

To carry out the guideline of “Go abroad” set by Ministry of Education and depend upon the cooperative network set up by the Base, send experts in all fields from ZNU or other units to Africa on long/short-term basis to give lectures or for educational exchanges.

(7) Hold cooperation forums, and establish on-line exchange platform of higher education.

Hold “China-Africa Presidents Forum” based on the present programs, then set up “China-Africa Higher Education On-line Exchange Platform”.

(8) Start bilateral or multiple academic researches on mutual topics.

Start academic researches or discussions in different fields held bilaterally or multilaterally with African countries on educational problems with common interest.

(9) Set up academic teams and start systematic research on African education.

Reinforce the construction of the academic teams and cultivate scholars for African educational research, start topic researches according to schedules, organize teachers to translate a set of African education series, and intensify studies on higher education in African Anglophone countries.

(10) Start comparative studies and provide background information for making policies toward Africa.

Start comparative researches on British, American, French and German educational exchanges toward Africa so as to lay scientific grounds for the nation’s educational cooperation policies.

China and Africa are known respectively as the biggest developing country and the continent with the largest number of developing countries. They share similar bitter history and expect similar development future. There is a task of mutually promoting and strengthening educational cooperation and exchange. Not only it consists of part and parcel of China-Africa cooperation and exchange to facilitate and deepen mutual traditional friendship, but also it promotes the two sides to learn from each other to raise the educational horizon and quality, mutually create in China and Africa a bright future for their reform and development in higher education, and commonly compose a new chapter of China-Africa educational cooperation and exchange.

Reference (omitted)

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