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**UNRAVELING AFRICAN AGENCY IN SHAPING EDUCATION
COOPERATION WITH CHINA:
A case study of Kenya**

Dissertation submitted by
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Education cooperation between China and Africa is often understood through the lens of China's soft power strategy, which overshadow the active role of African governments in exploiting the ongoing competition between China and the US. This thesis investigates the African perspective in education cooperation with China through the case study of Kenya. It poses the question: how has Kenyan agency in the education cooperation with China evolved? Building on the concept of African agency, which refers to the ability of African countries to act independently and make their own decisions in the context of international relations, this study argues that China's increased engagement in Africa's education sector has created more opportunities for Kenya to expand its agency. Kenyan agency is evident through various indicators, such as significant alignments between its education development priorities and the outcomes of cooperation frameworks with China, such as FOCAC, BRI, and other China's direct initiatives. The study also suggests that the level of agency in education cooperation is influenced to some extent by political and economic dynamics at the domestic level. Conducted through documentary research, using available secondary data, this thesis aims to explore the extent to which the Kenyan government exerts its agency in education cooperation with China. This contributes, through the case of Kenya, a more nuanced understanding of China-Africa relations in the education sector and contributes to the literature on African agency – and China's relations with Africa more generally - in the field of education cooperation.

Keywords: African agency, Kenyan agency, Education cooperation, Kenya-China relations

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Abbreviation and acronyms

AU	African Union
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
FOCAC	Forum on China–Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IO	International Organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NESSP	National Education Sector Strategic Plan of Kenya
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The question of agency in African politics and international relations has become even more topical in recent years due to intensifying geopolitical competition between China and the US. Despite the tendency in International Relations (IR) to highlight the dominance of China's soft power in its education cooperation with Africa, it is crucial to go beyond how external powers expand their influence by supporting African education, since global competition offers opportunities for African states to pursue extraverted politics based on strategies of diversifying external partnerships in order to secure domestic political gains. The thesis explores Kenya's active engagement in education cooperation with China, as a means to address challenges hindering its educational development.

Kenya – a middle-income country in East Africa with decades of being colonized by the British empire before gaining independence in 1963 – has been working hard to bring its country out of poverty and become a developed country. However, like other African countries, the development path of Kenya has been impeded by several factors derived from colonial era, as well as post-colonial Kenyan politics (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Alsan, 2015; Esteban et al., 2012; Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2016; Wietzke, 2015). The Kenyan government has sought to overcome these challenges, and enrich itself in several ways, including improving human capital with better education via international cooperation, in a bid to unlock the high potential of Kenyan people as well as to maintain in power.

Quality education, especially in higher education, is a crucial prerequisites to become a developed country since a high proportion of high-skilled labors not only attracts foreign investment in high-tech industrial sectors but also improve the domestic technology and innovations, leading to improved productivity (Bloom et al., 2006; Kruss et al., 2015). Moreover, it could also yield positive externalities, such as inequality reduction and poverty eradication, to society in the long run. Despite the significance of quality education, Kenya, like other developing countries, still faces difficulties in generating sufficient financial resources for facilitating their education system.

Quality higher education remains a bottleneck in Kenya's national development. Human capital needs to be invested more heavily, to pursue developed country's status. However, it remains a challenging task for the government to finance education system adequately due to its rising population. According to the PopulationPyramid (2023), Kenyan

population increased by 20 million within two decades (2003-2023), reaching 55 million people, and is estimated to reach 85 million by the end of 2050. While Kenya's education spending is relatively high compared to other African countries, standing at 5 percent of the GDP (CIA World Factbook, 2023), it remains insufficient to sustain the education system against the growing population.

Moreover, the political incentives of prioritizing physical investments over education development also indeed create challenges for politicians in allocating more budget to the education sector. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted Kenyan students, especially ones that have no internet access for learning. Therefore, to further develop the education system, Kenya would need to increase or even maintain the current rate, which require more financial resource to improve higher educational situation timely.

Instead of relying solely on the domestic sources, Kenya has also been receiving financial assistance from several sources to develop several sectors like infrastructure, digital, technology, and education. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries are long-standing contributors. For several decades, OECD countries have been mobilizing lots of resources to help develop Africa (OECD, 2023). While both hard and soft infrastructure have been established as development aid, the contributions from OECD countries remain insufficient for African nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, since lately it could not secure gradual financial support from the West (Mthembu & Mabera, 2021).

One of the emerging partners that become increasingly prominent in African continent is China with ties dating back to the post-colonial era. It was not until 1990s that China rebooted its relationship with Africa. China has continued to deepen its relations with African countries via Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and more recently Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Meibo & Xie, 2013). Since China's presence in Africa, concessional and non-concessional loans for financing infrastructure, namely roads, railways, dams, hospitals, schools, and telecommunication systems, have been provided.

Amidst ongoing criticism of 'debt trap diplomacy' (Al-Fadhat & Prasetyo, 2022; Bartlett, 2022a), Chinese loans towards Africa continue, but in a more discreet manner, with greater adherence to guidelines for debt sustainability. Moreover, China has not been investing in only tangible connectivity to facilitate economic activities but also intangible connectivity, such as education cooperation and cultural exchange with the aim of deepening ties between China and African countries at the people-people level. As a result, education cooperation has become a key element of boosting partnership between China and Africa (Ponomarenko & Zaballa, 2019).

Criticisms of Chinese engagement will not matter as long as African leaders and local people still share a positive perspective on China. Therefore, China started to focus on enhancing education cooperation with African people via several approaches, for example, granting short-term and long-term training for officials, university scholarships for students, and building Confucius institutes to teach Mandarin, and disseminate Chinese culture and tradition (King, 2020).

Thus far, there has been an intense debate on China's enhanced education cooperation with Africa from China's perspective, such as enhancing soft power to increase the positive image of China, and fostering ties with African leaders to gain international support (Edeh & Brenda, 2019; Hong, 2014; King, 2013b; Perez-Garcia & Nierga, 2021; Repnikova, 2022). However, there is a growing argument on the study of China-Africa relations being dominated by the mainstream International Relations (IR) Theory, resulting in the overemphasis on the material power of states (Mthembu & Mabera, 2021). According to mainstream IR, since China acquires much higher power than Kenya, China could influence and seek benefits from its counterpart as it wishes. Meanwhile, in Kenya, with its chaotic history of being colonized and governed for centuries, and the never-ending conflicts among ethnic groups within the region, their governmental roles have been neglected. Nonetheless, this debate solely focuses on China's perspective, assigning Kenya as a passive actor. The narrative of the new scramble for Africa is one of the misleading examples (Soulé, 2020).

This study offers an alternative perspective by departing from Kenyan side, which remains under-researched. It is worth highlighting that Kenya, and other African countries in general, since the independence, must not be recognized as passive actors that have no choice but to follow China since African countries are sovereign states, allowing them to play an active role, in their bid to voice and seek to maximize their interests, even when negotiating with great powers (Mthembu & Mabera, 2021; Soulé, 2020).

1.2 Research Question

This thesis poses the question: **how has Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China evolved?** The research timeframe spans from 2000 to 2023, focusing on the Kenya-China relationship from the emergence of FOCAC to the present year (2023). The objectives are twofold: first, to explore the development of education cooperation between Kenya and China from 2000 to 2023, and second, to assess the extent to which the Kenyan government has been able to exert its agency in shaping the nature and outcomes of this

cooperation. The expected contributions are to shed empirical light on how the Kenyan government has been actively engaging with China for its own interests in education cooperation, using available secondary data; and to apply the theoretical lens of African agency in the field of education cooperation.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. **Chapter one** departs with the introduction to emphasize the significance of research, a literature review and research methodology. **Chapter two** provides an overview of education cooperation in general, followed by the development of higher education cooperation between China and Africa, and more specifically Kenya. Then, it explains the modalities of higher education partnerships between China and Africa. **Chapter three** delves into the Kenyan case by investigating education development priorities of Kenya and education-related outcomes of its cooperation frameworks with China, followed by analyzing Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China. Finally, **chapter four** restates the main findings of the thesis and expands on avenues for future scholarly research.

1.4 Literature review

To address the research question, this thesis first thoroughly examines the existing literature for two distinct purposes, including establishing the current state of knowledge on the topic, and identifying research gap. Following a comprehensive review of the literature, it proposes that the existing literature be categorized into two main streams, namely the development of China's role in Africa, and the role of African agency in engaging with China.

1.4.1 The development of China's role in Africa and Kenya

The first stream focuses mainly on the development between China-Africa relation, and the increasing role of China in engaging with Africa. Studies on the relationship between African countries and China traced their history back to Zheng He and its presence during the cold war (Tan-Mullins et al., 2010; Chan, 2019). Nevertheless, it was only after the last decade in 20th century that China increased its presence in the world via Going out policy to incentivize Chinese companies to invest in foreign countries.

Scholars have proposed several factors that led to China's expansion in the 1990s. First, Qobo (2021) argues that it was driven by the need to stabilize the balance-of-payments, matching the country's current account surplus with a capital account deficit to sustain China's

economic growth. Second is the refocusing of China on alternative relations after the Tiananmen massacre was heavily criticized by the West (Uchegara, 2009). Third is economic benefits, including abundant natural resource and energy, investment opportunities, and market expansion (Staden et al., 2020; Uchegara, 2009; Wambui, 2019). Fourth is support from African countries at the international level (Uchegara, 2009). After the introduction of the "Going Out" policy, China has been actively seeking countries to invest in, leading to Africa becoming one of its target continents for fostering relations.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, their relationship has significantly deepened with the launch of Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) for inter-continental discussion, marking the formality of cooperation between China and Africa. Nowadays, FOCAC becomes a centrality of political relations and politics in Africa-China relations (Large, 2022). Several scholarships focused on the development of FOCAC, updating and comparing the outcomes of these meetings to yield China's outlook in Africa (Eom et al., 2018; King, 2007, 2020; Large, 2022; Yu, Shirley Ze, 2022)

Apart from FOCAC, it is worth noting that there is another crucial Chinese foreign policy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced by President Xi Jinping in 2013. Staden et al. (2020) investigates the 2015 FOCAC meeting, noting that China rarely mentioned BRI in their statement during the meeting. However, after FOCAC 2018, China began to emphasize the importance and potential synergies between the BRI and Africa. King (2020) explores the compatibility between two plans, arguing that BRI can complement FOCAC pledges on enhancing education cooperation.

Regarding China's strategies in Africa, although China has engaged with Africa from time to time since the decolonization and independence of African states, its return to Africa requires trust from African leaders. China has implemented several principles to attract African leaders. King (2007) emphasizes China's pledge on the mutuality and two-sidedness of the cooperation between China-Africa. However, we could see one-way learning in many areas of cooperation despite the emphasis on mutuality on paper (Large, 2022). Moreover, China also stands on its policy of non-interference, which enhance more opportunity to cooperate with countries where relations with the West are problematic (Uchegara, 2009). Cannon et al. (2022) agrees with Uchegara, adding that China's non-interference is attractive to African leaders, who have been looking 'East' for nearly two decades. Moreover, another attraction is that China show its equal respect by not displaying Africa as poor countries who require external aids, unlike the Western aid agencies (King, 2007).

China has been investing in both tangible and intangible connectivity with Africa. While China's tangible investment in Africa, such as building ports, highways, and stadiums, is significant, it is equally essential to understand network-building even though they are not as readily visible (Benabdallah, 2020). Additionally, King (2020) emphasizes the support to human resource development, arguing that China provide support under many different titles, including capacity building, training opportunities, scholarships, cultural partnerships, mutual learning, knowledge sharing, research, and people-to-people exchanges.

The investments in both tangible and intangible connectivity with Africa can yield several benefits to China in many spheres. Large (2022) highlights that China's investment in human capital via China-Africa Future Leaders Dialogue with the aim to deepen its political relation with Africa. Niu et al. (2021) add that education cooperation is a key area of cultural and top exchanges, which plays an important role in enhancing soft power, promoting mutual understanding, shaping positive national image. Although China's higher education engagement with Africa can be viewed as a development of soft power towards African countries (Lefifi & Kiala, 2021), King (2013) argues that African students studying in Chinese universities did not really shift their attitude from negative to positive.

Regarding the contribution of China to Africa, at the national level, the most concerning consequences is related to economy and local businesses. Uchegara (2009) raises several concerns for African people, such as low-priced goods, debt, little transfer of technology, little job creation, environmental impact, and labor standards. Wambui (2019) also proposes the impact on small local businesses and the rudimentary manufacturing industries in Africa. Another consequence derived from political relationships, such as maintaining authoritarian regime in Africa. According to Broich (2017), however, the non-recognition of Taiwan is the major determinant for Chinese official development finance, not the regime. At the global level, Li (2016) proposes that China reverses the current international political and economic order by introducing the eight principles for economic aid and technical assistance to other countries, which contradict to traditional western aid agencies.

Looking specifically into the realm of Kenya-China relations, there exists valuable literature. For instance, King (2013a) delved into the development of education cooperation between Kenya and China, and other works have explored various aspects of the bilateral ties. Another example is Chege's article (2008), which investigated economic relation between Kenya and China. Nevertheless, Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China remains under researched, especially during the presidency of William Ruto, revealing a significant research gap. Therefore, this thesis aims to address this gap by offering original

insights into Kenyan agency and its role in shaping education cooperation with China, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between the two nations.

1.4.2 The role of African agency in engaging with China

African countries' roles at the global stage were often underestimated by IR scholars, viewing them as passive actors who lack of ability of self-determination so-called policy taker rather than a policymaker in the context of great power competition. One reason derives from mainstream IR theories, which focus deeply on power of the states and the distribution of power between states, overemphasizing the significance of material capabilities and the size of economy in influencing other states (Lala, 2020; Mthembu & Mabera, 2021). Moreover, dependency theory also has remained influential over time, which set aside the roles of small powers in the shadow of great powers. Therefore, at the beginning, the study of China's presence in Africa focused mostly on China pursuing its interests in the region without taking into considerations of African side (Procopio, 2018). However, several scholars later have criticized the conventional approach, proposing to address these issues from African perspectives, or Africa-China studies, in other words.

Before the prevalent use of the term of “African agency”, Bayart & Ellis (2000) wrote a paper, proposing argument that is relevant to African agency. Their paper points out African roles in engaging with external powers by using examples from African history to conclude that African have been active agents throughout the history since African leaders have been making use of external environment by what he called "extraversion strategies" to benefit their countries and themselves. Several extraversion strategies are given ranging from democracy, humanitarian aid, financial, economic to cultural forms (Bayart & Ellis, 2000). His work becomes highly influential for scholars to study the phenomenon between African countries and China from the African perspective.

Since then, studies on the role of African actors in the global level have received more attention from scholars, especially in China-Africa relations. Alden (2013) argues that the dominance of IR in China-Africa studies is failing scholars to recognize domestic and transnational element. At the same time, Staden et al. (2020) caution not to assume that the power gap between individual African countries and China connotes that Africa is a vulnerable partner. This argument aligns with several scholars who suggest that although Africa don't acquire high military and economic power compared to great powers, they learn to find the way to exert their influence and push their agenda for their own interests (Mthembu & Mabera,

2021; Procopio, 2018). This is due to the fact that unlike the past, Africa countries in the post-colonial era could appoint their own delegates to represent their interests at the bilateral and multilateral level, allowing them to set and push their own agenda, which makes the neo-colonial competition narrative or what the paper calls "the new scramble narrative" misleading as it ignores the role of African agents (Soulé, 2020). Therefore, scholars came with a conclusion to refer "African agency" as a way that African countries are also active outside their region, and we must not see them as victims of others' actions (Coffie & Tiky, 2021; Mthembu & Mabera, 2021; Phillips, 2019; Shaw, 2016; Soulé, 2020; Staden et al., 2020).

Several definitions of African agency are proposed by scholars. For instance, Shaw (2016) defines it as the ways in which Africa's political, economic, social, and security actors can and do exert influence both on the continent and in global politics, as opposed to simply being passive targets or victims of others' actions. Another definition is set by Staden, Alden, and Wu (2020) as its ability to make independent decisions and to increase its bargaining power. For Andreasson (2013), agency can be defined as the ability of states – the primary actors in the international system – to generate and deploy a range of capabilities (hard and soft) in the pursuit of their national interest. Despite the lack of universal definition, this thesis explores the components and define African agency as the ability of African countries to act independently and make their own decisions in the context of international relations.

It is crucial not to make an assumption that agency is only possessed by the state, but there are several other actors at the regional and domestic levels that could influence the direction of the negotiation (Staden et al., 2018). Moreover, it is crucial to differentiate between agency and power. Agency can be observed within the specific context and structure of negotiations, rather than being solely determined by a state's overall power and resources (Procopio, 2018). As of 2023, the concept of African agency is still evolving with several scholars making effort to establish a more comprehensive understanding.

Regarding African agency in its cooperation with China, several studies are conducted at the bilateral level between an African country and China. For instance, Phillips (2019) identifies the nature and limits of Ghanaian agency in bilateral and multilateral aid relations since the oil discovery in 2007, arguing that China increases their ability to diversify and shift historic dependence on the World Bank for development finance. Regarding the multilateral level, Staden et al. (2020) give an example, contending that although Africa have much less power than China, it managed to push African Union Agenda 2063 into FOCAC meeting. Another example is that African countries successfully nudged China to prioritize the issue of industrialization as an outcome of the meeting, which is one of the top priorities of African

agenda (Mthembu & Mabera, 2021; Staden et al., 2020). Soulé (2020) suggests further that at the multilateral negotiation, African agency is expressed via Africa+1 summits as African agents used the engagement with external powers, especially with China for their own benefits, namely attract investment; diversify economic partners to reduce dependency; claim back their economic policy space; and escape political isolation.

Previous studies on African agency, which discuss how Africa agents make use of the engagement with external powers for their own interests, have covered very well in many areas at bilateral and multilateral levels. However, studies on China-Africa education cooperation remain revolving around how China develops its soft power strategy towards African countries and what are the motives behind China, while at the same time, study departing from an African side remains under researched, paving the way for further research on African agency in the field of education cooperation with China.

This thesis departs from the literature on African agency, arguing that African countries, in this thesis, the case of Kenya is an active actor, who seek to maximize interests and push for their own agenda in the bilateral and multilateral levels. It starts with a question of how Kenyan agency in the field of education cooperation has evolved with the aim to create a more nuanced explanation regarding the Africa-China education cooperation, and to fulfil the literature gap on how African agency is expanded in the China-Africa education cooperation. The following section presents a framework for understanding African agency in education cooperation, serving as a guideline for further analysis.

1.5 Framework – African agency in Education cooperation

This section presents a foundational framework for understanding African agency and/or Kenyan agency, which serves as an approach to examine how African countries assert their interests in education partnerships with China. It starts with the roots of African agency, followed by establishing approaches to examine Kenyan agency in the field of education cooperation.

The development of African agency can be traced back 1970s when agency theory was introduced in economic and management spheres by Jensen & Meckling (1976), who conceptualized principal-agent problem in corporate governance. Their work essentially reflects that the interests of the manager (agent) and the owners (principals) of the company might not be aligned. Later, the agency theory has been further developed and applied as a new approach for studying in international relations (IR).

The arrival of agency theory in IR has sparked debates on conceptualizing agency. The debate between structuralists and post-structuralists, for instance, revolves around the location of agency. Post-structuralists advocate examining the indeterminacy of practices to identify agency, while structuralists argue that agency should be located in the state and structure for clarity and operationalization. This thesis follows the structuralist approach for examining African agency in the field of education cooperation, since it discusses Kenyan agency in the global structural constraints.

The notion of agency, proposed by structural theorist Wight (1999), consists of three key dimensions. Firstly, it involves freedom of subjectivity in action, which encompasses the meaning and intentionality behind an agent's action. This dimension emphasizes agency as the act of consciously doing something. Secondly, agency is about being an agent of something, highlighting the influence of broader socio-cultural contexts and personal backgrounds on shaping an agent's capacity to act. The third dimension focuses on how agents are positioned within particular roles, whether formal or informal, which may empower or constrain their choices. His notion of agency underlines how agency is expanded in the wider, structural context (Brown, 2012; Wight, 1999).

With the focus on three dimensions, structuralist scholars further suggest looking at two analytical tasks for investigating agency. The first involves understanding the extent of agency by examining the ability to exercise subjective freedom of action (agency as doing something). The second task is to explore the social and political context within which agency emerges, considering the roles being filled and the broader social setting (agency as being an agent of something). Additionally, there is a dynamic aspect to agency, encompassing the interplay between the expression of agency and ongoing structural constraints over time. Agents operate in relation to a historical inheritance shaped by the accumulation of past agency (Brown, 2012; Wight, 1999). Therefore, it is crucial to examine agency using two components, namely the act of doing something and operating within structural constraints.

Agency theory in IR offers an alternative perspective to traditional power-based, structural frameworks, exploring the role of small powers in actively engaging with great powers. This has led to the proposal of African agency, which views Africa's cooperation with external powers from an African perspective, emphasizing the active roles of African countries.

African agency principally refers to the ability of African countries to act independently and make their own decisions in the context of international relations. This thesis notes that there are several internal actors, which could benefit from the enhanced cooperation with China, depending on their ability to expand their agency during the negotiation process at the

national level. However, this thesis focuses mainly on the development of Kenyan government's agency due to the availability of data.

Despite growing attention on the impact of education cooperation in international relations, together with the expanding literature highlighting African agency, none of the existing studies incorporates African agency and education cooperation, paving the way for the domination of soft power's narrative in education cooperation between China and developing countries. Therefore, addressing this research gap, this thesis begins to rectify the underdevelopment of African agency in the field of education cooperation, choosing Kenya as a case study.

This thesis follows the logic that African agency is acquired by all African countries since, unlike in the colonial era, Africa countries could appoint their delegates to represent their interests at the bilateral and multilateral level, allowing them to set and push their own agenda (Soulé, 2020). Therefore, it must be recognized that African countries do not have to follow China's development guidelines, but they can play active role to voice and seek to maximize their interests (Mthembu & Mabera, 2021; Soulé, 2020). It departs by examining two components provided by Wight (1999), which are the act of doing something and operating within structural constraints, to explore Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China.

Regarding the act of doing something in action, this study proposes investigating the intentionality and actions of the Kenyan government in bilateral and multilateral negotiations with China, such as FOCAC and BRI. Procopio (2016) also supports examining the negotiation process to understand the roles of African actors in advocating for their development priorities. While this approach offers valuable insights, it can be challenging to implement due to the complicated official procedures for conducting interviews in Kenya. Therefore, this thesis offers an alternative option, which will be discussed in the methodology part.

Meanwhile, for operating within structural constraints, it proposes exploring how Kenya's choices are restricted by structural constraints before and after China's enhanced engagement in education cooperation. The arrival of new actors in the region can affect state agency with the existing actors. Ghanaian agency in relation to the World Bank, for example, increased after China's presence in Ghana (Phillips, 2019). Moreover, Africa+1 summits, such as UK–Africa summit, Africa-France summit, and FOCAC, are the mediums that African agents use to engage with external powers for their own benefits (Soulé, 2020).

In conclusion, the definition of African agency that this thesis uses is the ability of African countries to act independently and make their own decisions in the context of international relations. The notion of agency is two-fold, consisting of the act of doing

something and operating within structural constraints. This study follows the logic that African countries, including Kenya has their own agency in making use of their relationships with external powers for their benefits, which can be examined via investigating the intentionality and actions of the Kenyan government in bilateral and multilateral negotiations with China, such as FOCAC and BRI, and looking at how Kenya's choices are restricted by structural constraints. Although the question regarding efficacy or how successful Kenyan agency has become is more relevant, it is beyond the scope of this thesis, as it primarily focuses on exploring the development of agency rather than its success. The next section discusses the research methodology employed in this investigation.

1.6 Methodology

This study explores Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China. It employs a qualitative approach for investigation, given the condition that reliable quantitative data on China's education cooperation with Africa remains scarce and scattered. It was mainly conducted through exploratory and descriptive analysis, focusing on the period between 2000 and 2023. It selected Kenya as a case study for two reasons. Firstly, Kenya is a typical case of Africa, whose relationship with China has experienced a significant development in several dimensions, including political, economic, societal, and educational in the last two decades. By looking at Kenya, it could establish an important example of African countries in their education cooperation with China. Secondly, there has been relatively less scholarly attention on Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China compared to the focus on the Chinese loan for the Mombasa–Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway, even though education has become a major theme in their bilateral relations.

Regarding data collection, this research used secondary data to illustrate how Kenyan agency has evolved in Kenya-China education cooperation. Several sources, including books, journal articles, reports, white papers, statements, speeches, and news, were collected. I mainly collected data issued by the officials, such as Kenyan government, and the Chinese government as well as reports, plans, and statements from the bilateral meetings, such as FOCAC and BRI. Moreover, several news sources are used to keep the data up-to-date, including media from China, Africa, and western countries, such as Education News Kenya, the Standard Kenya, and BBC.

Regarding data analysis, based on existing studies on African agency, the most suggestive approach to unravel African agency, or more specifically Kenyan agency, would be

to interview Kenyan officials who have the role to deal with China in enhancing education cooperation, which could give in-depth inputs during the negotiation process with China to demonstrate how Kenyan officials bargain, or lobby for fulfilling the benefits or needs of its country, instead of going along with what China proposes. This could reflect Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China.

However, due to several constraints, including time, medical requirement, and cost, this thesis could not follow the abovementioned approach¹. Therefore, it proposes an alternative option, which might not yield in-depth data as the former approach, but it could also detect the agency of Kenyan government. This alternative approach delves primarily into cooperation frameworks between Kenya and China, including FOCAC and BRI, and compare the education-related outcomes of cooperation frameworks with Kenyan education development plan and governments' speeches.

By looking at Kenyan development plans and speeches from the government as well as the education-related outcomes of cooperation frameworks, the study could identify the actions and intentionality of Kenya in education cooperation with China. Meanwhile, for structural constraints, this study looks at the changing global environment in the last two decades to analyze how Kenyan agency has been constrained by the structure of ongoing geopolitical competition.

While acknowledging certain limitations in testing the agency of the Kenyan government, this thesis selected the second option due to the lack of primary data access that would offer more detailed insights into the negotiation process, such as the response of African actors to Chinese-directed proposals, including their cooperation, rejection, or disruption. Nonetheless, the paper aims to mitigate these limitations by extensively analyzing a wide range of secondary data and employing data source triangulation techniques (Yin, 2013). By leveraging multiple sources, the study endeavors to generate valuable information and insights.

¹ My original plan was to conduct a comparative analysis of Kenya and Tanzania, using documentary research together with in-depth interview to explain African agency in education cooperation with China. Unfortunately, several difficulties emerged after sending interview requests. For instance, I had contacted Tanzanian officials of Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and sent interview request since March 2023. However, they only responded in June 2023, promising support but requesting permission or research clearance issued by the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), in order to carry out research activities in Tanzania. Meanwhile, for the case of Kenya, I received a response from a communication officer of the MOE. However, the Principal Secretary is the one with the authority to grant or delegate someone to be interviewed, which I also rushed to reach out, but there was no response from the Kenyan side.

Chapter 2: China's education cooperation with Africa

This chapter examines China's education cooperation with Africa in order to establish the current development of China's education cooperation with Africa, and Kenya before focusing on the agency of Kenyan government in the field of education cooperation with China. After a short introduction concerning education cooperation, it offers an overview of the development of education cooperation and the modalities of higher education partnerships between China and African countries. Education cooperation between China and Africa, including Kenya, has seen significant development through initiatives like FOCAC and BRI. Consisting of seven modalities, higher education partnerships stand out as a crucial aspect, providing a foundation for exploring Kenyan agency.

2.1 Education cooperation

Education plays a pivotal role in driving comprehensive national development across various dimensions. Regarding economic dimension, better education improves labor skills, which helps attract more investment and increase technology development, leading to the economic growth in the long run (Bloom et al., 2006). Regarding the societal dimension, better education can increase social cohesion and harmony due to more tolerance (Moiseyenko, 2005). Regarding the political dimension, better education enhances political awareness and participation (Meyer, 2017). Therefore, educational development is unarguably the main priority that all leaders seek to pursue, even though it may come with certain conditions beneficial for themselves. Nonetheless, ensuring quality education is a challenge that many countries cannot tackle alone, necessitating collaborative efforts and international cooperation in the field of education.

Education cooperation, in this thesis, refers to the collaboration between different actors in the field of education, including government, international organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and private sector. It consists of the exchange of students, knowledge, expertise, and resources as well as trainings, with the aim to improve the quality of education system, infrastructure, and policy.

At the global level, education cooperation has been promoted for several decades with various initiatives and programs aimed at improving access and quality in education, as well as enhance the comparability of education systems across the world. The efforts can be traced back to the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization (UNESCO) in 1945, which has played a critical role in promoting quality and access to education globally (UNESCO, 2015). Over the years, the international society has continued to increase its focus on education development, with initiatives such as the adoptions of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Despite the series of attempt by the international society, not all countries are able to improve access to education and promote quality education due to several issues, such as lack of infrastructure, natural disaster, political failure, economic downturn, or even pandemic (UNESCO, 2022). Regardless the issues impeding them from pursuing educational development on their own, each country also seeks external assistance since lots of developed countries as well as some developing countries have been engaging with less developed countries in terms of education cooperation.

Education cooperation involves multiple stakeholders engaging in various education-related matters, potentially leading to asymmetric but mutual benefits for both providing and recipient actors. Hence, it is crucial to understand that when a recipient country promotes education cooperation and receives assistance, they are aware of the advantages they stand to gain. In the next section, the education cooperation development between China and Africa will be discussed as a departure point for more specific discussion on China-Kenya education cooperation.

2.2 The development of education cooperation between China and African countries

Education cooperation between China and Africa can be traced back to 1950s. However, it was not until the beginning of the 21st century when both countries attend FOCAC, marking the active engagement of China in the African continent. Therefore, the new wave of education cooperation between China and Africa can be found in FOCAC, and another Chinese-led global connectivity plan Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

In the initial stages of educational cooperation between China and Africa around 1950s, the collaboration primarily revolved around limited study and teaching exchanges, which involved African students traveling to China for education and Chinese teachers coming to Africa during the 1950s and 1960s (King, 2013b; Procopio, 2016). At that time, the Chinese government offered a modest number of scholarships to African students. In the 1970s, the focus shifted towards the establishment of short-term training programs in China specifically designed for African professionals in diverse disciplines (Gonondo, 2017).

The new phrase of China-Africa education cooperation began after the introduction of the first ministerial conference of FOCAC where China reaffirmed its commitment to actively engage in African region in several fields, including human resource development, and education cooperation (Ponomarenko & Zaballa, 2019). Since then, China has been increasingly enhanced support for education and training in Africa, mostly at the higher education level. FOCAC acts as a medium where China and Africa agree on the agenda, deliver the declaration in the post-meeting, and publicize their pledges via the action plan. Apart from FOCAC, there is another cooperation framework, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was incorporated in and mentioned in FOCAC 2018 (Staden et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to look at the results of these meetings, in a bid to understand the development of education cooperation.

To sum up, FOCAC and BRI have been major discussion forums between China and African countries, signifying the deepened relationships between two countries in the last two decades in several dimensions, including education cooperation. Therefore, this thesis later delves into these two forums, in a bid to explore the development of education cooperation between China and Kenya. It is worth noting that China's support for education and training in Africa mainly revolves around higher education level, including university and vocational training (King, 2013b). However, it is not limited to tertiary education in the formal sense as it has expanded to other several partnerships, for instance, short-term and long-term trainings of African professionals, the increasing numbers of Confucius Institutes and Chinese-funded infrastructure, inter-university cooperation, and joint-research. Moreover, it is also appeared in other sections, including training of doctors, nurses, public health workers, and administrative personnel from African countries (King, 2020). The next section explores the development of education cooperation between China and Kenya.

2.3 The development of education cooperation between Kenya and China

The origins of educational cooperation between Kenya and China can be traced back to the 1980s when a few scholarships and brief training programs were offered to Kenyan students to study in China, followed up with strengthening connections between Egerton University (EU) in Kenya and Nanjing Agricultural University (NAU) in China in the 1990s, including the establishment of Chinese teaching center in Egerton university (Reilly, 2015). However, like other African countries, the education cooperation between China and Kenya was minimal before the 21st century (Procopio, 2016).

Thanks to the advent of FOCAC in 2000, education cooperation between China and Kenya improved gradually in several dimensions. In the aspect of student exchanges, there is no up-to-date total number of scholarships given to Kenyan students in the last two decades, but a Chinese official reported to the local media that since 1982 the number of scholarships funded by the government for Kenyan students had already exceeded 1,000 and more than 2,400 Kenyan students were studying in China as of 2018 (MFA China, 2018a; Xinhua, 2018). Moreover, after graduating from Chinese universities, Kenyan alumni are also active in Kenya China Alumni Association, working to promote Kenya-China friendship².

In case of inter-institution collaborative programs, Kenya has collaborated with China in several projects. A significant development is the establishment of the Sino-Africa Joint Research Center (SAJOREC), which serves as a platform for scientific research, knowledge transfer, and cooperation between Chinese and African scientists, focusing mainly on environment and agriculture (SAJOREC, 2018). Additionally, Mount Kenya University has partnered with China University of Petroleum for joint scientific and technological research projects, with the aim of strengthening scholarly ties, promoting academic cooperation, and fostering mutual understanding (Standard Kenya, 2016). These collaborative efforts contribute to scientific advancement and closer academic bonds between Kenya and China.

Regarding organizing professional seminars and workshops, Kenya and China have formed partnerships for short-term training programs held in both countries, providing opportunities for Kenyans to acquire specialized knowledge and practical skills in fields such as ICT, energy, and agriculture. As of 2018, at least 10,000 Kenyan government officials have participated training seminars in China, according to a Chinese official (Xinhua, 2018). Meanwhile, there are 2 Luban Workshops, specialized in training students and personnel in the field of ICT and energy (Kenya News Agency, 2021).

Regarding language school, notably, the first branch of Confucius Institute in Africa was established at the University of Nairobi in 2005, followed by three more in Kenyatta University, Egerton University, and Moi University (Confucius Institute, n.d.). Confucius Institute contributes to Chinese-language instruction and cultural immersion at their partner universities by supplying Chinese language teachers, donating teaching materials, and offering training programs for Kenyan Chinese-language teachers in China (Reilly, 2015). It is worth

² Kenya China Alumni Association webpage: <https://www.kenyachinalumniassociation.com/>

noting that the significant number of Confucius Institutes signifies the deepened relationship between China and Kenya not only in the educational as well as cultural dimensions.

Higher education partnerships between Kenya and China have been improving in every dimension since the launch of FOCAC, it is worth noting that Kenya has deepened its partnerships with China, especially in the development of TVET institutions. There are several contributions from the Chinese side with the aim to increase quality and capacity of TVET institutions in Kenya, such as modernizing TVET institutions, and providing equipment (Kenya News Agency, 2019a). Moreover, a number of TVET trainers have also been trained in several fields, such as electrical and electronics, mechanical, automotive and agricultural machinery technologies, in a bid to equip the current trainers with crucial knowledge to ensure the standard and quality of the institutions (Kenya News Agency, 2019b). The latest number provided by a Chinese official, citing that China has provided over 67,000 training opportunities for Kenyan personnel from different sectors since FOCAC 2015 (MFA China, 2018a).

Consequently, China's involvement in the education sector has equipped Kenyans with skills essential for the future. Notably, Kenya has made substantial progress in areas like ICT and agriculture, thanks to this engagement. Furthermore, Kenya has been equipped with a more skilled workforce, which could advance national development. Given the complication of the education cooperation between China and Africa, the next section discusses the modalities of higher education partnerships.

2.4 Modalities of higher education partnerships between China and Africa

Higher education partnerships, in general, consist of series of interactions between stakeholders, including government agencies, students, education institutions, and educational staffs, beyond secondary school level, including vocational training and university. Following the 2nd Ministerial Conference on China-Africa Educational Cooperation, the significant step of education cooperation development between China and Africa can be seen by the provision of 7 modalities of higher education cooperation, mostly in the partnership mode (King, 2013b).

First is high-level visits and delegations in the educational field, which involve visits by high-ranking officials, policymakers, and experts in the field of education from China and African countries. These visits serve as platforms for dialogue, policy discussions, and the exchange of ideas on education reform, curriculum development, and educational management strategies (King, 2013b; Mishra, 2022).

Second is student exchanges between China and Africa, which includes the provision of Chinese government scholarships to African students. This enhances opportunity of African students to earn essential knowledge and skills for their countries. Moreover, it helps promote mutual understanding, intercultural communication, and academic enrichment (King, 2013b; Reilly, 2015). As of 2018 – pre-COVID19 period –, there were 81,562 African students studying in China, accounting for 16.57% of the total number of foreign students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019).

Third is inter-institution collaborative programs, which are established between Chinese and African educational institutions, including university and TVET institutions, which are often seen in the form of joint degree programs or research partnerships. These programs facilitate academic collaboration, and resource sharing in several fields of study, such as agriculture, engineering, medicine, and business (King, 2013b; Obamba, 2017). The 20+20 cooperation program established 2009 is an example of this modality, which entails partnerships between 20 Chinese and 20 African tertiary education institutions, to promote capacity building and sustainable development.

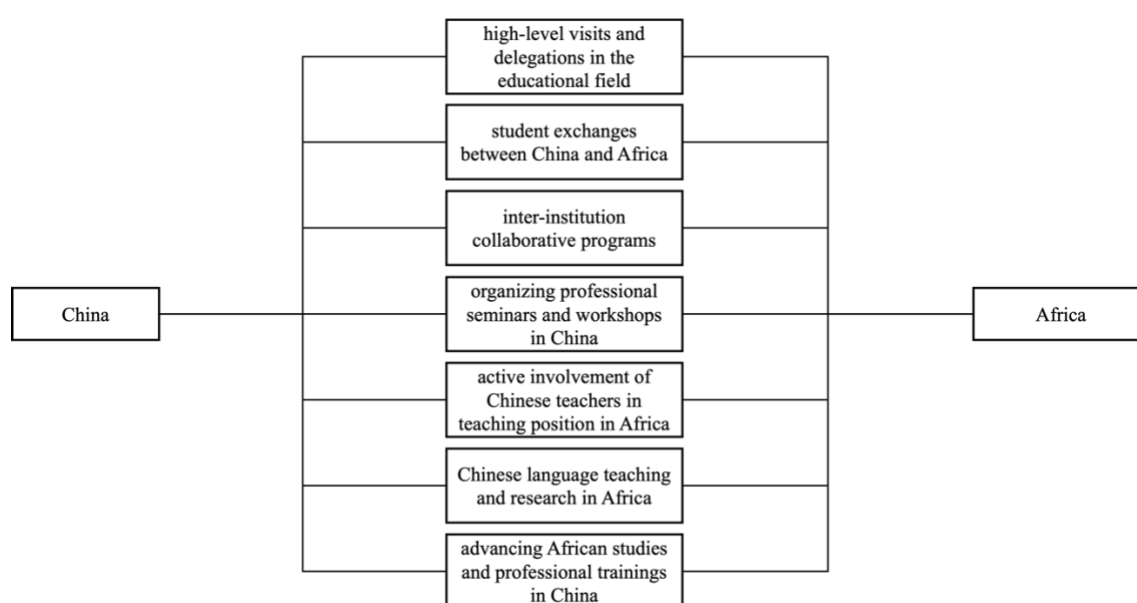
Fourth is organizing professional seminars and workshops in China, which is to organizes seminars, trainings, and workshops specifically designed for educators and government officials from African countries. Therefore, these events cover a wide range of topics adjusted for the participants (King, 2013b; Mishra, 2022). Moreover, according to 2017 McKinsey study, Chinese companies also involved in this modality by carrying out training courses for the local Africans (Huang & Askary, 2022). Nevertheless, Luban Workshops are also used to facilitate trainings to Africans within their countries (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2021).

Fifth is active involvement of Chinese teachers in teaching positions within African countries, meaning that China dispatches qualified teachers to African countries to support their education systems. These teachers contribute to subject-specific instruction, language teaching (including Mandarin Chinese), and teacher training programs (King, 2013b). The aims are to enhance the quality of education, promote cultural exchange.

Sixth is Chinese language teaching and research in Africa, which China promotes the teaching and research of the Chinese language (Mandarin) in African countries. It supports the establishment of Chinese language departments in universities, provides teaching materials and resources, and offers training programs for African teachers of Chinese (King, 2013b; Reilly, 2015). This helps foster linguistic diversity, cultural understanding, and opens up opportunities for African students to access scholarships and study opportunities in China.

Seventh is advancing African studies and professional trainings in China. This modality focuses inwards to China itself as China recognizes the importance of building its own capacity on African studies. Therefore, China has established specialized African research institutes in over ten universities, with the number continuously growing. These institutes focus on African studies, allowing China to deepen its understanding of the continent and strengthen its expertise in engaging with Africa effectively (King, 2013b; Mishra, 2022).

Figure 1: Modalities of education cooperation between China and Africa



Source: (King, 2013b), designed by the author

Modalities of education cooperation between China and Africa is a crucial foundation for understanding Kenyan agency. China has been using these collaborations to deepen its education cooperation with African countries that it has relationship with, meaning that education cooperation between China and Kenya is also part of this framework.

In conclusion, education cooperation between China and Kenya has seen significant development through seven modalities, mainly in higher education, including vocational training and university, since the beginning of the 21st century. The initiatives like FOCAC and BRI have become mediums for facilitating these collaborations, showcasing the growing significance of education as a key component of their relations. This chapter lays the groundwork for a deeper examination of Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China. The next chapter delves into Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China.

Chapter 3: Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China

“We are prioritising education issues because it is the only equaliser in the society.” President William Ruto's speech (Office of the President of the Republic of Kenya, 2023a)

This chapter explores Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China. It starts by identifying the education development priorities of Kenya and education-related outcomes of cooperation frameworks with China. Then, it explores the alignment between the domestic priorities and the increased cooperative issues, followed by the analysis on Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China, using concept of African agency. The agency of the Kenyan government can be seen through its actions, intentionality in development priorities, and governmental speeches. Amidst the structural constraints, Kenyan governments have actively sought to expand their agency in education cooperation with China by engaging in negotiations and bargaining for Kenya's development priorities.

3.1 Education development priorities of Kenya

To reflect higher education development priorities, this thesis explores National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2018-2022, issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE), Kenya³. NESSP is a comprehensive plan outlining the priorities, programs, and strategies for the education sector in Kenya for the next five years. Its successful implementation will contribute to achieving the aspirations of Kenya's Vision 2030⁴. Kenya aims to provide high-quality and inclusive education, training, and research for sustainable development via the provision, promotion, and coordination of learner-centered education, training, and research that is relevant to the labor market and emphasizes competency-based approaches. The policy priorities of this plan revolve around 4 areas, including access and equity; education quality and relevance; education management, governance and accountability; and labor market relevance.

Regarding higher education development, the report illustrates several improvements in terms of the number of TVET institution and university, and the increased number of

³ The latest publicized National Education Sector Strategic Plan of Kenya

⁴ The country's long-term development goals are set out in Vision 2030, which aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030 in a clean and secure environment.

enrolments in higher education. Within five years, the number of TVET institutions experienced a significant growth, nearly doubling from 700 to 1,300. This expansion is reflected in student enrolment, which saw a substantial increase from 148,009 in 2013 to 363,884 in 2018 across various TVET institutions. Meanwhile, Kenya also witnessed an increase in the number of universities, with the count rising from 57 to 74, dispersed across different regions. Consequently, the overall student enrolment in universities also witnessed a twofold increase, surging from 251,196 in 2013 to 520,893 in 2018.

Despite the improvement achieved within a five-year period from 2013 to 2018, the MOE highlighted that financing gap is widening over the period, impeding the development of education in Kenya since government spending on education sustains about 5.3 percent of the total GDP with around 92 percent of this expenditure is allocated to recurrent expenditure. Moreover, several challenges, especially in TVET and university, remain unresolved, including inadequate data, low female enrolment rate, poor relevance with market needs, inadequate physical infrastructure development, low proportion of Science Engineering and Technology (SET) subjects, and inadequate qualified teaching staff, according to the NESSP (2018-2022).

The recognition of a financing gap in the five-year plan has led to proactive measures to address potential risks in educational development. The MOE has emphasized the identification of risks and the implementation of mitigation strategies. As part of these efforts, the MOE aims to collaborate with various stakeholders, including development partners and NGOs, to ensure effective risk management and successful implementation of the plan.

Apart from the development plan, TVET institutions play a vital role in Kenya's higher education development goals. Emphasized by a former Principal Secretary for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), TVET education is crucial for combatting the high unemployment rate in the country (Gachanjahe, 2017). However, vocational skills training faces challenges and remains relatively unpopular among the Kenyan population.

Education development priorities of Kenya revolve around four main areas, namely access and equity; education quality and relevance; education management, governance and accountability; and labor market relevance. The development of TVET is essential for nurturing skilled human resource to serve future market. Several challenges, such as financing gap, were emphasized as one of the major obstacles in the development plan, which the development trajectories seem to worsen due to the rise of population. It also calls for further collaboration with stakeholders, such as NGOs, and development partners. In the next section, this thesis explores the outcome of FOCAC and BRI, in a bid to compare the alignments

between Kenya's development priorities and the outcomes of cooperation frameworks with China.

3.2 Outcome of cooperation frameworks

FOCAC and BRI serve as significant mechanisms for strengthening the relationship between China and Africa. It is worth noting that these forums are based on two-sidedness and mutuality, meaning that the engagements are conducted in a two-way direction. This section explores the outcomes of these cooperation frameworks concerning education cooperation. While these meetings are not conducted exclusively between Kenya and China, the results can resonate with the advancement of education cooperation between the two countries, and can reflect alignments between domestic needs and China's provision for educational support.

The first FOCAC Ministerial Conference, held in Beijing in 2000, pinned down the commitment of China in enhance engagement in the African region, resulting in several pledges for strengthening higher education cooperation, such as providing 7,000 professional trainings for Africans, and establishing African Human Resources Development Fund (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2012).

Followed by the first conference after three years, the second FOCAC Ministerial conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2003 resulted in wider higher education cooperation, for instance, the provision of training to 10,000 African personnel in different fields, the facilitation of teacher exchange, the provision of 2,000 scholarships to Kenyan students, the expansion of African academic discipline. Moreover, the development of TVET institutions was first mentioned in this conference (FOCAC, 2009a; Gonondo, 2017).

Three years later, the first FOCAC summit was held in Beijing in 2006 together with the third FOCAC Ministerial Conference, pushing forward several education-related resolutions, including enhancing closer cooperation between higher education institutions, promoting bilateral students exchanges programs, ensuring mutual accreditation of academic degrees, increasing the number of Chinese government scholarships to African students to 4,000 and providing 15,000 training opportunities to African professionals. In this summit, the provisions of annual training specifically for educational staffs, and Chinese language teaching in Africa through Confucius Institute were initially implemented (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe , 2006).

The 2009 FOCAC was held in Egypt, resulting in several advances as well as new initiatives of Africa and China educational cooperation. One notable achievement was the

establishment of 20+20 university collaborations, fostering joint research initiatives between Chinese and African universities. Additionally, China prioritized enhancing capacity-building and strengthening ties with the public sectors of African nations by offering hundreds of high-level and mid-level African administrative personnel opportunities to participate in MPA (Master of Public Administration) programs in China. For students and teachers, the cooperation saw an increase in scholarships, teacher training programs, and opportunities for post-doctoral researchers (FOCAC, 2009b; Gonondo, 2017). While there was new agenda related the development of science and technology, it is known that university partnerships in support of science laboratories had been active in 25 universities in at least 20 African countries since the early 1990s (King, 2013a).

The 2012 FOCAC in Beijing saw an increased number of trainings for 30,000 African professionals, and government scholarships for 18,000 African students. Trainings for vocational and technical skills were also part of the outcomes as well as science technology cooperation, knowledge sharing, and technology transfer (Gonondo, 2017). Moreover, new pledges from Chinese side included implementing “African Talents Program” to attract knowledgeable Africans, and the financial provision under the framework of the UNESCO trust fund to support education development programs in Africa (FOCAC, 2012).

The 2015 FOCAC, held in South Africa, was the first to be held after the formation of what became known as the BRI. However, the newly developed initiative was not emphasized during this conference. Regarding higher education, the conference resulted in a similar trend as the former one as the Chinese pledged to offer 30,000 government scholarships, and 40,000 training opportunities to Africans. They also deepened the cooperation in vocational training as China sought to assist African countries to renovate and build vocational and technical training facilities as well as provide training 200,000 African vocational and technical personnel (MFA China, 2015).

The 2018 Beijing FOCAC resulted in an even higher number for government scholarship provision to 50,000 African students, and 50,000 training opportunities for African professionals (King, 2019). With the usual continuation of the former action plan, China additionally introduced the establishment of 10 Luban Workshops in Africa, as well as provided a tailor-made program to train 1000 high-caliber Africans (MFA China, 2018b). Moreover, China also welcomed more members from African countries to BRI.

2021 FOCAC – the first meeting after the emergence of COVID19 held in Dakar, Senegal – resulted in several continuations of implementing programs, such as inviting 10,000 high-level professionals to seminars and workshops, and setting up more Luban Workshops.

However, there was no number of government scholarships pledged in this action plan, unlike the previous ones (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2021).

Table 1 the development of education cooperation in FOCAC

FOCAC	Number of scholarships	Number of training opportunities	Significant developments
2000	N/A	7,000	Human Resource Development Fund, professional trainings
2003	2,000	10,000	Discussion on TVET development
2006	4,000	15,000	Training specifically for educational staffs, Confucius institutes
2009	5,500	20,000	20+20 university collaborations, African administrative personnel to MPA program, joint-research, post-doctoral training, exchanges of think tank
2012	18,000	30,000	African Talents Program, UNESCO trust fund
2015	32,000	40,000	
2018	50,000	50,000	Luban Workshops
2021	N/A	10,000 (High-level professionals)	

Source: FOCAC Action Plans since its establishment, designed by the author

FOCAC has demonstrate deepened education cooperation between China and Africa, including Kenya. Since 2000, education cooperation has been gradually improved from one to another, widening the quantity and the quality of cooperation. It started with setting up a human resource development fund and offering training to thousands of African professionals, leading to spillover effect of cooperation in different areas, including cultural and language exchanges, inter-university partnerships, joint-research, exchanges of think tank, TVET institution revitalization, and more recently Luban Workshops.

Apart from FOCAC, the BRI is also one of the main frameworks of education cooperation between China and Africa, although Africa was not included in the beginning due to the lack of connection in the earlier silk road (Staden et al., 2020). The BRI is a trans-continental connectivity, which include human resource exchange and development as one of the major connectivity, along with infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people (King, 2020). Regarding education cooperation, the Education Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative seeks to promote the deepened cooperation between universities, joint-research,

short-term professional training, Technical vocational education and training, as well as language exchanges (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2016). The inclusion of African continent into the BRI is likely to compliment the commitments and pledges made in FOCAC, in respect of education cooperation (King, 2020). However, unlike FOCAC, there is no official number provided in the plan.

The development of FOCAC and the BRI demonstrates China's commitment in contributing to human resource development in African countries, guided by modalities of higher education partnerships, including high-level visits and delegations in the educational field; student exchanges between China and Africa; inter-institution collaborative programs; organizing professional seminars and workshops in China; active involvement of Chinese teachers in teaching positions within African countries; and Chinese language teaching and research in Africa. The major components of Chinese pledges in FOCAC and the BRI include annually increased grants for short-term trainings and government scholarships, as well as TVET institution development. In the next section, this thesis explores Kenyan agency by analyzing alignments between Kenya's development priorities and education-related meeting outcomes between Africa and China.

3.3 Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China

“We must - jointly with other countries and partners - design a sound framework that will consciously nurture and invest in human capital that yields high returns.” President William Ruto commented during the Africa Heads of State Summit on Human Capital. (Office of the President of the Republic of Kenya, 2023c)

To shed light on Kenyan agency, this section presents alignments between Kenyan development priorities and education-related outcomes of cooperation frameworks. Then, it provides analysis on Kenyan agency in education cooperation with China, using concept of African agency.

3.3.1 Alignments

This thesis investigates Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China via exploring the cooperation frameworks between Kenya and China, namely FOCAC and the BRI. It is worth noting that FOCAC and the BRI is a medium that African countries play proactive roles in negotiating with China for their benefits, resulting in FOCAC action plans, and the

establishment of specific initiatives. The education-related outcomes of these forums align closely with Kenya's national development goals, such as Vision 2030 and the National Education Sector Strategic Plan. This thesis identifies two major alignments between Kenya's development priorities and education-related meeting outcomes with China.

First is TVET development. Kenya views the development and revitalization of TVET institutions is essential for reducing unemployment rate and advancing industrialization in the long run since it could equip human resource with skills needed to serve in future market. However, according to the national education development plan, Kenya is still in short of funding for improving and expanding TVET institutions. On the other hand, China has sought to revitalize TVET institutions in Kenya via the provision of financial support and training opportunities in China as well as the establishment of Luban workshops in Kenya. Moreover, Chinese companies within Kenya also offer training specifically in each field for Kenyan with opportunity for future career in their companies. China's assistance on improving TVET institutions complements the support received from other development partners, further contributing to this objective.

Another crucial aspect is scholarships. Kenyan education development plan reviews that the country currently faces a shortage of qualified teaching staff in Science, Engineering, and Technology subjects, especially in higher education, which require cooperation for human resource development from their development partners. However, China has been providing scholarships to Kenyan students, enabling them to pursue higher education in these critical fields. This support plays a vital role in addressing the shortage of skilled educators and fostering expertise in key areas that are essential for Kenya's development.

The alignments between Kenyan development priorities and education-related meeting outcomes with China show that engaging with China is beneficial for Kenya's education development. However, identifying Kenyan agency remains challenging since there is no evidence that Kenyan governments have sought to expand their agency. Therefore, the next section explores the act of doing something and intentionality, as well as structural constraints to identify Kenyan agency.

3.3.2 Exploring Kenyan agency

“China will consider Kenya Government’s priority areas of interest,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (Office of the President of the Republic of Kenya, 2023b)

It is essential for Kenya, like other developing countries, to engage with external powers to improve human capital. China’s enhanced engagement with Africa in the education sector has opened up more opportunities for the Kenyan government to expand its agency and establish education partnerships with emerging actors to meet domestic needs. This section explores Kenyan agency by examining the actions taken and the intentionality of Kenyan governments, as well as the structural constraint. While there might not be clear evidence highlighting Kenyan agency in the negotiation process during the administration of former President Mwai Kibaki, it becomes more apparent with the subsequent two presidents.

Kenya under President Mwai Kibaki (2002-2013)

During President Mwai Kibaki's administration, his commitment to quality education for national development was evident through significant policy measures. He implemented free primary education, a move aimed at increasing access to education across the country. Additionally, the launch of Vision 2030 as a development blueprint showcased his vision for a prosperous and educated Kenya.

The implementation of "Look East" policy was another noteworthy aspect of his administration. This policy sought to strengthen relations with development partners from Eastern countries, including China, to foster economic and educational cooperation. After his presidency, President Kibaki continued to advocate for developing education in Kenya. He emphasized the importance of improving technical courses that align with the needs of industrialization, recognizing the significance of skilled labor in driving economic growth (Amalemba, 2017).

Throughout his tenure and even after his presidency, President Kibaki displayed both actions and intentionality to facilitate education development in Kenya. His efforts to enhance access to education, engage with Eastern partners, and advocate for relevant technical courses underscored his commitment to the advancement of education for the nation's development.

Kenya under President Uhuru Kenyatta (2002-2013)

During President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration, Kenya focused on the development of secondary and higher education, with a vision to transform the country into a middle-income economy by 2030. President Kenyatta emphasized the importance of investing in education for the youth, recognizing its potential to drive economic growth (Otieno, 2014). He also expressed the need to equip young people with appropriate technical skills, recognizing the importance of a skilled workforce for national development (Oduor, 2016).

Moreover, Kenyatta addressed, in an international conference, the challenges faced by African countries in advancing education development. He emphasized that with the right partnerships and adequate financing, these obstacles could be overcome (Oduor, 2018). The mention of "right partnerships" indicates that Kenya was deliberate in seeking collaborations with favorable partners, highlighting the country's intentionality and actions to expand its agency in shaping education initiatives.

During President Kenyatta's presidency, education remained a top priority for the Kenyan government, and the focus on youth education and technical skills was seen as vital for the nation's progress. The emphasis on partnerships and favorable collaborations demonstrated Kenya's proactive approach to expanding its agency and working with partners who aligned with its development goals.

Kenya under President William Ruto (since 2022)

During President William Ruto's administration, there was a notable shift in his approach to Kenya's cooperation with China. Initially, he campaigned on an anti-China platform, expressing concerns about various aspects of the bilateral relationship. However, after his election victory and subsequent meetings with Chinese officials, President Ruto's stance appeared to reverse. He emphasized the strong friendship between Kenya and China and expressed his commitment to expanding and strengthening their bilateral relations. Ruto highlighted areas of cooperation, including infrastructure, agriculture, and education, with a focus on mutual benefits for both countries (Bartlett, 2022b).

The statement made by President Ruto suggests a pragmatic and diplomatic approach towards engaging with China. While he had initially expressed concerns about certain aspects of the Kenya-China relationship, he later acknowledged the potential benefits of collaboration between the two nations. The reference to "mutual benefit" signals an intention to negotiate agreements that would be more balanced and beneficial to both Kenya and China.

Indeed, a significant shift in a political stance of President William Ruto on China can be viewed as a betrayal by some of his supporters. Nevertheless, it is feasible that President Ruto purportedly mobilized public opinion for seeking better deals with China. While there is no concrete evidence at this point, his election victory in 2022 have signaled China that Kenyan citizens are more aware of their country's relations with China and that they expect a more beneficial partnership.

During the meeting with Kenyan officials, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi made a statement that "China will consider Kenya Government's priority areas of interest" (Office of the President of the Republic of Kenya, 2023b). Although the speech did not directly address education cooperation, this reflects that Kenyan government have actively pushed forward its development priorities. This highlights Kenyan agency, emphasizing their active role and intentionality in shaping their engagements with China. It signifies that Kenya is not merely a passive recipient of Chinese initiatives but an active participant in negotiations and decision-making processes, demonstrating their ability to actively contribute and influence the terms of their cooperation with China.

Regarding structural constraints, this thesis identifies two major recurring patterns which influence the options and opportunities of the government of Kenya in expanding its agency. First is Kenya's mounting debt to China. In the beginning, Kenya greatly benefited from higher education partnerships with China, particularly during the construction of the SGR railway, which led to a significant increase in scholarships and assistance for TVET institutions – both essential for Kenya's education development. However, after the completion of this joint-funding project, the operation has turned out to be less lucrative than expected, mounting its debt owed to China. This debt burden could potentially limit Kenya's leverage and choices when negotiating with China.

Second is the increased global competition between China and the US. It is worth noting that the Kenyan government not only benefit from China's education cooperation itself, but it also benefits from traditional donors as they want to remain relevant in the region. With the strengthened education cooperation between Kenya and China, the country's development priorities have received additional support that complements the existing assistance from western nations. Therefore, this collaborative approach has contributed to a more comprehensive and diversified approach to addressing Kenya's educational needs and development goals.

In conclusion, education cooperation between Kenya and China has provided opportunities for Kenya to pursue its educational development priorities, including seeking fundings from development partners, enhancing qualified teaching staffs, developing TVET institution and universities, and equipping labors with skills needed for industrialization. By looking at the act of doing something, and intentionality via its development priorities and governmental speeches, it argues that the governments of Kenya have actively sought to expand its agency in the education cooperation with China by negotiating and bargaining for Kenya's development priorities. Although Kenya benefited significantly from higher education partnerships with China, there are several structural constraints, notably its increasing debt to China, and global competition, which yield diverse influence on options and opportunities of the agency of Kenyan government.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Amidst a new era of geopolitical competition, understanding education cooperation between Africa and China requires a multifaceted perspective, an outside-in view exemplifies China's increased influence in the region, making its return to hard power, while an inside-out perspective explains how African states actively exert their agency in exploiting, or making use of competition between the US and China in general and in education more particularly.

This thesis took the second path by exploring Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China, and investigated the research question: how has Kenyan agency evolved in education cooperation with China? This study has produced a more nuanced understanding from the perspective of the Kenyan case, which contributes to the addressing the underdevelopment of scholarship regarding African agency in the field of education cooperation with external powers. It began with a brief introduction on education cooperation, followed by analysis of the development of education cooperation and modalities of higher education partnerships between China and Africa, highlighting China's enhanced engagement after the first FOCAC in 2000 with 7 modalities for fostering education cooperation. Then, it showcased 7 modalities, using the case study of Kenya, which illustrates the enhanced cooperation, especially TVET.

To uncover Kenyan agency, this thesis compared the alignments between Kenya's development priorities and the education-related outcomes of cooperation frameworks with China, followed by analysis on the action and intentionality of Kenyan governments. Building on the concept of African agency, this study proposes that Kenya, evident through the alignment of two frameworks, has benefited from China's enhanced engagement in Africa's education sector, notably in TVET institution development, and the provision of scholarships. The agency of the Kenyan government can be seen through its actions, intentionality in development priorities, and governmental speeches. Kenyan governments have actively sought to expand their agency in education cooperation with China by engaging in negotiations and bargaining for Kenya's development priorities. Although Kenya benefited significantly from higher education partnerships with China, there are several structural constraints, notably its increasing debt to China, and global competition, which yield diverse influence on options and opportunities of the agency of Kenyan government.

Despite its significant contributions, this thesis has a number of limitations encountered during its execution. Firstly, the accessibility of data on negotiation processes and outcomes

remains a significant obstacle, although interviewing Kenyan officials could help overcome it, the author was unable to do so due to the constraints of time and resources. This thesis identified how agency is done by the impacts of agency are hard to fathom. Thirdly, while the literature suggests the investigation on the agency of domestic actors for more in-depth research, this thesis mainly focuses on the agency of the Kenyan government due to the inability to secure interviews within timeframe.

This thesis opens up a number of future research directions, of which four can be noted here and all of which underscore how productive the question investigated here is for further scholarly research and, indeed, policy engagement. Firstly, this thesis recommends incorporating interview data in terms of methodology alongside secondary data to enrich the empirical foundation. Secondly, it suggests exploring agency of domestic actors and their role in advocating for their interests, in order to expand the concept of African agency beyond state actors, such as private students going to China for their education. Further fieldwork with key protagonists would uncover inside story on education cooperation. Thirdly, in the area of cooperative frameworks, the thesis highlights the increasing relevance of recent and new Chinese foreign policy initiatives like the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and indeed the Global Civilisation Initiative, which deserve greater attention and scrutiny at the global level but also in cases like Kenya, where this appears to have implications for education cooperation among other sectors. Finally, and most importantly, the issues regarding long-term impact of education cooperation on Kenya and beyond remain significant for further research. By addressing these aspects, future studies can enhance the understanding of the dynamics of education cooperation between Kenya and China.

In the midst of intensifying geopolitical competition between the US and China, and concern at the spectre of a ‘new type of Cold War’ affecting Africa, exploring Kenyan agency in its education cooperation with China offers an alternative perspective to better understand this phenomenon, rather than focusing on Chinese soft power. Moving beyond education, and in this context as we anticipate an unpredictable future, education competition between external powers led by the US and China may be incorporated in a new type of Cold War, making it crucial to examine its implications for agency and educational development in Kenya and Africa more generally.

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