

Building Dialogue Among Nations Through Educational and Cultural Cooperation: The Case of Burundi and the P.R. China

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Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to highlight the process of educational and cultural cooperative between China and African countries, particularly Burundi, the gap it came to fill and the positive outcomes it has generated. It is essentially based on a review of existing relevant documentation. African Universities were born during a period marked by rapid change as most of the countries of the continent were achieving independent nationhood. In this context, those young institutions were assigned the daunting task of contributing to national development through research activities and by producing competent manpower to help in solving the complex problems facing those societies. To this end, African states have sought to enhance the performance of their higher education systems through cooperation with China an emerging but experienced country. Hence, since the 1960s, China has been granting scholarships and other facilities to prospective African leaders and technocrats to study in different regions of the host country. Within this framework, Burundi has enjoyed cooperation assistance from the P.R. China, in economic, medical, cultural and educational matters since independence. This has helped the country to build the capacity of its education system, particularly higher education. We may conclude by saying that the offering of scholarships, the exchange of scholars, artistic performances on both sides as well as the widening Chinese language teaching programme in schools and universities through the Confucius Institute have gone a long way in promoting intercultural appreciation and understanding between the two countries. In this perspective, there is a need for highlighting the extent to which China-Burundi educational and cultural cooperation has contributed the building of mutual understanding between, the two countries.

Keywords: Cooperation; culture; education; dialogue; globalization; university; China; Burundi.

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1. Introduction

China and Africa are two parts of the world that share a number of points of convergence with some marked differences of some kind. The two entities enjoy

old civilizations with a rich and diverse cultural heritage which constitute a priceless contribution to humanity.

Both China and Africa belong to the group of developing countries facing a variety of common challenges that they need to address through multifaceted cooperation particularly in the educational domain. China, having made major strides in the field of development since 1949, has been both a partner and a model for the newly independent African states which have sought to emulate and to work with China particularly in education. To achieve this objective, international cooperation is a crucial factor. Indeed, as Jullien de Paris (1817, p. 14) has emphasized, it is by exchanging and pooling forces together that we acquire, so to say unlimited capacity.

In the case of Burundi, following the socio-political crisis of great magnitude and protracted civil strife that the country has gone through for over a decade, an urgent need has been felt to rebuild the capacity of its higher education institutions with the backing of foreign partners. It is within this context that long term cooperation endeavours between Burundi and China have materialized in general and particularly in higher education. One material realization having been the building and equipment from scratch of the Higher Normal School (Higher Teacher Training College) to uplift the quality of education in the country.

The present paper intends to highlight and discuss the challenges facing the higher education sector in Burundi and the role of Sino-Burundi cooperation in addressing the situation. It further lays emphasis on the implication of these educational interactions and exchange in enhancing intercultural dialogue and understanding between the two nations.

2. General background

2.1. Culture: Tradition and Change

China is, according to Gu Mingyuan (2014, p. 6), an ancient civilization with a long history and an old culture. It is a country with multiple nationalities each of which has its cultural identity. Chinese cultural traditions form therefore a wide system which does encompass the cultures of many communities, the Han being the dominant one. This mosaic of cultures is, according to the same author, the result of conflicts, integrations and interactions of all kinds, over thousands of years.

Confucianism has over centuries constituted the heart and spirit of Chinese culture. Gu Mingyuan (2014, p. 31) says:

Confucian thoughts and culture cannot be said to be the representative of the entire Chinese traditional culture, however, it is the best representation of that culture. The fundamental ideas of Chinese traditional culture are mainly reflected in Confucian teachings. They mark the difference between Chinese and other cultures.

According to the above cited author (2014, p. 65), Chinese culture hinges around a number of characteristics such as its patriarchal clan system as foundation of ethical culture, the family being the basic unit of society. Other main features include,

the centrality of «humanity» that is the human being as the centre of the universe, harmonization between the spiritual and earthly, the maintenance of harmony and balance, peaceful coexistence, honesty, industriousness and the cultivation of a holistic perspective.

Both Chinese and African cultures have been widely affected by the advent of Western cultural patterns mainly through education. In China as in Africa, the dissemination of Western learning systems began with the advent of Christian missionaries, and mission schools although at different periods in history. On the other hand, African cultures have been overwhelmingly affected by foreign ones. Hence, educational and cultural cooperation between China and Africa has been helping to reduce the traditional over-dependence on Europe by African countries thus reinforcing South-South interdependence and exchange for mutual benefits.

In the face of Western domination, China responded well to the challenge of preserving its own language and its culture as rooted in Confucian values and integrating the new Western knowledge into the existing Chinese cultural universe. Indeed, as Gu Mingyuan (2014, p. 268) says, «ethical values are the core and the centre of Chinese education». The objective of education, he adds, is to produce both «sages» and «gentlemen» by putting emphasis on the harmonious cultivation of mind and character. In this perspective, scholars like Lan Ye quoted by Zhong Yong (2011, p. 168), have advocated the «integration of elements from classical Chinese culture and those from the fundamental realities of the country».

The advent of a western type and style of schooling in Africa de facto imposed a novel conception of education. In this perspective, western culture and languages assumed to be « richer and more civilized » because stemming from the Greek and Latin literary heritage, gradually marginalised and dominated indigenous cultures and languages that were thought to be «crude and heathen». This point is further discussed by J. Ki-Zerbo (1990, p. 50) when he argues:

The African indigenous education system was undermined by colonial domination which provided as a substitute a completely different structure within the perspective of subjecting the continent to European interests. Education ceased to be functional and relevant to African realities. It was no longer a natural outcrop of society, but it became rather an alien body transplanted from elsewhere to enhance the achievement of other people's objectives.

Indeed, to paraphrase Ibn Khaldoun as quoted by Bousnina, the vanquished have taken the conqueror as a model to imitate in his external appearances, his beliefs, his traditions and patterns of living.

All along the colonial period, the education system designed for indigenous peoples was characterized by a pervasive attempt at cultural alienation. Indeed, despite variations in intensity, the language of instruction policy was Eurocentric in nature in the sense of ensuring the supremacy of English or French as the dominant channels of communication, knowledge acquisition and cultural production. Indeed, as R. Arnove and A. Arnove, have pointed out, «language policies are central to an understanding of how colonial powers attempted to use schools to assimilate, acculturate and control colonized populations».

The same idea is echoed in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's reflection that: Colonization of the mind was one of the central and most enduring projects of the colonial powers in Africa. He goes on to argue the biggest weapon wielded and actually unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, their languages, their heritage, their environment, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance with other people's languages, rather than their own.

In this perspective, education has been a factor of alienation, rather than of integration. Instead of promoting the creative and productive intellectual resources of the people, schooling has fostered the emergence of an elite, cut from its social roots, prone to imitation rather than imagination.

Concerning the challenge of cultural alienation, in a recent study on the Evaluation of the Use of Kirundi, the national language of Burundi, J. Bukuru (2008) was alarmed by the very marginal status of the language in almost all sectors of public life, including formal education, as compared to French and English. This situation implies that Africa and Africans have much to learn from China in terms of adopting Western schooling models, cultures while preserving the national cultural identity and language.

Africa is a continent which is rich in terms of history and cultural traditions. It is also, according to Leo Frobenius (1952, p. 16), a region of the world where have thrived «some of the oldest, richest, most colourful and lively human civilizations. Indeed, archeological research has revealed that Africa is the «cradle of mankind» and, as D. Pauline (1965, p. 10) has noted, «prehistoric man on the continent was endowed with technical know-how and artistic creativity as found in other regions of the world».

According to L.J. Calvet (1991, p. 55), the African continent may be divided into five major Cultural Areas such as the Maghrebine or Arabo-Berber, the Nile Valley, the Sahelian, the Sudano-Guinean and the Bantu Areas. Each of these Cultural Areas is inhabited by a large variety of ethno-linguistic communities, speaking a wide variety of languages and dialects. One third of the world's 6,000 or so languages are spoken on the old continent.

As such, Africa in general and Burundi, in particular, have much to share with China in terms of rich cultural traditions and heritage. Indeed, over the years, there have been dynamic interactions between the two countries in terms of mutual visits by artist groups. Hence, Burundi's renowned drummers have held exhibitions in Chinese cities, while China's own artists have performed in Burundian towns. In addition, Burundi's national television does sometimes broadcast documentary programmes on China's art and culture particularly to mark the country's important dates in its history.

At the linguistic level, while some major African languages are taught in some of China's Universities, the Chinese language has increasingly become an attractive option in the school curricula of many African countries. This is perceived to be an imperative as interacting and trading with China has become an overwhelming reality.

China, like India, is growing fast. Its reform and opening up process during the 1980s has promoted communication and exchange between it and other countries, particularly in the Africa region. Indeed, China has made significant strides in many fields including applied scientific research (Altbach, 2001, p. 199). China has made considerable progress in industrial development. It has a vast and growing high-tech industrial base capable of producing a wide variety of products which are sold as consumer goods around the world.

2.2. Education: Achievements and Challenges

In terms of academic potentialities, China does possess a large, diversified and complex academic and research system with well over 1,000 colleges and universities (Altbach, 1998, p. 204). This system has been steadily expanding with the creation of private post-secondary institutions. In addition, according to the same author, China is endowed with a large number of research institutions in a variety of disciplines, with excellent levels of performance.

In this perspective, China's high level of academic achievements are further enhanced by a wide and active academic diaspora, exchange of scholars with advanced countries and a high number of Chinese students in foreign universities who bring back competence and expertise in many fields, sometimes achieving positions of leadership, in teaching and research.

Nevertheless, despite the achievements made over the last decades, China still has some way to go before achieving full parity with the developed nations in the field of research and higher education. This is the reason why it is of great importance for the country to gain new ideas and experience through cooperation and exchange not only with the advanced industrial and middle level countries, but also with less developed nations like those of the Africa region.

Higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa was born in a context of accelerated change and high expectations as the region's countries were achieving independent nationhood. It was assigned the daunting task of underpinning development processes by training high level manpower and providing relevant knowledge to uplift the people's living standards. Higher education in the region has been expanding since the 1960s with the birth of new universities and other tertiary institutions, in a context of limited academic resources, thus affecting the quality of learning. In Kenya, for example, the total number of University students more than doubled from 44,000 in 1996 to 96,000 in 2002 (Bugwabari et al., 2012, p. 245). In Burundi the figures for public higher education grew from 5,001 in 1998 to 11,265 in 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 16).

Educational cooperation between China and Africa began to take shape soon after the birth of the People's Republic of China namely through the granting of scholarships to students from Egypt and other African countries. The beneficiaries of those grants as well as self-sponsored scholars have been increasing in number ever since. Many have successfully undertaken Diploma, Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral degree courses, in a variety of disciplines.

In terms of educational cooperation, China has offered valuable assistance to a number of African countries. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education

(2003, p. 17), China has, between 1956 and 2002, granted scholarships to about 15,333 African students to attend universities and colleges in different regions of the country. They have been pursuing their study programmes at various levels ranging from the Doctoral, Masters and Bachelor degrees to non-degree courses, short term language intensive courses, «Great Wall» Scholarships and visiting scholars conducting research projects on Chinese Culture. In the same vein, it is worth noting that hundreds of Chinese scholars are engaged in research endeavours on African studies, ranging from languages, history, culture and other domains related to socio-economic development.

The same source indicates that over time, the Chinese Ministry of Education has offered numerous African countries a substantial number of facilities of many kinds, from infrastructure, laboratories, to scientific equipments, while availing teachers and professors covering specific disciplines (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 59).

Within the same framework, Chinese language teaching programmes have been in place in all four corners of the continent, particularly in Burundi since 2012. They are backed by the supply of books and materials and the construction and equipment of Confucius Institutes. The latter are strategically positioned on University Campuses where the elites and professionals are educated, with potential impact on the country as a whole. In the same perspective, a state sponsored Afro-Chinese exchange of scholars has been going on for mutual benefit. These include Chinese scholars working in African Studies centres and producing a large number of quality publications. It is within such centres that African languages like Kiswahili are taught, which helps further to build and deepen an intercultural link between China and Africa (China, Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 59). On this point, Omoifo (2005, p. 357) says:

The global of multicultural exchange of knowledge is to generate active dialogue and understanding and to broaden the beneficiaries' perception. This helps to become more aware about diversity among cultures and civilizations.

Before looking at the educational cooperation framework with Burundi, a descriptive account of two major higher education outlets may present a picture of the challenges and realities facing the University of Burundi and the Higher Normal School.

3. The University of Burundi

Higher Education in Burundi is a post-independence phenomenon. The University of Burundi was inaugurated in October 1964 with a hundred students or so. Its stated mission as indicated by the then Minister of Education was to provide the highest form of training to future leaders and professionals for the newly independent nation (Rwantabagu, 2008, p. 29). Indeed Belgian colonial policy had given priority to basic and vocational education. The University of Burundi has also been assigned the task of carrying out research in line with the need to solve the multitude of challenges that a developing society is facing.

By and large, the new University institution inherited the mantle of the Belgian metropolitan Universities in various ways. Indeed, the candidates were keenly selected at the completion of their high school studies and submitted to further screening before final admission. Hence, from the outset, the University of Burundi like its African counterparts inherited the Euro-medieval traditions of an ivory tower or citadel of scholarship where only a selected few were admitted to acquire esoteric knowledge through an alien language, far remote from the daily socio-economic and cultural realities of the surrounding environment.

On the whole, the post-independence period has been marked by expansion, diversification and consolidation of degree courses. Indeed, the number of Faculties increased from merely four in 1964 to thirteen by 2019. At the same time, full, four-year degree courses were established.

With its 13,000 or so student population, vast academic infrastructures as well as its experienced body of teachers, the University of Burundi is the major component of higher education in the country. It is also a leading institution in the Great Lakes Sub-Region of Africa. Its library and laboratory resources are shared by the country's emerging universities which also rely mostly on academic personnel for teaching purposes. The University of Burundi is the largest source of trained doctors, engineers, lawyers, economists and natural scientists. It provides the country with skilled professionals in agriculture, crop science, nutrition and the like, within the Higher Institute of Agriculture.

The University of Burundi like her counterparts everywhere, is not a simple capstone of the school system. It trains teachers, inspectors, school managers, education planners and curriculum designers who have an impact on the quality of the entire education system. Hence, the institution needs to build up its capacity for an optimal contribution to national development.

4. Challenges Facing the University of Burundi

1°. Massive Enrolments and Teacher Scarcity

The above mentioned national crisis that has paralysed the country's institutions did not spare the University of Burundi. Indeed, the latter has been affected by the situation of conflict and instability in many ways. On the one hand, the University has lost the cream of its academic staff, both junior and senior, who migrated to other countries in search for security and greener pastures. Hence, according to the University of Burundi Annual Report for 2016, close to 150 assistant lecturers sponsored to go abroad for further studies have not returned to the country.

This situation has happened at a period of soaring enrolments in all Faculties and Institutes. This has put a heavy strain on the remaining teaching personnel in terms of teaching load and supervision, thus jeopardizing the quality of their interventions.

In the same perspective, the rise in enrolments in a context where infrastructure and equipments have not followed the trend, poses immense difficulties as students are crowded in inadequate lecture halls where poor lighting and communication are not conducive to efficient learning. The same situation discourages teachers

from adopting creative, participatory approaches as they are overwhelmed by the excessive number of learners.

2°. *Adverse Learning Conditions*

The social conditions in which students live and work do create an unfavourable learning environment. On the one hand, scarcity of on-campus accommodation forces many young men and women fresh from rural protective schools to fend for themselves in unsafe, poorly lit, remote and overcrowded neighbourhoods. This is, according to the Burundi Ministry of Education (2017), a major cause of failure.

On the other hand, the social upheavals and bereavements that many students have gone through during a decade of conflict, have had their toll on mental destabilization and inability to concentrate on academic work without special care and assistance. Hence, the decision taken to establish student counseling units in all departments and Institutes of the University of Burundi is a positive undertaking.

The quality of the candidates currently admitted from an expanded secondary school system where teaching and learning conditions in many cases are precarious, is a major source of problems. Indeed teachers have to face a situation where many students have such a poor command of French, the language of instruction ; thus oral and written expressions are severely hampered (Rwantabagu, 2006, p. 7).

Finally, the capacity of the University has been weakened by the freezing of international cooperation as many external donors and partners withdrew their usual support in terms of specialized teachers, documentary resources, laboratory equipments and the funding of research initiatives.

The weight of tradition, that is the persistence of the colonially inherited programmes and academic structures is yet another issue facing the University. Indeed, the institution has not undergone any deep academic reform during the fifty years of its existence, except for some piecemeal modifications (Rwantabagu, 2005, p. 5).

Hence, the candidates of today are still subjected to the same encyclopaedic curricula, having little relevance to the world of work. There is a glaring lack of balance between the theoretical and the practical dimensions of the knowledge acquired. This is what authors such as A.Wandira (1977, p. 21) underlined while commenting on the African University in general:

In African Universities, students could graduate without an objective and scholarly understanding of the society from which they themselves had come and their education was not always seen by those paying for it to be relevant to Africa's needs for high level manpower. Many Africans pursued courses of study traditional to Oxford or Cambridge and without any visible and obvious relevance to their future employment.

This mimetic tendency among our institutions of higher learning is at the centre of the African education crisis and it calls for change and demystification of the acquired models (Poncelet, 2002, p. 24).

The crisis at the University of Burundi pertains also to the collapse of the research sector which used to be one of its major assets. The situation is attributable both to the dwindling resources allocated to it as to the freezing of international i.e. Western cooperation which has been the main source of funding for most research centres. Indeed, during the cited crisis period, all cooperation ties to Northern institutions and governments, was suspended except for some non-governmental interventions, from Belgium and elsewhere.

China however has remained at the side of higher education in Burundi at a time of great need, particularly with its commitment to build and equip the Higher Normal School, the supply of specialized Chinese teachers and the granting of scholarships to prospective teachers at the University and at the Higher Normal School.

5. The Higher Normal School

As the second largest public institution of higher learning, the Higher Normal School was created in 1999 to supplement the University of Burundi in the professional training of high school teachers at a period of acute shortage in an expanding school system. With a population of 1,700 students in 2006, it has an intake of about 1,000 candidates. It offers a three-year training through departments of Arts, Natural Sciences and Applied Science (Higher Normal School Report, 2016).

As of today, the school enjoys sufficient academic space after the completion of the Chinese funded building scheme. But, an acute shortage of teachers still remains, relying of senior personnel from the University of Burundi for specialized courses. Besides, its library, computer and laboratory resources and facilities leave much to be desired in relation to the needs of a rising student population.

Like the national University, the Higher Normal School has a wide ranging impact on the rest of the school system as quality and efficiency of the latter will depend on the performance level of the first. That is why the college's capacity needs to be strengthened so as to yield optimal outcomes.

6. General Trends

Higher Education in Burundi is expanding at a time when here and there, on the continent, scholars and policy makers are working out institutional models that are more in tune with today's local and global realities. For this, a well designed Afro-Chinese cooperation programme may help in implementing a cost-reducing and community based course with a strong practical component, income generating activities and an Aids Prevention and Education Programme (World Bank, 2003). It is within this framework that the World Bank sponsored Accra Conference was convened in 2003. Under the theme *Improving Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Things that Work*, the conference discussed innovatory experiences that have been successfully tried out in various countries.

In the same perspective, many institutions have integrated I.C.T. within the normal academic set up. Indeed as Unesco (2003, p. 5) emphasized:

The impact of I.C.T.s on higher education has proved more rapid, more complex and more pervasive than envisaged before. Their potential to increase access to higher education, to reduce costs, to renew modes of delivery and learning, to enhance research and to facilitate international cooperation is unanimously recognized.

Such models are advanced in China and should inspire policy makers in Burundi so as to work out a higher education model that is responsive to the country's burning problems such as hunger, excruciating poverty, social conflict and environmental degradation in addition to the building of a knowledge society.

In today's globalized context, Burundi needs to look beyond the confines of the African context in order to seek models and innovations that may inform its reform programmes in higher education. In this perspective, as recent history has proved it, relying on the Northern linkages and academic traditions is a short-sighted solution that can lead to an impasse (Brock-Utne, 2000, p. 225).

Hence, within a South-South cooperation framework, the Chinese linkage may prove to be a viable alternative as it is a way of delinking from the colonially inherited framework that has held higher learning institutions tied to the academic models and standards of Northern countries.

Indeed, China is a fast developing country, with an innovatory, work-oriented and diversified higher education system (Zhong and Hayhoe, 2001, p. 289). On the other hand, with regard to staff development, sending Burundi scholars for advanced studies in Chinese Universities offers the double advantage of diversification of knowledge systems (G.Mingyuan, 2001, pp. 98-100) and (Postiglione, 2003, p. 165) and the minimization of the brain-drain as the rate of return after graduation is far higher for China than for Western countries.

7. The Orientation and Significance of China-Burundi Cooperation in Education and Culture

China and Burundi have enjoyed close cooperation ties since independence in 1962. These links were further strengthened in June 1972 when a Cooperation Agreement in Economic, Commercial, Educational and Technical fields was signed between the two countries. Since then, China has backed Burundi's development through interventions of many kinds including loans and grants for the building of infrastructure and industrial enterprises and in the sectors of health and education. China has been one of the rare countries that have stood by the side of Burundi during the conflict period the country has gone through since 1993 while other countries suspended cooperation. Joint Commissions sit regularly to evaluate achievements and the progress made and map out cooperation strategies and priorities for the future.

At the economic level, China's contribution concerns the building and equipment of the Bujumbura Textile Complex «COTEBU», the largest industrial establishment in the country. It is a joint venture enterprise providing direct and indirect employment to thousands of people.

It concerns also the building or rehabilitation by Chinese companies of major roads and hydro-electric power plants in the country. To these should be added the building and equipment of the national Food Technology Centre, in the capital. At the Medical level, Burundi has benefited from Chinese cooperation in many aspects including the sending of teams of specialized medical personnel to rural and urban hospitals, and multifarious assistance to the Ministry of Public Health.

Within the framework of cultural and educational cooperation, the work undertaken by the Confucius Institute since 2012 is worth stressing. Strategically situated on the main Campus of the University of Burundi, the Institute has actively participated in numerous activities aimed at the dissemination of Chinese culture and language in many parts of the country, among the younger generation.

Chinese language courses comprise of different categories and levels, from conventional to special courses, the training of local teachers of Chinese, medical, agricultural and technological Chinese, complete with Summer sessions. The number of Chinese language learners in secondary schools has made a breakthrough with 7,016 students, in 73 classes (Burundi Confucius Institute, 2017, p. 1).

Within the Chinese language course designer's, perception, language curriculum has to involve a variety of cultural activities as an effective way of becoming emotionally and personally involved in the target culture and way of life. Such special performances include Martial Arts, Kungfu (which some teachers include in Physical Education classes), special dance performances, Chinese songs, the playing of musical instruments, painting, Chinese cuisine, special regional costumes, New Year Festivals, all complete with competitions in various disciplines. Hence, based on the principle that language is the conveyor of culture, by organizing varied cultural activities, students experience fun in the process of language learning as a multidimensional process (Burundi Confucius Institute, 2017, p. 9).

To enliven further the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture, competitive activities are carried out, complete with exhibitions, lectures, talks by learners. In the same perspective, a number of candidates, on basis of performance, are selected for scholarships allowing visits to China so as to gain first hand experience of China's Cultural and Natural realities which is a privileged way of promoting intercultural understanding, friendship and appreciation. It is in the same vein that in October 2017, an artistic group from Inner Mongolia visited Burundi and displayed splendid Mongolian arts and performance to Burundian audiences of all ages, numbering in thousands (Confucius Institute, 2017, p. 10).

Among the advantages gained by Chinese language learners are linguistic competence which is an asset when conducting business activities with Chinese dealers, employment as interpreters in many Chinese owned businesses, appointment to diplomatic missions involving the language and the like. The Burundi Confucius Institute intends to extend its activities further in the country after the completion of its Headquarters within the University of Burundi premises. In this perspective, the intensification of mutual visits and interactions, with the involvement of Bo Hai University in China will enhance Sino-Burundian Cultural relations for mutual benefit. Burundi, since the 1970s, have been granted scholarships to study in China.

Over the years, China's support to the education sector has taken many forms. At the general level, short term scholarships are available to the government for study at Chinese institutions in such key areas of development as Agriculture and Fisheries, Water Resource Management, Nutrition and Educational Administration.

At the academic level, the Government of China under its bilateral cooperation programme with Burundi has since the 1970s and until today been offering annual scholarships to Burundian students for undergraduate studies in the country's tertiary institutions. About 400 such scholarships have been granted so far. This reflects the will by leaders of both countries to enhance development through the training of talent as the Chinese Ministry of Education says: «Different generations of leaders from both China and Africa attach great importance to the development of education and have done their best to promote bilateral cooperation through various means».

For the University of Burundi, and the Higher Normal School, the Government of China has for the last five years been offering close to eight annual scholarships for post-graduate study programmes. These scholars serve not only as a link between, the two states and university institutions, but also they bring back a knowledge and appreciation of Chinese culture and scholarship which they pass on to the youth of Burundi through their teaching programmes. Indeed, if Montaigne was right, «travel enables young people to bring back the characteristics of those nations and their manner of living» (Scanlon, 1960, p. 128). The beneficiaries of such grants have acquired a broader understanding of the Chinese people and their culture.

In the same perspective, the presence of Chinese teachers of Food Science and Agro-Technology within the Higher Institute of Agriculture of the University of Burundi has gone a long way in enhancing the teaching of those subjects in terms of expertise, curricular innovation and the provision of specialized equipments. Their presence at a time of deep crisis has helped to boost the teaching personnel at the University. About 20 young academics from the University of Burundi have gone to China for their graduate programmes, in various disciplines.

At the material level, the Chinese Government has assisted in the building of a vast multi-million Dollar new campus for the Higher Normal School. This will improve the quality of learning among the students, as future educators, which is bound to impact on the quality of education offered in the country's schools and colleges. At the same time, the acquisition of appropriate academic infrastructures and equipment will enhance the school's performance, allowing it to become the second public university in the country, with a pedagogical orientation. To this contribution should be added the building and full equipment of an innovative technical school in Bujumbura, the capital city.

On the other hand, the consolidation of the China component in the Comparative Education and Culture course both at the University of Burundi and at the Higher Normal School has gone a long way in enlightening future teachers and education leaders on contemporary issues in Chinese education in terms of curricula, language learning and higher education innovation and diversification.

This is indeed the role envisaged for Comparative Education that it should enhance an exchange of information between educators, but also mutual and understanding among nations (Scanlon, 1960, p. 5). On his side, R.R. Singh (1991, p. 17) underlines the virtues of international relations in education by saying:

International cooperation and participation have an important contribution to make. Inter-country joint projects, exchange of experience and of well designed information and personnel can contribute significantly to each participating country's efforts, both present and prospective.

This is still emphasized by Lester Pearson who is quoted by S.P.Huntington (2002, p. 321) as saying that humans are moving into an age when different civilizations will learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, learning from each other, studying each other's ideals and culture, mutually enriching each others' lives.

8. Conclusion

Modern education has become an international phenomenon. Learning from each other and exchanging with different countries is now an imperative in the words of G. Mingyuan (2014, p. 64). The internationalization of education is further promoted by student mobility worldwide and the exchange of experts and scholars for the sharing of ideas. In this perspective, African countries have much to learn from China in the field of education and science in harnessing the information technology, while stressing the ethical foundations of education. In addition, both partners need to discover and appreciate each other's cultural heritage for deeper mutual understanding. In his book, on *Comparative Philosophy* (1931, p. 2), Paul Masson-Oursel comments:

The interest in China by Voltaire derives from the desire to learn from other cultures. By showing that there is much wisdom in other lands as in our own, we teach our fellow citizens that differences are a source of cultural enrichment.

This is further emphasized by the Chinese leader, Hu Jintao when he says that «different civilizations have to learn from each other through exchange so as to enrich each other» According to him, our world will become dynamic and colourful as we move forward together.

In the case of Burundi, the country's universities are engaged in a process of reviewing and adapting their teaching programmes and academic structures in the light of new developments worldwide. Hence, they need to be extroverted by seeking inspiration and models in Africa and beyond.

In conjunction with sister institutions in the land, the University of Burundi has a leading role to play in the country's reconstruction through research and the generation of competent human resources. Together with the national Higher Normal School, it is responsible for training a well grounded body of teachers and other professionals who will promote the quality of teaching and leadership in the country's school system.

In this perspective, academic input from Chinese Universities is of paramount interest as Burundian learning institutions grapple with the task of becoming relevant to the needs of a developing society. Hence, the utilitarian and work-oriented model of the Chinese University will be of great value. On the other hand, as Hayhoe and C. Pan (2001, p. 346) have observed, Chinese Universities may bring some of the rich

resources of Confucian humanism and ethical values to enrich the local philosophy of education. By and large, as stipulated in a recent report (2017, p. 73), in order to achieve its objective of providing inclusive and quality education for all, the Burundi government will need cooperation and support from close partners such as the P.R. China.

But, to be fruitful and meaningful, cooperation must be a two-way process. In this respect, as cooperation ties are established with Chinese Universities, the latter should host Burundian scholars within an exchange programme for teaching and research purposes.

Intercultural cooperation is a factor that can enhance harmony among nations, by reducing, prejudice and conflict between peoples. In the case of Burundi and China, cultural and educational exchange programme have become a reality over the years. Those deep contacts have helped to sow the seeds of unity, solidarity and mutual appreciation between the two nations on the basis of mutual appreciation.

With regard to educational cooperation, academic input from Chinese Universities is of paramount interest as Burundian learning institutions grapple with the task of becoming self-confident and relevant to the needs of a developing society while avoiding what P.J. Houtondji calls «scientific dependence on the West».

The on-going Chinese language teaching programme embracing hundreds of youth countrywide is no doubt contributing to knowledge and appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of China among Burundian elites. In this respect, visits to China by Burundian artists, students and academics in the Humanities field, must be intensified to promote appreciation by Chinese youth and adults alike of Burundian colourful cultural tradition. In this process, it would be beneficial for both partners to have Chinese and Burundian youth visit each other's schools, universities and village communities.

Concerning, the impact of the on-going cultural and educational cooperation, there is an obvious tendency among Burundians who graduated from Chinese Universities and colleges to have a good mastery of the Chinese language and culture, but also to encourage their fellow countrymen to do business, to seek medical care and to send their own children to China. Jereny Luedi (2008, p. 15) has noted this at a general level by saying that «elites with friendly ties to China are sending their own children to China».

Indeed, as Picco and al (2001, p. 69) have put it, «through dialogue we learn to appreciate diversity as a marvelous mixture of people and cultures which can enrich our knowledge of each other». Truly, as Unesco emphasizes, dialogue among civilizations constitutes an essential stage in the process of human development that is both equitable and sustainable, but also in the building of world peace.

9. References

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