

Engaging academically with China in Africa – the institutional approach of the University of Botswana

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Abstract

In 2006 the University of Botswana adopted the *Policy on Internationalization* which had three objectives: 1) to expand international student and staff exchanges; 2) to expand international research co-operation; and 3) to enhance the internationalisation of all curricula. As a result of the policy, the University has developed a number of academic partnerships in East Asia since 2006. The policy made a commitment to increase the number of university partnerships, not only in the traditional areas of Europe and North America, but particularly within Africa and with key economic powers in Asia, which were identified as China, India, Japan and South Korea. The most intensive academic engagement within East Asia has taken place with China and a strategic institutional approach has been adopted to develop this engagement.

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Introduction

The University of Botswana (UB) is the nation’s flagship university and until 2005 it was the country’s only public university. It was established as an autonomous institution in 1982 but has antecedents going back to the formation of the University of Bechuanaland, Basutholand and Swaziland in 1964. It has grown steadily over the years and now has approximately 18, 000 students and 900 academic staff. It plays an important role within national life in terms of developing human resources, creating and applying research knowledge, and engaging with the wider community. Since 2004 it has sought to project itself more vigorously as an international centre of academic excellence. In particular, in 2006 the University adopted the *Policy on Internationalization* (University of Botswana, 2006) which had three objectives: 1) to expand international student and staff exchanges; 2) to expand international research co-operation; and 3) to enhance the internationalisation of all curricula. The policy made a commitment to increase the number of university partnerships, not only in the traditional areas of Europe and North America, but particularly within Africa and with key economic powers in Asia, which were identified as China, India, Japan and South Korea. To advance the internationalisation agenda, an Office of International Education and Partnerships (OIEP) was set up in 2006, the first such office in Sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa, with a Director reporting to the Deputy Vice Chancellor – Academic Affairs.

As a result of the policy, the University has developed a number of academic partnerships in East Asia since 2006. It has memoranda of understanding with three universities in South Korea with which student exchanges have taken place, and with four universities in Japan where the linkages have also included staff exchange and some joint research. But the most intensive academic engagement within East Asia has taken place with China and a strategic institutional approach has been adopted to develop this engagement. This approach includes the establishment of a distinctive organisational architecture to encompass a number of different, though related, academic objectives. This architecture comprises the Confucius Institute, which is responsible for outreach to the general public on Chinese language and culture, the Department of Chinese Studies which is responsible

for the academic study of China, and the multi-disciplinary Africa-China Research Group which focuses on the relationship between Africa and China. This structure is underpinned by strategic partnerships with two Chinese universities.

Background

UB's strategic institutional approach to academic engagement with China and its organisational embodiment has developed since October 2005 when I first held initial discussions at the Chinese Embassy about the possibilities of partnerships with Chinese universities in my capacity as Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs). During 2006, the Office of International Education and Partnerships supported a number of visits by UB academics to China and in November it organised a discussion panel which I chaired. The panel included a representative of the Chinese Embassy. The meeting was reported in an article in the *University of Botswana Newsletter* entitled "UB takes initiative for educational co-operation with China" (University of Botswana, 2007, pp. 1 & 3). The academics on the panel indicated that joint research, staff and student exchange, and conferences were potential areas of co-operation although they felt that there was a problem of language that could hinder collaboration. The representative of the Chinese Embassy reported on the outcome of the recently held Beijing Summit of the Forum for China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) where the Chinese Government had announced major initiatives in educational co-operation. He stressed the importance of developing Chinese language learning in Botswana.

The section on Education in the *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2007 – 2009)* included the commitment by the Chinese Government to "Establish Confucius Institutes in African countries to meet their needs in the teaching of the Chinese language ... " (Forum on China-Africa Co-operation, 2006, 5.4.4). The concept of the Confucius Institute had first been announced in 2004 under the aegis of Hanban (the Office of Chinese Language Council International). The concept is a soft power initiative of the Chinese Government to promote Chinese language and culture, in a manner comparable to the cultural diplomacy of France's Alliance Francais and Germany's Goethe Institute. But in con-

trast to the French and German organisational model, a Confucius Institute is a partnership between a host country university and a Chinese university, with resource support from Hanban. Hence at the invitation of Hanban, through the Chinese Embassy, I led a UB delegation to China in October 2007 comprising the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Dr Rasebotsa, and the Director of International Education and Partnerships, Professor Holm. The trip involved visiting seven universities in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou in order to identify a partner university for the establishment of a Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana. In preparing this article I came across a note that I made at the end of this trip which crystallises the delegation’s overall conclusions. The note is entitled *UB’s China Initiative – Basic Precepts* and contains five bullet points, reproduced verbatim as follows:

- China now a global leader politically and economically – it is important to have soundly-based international relations
- China now a leading player in Africa (momentum of November 2006) (i.e. FOCAC Beijing Summit) and of great significance to Botswana particularly. Increasing interactions at level of the state AND of ordinary people
- Misconceptions about China in Botswana and low level of knowledge/understanding amongst general public. Potential points of friction
- Need for UB to take a leadership role in developing knowledge, analysis and awareness that will enhance foreign policy, strengthen economic interactions and provide public education, so that Botswana is better able to benefit from China’s role and avoid potential disadvantages
- Need for China to understand Africa better and have broader base of analysis and public understanding

The note captures the key arguments for UB’s academic engagement with China. Four major areas of academic activity emerge from these basic precepts. First, there is need for public education about China and its language and culture. Sec-

ond, there is need for the academic study of China. Third, there is need for research on China's role in Africa in general and in Botswana specifically. Fourth, there is need to support African Studies in China. This is the basis for the organisational structure, university partnerships and academic activities that have evolved since 2007 and which are discussed below.

The Confucius Institute

The UB delegation that visited China in 2007 signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Confucius Institute Headquarters at Hanban to establish a Confucius Institute at UB. Sahlins (2013) in a critique of Confucius Institutes states that agreements with Hanban are standardized and have clauses stipulating secrecy and conformity to Chinese law. He further argues that there are built in curriculum restrictions whilst host university oversight of the Institutes is weak. In the case of UB, the Memorandum of Agreement (University of Botswana & Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2007) was negotiated by Professor Holm, the very experienced Director of the Office of International Education and Partnerships at the time, who ensured that UB's interests were safeguarded and that the document was tailored to the UB context. The document has no secrecy stipulation and in Article 13 on Dispute Settlement says that in case of dispute the parties should "submit the issue involved to a Court of competent jurisdiction in terms of the laws of Botswana". It establishes a governance structure in which the Director of the Confucius Institute reports to the UB Dean of Humanities on administrative matters, whilst the UB Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs) is Chair of the Board of Advisors, the body responsible for policy matters that is comprised of representatives of the two universities. Furthermore, Article 5.4 states: "The academic staff of the Institute shall be free to select the teaching materials that will be used in class."

The Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana (CIUB) started operations in 2009 as a partnership between UB and Shanghai Normal University (SHNU), which was chosen partly for its interest in Africa evidenced by its Centre for African Studies. CIUB has developed as the community outreach arm of the University for the promotion of Chinese language and culture amongst the general public.

It receives an annual budget from Hanban, which has varied from US\$ 80,000 to US\$ 140,000 depending on the planned activities. SHNU incurs expenditure in relation to the Chinese Director and the language teachers employed. UB pays for the salaries of the local Director, the administrative officer and the secretary, and makes a small provision for operational expenses. It also provides the office and teaching facilities, staff accommodation, and meets the overhead costs. CIUB currently has 15 staff, including the Chinese director and 11 language teachers from China. Its main activity is to offer evening classes in Mandarin to working members of the public. There are several intakes per year and enrolments rose from 80 in the first intake in 2009 to 316 in 2013, totalling 2675 enrolments over the four years. These students have the opportunity to join annual study visits to China. CIUB has also provided specialised language training courses, for example for the Department of Immigration, and runs Confucius Classrooms in three private schools. It has organised 44 scholarships for Botswana to study at Chinese universities. It has also arranged cultural events, including hosting groups from SHNU, and it has sent teams of staff members to visit schools around the country promoting Chinese culture. The first local Director was the former Dean of Humanities, Dr Rasebotsa, who ensured strategic management from the beginning, whilst her successor, Professor Mgadla, has the extremely important attribute of being competent in Mandarin. In co-operation with the Chinese co-directors from SHNU, they have provided excellent leadership for the development of the Confucius Institute.

In the West there is an expanding critical literature on Confucius Institutes which argues that they are propaganda tools of the Chinese Government, which limits their academic freedom and restricts their curriculum. Wikipedia, for example, has an entry entitled “Criticisms of Confucius Institutes” which is 27 pages long and has 151 footnotes (Wikipedia, 2014). However, King (2013: 173-185) in his discussion of Confucius Institutes and soft power in Africa sees CIs in a positive light and casts doubt on whether they do have a “politicised mission” and whether there is Chinese Government interference in their operations. In the light of these different perceptions, it can be concluded that after five years of existence, the

time is ripe for an in-depth, empirical case study of the Confucius Institute of the University of Botswana within a global perspective.

The Department of Chinese Studies

The belief that there was need for the University of Botswana to provide opportunities for the academic study of China led to the development of a BA in Chinese Studies, which commenced in 2011, and the establishment of the Department of Chinese Studies in 2013 to provide the organisational base for teaching and research on China (that is, the discipline area of Sinology broadly conceived). A deliberate decision was taken that this initiative should be separate from the Confucius Institute and its special funding arrangements so that the academic autonomy of the Department would be transparent. The Department is located in the Faculty of Humanities and the degree is a standard programme within the Faculty's curriculum. Thus it is a normal part of the University's budget and has the same status as other departments. This was seen as an important principle given the global concerns about Chinese Government funding of Confucius Institutes. However, it is noted that in some African universities, such as the University of Nairobi and the University of Zimbabwe, degrees in Chinese language and culture are offered through the Confucius Institute.

The University of Botswana's BA in Chinese Studies was approved in 2010 and had its first intake of 20 registered students in 2011, with subsequent intakes of 16 in 2012, 30 in 2013 and 19 in 2014. The degree is a four year programme with the standard structure for a Single Major degree in the Faculty of Humanities. In the document formally proposing the degree it was stated that the aim of the programme was to produce graduates with the following competencies (University of Botswana, 2010a: 2-3):

- Language skills in Mandarin Chinese at Level 4 in the Chinese Proficiency Test (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi: HSK). Level 4 means they will be fluent for practical purposes. They will be able to translate both ways with contextual appropriateness.

- In-depth knowledge of Chinese history and culture. The students will learn about the background to Chinese civilization so that they can communicate as informed and educated people, and develop their general education.
- Academic and experiential understanding of contemporary China, inter-cultural fluency and communication skills. The students will spend a year in China and will gain an understanding of the language, history and culture of the Chinese people.
- An understanding of modern Chinese issues, and especially an ability to analyse Africa-China relationships.
- A sound basis for employment and further study related to China.

To develop these competencies, the curriculum includes courses in Mandarin and non-language courses in Chinese history, culture, literature, philosophy, religion, politics, economics and international relations. It is mandatory for students to spend the third year in China and currently they all go to Shanghai Normal University for this period. The programme structure enables Chinese Language or Chinese Studies to be a Minor subject for students following other programmes, for example in the Faculty of Business.

The Department of Chinese Studies was established in 2013 and has a staff establishment of four. The Founding Professor is Professor Fang, who is on leave of absence from Shanghai Normal University. He has written on the issues facing the development of the BA programme that must be addressed through on-going operational research, such as student demand, curriculum structure and content, language proficiency attainment and graduate employability (Fang, 2013). It is clear that the Department of Chinese Studies will face a number of challenges as it develops its academic curriculum and research programme. The major challenge in the current situation of limited resources will be capacity-building to develop local staff with Chinese language competence and PhD qualifications in linguistics and other specialisations who will be able to sustain the undergraduate programme and develop graduate studies and research. A deep understanding of Chinese language

and culture (the traditional strength of Sinological training) is necessary for scholarship that goes beyond “translated China” (Australian Centre on China in the World, 2014) and encounters directly the Chinese world. At the moment, as a short-term solution, some of the language tuition on the BA programme is undertaken by instructors from the Confucius Institute and some of the non-language courses are undertaken by non-specialists from other departments.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, the importance of the study of China makes it imperative for the University to sustain and develop the Department. Holcombe in his book *The Genesis of East Asia, 221 B.C. - A.D. 907* states that East Asian civilization may be said “to represent the single most important major alternative historical evolutionary track to Western civilization on the face of this planet with a continuing history of success that can rival that of what we call the West.” (Holcombe, 2001: 3). Within East Asian civilization, it can be argued that China is the dominant factor, both historically and in the present. Africa’s colonial and post-colonial experience has linked it closely to the West, economically, politically, socially and intellectually. But the contemporary rise of China has introduced new realities to which African academic institutions, such as the University of Botswana, must respond. This “alternative ... to Western civilization” must be understood, analysed and critically engaged by African scholarship. Hence it is of particular importance how the Department will develop its intellectual identity in the context of international debates on defining contemporary Sinology (for example, Barme, 2005) and on the nature of Asian Studies in Africa (see: International Institute for Asian Studies, SEPHIS and the University of Zambia, 2012).

The Africa-China Research Group

In May, 2011 I convened a meeting on “UB and the Study of China” in my role of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs). The meeting comprised three Deans, the Director and Deputy Director of OIEP, the University of Botswana Director of CIUB, and four staff members actively involved in Africa-China issues. One outcome was the formation of the “Botswana-China Interest Group”, an informal multi-disciplinary group that met under the dynamic leadership of the Dean of the

Faculty of Humanities, Professor Moahi, to promote research and scholarly exchange. In May 2013 this group organised a workshop entitled *Developing a Research Agenda on Botswana-Africa-China Issues at the University of Botswana* (Moahi & Author, 2013). The workshop was attended by around fifty participants who included UB staff, representatives of the Botswana Government, members of civil society and the private sector, and representatives of the Chinese Embassy and the Chinese community. Two key presenters were from UB partner universities, namely the Director of the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Stellenbosch and a representative of the Institute for African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University. The workshop showed a significant level of interest in Africa-China research both inside and outside the University and a major outcome was the establishment of the Africa-China Research Group (ACRG) in May 2013 with formal Terms of Reference. Its stated purpose is to promote multi-disciplinary research by University of Botswana scholars and UB partners on issues connected to the Africa-China relationship and its ultimate aim is the establishment of a research centre. It has an electronic mailing list of around 100 and this has been the platform for exchanging information and academic resources. In its first year, ACRG had five business meetings and held two seminars and a research workshop.

In June 2014 it organised a major conference entitled *Africa-China – Advancing Mutual Understanding through Multi-Disciplinary Research*. The conference was a closed event for participants from UB and its strategic partners, namely Shanghai Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University in China and the Centre for Chinese Studies of the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. An invitation was extended to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and to the Confucius Institute of the University of Zambia. Invitees also included representatives of Government departments, the Chinese Embassy, the business community and civil society. In total, there were over 100 participants. There were thirty seven presentations covering seven research themes primarily from the disciplinary areas of education, the social sciences and the humanities, namely: education; language, culture and the media; economics; interna-

tional relations; the environment and tourism; health; and design. The Conference showcased original work by African and Chinese scholars on many issues that are encompassed by the Africa-China relationship and it provided an opportunity for interaction between the two scholarly communities, exemplifying South-South intellectual co-operation. It was funded by contributions from the Confucius China Studies Programme of Hanban, three faculties at UB, the Chinese Embassy, the UB Public Affairs Office, various local Chinese businesses, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation.

The mission of ACRG is located within the wider context of the politics of knowledge production on Africa-China issues. The rise of China has initiated a restructuring of the global political economy over the last decade, signalling the end of the uni-polar world dominated by US American hegemony since the end of the Cold War in 1991 and creating in the West what Ambassador Liu of the China-Africa International School of Business at Zhejiang Normal University has called “strategic anxiety”. This structural change has had major consequences for Africa, as China’s engagement with the continent has intensified at every level (from the state to the individual) and the pattern of post-colonial relations with the West has been disrupted. Many questions have arisen about the impact of China on the continent and about the nature of the African presence within China. Where does the information and analysis come from to address these questions and to guide responses to their implications? Too often it has been refracted through the lens of Western concerns and interests embedded in media discourse, technical reports and scholarly output.

It is clear that the economic and political dominance of the West also has an intellectual dimension. One outcome is the phenomenon of “constructing the Other” through the generation and reproduction of hierarchies and stereotypes about non-Western cultures and peoples, most famously analysed by Edwin Said in his book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). This idea of Orientalism has recently been applied by Vukovich (2012) to the analysis of Western knowledge production on the People’s Republic of China since the 1970s and its essential location in Cold War discourse

and neo-liberal ideology. The idea of cultural and ideological bias may be extended to characterize much Western writing on the relationship between Africa and China. The problem is compounded by the fact that both African and Chinese scholars are very much reliant on Western literature. This argument is well made by Hirono and Suzuki (2014) in their article in the *Journal of Contemporary China* entitled “Why do we need ‘myth-busting’ in the study of Sino-African relations?” They conclude that it is necessary “... to encourage Chinese and African scholars to set the research agendas of China-Africa relations” (Hirono and Suzuki, 2014: 459) and to produce their own critical perspectives.

This is a position that the Africa-China Research Group has fully endorsed. Indeed its use of the couplet “Africa-China” (as opposed to the more usual China-Africa or Sino-Africa) is a deliberate signal that it adopts an Africa-centred approach to its mission. The importance of this mission was made clear in quantitative terms in 2011 in a study by Mohamed Salih for CODESRIA which found that only 7 per cent of 900 recent publications on China-Africa relations had been produced within Africa, whilst the rest were produced outside Africa and primarily by non-Africans (Liu, 2011). A key aim of the ACRG is to increase the volume of work being published by African scholars, especially those of the University of Botswana. It is considering how to develop both a “think tank” function of responsive applied research and a coherent long-term research programme centred on selected thematic areas.

It also seeks to promote collaborative research with Chinese scholars as part of the process of challenging Western hegemony. It is evident that the study of Africa by Chinese scholars is expanding rapidly and is being supported by the Government, for example through the 2012 competitive funding programme for area studies that designated three universities as centres of excellence in African studies (Beijing University, Shanghai Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University). However, it has been observed that too little of this research is based on fieldwork in Africa. Ambassador Shu at the recent UB conference referred to those Chinese scholars who make short visits to Africa as “dragon flies”. There is need for African institutions to facilitate Chinese scholars to undertake in-depth empiri-

cal study in Africa. Above all, it is imperative that there is more *joint* research by African and Chinese scholars pursuing research agendas of mutual interest and generating shared knowledge on significant issues. ACRG is actively seeking to support the formation of joint research studies and to identify funding sources.

However, to sustain the momentum of this intellectual project, there is need for a stronger organisational base than that provided by a research group. Hence the ACRG is now pursuing its most important long-term goal, namely to establish the Centre for Africa-China Research. In 2010, the Senate of the University of Botswana approved a policy entitled *Guidelines for the establishment and implementation of research institutes and research centres* (University of Botswana, 2010b). The *Guidelines* provide quite clear procedures and criteria for the establishment of a research centre. The ACRG has already developed the critical mass of researchers from different disciplines and the track record of academic activity that will enable it to meet the stated criteria. The *Guidelines* also include a section on how the University will contribute seed funding to assist a Centre for the first three years of its existence. However, UB is currently undergoing a budget crisis and the relevant line item in the institutional budget has been suspended and it is unlikely to be restored in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the University Research Committee has agreed to approve new Centres that have their own funding.

Therefore the main challenge for the envisaged Centre will be to find its own sources of funding, particularly sustainable funding for salaries and core activities as opposed to funds for research and publication projects or specific events like conferences for which once-off donor funding is often available. It will be necessary to study closely how other centres around the world have solved this problem and learn from their funding solutions. The key issue will be how to raise funds whilst ensuring academic independence and the capacity for critical analysis. Furthermore, to be viable the Centre will need to project a profile and usefulness beyond the confines of Botswana, particularly within the SADC region. As Professor Mazonde said in his presentation to the recent conference, a centre “must be locally relevant and internationally competitive”. (Mazonde, 2014)

Critical issues

On the basis of the University of Botswana’s experience over the last nine years, six critical issues can be identified which are also of relevance for academic institutions in Africa that engage academically with China, as follows:

- *Staff development.* The most critical constraint on the future development of UB’s academic engagement with China is the lack of staff fluent in Mandarin, which is necessary for the teaching of Chinese language, for teaching about different aspects of China, and for undertaking research related to China, including its involvement in Africa. Considerable effort and resources will be required to develop a group of UB staff with the language fluency required to sustain this area of academic work, and graduate study opportunities must be found both in China and elsewhere to develop this capacity.
- *The role of institutional management.* In developing and sustaining a strategic institutional approach, the role of management is crucial. The development of UB’s approach was based on a shared vision at the most senior levels of the University’s management system, namely executive management, deans and directors, and it involved strong teamwork. However, a significant number of personnel changes have taken place in UB management recently and hence it may be a challenge to sustain a coherent institutional approach and effective support to unit-level activity.
- *Funding.* Very generous funding for academic activity is available from China through a variety of sources, including Hanban’s Confucius China Studies Programme, the China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Programme within FOCAC, the Chinese Ministry of Education “20+20” programme for China-Africa university co-operation, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs “10+10” programme for China-Africa Think Tank co-operation, local Chinese Embassy funds, Chinese Government scholarships, individual Chinese universities, and local Chinese businesses. In my experience, these Chinese funding sources have not influenced the content

of academic activity but nevertheless the perception of this possibility needs to be addressed. Hence institutional funding is vital to ensure and demonstrate academic independence, as well as diversification of funding to include other sources within the country and internationally. The nature and availability of funding constitutes a major challenge for the sustainability of UB's China initiative.

- *Academic links and networks.* To support its activities, it is important that the institution has strong academic links with other universities and is networked with other relevant bodies. UB was able to forge strategic partnerships with Shanghai Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University because of the strong commitment of both institutions to Africa. As it develops new areas of research collaboration, it will undoubtedly require additional Chinese partner universities. Such partners must be chosen strategically and not haphazardly. In this manner, UB reached out to the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Stellenbosch as the continent's premier centre for the study of China. UB is also strongly committed to participating in CODESRIA's Africa Forum for the Study and Research on China and China-Africa Relations because of the importance of the Pan-African mission of CODESRIA. A critical mass of African scholarship can only be achieved by coordination at the continental level and CODESRIA's leadership is therefore indispensable. It must be noted that sustaining academic links and networks so that they are productive requires considerable time and effort by key people within UB, which therefore requires a strategic recognition of their importance.
- *Diplomatic partnerships.* An essential partner in the development of all UB's activities has been the local Chinese Embassy which has provided a high level of involvement and support from the beginning. It can be concluded that a good relationship with the Embassy is indispensable. The Botswana Embassy in Beijing has been consistently interested and helpful. A more recent partner is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-

operation and discussions are taking place in respect to its language and policy analysis needs. The diplomatic dimension of UB’s work with China needs careful attention.

- *Theoretical/methodological challenges.* Whilst the foregoing issues are essentially practical, the final issue is the extent and depth of the intellectual challenges facing the project of engaging academically with China that have to be addressed by African scholars such as those at UB. There is an extensive agenda here, situated within global knowledge dynamics and the need to challenge the dominance of Western academic discourse. It includes consideration of relevant theoretical debates in different disciplines and the methodologies and analytical frameworks appropriate to empirical research, including comparative studies. It includes developing distinctive African perspectives on the field of “area studies” in general and Asian/East Asian/Chinese Studies in particular, as well as the discipline of Sinology. Debate in these domains of theory, methodology, and disciplinary paradigms is necessary to enhance the quality and sustain the momentum of research being undertaken by African scholars. There is need for a regular continent-wide seminar on these issues, perhaps organised by CODESRIA in conjunction with institutions such as the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Botswana.

Conclusion

This article has provided an account of the development of the University of Botswana’s academic engagement with China from the perspective of an actor who has been involved both administratively and intellectually. The account has sought to explain and analyse the organisational architecture built to advance various academic objectives, encompassing the Confucius Institute, the Department of Chinese Studies and the Africa-China Research Group. It demonstrates that UB has taken a strategic institutional approach suited to its own context. Finally, the consideration of critical issues has provided a reflection on aspects of the University of Botswana’s experience that may be of wider relevance for other institutions

in Africa. The rise of China has led to a major shift in the global political economy and it is essential that African higher education institutions respond accordingly.

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