

Institutionalising Chinese language teaching in Africa: The Role of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms

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Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Africa

- This year marks the 20th anniversary of the first Confucius Institute (CI) in Africa – the CI at the University of Nairobi.
- There are now 67 CIs in 47 African countries. I have visited 12 CIs in 6 African countries.
- The CIs have been growing robustly in Africa, while more than 100 CIs have been shut down in the US due to geopolitical reasons.
- From Hanban (CI Headquarters) to the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) – a decentralisation trend.
- Li, S. & King, K. (2024). The Rise, Decline, and Possible Resurrection of China's Confucius Institutes. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/the-rise-decline-and-possible-resurrection-of-chinas-confucius-institutes/>
- Li, S. (2024). Problematising China's soft power: setbacks of Confucius Institutes and the decentralisation of its international language and culture promotion strategy. *The Pacific Review*, OnlineFirst, 1-25.

Operational Features

- Joint venture between Chinese and African higher education institutions.
- Affordable tuition fees and scholarships.
- Expansion of local networks (Confucius Classrooms, teaching centres).
- Organising intercultural activities (e.g. summer/winter camps in China, language competitions, Chinese festival events, etc.).
- Offering continuous incentives (e.g. jobs, study in China, etc.).

From CIs to a Wider Chinese Network

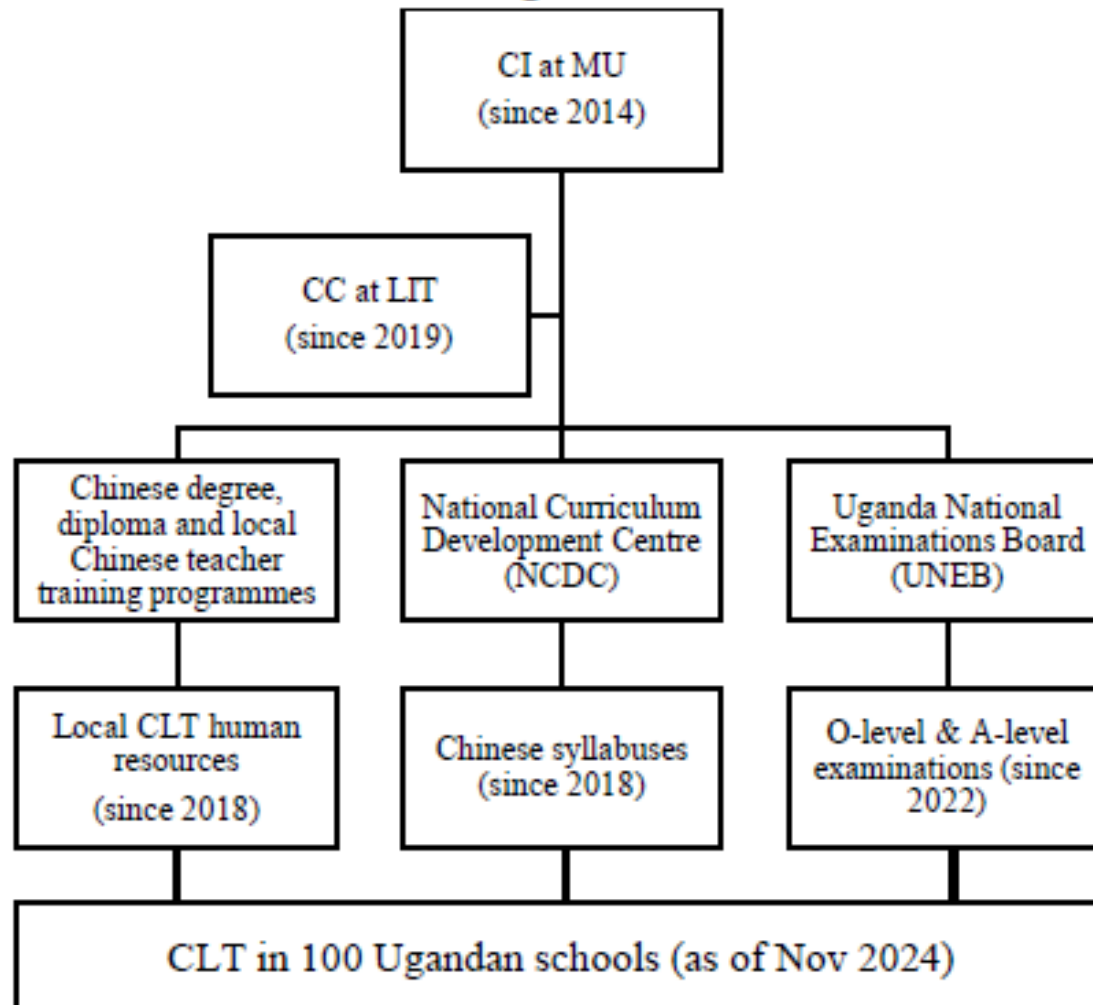
- Study and Certification Opportunities for Local Individuals
- Recognition of Chinese Language Skills by CI and China-Related Organisations
- Expanding Chinese Knowledge and Influence Locally
- A Dynamic Cycle of Career Advancement and CI Support
- CIs as “Recruitment Agencies” to Careers with Chinese Companies and Organisations

Chinese language teaching (CLT) from higher education to basic education

- CIs have succeeded in institutionalising CLT in African higher education systems.
- As of December 2024, 17 African countries have integrated CLT into their national curricula at the basic education level.

Institutionalising Chinese Language Teaching in Africa: The Case of Uganda

Chart 1. Institutional Structure of CLT in Uganda



Institutionalising Strategies of CLT in Uganda

- Support and Promotion by Both Governments
- Training Existing Local Teachers
- Providing Opportunities and Incentives (e.g. jobs, scholarships)
- Organising Chinese Language Activities and Competitions (e.g. Chinese song competitions, Chinese Bridge competitions, etc.)

Challenges

- Teacher Retention Issues
- Inconsistencies in the Quality of Local Teachers
- Shortages of Teaching Materials and Resources
- Public Concerns over CLT as Cultural Imperialism
- Concerns over the Long-Term Sustainability

Further reading

- Li, S. (2024). Problematizing China's soft power: setbacks of Confucius Institutes and the decentralisation of its international language and culture promotion strategy. *The Pacific Review*, OnlineFirst, 1-25.
- Li, S. & King, K. (2024). The Rise, Decline, and Possible Resurrection of China's Confucius Institutes. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/the-rise-decline-and-possible-resurrection-of-chinas-confucius-institutes/>
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CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AND THE PROMOTION OF CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: A CASE STUDY

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OUTLINE

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Impact of Confucius Institute in Africa
- The Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana
- Critical Evaluation
- Conclusion

ABSTRACT

Confucius Institutes (CIs) have played a major role in enhancing Chinese soft power and influence in many African countries. Studies have emphasized the role of CIs in promoting Chinese language and culture and very few scholars question their influence on Africa's own cultural growth and influence. This paper explores the actual impact of CIs in Africa from the perspective of African interests and goals. We use the Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana (CIUG) as a case study to elaborate how CIs influence the African continent. We argue, based on the case study at CIUG, that while CIs have played a prominent role in promoting human resource development through educational training, the arrangement and structure promote patronage dominated by Chinese interests and ideas. We propose a reciprocal arrangement and encourage African actors to use this collaboration to promote African languages and culture.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to evaluate the presence and actual impact of the Confucius Institute (CI) in Africa, with a case study of one of them stationed at the University of Ghana.

The establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs) (孔子学院)(Kongzixueyuan) in various countries (Xiaoping 2008) is one of the routes through which China has been promoting its global image.

Expectedly, CIs have been the subject of critical scholarly engagement, especially in Africa where such Chinese cultural institutes have been established in recent years

INTRODUCTION CONT'D

Since then, CIs have surfaced in countries across every region of the African continent. Specifically, countries such as South Africa, Ethiopia, Egypt, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, and Morocco have Confucius Institutes in their institutions of higher learning (Procopio 2015). However, there is a school of thought which is skeptical of CIs. Pessimists argue that the CIs are a tool used by the Chinese government to spread propaganda in the world under the guise of teaching (Hubbert 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is an important aspect of culture. From the late 1990s, the government of China has popularized the Chinese language and culture in many parts of the African continent. The promotion and popularization of the Chinese language are geared towards enhancing the friendship, economic, and cultural cooperation between China and many African states.

LITERATURE REVIEW CONT'D

Since their establishment, CIs have grown exponentially and spread widely in Africa. According to Akhtaruzza, Berg and Lien (2017), Africa has 46 CIs in 32 countries out of the 55 countries that make up the continent. The authors stated that South Africa and Kenya have the most, with five and four CIs respectively, and Tanzania, Ghana, Egypt, Madagascar, Nigeria, Morocco, and Ethiopia are among the African countries with two CIs.

IMPACT OF CIs IN AFRICA

The first major impact of CIs in Africa is the educational training that Africans have undergone. Through CIs and other related educational cooperation, China has supported Africa in science and technology, technical and vocational educational training, and higher education (King 2014)

A second positive impact of CIs is the number of scholarships awarded to Africans. As part of the training and equipping of Africans with knowledge and skills, many Africans have received scholarships in different fields (Niu 2014).

IMPACT OF CIS IN AFRICA CONT'D

Research indicates that, to overcome the language barrier among members of the business community involved in the Afro-Chinese trade in Africa, **With this in mind, we do a case study of the CI at the University of Ghana, Legon (CIUG) to see what impact it has.**

THE CI AT the UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

The University of Ghana, and Zhejiang University of Technology established the first Confucius Institute in Ghana in 2013 to promote the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture in Ghana." Since its formation in 2013, This activity involved a Chinese language and culture competition by students and graduates of the Institute during an International Chinese Language and Culture Day in April 2023. Each had to speak Chinese for some minutes before performing a Chinese cultural activity such as Kungfu or Tai Chi. This day-long event is further described in detail below.

THE CI AT UNIVERSITY OF GHANA CONT'D

This program featured 19 University of Ghana Chinese language students who competed and show-cased their knowledge and proficiency in the Chinese language as well as their talents and skills in Chinese cultural arts through. The contestants walked away with several awards such as mobile phones, Bluetooth speakers, headphones, power banks, and many more.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

The students appeared to us to have a relatively high level of Chinese language fluency; this shows that the Institute is fulfilling its functions well. However, one may ask: what else can the Institute do to further strengthen the implementation of its mandate? The Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana (CIUG) can provide more scholarships for students to study abroad in China

The CIUG can also give grants for more research work

Further still, the CIUG can train more local Chinese language teachers to help in teaching the language across the nation..

Finally, CIUG can organize more of the kind of cultural activities that we witnessed on April 21,2023 for students and learners of the Chinese language to experience.

CONCLUSION

As Bodomo (2009) and subsequent work continues to point out, there is much asymmetry in Africa - China relations. We have seen in this talk a short description of the presence of CIs in Africa and their impact, with a case study as empirical evidence, showing that one of the two partners, China, is doing all it can to promote its language and culture in Africa, while the other partner.

Apart from efforts by individuals to teach African languages and culture in China, including the first presenter of this talk, who started an African Studies program (that taught Swahili, Hausa, Akan and Dagare) at the University of Hong Kong in 2008, we are not aware of any African government programme to teach Africa languages and cultures in China. This must change and we propose the establishment of African cultural institutes in China (Bodomo 2022), which we may choose to name after our political heroes and intellectuals, giving us names such as Mandela Institute, Nkrumah Institute, and Nyerere Institute

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the Confucius Institute to promote educational cooperation, the collaboration is far more one sided with Chinese cultural economic and political agenda taking center stage.

However, African partners need to utilize the CI structures to promote African languages and culture in the opposite direction if indeed the collaboration is to advance African cultural profile as well.

Third, African learning institutions hosting CIs should promote mutual learning and innovation by imputing African expertise, theories, concepts, and perspectives at the heart of CIs hosted in their institutions. African culture and Chinese culture differ from one other in many aspects and institutions of higher learning should be at the forefront in promoting the normative and ideation resources that advance African political values, philosophy, and moral appeals.

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A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Exploring the Experiences of African Doctoral Students in Universities in China

Presented By : Vedika Kedia

BACKGROUND

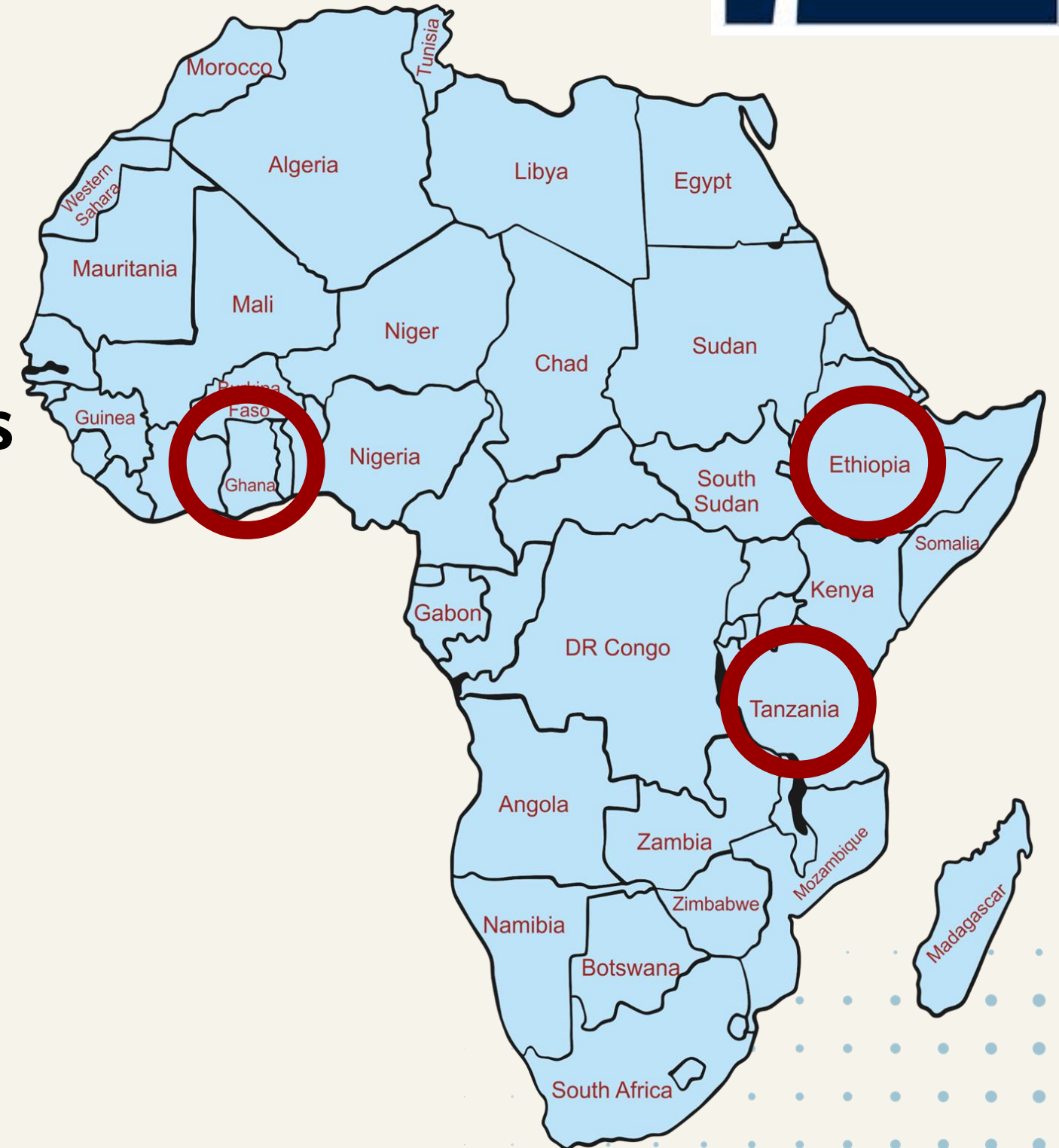


- **Forum on China Africa Cooperation (started 2000)**
- **'People-to-people' cooperation**
- **2018: 80,000 African students in Chinese universities**
- **2015-2020: African doctoral candidates in China doubled to 8000**
- **The China-Africa Universities 100 Cooperation Plan (2023)**

CGHE PROJECT



- Qualitative interviews with 27 African doctoral candidates from Ghana (17), Tanzania (7) and Ethiopia (3).
- Majority of the candidates were teachers in African universities aspiring to return to the positions
- Recipients of Chinese government and other provincial scholarships, they were enrolled in universities of Project 211



Knowledge Flows

China

China's drive to publications

Structure of PhD by publication which requires published academic works in addition to the traditional PhD model (Pelser, 2024). The focus is on high-impact globally indexed first quartile journals.

Funding Support for Research

For example, I wrote a research paper on the XXX River and then I wanted to actually go and see the river by myself. She arranged a trip for me.

Scientific Agenda

"In the world right now it's all about climate change and sustainability. And I, as an early researcher, My first publication was in 2018 but my h index is now 8. I am cited. I am able to publish in good journals.. So yes, Its hot topic"

Infrastructure Blockage

"Coming from a place where you could search and read any paper you wanted. To a place where even if you have a good internet connection, access to papers is not easy."

Africa

Shared Challenges/ Different Trajectories



China

- Research emerging from China faces challenges in establishing global impact (Li & Yang, 2020) (Zhang et al., 2019)
- Limited Outreach of English language journals (Xu et al., 2019)
- Drive for publications in globally indexed journals

"The big idea was to get the paper. So from the word go it is about 'do you have a paper or not?'"

Africa

- Government impetus to enhance research output for greater socio-economic development (Mouton & Beaudry, 2018)
- Quest for credibility of research via publications internationally indexed journals (Mills et al., 2021)
- Value of the transferable credentials

"With research exposure and research output...you could then say you are even better than somebody who retired on you higher than you on the academic ladder"

Shared Challenges/ Different Trajectories



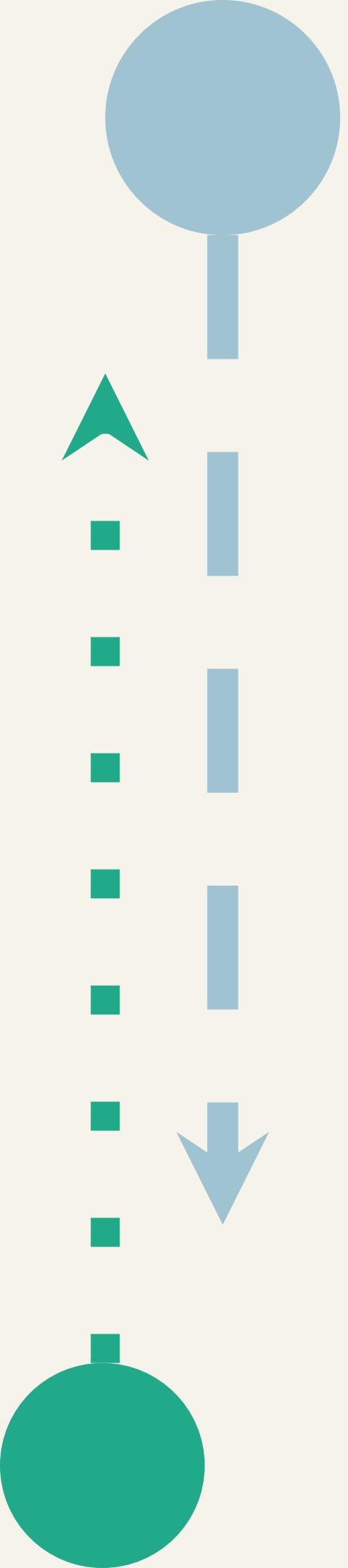
While Africa and China are both struggling against the hegemonic dynamics of global knowledge production, their trajectories are vastly different. The experiences of our participants reflect the diverse trajectories of the two regions' attempts to navigate the dynamics of global knowledge production.



THANK YOU

For further discussion, please reach out at vedika.kedia@education.ox.ac.uk

CGHE 2025



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