

A Study on the Relationship between Confucius Institutes and Kenya's Agricultural Economy in the Belt and Road Perspective: A Case Study of Confucius Institute at Egerton University

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Abstract:

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has attracted attention from all sides since it was proposed. As one of the bridges connecting China and the countries along the Belt and Road, Confucius Institutes have also received attention for their declining popularity and role in recent years. To explore whether Confucius Institutes can seize the new development opportunities brought by the Belt and Road, to realize innovative development and achieve better economic cooperation between China and the countries along the route. This paper takes Kenya's economic structure as an entry point and focuses on the relationship between Kenya's economic and agricultural development and the development of Confucius Institutes. Using the case study method, it analyzes the agricultural cooperation mechanism of the Confucius Institute Egerton University in Kenya--"Chinese + Agriculture" schooling characteristics. The paper concludes that under this mechanism, the Confucius Institute does have the possibility of further development. Based on this, this paper puts forward the following suggestions. The future development of Confucius Institutes should not be purely as a platform for cultural export but should pay more attention to the development mechanism that combines with the actual economic needs of the local community to have a more long-term development.

Keywords: The Belt and Road Initiative; Kenya; Confucius Institutes; development strategy; agricultural economy

1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is essentially an economic cooperation initiative aimed at promoting economic cooperation and development in the countries along the route. The main reason why Kenya has joined the BRI is that it is in line with Kenya's individual economic development and is of great significance to the overall development of Kenya's neighborhood. First of all, from the point of view of the individual country, agriculture, as one of the important economic pillars of Kenya's economic structure, has a low degree of scientific agriculture. The economic output of agriculture is largely limited by the natural conditions of the year. The biggest problem with this type of agricultural production is the uncertainty of the annual economic income from agriculture. By participating in the construction of the Belt and Road, Kenya can learn agricultural knowledge and introduce the lack of domestic agricultural technology and basic measures, thus improving the scientificization of agriculture and upgrading the level of economic development. Secondly,

from the perspective of the overall development of the neighboring countries, Kenya, as one of the important countries in Africa, will participate in the Belt and Road Construction to promote the economic development of the whole region. The in-depth cooperation between Kenya and China not only strengthens the friendly relations between China and Africa but also provides an example for other African countries to learn from and cooperate with. At the same time, Kenya has strengthened its connectivity with neighboring countries through BRI, contributing to the overall prosperity of the regional economy.

As a communication platform between China and Kenya, Confucius Institutes can take this as an entry point to find new development strategies to change the declining popularity of Confucius Institutes. The original role of the Confucius Institutes should be transformed from purely exporting Chinese culture to providing a platform for language learning and related agricultural talents as part of China's agricultural and economic assistance to Kenya. The "Chinese+Agriculture" program of the Con-

Confucius Institute Egerton University is a good example of this transformation. Based on this, this study explores the possibilities for further development of the Confucius Institute Egerton by examining the model of “Chinese + Agriculture”.

2. Kenya and the Origins of the BRI

2.1 Development and Objectives of the BRI

The origin of the BRI can be traced back to the ancient Chinese “Land Silk Road” and “Maritime Silk Road”. Its role is to open up economic trade and cultural exchanges between ancient China and the Western world. Based on this historical and cultural heritage, China borrowed the historical symbols of the ancient Silk Road and proposed the BRI, a new era of international cooperation, in 2013. It aims to actively develop economic cooperation among countries along the route based on peaceful development and to jointly build a community of interests, destiny, and responsibility that is economically integrated and culturally inclusive. This strategy not only opens up a broader international market for China and changes China’s integration into the globalization process from a passive to an active one, but also promotes the economic growth and social progress of the member countries, upgrades the national living standards of the member countries, and contributes to the overall prosperity and stability of the regional economy. As one of the practices of the Belt and Road Strategy, Confucius Institutes can play an important role in serving the Belt and Road Initiative. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, Confucius Institutes have transformed their role, no longer overemphasizing the export of Chinese culture, but rather becoming an important tool for local Chinese language learning and exchanges in the fields of knowledge and technology, and their role lies in the development of services at the economic and social levels.

One of the member countries, Kenya, has utilized the Confucius Institutes under the Belt and Road Innovation to strengthen economic cooperation and promote Kenya’s economic development through interconnectivity in various fields with the participating parties. For example, the Egerton Confucius Institute in Kenya realized that the attention of Confucius Institutes around the world is declining, and the Confucius Institutes must reform and innovate if they want to realize the increase in popularity. Therefore, Egerton Confucius Institute changed the previous mode of schooling, which was to promote Chinese culture, and innovatively launched the “Chinese + Agriculture” schooling characteristics according to the demand of the Kenyan agricultural market, local people’s feedback, and social concerns about agriculture. Under

this model, Confucius Institute Egerton University is only a learning platform for Chinese language learning and related agricultural talents provided by China’s agricultural and economic assistance to Kenya. To a certain extent, it has played a role in stabilizing the income of rural residents in Kenya, employment, social stability, and other aspects of the promotion of Kenya’s economic and economic development. The Kenyan government and people, seeing the economic benefits brought to Kenya by the innovative Confucius Institutes, began to take the initiative to pay attention to the Confucius Institutes again. This process is a win-win situation for the Confucius Institute and Kenya.

In this way, Confucius Institute Egerton University can provide rich practical cases and research data for the development of Confucius Institutes in Africa under the perspective of Belt and Road, become a model of China-Africa economic cooperation, and provide case support for the promotion of Belt and Road economic strategy.

2.2 Current State of the Kenyan Economy

2.2.1 Structure of the Kenyan economy

Kenya’s economy is structured as a “mixed economy” with the private sector accounting for more than 70% of the total economy [1]. Agriculture, industry, and services are the three pillars of Kenya’s national economy. Agriculture is the basic industry in Kenya, agricultural GDP output value accounts for 32.94% of the whole economy, the lowest is 23.13%, and the highest is as high as 41.95% [2]. The value added in agriculture per capita was \$841.32. The agricultural industry absorbs 61.9% of Kenya’s labor force [2]. This means that agricultural development in Kenya is directly related to national stability and economic development in Kenya.

2.2.2 Importance of agriculture in Kenya

As the data in Tables 1 and 2 show, in 2014, Kenya’s economic growth rate was 5.3% and agricultural output was Kshs 822 billion (US\$8.69 billion), which was 27.3% of the country’s GDP [2,3]. In 2016, the economic growth rate was 5.85% and the share of agricultural value added in the GDP was as high as 35.6%, with an agricultural value-added of US\$841.32 per capita [2]. The economic growth rate in 2017 was 4.9%, the main reason for the decrease in growth rate compared to 2016 was the slowdown in the growth rate of gross value added in the agricultural sector, which decreased by 1.6% [1,4]. The economic growth rate in 2018 amounted to 6.3%, with agriculture contributing to 34.1% of Kenya’s GDP [1]. The economic growth rate in 2019 will be 5.4%, with agriculture accounting for 34.1% [1]. In 2020 the economy was negative -0.3% but agriculture accounted for 35.1%

of Kenyan GDP [1]. In 2021 the economic growth rate was 7.5% and agriculture accounted for 22.4% of Kenyan GDP [1]. In 2022 agriculture accounted for 21.2% of the total Kenyan GDP [1]. This shows that although the share

of agricultural output in Kenya’s GDP has been declining, the value added of agriculture as a percentage of GDP has been maintained at around 30% and agriculture is still the largest industrial sector in Kenya [2].

Table 1. Kenya’s Three Pillar Industries as a Share of GDP (%), 2018-2022 [1].

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Services
2018	34.1	34.2	23.3
2019	34.1	34.2	23
2020	35.1	35.7	21.3
2021	22.4	16.7	54.4
2022	21.2	17.7	61.6

Table 2. Kenya’s Economic Growth Rate and Share of Agriculture (%), 2014-2022 [1].

Year	Economic growth rate	Agriculture as a share of GDP (%)
2014	5.3	27.3
2015	5.6	
2016	5.85	35.6
2017	4.9	20.9
2018	6.3	34.1
2019	5.4	34.1
2020	-0.3	35.1
2021	7.5	22.4
2022	4.8	21.2

In 2008, the Kenyan government formally launched the Vision 2030 plan for economic development, which sought to achieve an average annual economic growth of 10% [1]. In fact, since the launch of this plan, Kenya has failed to meet this target, the main factor being the contraction in agricultural development. For example, the highest export earnings in 2022 are the top three agricultural earners of tea (\$1.2 billion), horticulture (\$1.12 billion), and coffee (\$272.6 million) [1]. However, a factual comparison of Table 1 shows that in 2022, Kenya’s top three industries, agriculture, accounted for only 21.2% of total GDP, services accounted for the vast majority of 61.1%, and industry accounted for 17.7% [1]. Agriculture has contracted during this period, leading to a decline in Kenya’s economic growth rate to 4.8% in 2022 from 7.5% in 2021 (as shown in Table 1) [1]. Not coincidentally, the economy was able to grow at 6.3% in 2018, the highest growth rate in the period 2013-2018 also due to the contribution of agriculture in that year. Compare this to other sectors at that time [1]. For example: transportation and warehousing grew at 8.8%; accommodation

and food services grew at 16.6% and telecommunications grew at 13.5%. The manufacturing sector grew at 4.2%, accounting for only 7.7% of GDP. Agriculture itself grew at a rate of 6.4% and accounted for 34.1% of GDP [5]. In summary, agriculture is an important source of support for the construction and development of Kenya’s national economy and plays a key role in Kenya’s economic agenda, then the advancement of modernization of agriculture has become a requirement for Kenya to promote the top priority of economic development.

2.2.3 Problems in Kenya’s agriculture

Kenya’s agriculture can be problematic also because Kenya’s agricultural production is still relatively crude and dependent on the weather. In 2014, Kenya’s agriculture accounted for 27.3% of Kenya’s GDP. The growth rate declined to 3.5% from 5.2% in 2013 due to reduced rainfall [2]. In 2016 Kenya was domestically affected by drought and the poor performance of agriculture led to a slowdown in economic growth only adding 0.25% growth rate compared to 2015 (as shown in Table 2) [1]. Until

2018 the economy grew at 6.3%, the highest in the period 2013-2018, with agriculture growing at 6.4%, accounting for 34.1% of GDP [5]. Its main growth factors were: increased agricultural output due to higher rainfall. In particular, Kenya's agriculture has suffered from successive food crises, the great drought in the Horn of Africa, and other factors, and the economic growth rate was significantly lower than the expected target of 10% that was originally scheduled. 2022 was affected by the drought, and agricultural output was poor, and the total value added in agriculture declined by 1.6% in 2022. Maize production decreased from 36.7 million bags in 2021 to 34.3 million bags in 2022, tea production decreased from 537,800 tons in 2021 to 535,000 tons in 2022, horticultural exports decreased from 405,500 tons in 2021 to 392,000 tons in 2022, and milk decreased from 201.9 million liters in 2021 to 754.3 million liters [1].

Based on the above three reasons, shows that there is an urgent need for Kenya to find a solution to the over-dependence of agriculture on natural conditions, to develop the science and modernization of agriculture, and to accelerate the steady rise of agriculture to drive the overall economic development, which is the origin of Kenya's accession to the Belt and Road Initiative.

3. The Role of Egerton Confucius Institute in Kenyan Agriculture

The first phase of the Confucius Institute aims to promote Chinese culture, although it has achieved certain results, it has not grasped the right balance and over-emphasized the promotion of culture, which has led to the resentment of many countries, and the development of the Confucius Institute has shown a downward trend. Despite this trend, there are still many Chinese learners studying Chinese. The main reason for this is that they want to learn Chinese so that they can connect more harmoniously with China's agricultural technology and economic assistance to Kenya.

To this end, the Confucius Institute has taken advantage of the opportunities brought about by the Belt and Road Initiative and has transformed itself from emphasizing the export of Chinese culture to the local community to providing a platform for language learning and related human resources for the local community to better receive China's economic assistance. An example of this is the Confucius Institute at Egerton University, which was established in July 2012 in Kenya.

Following the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, China, under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has proposed to further strengthen its economic cooperation with African coun-

tries. China chose to establish the Egerton Confucius Institute in Kenya not only because Kenya is the country that has received the most financial assistance from China in the construction of the New Silk Road. Rather, it is an important fulcrum for China-Africa economic exchanges, such as Kenya is a more economically developed country in Africa. China and Kenya have always had good economic cooperation. Kenyan overseas Chinese have been active in the spread of Chinese culture to a certain extent to promote civil diplomacy and economic cooperation.

Based on the importance of agriculture to Kenya's economic development and the problems of Kenya's agricultural development, under the "One Belt, One Road" economic strategy, China has continuously strengthened its agricultural technology cooperation with Kenya, and Egerton Confucius Institute's "Chinese + Agriculture" model has changed the previous model and has become China's contribution to its agriculture and economic development. Egerton Confucius Institute's "Chinese + Agriculture" model has changed from the previous model and has become a learning platform for language learning and related agricultural talents provided by China's agricultural and economic assistance to Kenya. Its role is to construct a Chinese language learning environment, to use Chinese language learning as a bridge of economic interests, to promote agricultural economic cooperation between China and Kenya, and to achieve the purpose of economic cooperation between the two countries.

3.1 Teaching Agricultural Theory Knowledge

Egerton Confucius Institute combines the basic situation that agriculture is the backbone of Kenya's economy, and innovatively introduces the characteristic teaching mode of "Chinese + Agriculture". That is to say, the relevant professor lectures on agricultural knowledge, and the teachers of the Confucius Institute supplement the teaching of the relevant Chinese vocabulary told by the professor in the class with the characteristic theoretical teaching. For example, the third Confucius Institute Day series of Chinese + Agriculture teaching activities in 2021 and "Chinese + Biomass Processing Technology" teaching activities in 2023. This mode of teaching helps agricultural practitioners to understand agricultural knowledge and master crop cultivation and breeding management techniques, thus improving the efficiency of agricultural production. By the beginning of 2022, this model has organized 29 agricultural technology training courses for Kenya, training more than 1009 agricultural personnel [6]. Through this model, the Confucius Institute has cultivated many agriculture-related talents for Kenya, and the students majoring in agronomy not only inject new vitality into the development of the rural economy but also

solve the problem of personal employment. In this model, Egerton Confucius Institute students implicitly understand that only learning Chinese can better absorb the relevant professional knowledge, and the Kenyan people will believe that through the Confucius Institute to learn Chinese to increase their economic gains. As a result, the Kenyan economy improves and the Egerton Confucius Institute grows in popularity.

3.2 Provision of Agricultural Experts

China uses the Egerton Confucius Institute as a medium to send Chinese agricultural technology experts to Kenya to teach and practice in the countryside at the Egerton Confucius Institute. As of 2019, China has sent 100 times of agricultural experts to Kenya [7]. Among them, Prof. Liu Gaoqiong went to Egerton Confucius Institute to teach for 25 years. During that time, he helped Kenya train more than 2,000 young-generation agricultural science and technology cadres and produced more than 10 masters and PhDs [8]. In 2023, Egerton Confucius Institute experts also led students to Matangitissa village in Nakuru County, Kenya, to organize a 1-week training course on tomato production in the China-Africa Model Village for Agricultural Development and Poverty Reduction. This activity led to the participation of 100-200 farmers including the surrounding villages, promoted agricultural technology to the poverty reduction demonstration village, led the local small farmers out of poverty, and made an important contribution to Sino-Kenyan agricultural cooperation and Kenya's economic development.

3.3 Provide Joint Laboratory

Egerton Confucius Institute makes full use of the two universities it cooperates with. Nanjing Agricultural University of China and Egerton University of Kenya have jointly established 14 "One Belt, One Road" joint laboratories, including China-Kenya Crop Molecular Biology, and "China-Kenya Horticulture Technology Cooperation Center" experimental plantations with the Confucius Institute at Egerton University as a platform. Today, the laboratory has eight plastic greenhouses using Chinese greenhouse technology and has produced many new varieties of grain beans, sorghum, millet, peanuts, and so on. These new varieties generally increase yields by 10 percent over similar varieties. The agricultural joint laboratory provided by Egerton Confucius Institute provides scientific and technological support science and technology for the safe and efficient production of Kenyan agriculture through the advantages of scientific and technological innovation of the Chinese side and the Kenyan side's resources, which helps to improve the efficiency of agricultural production and promote food security, and becomes an important

driving force for the development of Kenyan agriculture.

3.4 Cultivate Talents

Egerton Confucius Institute has cultivated a sizable number of agricultural science and technology talents for Kenya. As of 2019, the Egerton Confucius Institute has trained 90 PhDs and masters for Kenya and other East African countries, and more than 70 international students who went to China to study agriculture [9]. Today, the Confucius Institute has trained nearly 15,000 local Chinese language learners and agricultural technicians in Kenya [10]. The Egerton Confucius Institute has trainees from all over Kenya.

Egerton Confucius Institute in this innovative characteristics of schooling students not only understand agricultural knowledge, but also enrich the Chinese language knowledge, and effectively help China's advanced agricultural and industrial technology demonstration and promotion in Kenya, for Kenya's agricultural research, training of agricultural personnel, agricultural achievements demonstration and transformation to provide a platform for cooperation, to help farmers achieve the goal of income generation and poverty reduction, and to promote the development of Kenya's agriculture.

It is thus found that Confucius Institutes need to combine the current situation with the basic national conditions of the local countries if they want to develop further. There cannot be a single party interested in promoting its development, today's Egerton Confucius Institute is indeed the result of the transformation for the Kenyan local to better receive China's agricultural and economic assistance to provide language learning and its related agricultural personnel learning platform.

4. Conclusion

This paper examines the relationship between the Kenyan Confucius Institutes and the Kenyan agricultural economy and finds that the Kenyan Confucius Institutes under the Belt and Road have made great innovations and improvements compared to before the Belt and Road was proposed. The development of Kenyan Confucius Institutes today is no longer based on the Chinese cultural perspective alone but has become an economy-driven language learning platform by combining local social issues and people's needs. Further, as a platform for Chinese language learning, the Confucius Institute in Kenya has enabled the local community to better learn agricultural technology and related equipment assisted by China, agriculture is one of the pillar industries of the Kenyan economy, which shows that the Confucius Institute in Kenya has played a good role in promoting the Kenyan economy. The global Confucius Institutes can learn from the inno-

vative development of the Egerton Confucius Institute in Kenya, and transform it by the local conditions, to realize the further development of the Confucius Institute. The global Confucius Institutes can learn from the innovative development of Egerton Confucius Institute in Kenya and transform with the local situation to realize the further development of Confucius Institutes.

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