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## Foreign aid study: Chinese schools and Chinese points

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### ABSTRACT

China is playing an increasingly important role in the international aid system, attracting widespread attention both at home and abroad. Chinese scholars, based in China, have a deeper understanding of China's political and economic system and China's foreign aid policies and practices. This article analyzes China's academic schools and points in foreign aid. National leaders' Philosophy of foreign aid is the core of Chinese aid policy. But Chinese scholars have different views on whether China has formed a systematic foreign aid theory. They also have conflicts in the scale of China's foreign aid and its status in the international aid system. Some Chinese scholars put forward 'new modes' for its aid. Through a review of the literature, this article explores China's four core motivations: political, diplomatic and strategic motivation, economic motivation, development motivation, and humanitarian motivation.

**KEYWORDS** China's foreign aid; Chinese schools; Chinese points

Since the 21st Century, patterns of international aid have been gradually diversified by the world economy's rapid growth and transformation. China and other emerging donors are playing an increasingly important role in the international aid system, attracting widespread attention both at home and abroad. On one hand, Western researchers use existing Western foreign aid theories, principles, and standards to analyze China's foreign aid policies and practices, which has led to many questions and criticisms. On the other hand, Western studies are mostly based on secondary sources or even media reports, such as the AidData database, widely used in the current empirical research. This database is extracted from multi-channel news reports. It lacks a fundamental understanding of the concept, sources of

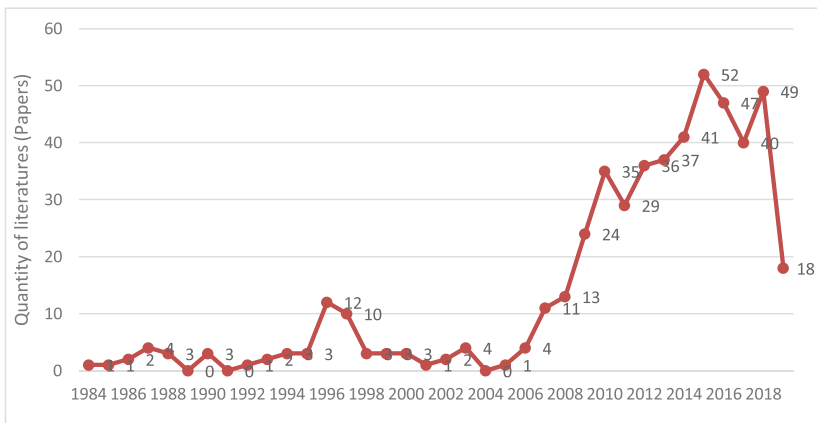
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funds and modes of Chinese foreign aid. Therefore, although this database appears to be rich in form, it can often lead to incorrect judgments and confused conclusions. Chinese scholars, based in China, have a deeper understanding of China's political and economic system and China's foreign aid policies and practices. Through the understanding of leaders' speeches, government policies and aid projects, they have established a deep understanding of the nature and characteristics of China's foreign aid, and raised this perceptual knowledge to the theoretical level through deep research.

In order to better present the views of Chinese scholars on China's foreign aid, we searched Chinese academic articles from China's largest journal database, China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), with the time span 1984–2019 (up to 8 July, 2019). We comprehensively retrieved journal articles from CNKI's Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) source journals and Chinese core journals, but excluded masters and doctoral degree dissertations, conference papers and newspaper articles. The Chinese government and scholars use different terms when they discuss 'foreign aid' (*duiwai yuanzhu*). Searching papers by their 'theme', we employed terms such as 'China + aid' (*zhongguo + yuanwai*), 'China + foreign aid' (*zhongguo + duiwai yuanzhu*), 'China + economic and technical assistance' (*zhongguo + jingji jishu yuanzhu*), and 'China + aid to Africa' (*zhongguo + yuanfei*).

In order to avoid omitting important sources not retrieved using these keywords, we also conducted literature retrieval on the authors of the above-mentioned and previously accumulated documents. After reading these papers one-by-one, removing unrelated papers, we added new documents cited by existing articles and created a database with 498 valid results. It can be seen from [Figure 1](#) that prior to 1990, Chinese research on



**Figure 1.** Quantity of papers published by Chinese scholars on "Foreign Aid": 1984–2019.

Source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI).

foreign aid was very rare. After 1995, Chinese scholars gradually began to study the theoretical and policy issues of foreign aid. Since 2005, Chinese scholars have gradually increased their research on foreign aid, especially after 2010.

There are two theoretical and policy systems in the field of foreign aid. The mainstream is Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development–Development Assistance Committee’s (OECD-DAC’s) relatively mature and complete system. Chinese scholars have come into contact with these theories and policies at international conferences and by reading academic scholarship, and have learned a lot of useful knowledge, particularly regarding the content and framework of international development, the specific methodologies of international development research, and the concrete operations of international development assistance management. However, China’s foreign aid is fundamentally different from that of DAC. China cannot use Western theories and principles to transform China’s foreign aid, but can only borrow some elements from Western aid practices to reform and upgrade China’s foreign aid management. China has its own foreign aid philosophy, motives, principles and practices. As a developing country, China has established unique practices of economic and social development in its own development process, and also explored a set of experiences and practices in its foreign aid. The expansion of the scale of China’s foreign aid and influence and China’s rising status in the international development assistance system will certainly drive the theoretical research of China’s domestic scholars. Has the Chinese academic community formed ‘China’s foreign aid theory’? From what perspective do current Chinese scholars research on China’s foreign aid? And, what is the Chinese academic community’s view on China’s foreign aid? The discussion of the above issues is the focus of this paper.

## **1. The concept of Chinese foreign aid and its academic schools**

Searching CNKI with ‘foreign aid theory’ (duiwai yuanzhu lilun) reveals limited literature.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Chinese scholars use ‘foreign aid theory’ less and use ‘foreign aid concept’ (duiwai yuanzhu linian) more to summarize the nature of China’s foreign aid, its goals, interests, functions, methods, and strengths. Qu (2019, p.95) believes that Chinese scholars mainly study China’s foreign aid concept from three aspects: the first one is based on the perspective of character research, mainly national leaders’ ideas and strategies for foreign aid; the second one is based on the perspective of time research, paying attention to different policies and concepts of China’s foreign aid at different stages; the third one is based on the perspective of regional research, mainly focusing on aid to Africa. Some scholars have explored cultural factors in the formation of the above-mentioned foreign

aid ideology from Chinese ethical thoughts and traditional culture. This research perspective can better reflect the fertile ground of China's foreign aid thinking, at a deeper level.

### ***1.1. National leaders' philosophy of foreign aid***

Due to the collective governance system in China, the Party and national leaders' concept of foreign aid reflects that of the top leadership of the Communist Party at any given time, and the whole country. We can also say that the foreign aid concept of the Party and the state is known to the public through the public statements of the Party and state leaders.

In the study of the foreign aid concept of the Party and state leaders, the words 'thoughts' (sixiang), 'ideas'(linian), and 'points' (guandian) (such as world view, international cooperation outlook) are commonly used, mainly for Mao Zedong (Qin, 2016), Zhou Enlai (Xue, 2013), Deng Xiaoping (Wu & Zhang, 2005; Cai, 2018) and Xi Jinping (Liu, 2018; Su & Li, 2019). These studies are usually based on the leaders' anthologies, chronologies, biographies, summary of speeches and other historical materials that are related to China's foreign aid, and combined with the situation at home and abroad. Through these analyses, we can understand the motives and principles of China's foreign aid in different time periods.

Mao Zedong saw providing foreign aid as an inescapable internationalist obligation. On June 27, 1950, when Mao met with the Vietnam Military Advisory Group, he pointed out that 'to help the oppressed nations and their liberation struggle is an issue of internationalism and a duty of the Communists. There are still many nations being oppressed and invaded by the aggressor countries and under the iron hoof of imperialism, we are not only sympathizing with them, but also reaching out to help them' (Zhongguo junshi guwentuan yuanyue kangfa shilu, 2012, pp.38–39). During that period, China's foreign aid not only helped the national independence and economic development of the third world countries, but also reduced the pressure placed on the new socialist China. Such help was seen as mutual, not unilateral. On February 21, 1959, Mao said in a conversation with the youth representatives of Africa: 'You need support, we also need support, and all socialist countries need support ... so we are mutual support. Your anti-imperialist movement is support for us ... we can contain imperialism and disperse its power, making them unable to concentrate on oppressing Africa' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China & Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, 1994, p.370). Mao followed the peaceful diplomatic thought of not interfering in other nations' internal affairs and opposing great powers. This idea is still the cornerstone of China's foreign aid policy up to today.

Zhou Enlai's foreign aid thinking was mainly reflected in his 'Eight Principles of Foreign Economic and Technical Assistance' proposed during his visit to Asia and Africa in 1963-1964. On one hand, China 'provides assistance on the basis of the principle of equality and mutual benefit. It does not regard aid as a unilateral gift, but believes that aid is mutual.' China's foreign aid 'strictly respects the recipient countries' sovereignty, does not attach any conditions, and never asks for any privileges' (Xue, 2013; Zhounlai zongli fangwen feizhou, 8-9). On the other hand, Zhou made it clear that 'the purpose of providing assistance to foreign countries is not to cause the recipients to rely on China, but to assist the recipients to gradually embark on the road of self-reliance and economic independence.'

Deng Xiaoping's foreign aid ideology reflected his diplomatic thought of actively avoiding confrontation, and the unity of national interests and morality (Wu & Zhang, 2005). He believed that foreign aid was an objective need to promote international morality and safeguard national interests; the formulation of foreign aid policy should be based on the international situation and national conditions and strength; foreign aid should adhere to the principle of treating each other equally, respecting the sovereignty of recipient countries, and not interfering in the internal affairs of other countries; and that foreign aid management should expand functions, optimize structure, enrich forms, and enhance efficiency (Cai, 2018).

Xi Jinping's theory of foreign aid can be characterized as practical and realistic, and is based on China's national conditions, relying on the overall pattern of international relations and the 'Belt and Road' initiative, advancing with the times and constantly reforming and innovating. Su and Li (2019) believe that Xi's theory is 'rational thinking and practical summary of China's foreign aid, basing on New China's foreign aid concept and practice, combining with changes in the international situation and changes within China's national strength and international status.' Xi's approach to foreign aid mainly reflects that major countries need to pursue common development, while maintaining China's primary principle not to interfere in other countries' internal affairs; 'teaching one to fish is better than giving him fish' (shouren yiyu buru shouren yiyu). Mentioning the international aid system, Xi mainly advocates the role of the United Nations and conducts bilateral and multilateral assistance cooperation in an open and transparent manner. Liu (2018, p. 38) believes that Xi's foreign aid thinking is pragmatic, strategic, scientific and responsible.

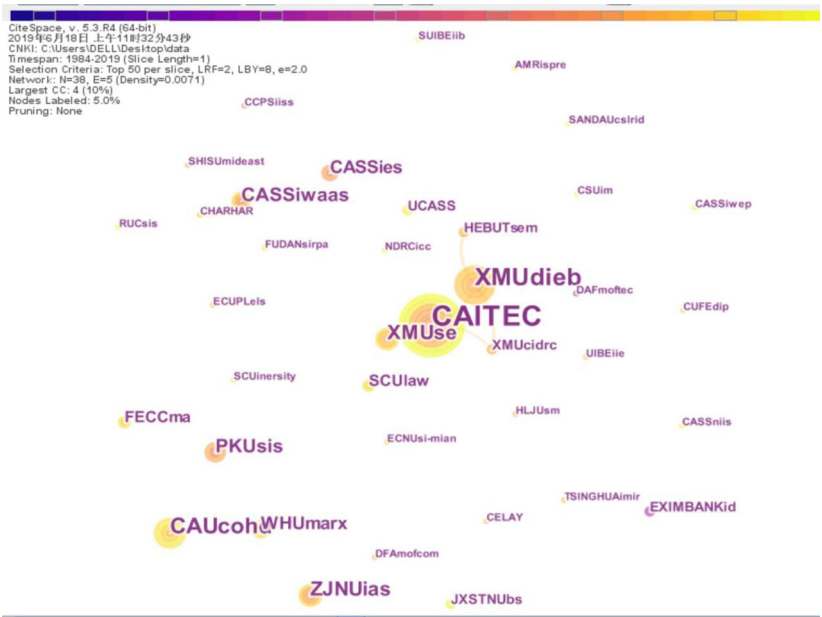
### ***1.2. The theory of foreign aid in Chinese academic circles***

China's foreign aid theory is the key concept and theoretical core of 'China's foreign aid', and a set of coherent theoretical statements have developed around the core concept (Ren, 2016, p. 56). Chinese scholars

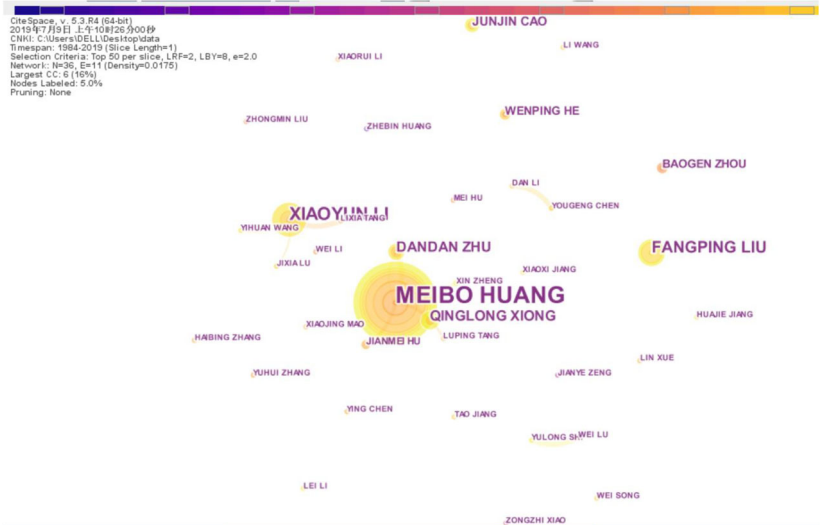
have different views on whether China has formed a systematic foreign aid theory. Pan (2013, p92) believes that China has formed the 'the theory of foreign aid with Chinese characteristics' (zhongguo tese duiwai yuanzhu lilun), that is, the ontology with altruism and win-win spirit as the core, the development purpose-oriented epistemology, the equal and open methodology, and the emphasis on comprehensive means and gradual practice. But some scholars hold the opposite view. Hu (2011) points out that China's foreign aid is misunderstood by Western society because China lacks a systematic theoretical system to explain the aid relationship between China and recipient countries, especially in Africa. This aid relationship is different from the West in two aspects. Firstly, the Western realist view of aid theory emphasizes aid conditions, whereas China does not attach conditions to foreign aid. Secondly, Western humanitarian aid theory dictates that international morality is the basis for providing aid, whereas China's foreign aid takes into consideration national interests. 'The foreign aid theory with Chinese characteristics' should be built in the traditional culture of China, such as its core worldview of 'harmony and difference', its communication criteria of 'self-denial and ritual', its traditional methodology 'teaching people to fish' and its spirituality in 'feeling for others' and 'emphasis on affection and righteousness'.

From the perspective of discipline foundation, research perspective and research methodologies, China's research teams focusing on foreign aid mainly include: the research team of Li Xiaoyun in the College of Humanities and Development, China Agricultural University, from the perspective of international development public policy; the research team of Huang Meibo in the International Development Cooperation Academy, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics (formerly School of Economics, Xiamen University before February 2018), from the perspective of economics and management; scholars in the Institute of International Development Cooperation of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, from the perspective of international political economy and international relations. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate China's research institutions and major scholars on foreign aid:

Note on acronyms in Figure 2: CAITEC: Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation; XMUdieb: Department of International Economics and Business, Xiamen University; XMUse: School of Economics, Xiamen University; XMUcidrc: China International Development Research Center, Xiamen University; HEBUTsem: School of Economics and Management, Hebei University of Technology; UCASS: University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; CASSiwaas: Institute of West-Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; CAUcohd: College of Humanities and Development Studies, China Agricultural University;



**Figure 2.** Display Degree of China’s Research Institutions on ‘Chinese Foreign Aid’, 1984–2019.  
 Source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) .



**Figure 3.** Display Degree of Chinese Scholars on ‘Foreign Aid’, 1984–2019.  
 Source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) .



CASSies: Institute of European Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; ZJNUias: Institute of African Studies Zhejiang Normal University; PKUUsis: School of International Studies, Peking University; SCUlaw Sichuan University law School; FECCma: Foreign Economic Cooperation Center, Ministry of Agriculture; EXIMBANKid: International Department of the Export- Import Bank of China.

The team led by Li mainly studies China's foreign aid from the perspective of international development public policy. It focuses on micro-level research, using the ethnographic field survey methodology, using agricultural technology demonstration centers and Chinese aid personnel in Africa as its main research objects. Li's team believes that China's foreign aid is an extension of its domestic development approach overseas (Li, 2017). There are many differences in value and form between China's foreign aid practice and existing Western-based international development practice. China has provided an alternative development model with solutions to global development issues. China's development knowledge construction path is an empirical construction, which is different from Western theoretical construction (Li, Zhang, & Liu, 2017). China should provide a scheme to reinvent the global development program under the main path of 'new South-South Cooperation' informed by its experience of development, new development resources and new development system (Li & Xiao, 2017, p. 1).

Huang and her research team mainly study China's foreign aid from the perspective of economics and management. The team was based at Xiamen University and transferred to Shanghai University of International Trade and Economics in early-2018. On the one hand, the team conducted a systematic study of China's foreign aid management system (Huang, 2007), and studied the foreign aid management mechanisms of major traditional donors and emerging donors, and found lessons for China to learn from. On the other hand, they studied the effects of China's foreign aid and development financing from an economic perspective, including the impact of aid and development financing on trade, investment, economic growth and poverty alleviation. The team believes that on the basic principles of South-South Cooperation, China's foreign aid policy can learn from the aid management experience of DAC countries and advocate for a combination of 'aid effectiveness' and 'development effectiveness', to strengthen the management of China's foreign aid and attach importance to the actual economic, social and environmental effects of China's aid on recipient countries.

The team of the Institute for International Development Cooperation of China Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation conducts empirical and applied research on China's foreign aid policy from the perspective of international political economy and international relations, and

has provided relevant policy advisory services to China's foreign aid management and implementing departments for a long time. It has accumulated a rich portfolio of research in China's foreign aid policy planning, data, statistics, country analysis, domain topics, and foreign aid evaluation.

There are many Chinese scholars in political science who have studied Chinese foreign aid. Zhou Hong from the Institute of European Studies of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is a scholar who has conducted foreign aid research for a long time. She originally focused primarily on China's recipient status. As China's foreign aid advanced, she shifted her research perspective to China's foreign aid and she has comprehensively studied China's aid's concept, structure, quality and management (Zhou, 2010, 2013). Drawing upon the theory of the interaction between foreign relations and domestic politics in international politics, Ren and Guo (2016) constructed a preliminary theoretical framework for China's foreign aid, namely the 'motivation-relationship' interpretation mechanism.

## **2. The China foreign aid mode**

Chinese scholars put forward new concepts to define China's development cooperation mode basing on summarizing the principles and practice of China's foreign aid. They also have conflicts in the scale of China's foreign aid and its status in the international aid system.

### ***2.1. China's foreign aid under the principle of South-South cooperation***

China's foreign aid follows the main principles of South-South Cooperation (SSC). Huang and Tang (2013a, p.66) believe that China's foreign aid is carried out within the SSC framework, and its aid principles, policies and concepts are consistent with SSC's core essence. Ren and Guo (2016) hold that China's foreign aid and SSC are closely linked, stating 'the unequal international economic order makes China consciously strengthen SSC through foreign aid'. Zhou (2010) pointed out that China's foreign aid 'puts forward a series of concepts and policies with Chinese characteristics, such as people-oriented, paying attention to the livelihood of the recipients, and sets an example of SSC' in the new century.

The most important principle of China's foreign aid is political equality without political conditions attached. Non-conditionality is the greatest feature of China's foreign aid policy. Premier Zhou unveiled three cornerstones of foreign aid in 1956, with the second being 'mutual assistance without any economic or political conditions attached' (CPC Central Research Office, 1998, p. 576).<sup>2</sup> The principle of non-conditionality is theoretically consistent

with the basic norms of international law and international codes of conduct, and it has also been universally recognized by developing recipients in practice (Ding, 2016, p. 46). In the new era, 'China should continue to adhere to the principle of without attaching (any) political conditions and carry out foreign aid under the SSC framework' (Bai, 2015, p. 61). Han (2018, p. 112) believes that in the new era China's foreign aid policy should continue the principle of no additional political conditions, but it should be narrowly defined. 'No additional political conditions' does not mean that the recipient countries do not commit to any obligations – the recipients should be required to undertake corresponding obligations based on the contract and international law (such as providing legal facilities) in order to ensure aid effectiveness. Based on a series of facts about aid to Africa, by Chinese and Western donors, He (2007) pointed out that the development of China and Africa should not be directed by any third country, and that China and Africa were equal and had established a mutually beneficial SSC partnership.

## ***2.2. "New mode" of China's foreign aid***

The ultimate objective of China's foreign aid is to promote Southern countries' common development, and to contribute to SSC among China and other developing economies, 'using "package" approaches combining trade, investment, preferential loans and commercial loans to boost growth of developing countries' (Huang, 2018, p.39). In this process, China's foreign aid has reflected many new modes.

Li and Xiao (2017, p.10) put forward the concept of 'New South-South Cooperation', which 'inherits the political legacy of non-interference in domestic affairs in SSC and emphasizes respect for national demand orientation and the principle of reciprocity and mutual benefit in the new era of global development'. It is a global development mode under the new development experience, new resources and new system and emphasizes the integration of aid, trade and investment.

Zhang (2012b, p. 78) defined the model of China's aid to Africa as 'development-oriented aid', which helps and guides recipient countries to achieve self-development through equal 'aid + cooperation' and ultimately realizes mutual development between recipient and donor states. The theoretical pillars of this model include peaceful development, equal treatment of state relations, mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation and common development goals. Huang and Tang (2013b) further defined China's foreign aid as 'growth-driven aid' which is without any political conditions, advocating mutual benefits, and promoting economic growth and poverty alleviation in recipient countries. This new aid mode advocates

'development effectiveness' and emphasizes direct economic promotion to recipients.

Cheng (2016) generalized Sino-Africa development cooperation as 'official development finance with Chinese characteristics' (ODF-CC) which simultaneously meets three requirements of officially, development-oriented and concessionality. He advocates that ODF-CC is a 'South-South' development cooperation mode, which is provided by the Chinese Government and is geared to developing countries with high preferential components and highly dependent on various financial credit instruments.

Xu, Li, and Ma (2015) used the concept of "parallel experience transfer" and regarded China as the representative of providing development-oriented public goods which include mutually beneficial infrastructures, technology transfer and parallel experience sharing. Liu (2014, p. 91) regards China's aid to Africa as "relation aid", which is different from the "dominant aid" of traditional donors. China's aid to Africa aims at relations building and attaches importance to the emotional significance and relationship building in exchange process. Such assistance is a process of two-way interaction, and a natural extension of friendly relations between the two sides, emphasizing mutual benefit and assistance, in order to achieve sustainable relationship progress in the form of aid and cooperation.

### ***2.3. The scale of China's foreign aid: too much or too little?***

In the 1970s, China's foreign aid accounted for 7.5% of the national fiscal expenditure (Shi, 1994, p. 298). Beginning with its reform and opening-up policy in 1978, Chinese foreign aid has been adjusted to coordinate with domestic fiscal revenue. According to the White Paper (2011) on China's Foreign Aid, China had provided a total of 256.3 billion yuan in aid by the end of 2009. From 2010 to 2012, China's foreign aid amounted to 89.3 billion yuan (White Paper, 2014).

In recent years, the increasing scale of China's foreign aid has attracted widespread attention in the international community, and whether China should expand its foreign aid at this stage has also become a focus of domestic public opinion (Luo & Li, 2019, p. 62). The appropriate scale of aid is an important basis for giving full consideration to the role of aid and achieving the objective of aid (Luo & Liu, 2007, p.29). There are three views on the scale of China's foreign aid at this stage: too much, too little, or just enough.

One view is that the current scale of China's foreign aid is in line with China's development level. Ding (2016, p. 47) argued that China's aid scale has eliminated the previous excessive expenditure which was incompatible with China's level of economic and social development, and the scale of

China's current foreign aid (total amount and its proportion in government fiscal expenditure) currently matches its socio-economic development level and policy objectives.

Some scholars believe that the scale of China's foreign aid is still far behind that of Western countries (Xie, Tian, & Haung, 2012, p. 155) and that China's current foreign aid is too little. Luo and Liu (2007, p.30) pointed out that 'African countries generally welcome all kinds of aid from China and hope that such aid will continue to increase with the strengthening of China's economy and the continuous development of Sino-Africa relations', which was an implicit expression of China's relatively small scale of aid to Africa at the time. Ye (2013) argued that although China's contribution to the global multilateral development had increased rapidly, its scale was still relatively small. Hu, Zhang, and Gao (2017, p. 5) pointed out that 'although China's foreign aid has grown rapidly and ranks fourth in the world, it still has a large asymmetry with the proportion of China's total economic output, foreign trade and foreign investment in the world, which is also inconsistent with China's international status and has become a shortboard of China's "going out" strategy'. Therefore, China should learn from the Marshall Plan of the United States (Hu et al., 2017, p. 10) and expand the relative scale of its foreign aid.

But most Chinese scholars think that China's foreign aid policy is totally different from the Marshall Plan (such as Jin, 2015). They think that China's foreign aid policy embodies many 'self-interest motivations' such as China's economy, politics, diplomacy and strategy, and other 'altruistic motivations' such as development, livelihood and humanitarianism. It is not scientific to simply require the scale of China's foreign aid in terms of the proportion of total economic output, foreign trade and foreign investment in the world. Moreover, the international measurement of a country's aid obligations is generally based on the percentage of foreign aid in GNI, rather than on indicators of opening-up such as exports. Huang and Xiong (2014, p. 60) even argued that it is not feasible to measure a country's responsibility or obligations related to foreign aid based on its total economic output. China is currently exceeding its international aid obligations if the level of its per capita income and the problem of its poverty reduction are considered. Dong (2018, p. 101) believes that China's aid to Africa should not blindly be expanded in scale, but should pay more attention to optimizing its impact, through adjusting aid structure and focusing more on improving livelihoods.

He and Tang (2007, p. 84) held that the scale of China's foreign aid will increase with the further improvement of its economic strength, arguing that with the rise of China's national power, 'the Government can gradually increase the proportion of ODA to GNI in a planned and systematic way'. In

2016, foreign aid was incorporated into the National Five-year Development Plan for the first time. The 13th Five-Year Plan stated that China would 'expand the scale of foreign aid'. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC in 2017 pointed out that China will increase its aid to developing countries, especially the least developed countries. China should recognize its own current status as 'a responsible great developing country' and provide foreign aid based on its own strength (Luo, 2014, p. 42).

#### **2.4. The status of China's Foreign Aid in the international aid system: challenge or complement?**

Chinese academia generally agrees with China's status as an emerging donor and believes that China belongs to the Southern donor countries. China has become the most concerned emerging donor because it provides the most aid and its recipient countries have the widest scope (Mao, 2010, p. 59). The international community regards China as an 'emerging donor', reflecting the view that China's foreign aid activities began in recent years (Xie et al., 2012, p. 148). In fact, China's foreign aid has a long history, beginning in the 1950s. Like Brazil, India and other emerging donors, China invests most of its grants and concessional loans in infrastructure construction, mainly through project assistance and technical cooperation. With the fundamental difference of concepts and principles with DAC countries, is China's foreign aid a challenge or a complement to the traditional aid system?

##### **2.4.1. China's foreign aid is a challenge to the traditional international development assistance system**

Some Chinese scholars believe that due to differences in aid principles and practices, the rise of emerging donors, including China, is a challenge to the traditional development assistance system. Southern donors have emphasized independence and the uniqueness of their own forms of development cooperation. Yao argues that China's foreign aid scale ranked at the forefront of the world, and that China has the strength to compete with traditional donors. The collective rise of emerging donors, including China, poses a structural challenge to the Western-led international development assistance order (Yao, 2019, p. 31). The establishment of development *financing* institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) and the Silk Road Fund (SRF), constitutes a challenge to the traditional system dominated by *financial* development institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Li and Xiao (2017, p. 7) point out that China has become the main supplier of new

global development resources. The G20 Hangzhou Summit in 2016 marked that the development proposition of the Southern countries represented by the 'China Program' was gradually becoming an important substitute for global development (Li & Xiao, 2017, p. 9).

#### ***2.4.2. China's foreign aid complements the existing international development assistance system***

Other Chinese scholars have argued that China's foreign aid is not a challenge to the existing development assistance system. Firstly, China has not attempted to challenge the mainstream economic development theory (Ye, 2013, p. 54). Secondly, China's foreign aid belongs to SSC among developing countries, which is essentially different from DAC development assistance. Chinese scholars mainly put forward corresponding policy recommendations under the SSC framework. As an emerging donor, China is a leader in SSC (Yao, 2019, p. 37) and should strengthen communication and coordination with emerging aid powers, maintain its foothold and develop SSC assistance (Mao, 2010, p. 58). In terms of the multilateral global aid system, China also has no intention to challenge the historical norms and policies advocated and implemented by multilateral development agencies (Ye, 2013, p. 54). Thirdly, in terms of aid scale, DAC donors are still the main force of development assistance, and the scale of aid from developing countries, including China, remains limited (Huang & Tang, 2013b, p. 23) and is not enough to challenge the dominant position of the largest traditional donors (Pang, 2013, p. 34). Although China's aid to sub-Saharan Africa is of considerable scale, these areas were originally neglected by traditional donors (Pang, 2013, p. 36). Therefore, China's foreign aid is a complement to the existing international development assistance system.

### **3. The purpose and motivation of China's foreign aid**

Academia usually divides foreign aid motivation into self-interest motivation and altruism motivation, in which self-interest includes political motivation and economic motivation, while altruism includes development motivation and humanitarian motivation (Huang & Tang, 2013b, pp. 10–13). Through a review of the literature, we will explore these four core motivations. The first category, political motivation, is also taken to encompass diplomatic and strategic motivations.

#### ***3.1. Political, diplomatic and strategic motivation***

Political and diplomatic motivations are important for China's foreign aid strategy, which is fundamentally an integral part of its overall national strategy. Zhou and Liu (2009, p. 46) pointed out that China's foreign aid is

aimed at serving national strategic interests, which is similar to that of Western countries. Chinese scholars also regard foreign aid as an important component of China's peaceful diplomacy strategy (Zhang, 2008, p. 38) and a strategic decision of several generations of Chinese leaders (Xue, 2011).

Foreign aid has been provided since the founding of the New China in 1949. The main motivation of China's foreign aid in 1950-1970s was political (diplomatic) motivation. Seeking the widest possible international support from developing countries was the primary purpose of China's foreign aid during that time period, when Chinese foreign aid won favors from recipient countries and the 'Albania-Algeria proposals' made it possible for China to resume its legitimate seat in the United Nations.

Deng had always stressed that foreign aid was an indispensable strategic expenditure for China, with foreign aid strategy related closely to national interests (Chen, 2009, p. 78). With the constant adjustment and change of national strategic needs, China's foreign aid strategy has generally undergone a transformation from focusing on internationalism to paying attention to both internal and external situations and coping with both internal and external challenges. The year of 2013 can be regarded as the beginning of a new era in China's foreign aid policy, in which Chairman Xi put forward the 'Belt and Road' initiative. Over the past seven years, China has consistently abided by the principles of non-conditionality, equality and mutual benefit in foreign aid, and foreign aid work has been guided by the concepts of inclusive growth, consultation, contribution, shared benefits and strengthened communication and connection between China and other countries and international organizations participating in the 'Belt and Road' initiative. China's foreign aid has gone from the stage of scale expansion to intensive development. In 2017, the 32nd Session of the CPC Central Committee's Deep Restructuring Group deliberated and adopted '*Opinions on the Implementation of Foreign Aid Reform*', emphasizing the need to optimize the strategic layout of foreign aid. This is the first time in recent years that the Chinese Government has emphasized the strategic role of foreign aid. The goal of China's foreign aid at present should be to fully cooperate with the implementation of its overall national strategy (Liu, 2015, p. 88, p. 91). China's foreign aid will help to usher in a new period of growth, while there is an objective need for China to change from being a passive responder to global challenges to actively participating in global governance after 40 years of reform and opening-up (Liu, 2018, p. 38).

However, while facets of Chinese diplomacy seek to serve its national economy, China has not yet formulated a foreign aid strategy to serve its overall economic development (Liu, 2015, p. 89). Wang (2019, p. 78) points out that China's foreign aid lacks strategic planning. Zhang (2012a) believed that China's aid to Africa was facing five strategic balance issues against the



background of major adjustments in the current international pattern and international development assistance trends. China 'should adjust its foreign aid system in time to meet the strategic requirements of participating in global governance, satisfy the strategic needs of aid to Africa, and focus on promoting China's development concept and experience.' Bai (2013, p. 70; 2015, p. 53) studied the strategic choice of China's foreign aid and suggested China's foreign aid strategy be reformed in line with the Belt and Road Initiative. He considered that 'in the new era of the Belt and Road Initiative, China's foreign aid has undergone significant changes and is in an important transition period' (Bai, 2015, p. 53), while 'foreign aid has increasingly become a policy tool and governing strategy for the transformation of China's economic resources and power into influence and soft power' (Bai, 2013, p. 70). After Xi put forward the 'Overall National Security Concept' in April 2014, China's foreign aid strategy going forward should pay full consideration to security pressures and moral needs, while at the same time serving national economic development. As an international public good, foreign aid is also an important means for China to fulfill its responsibilities and build its image as a strong and capable country (Wang, 2015, pp. 55, 57–58, 59).

### **3.2. Economic motivation**

The focus of Chinese foreign policy shifted from opposing imperialism to enabling domestic economic growth after 1978. And the form of foreign aid has also changed from one-way aid to mutually beneficial cooperation (White Paper, 2011). Economic motivation has gradually replaced political (diplomatic) motivation as the primary motive, while mutual benefits and the notion of win-win co-operation have become the most important principles of China's foreign aid. Chinese scholars often use such terms as 'foreign economic and technological cooperation' (*duiwai jingji jishu hezuo*) and 'foreign economic cooperation' (*duiwai jingji hezuo*) while studying foreign aid. Most scholars believe that foreign aid is the main form of China's participation in international economic cooperation. Zhang (2009, p. 4) regarded the provision of economic and technical assistance to foreign countries as the beginning of China's foreign economic cooperation. The Academic Committee on Development Assistance, which was set up under the Chinese Society for International Economic Cooperation in 1987, also included development assistance in the scope of foreign economic cooperation. In reform of foreign aid policy since the mid-1990s, China has further emphasized economic motivation, while a major purpose of foreign aid has been to ensure the supply of energy and resources, and to seek international markets for domestic products. Huang and Tang (2013a, p. 66)

clearly pointed out that ‘in the view of “aid + cooperation”, China does not shy away from economic interests in foreign aid. Mutual benefit and assistance are the basic purposes of China’s foreign aid’.

When studying the role of China’s foreign aid, Chinese scholars often associate foreign aid with foreign trade and foreign investment. The results of empirical analysis show that China’s foreign aid has a significant role in promoting trade with and investment in recipient countries. Zhang, Yuan, and Kong (2010, p. 73) argued that China’s aid to Africa has greatly promoted China’s exports to Africa. Meanwhile, China’s foreign aid and FDI to Africa are complementary in scale, and China’s long-term assistance to Africa has promoted Chinese enterprises investment in Africa. Peng and Lin (2019, p. 2) argued that China’s foreign aid could promote China’s exports to ‘Belt and Road’ countries through the infrastructure effect, the systems friction easing effect, the political relations improvement effect and cultural integration effect. Hu, Ding, and Deng (2015) found that ‘China’s aid to Africa is conducive to promoting China’s FDI. In particular, the promotion effect of aid on FDI is more obvious when China’s investment enters a smaller host country’. Chen and Wu (2019, p. 45) also found, via an analysis of 39 African states, that China’s infrastructure aid to Africa has significantly boosted China’s FDI in Africa. Zhou, Hong, and Wang (2018) found that China’s aid to Africa can regulate the political risk of FDI in diversified African economies. From the perspective of public goods, Huang (2015, p. 97, 103) believes that goods or services provided by aid projects have obvious positive externalities, which can reduce external costs of donors’ FDI enterprises in recipient countries, thereby promoting donors’ investment in recipients. Case studies also show that China’s foreign aid has become an important channel for Chinese enterprises to ‘go out’ and realize industrial transfer (Luo, 2019, p. 74; Zhang, 2007a, p. 30). However, some scholars have argued that China’s foreign aid is not conducive to China’s own economic growth (Yu & Kan, 2017), while some Chinese scholars have put forward suggestions and other perspectives on how to use foreign aid to promote China’s economic development, such as using foreign aid to promote the internationalization of the Renminbi (Yang, 2012; Yang, 2015).

### **3.3. Development motivation**

The ultimate goal of China’s foreign aid is to promote recipients’ development and focus on improving their independent development capacities. With the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 and the establishment of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, China’s foreign aid attaches greater importance to SSC, and development and humanitarian motivations have been further enhanced in China’s foreign aid policy. Huang and Liu (2013, p. 62) believe that the ultimate goal

of China's foreign aid is to reduce poverty, which should be the single goal. Zhang (2007b, p. 79) argues that China's aid to Africa is 'centered on promoting African economic development', and that aid projects 'were determined through consultation between the two sides and played a positive role in promoting African development'. Zhang further argued that China's aid to Africa has achieved the goal of promoting development through assistance, and promoting cooperation through development, and ultimately realizing common development between China and Africa. Luo (2013, p. 22) said that China's foreign aid and economic cooperation with Africa 'should not only alleviate poverty and provide humanitarian relief, but also focus on promoting African industrialization and modernization and enhance their capacity to develop independently'. Wang and Zhao (2014) showed that China's aid to Africa has significantly promoted Africa's economic growth.

In recent years, China has further strengthened its aid in the livelihood field and provided livelihood aid projects to Southern countries. Zhu and Huang (2017, p. 88) demonstrate that China's livelihood aid covers eight areas: living material assistance, education, medical treatment, water supply, environmental sanitation, employment, housing, and urban and rural public facilities – which are mainly used to meet basic survival needs and boost the basic development opportunities and capabilities of recipients. Hu and Liu (2009) regarded China's policy of providing 'livelihood aid to Africa' as being aligned with the goals of economic growth, improving livelihoods and pursuing mutual benefits. Some scholars argue that China's aid policy, prioritizing development aid and putting livelihoods first, has brought real and tangible benefits to both sides. However, some scholars hold a different view regarding the development motivation of China's foreign aid. For example, Liu (2015, p. 89) believes to the contrary that China's foreign aid attaches too much importance to economic interests and neglects livelihood projects, having a negative impact on social development and environmental protections in recipient countries.

### **3.4. Humanitarian motivation**

Foreign aid concerned with humanitarian motivation is predominantly used to help recipient countries 'cope with international unexpected events and emergencies, alleviate the unfortunate situation of backward countries and save lives' (Huang & Tang, 2013b, p. 11). Li (2012, pp. 48–50) argues that China's foreign humanitarian assistance has progressed through three distinct stages: revolutionary humanitarian assistance (1950–1978), pragmatic humanitarian assistance (1979–2003) and non-discriminatory humanitarian assistance (2004–present). China provides

emergency humanitarian assistance on its own initiative or at the request of recipient countries, including materials, cash and rescue workers. In September 2004, the Chinese Government established a formal emergency mechanism for humanitarian emergency relief assistance. Almost 200 emergency aid operations have been carried out by the end of 2009 (White Paper, 2011), while from 2010 to 2012, China provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the value of 1.5 billion renminbi, to more than 30 countries (White Paper, 2014). Li (2012, pp. 50–52) argues that China's foreign humanitarian assistance has gradually been in line with international practices.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 provided a 'truly transformative international development framework' (Huang, 2016, p. 78). China's emergency humanitarian assistance abroad has helped the recipient countries and regions maintain social order and maintain stability in spite of testing circumstances (Liu, 2015, p. 89). Such assistance 'reflects a humanitarian spirit of poverty alleviation and relief, and a harmonious world concept of "some people and some regions getting rich first, then the rich help the poor, in pursuit of common development".' (Luo, 2014, p. 39).

Huang and Liu (2013, p. 62) proposed that with the growing strength of China's economy and the rise of its international political and economic profile, China should shift its main objective of foreign aid and gradually strengthen foreign aid as a component of diplomatic relations, within a broader international perspective. While realizing its own interests, China should help the world's less-developed countries reach the UN Millennium Development Goals (and then Sustainable Development Goals) and ultimately achieve the coordinated development of the world economy as a whole. In April 2018, the China International Development and Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) was established to oversee China's foreign aid affairs as a sub-ministerial organ, directly under the State Council. On the one hand, the establishment of CIDCA reflects the transformation of China's foreign aid role from promoting global economic cooperation to serving great power diplomacy. China's foreign aid will play a greater role in serving its foreign strategy and promoting the construction of the Belt and Road in the future (Yao, 2019, p. 35), and it is an important manifestation of China's image as a large, responsible developing country. On the other hand, China's foreign aid in the new era will pay greater attention toward enhancing the independent development capacity of recipient countries, promoting the establishment of series a new win-win bilateral relationships and propelling the creation of a *Community of Shared Future for Mankind* at the global level, through the Belt and Road Initiative.

## **4. The evaluation of Chinese foreign aid impact and effectiveness: aid effectiveness and development effectiveness**

### ***4.1. Aid effectiveness: standards and norms of aid***

The existing international aid system is complex. There are many differences in procedures for assessment, approval, reporting, and valuation between donor and recipient countries, making transaction costs very high. To make aid more effective, efficiency, governance and transparency must all be improved. DAC members have made a clear commitment to their 'aid effectiveness' agenda by signing the *Paris Declaration (2005)* and the *Accra Agenda for Action (2008)*. Most DAC members have formulated clear, actionable, and time-bound aid effectiveness action plans. Improving 'aid effectiveness' depends upon the strict evaluation of the entire foreign aid process.

The developed countries have put huge resources into foreign aid, but outcomes are not always satisfactory. This makes the international community rethink whether 'aid effectiveness' is a reality and whether it should consider changing the concepts and methods of international development assistance. Wang & Liu (2012) argues that aid effectiveness is a process-driven development approach which is more focused on the Western-style democratic political process of good governance, accountability, transparency, and participation in recipient countries. But this kind of development assistance has not succeeded in poverty reduction in recipient countries. Sun (2008) pointed out that international development assistance has gone through seven decades, but most of the recipients – especially recipients in SSA – have not achieved the level of development they hope for. On the contrary, their economies have stagnated or regressed, their poverty-stricken populations have increased not decreased, and they still rely on assistance in varying degrees.

### ***4.2. Development effectiveness: the actual effect of China's foreign aid***

Different from the 'aid effectiveness' standard emphasized by developed countries and the evaluation index system of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC), Chinese scholars advocate 'development effectiveness' focused on the 'results' of foreign aid. 'Development effectiveness' focuses more on whether aid can bring faster economic growth, higher employment and reduce poverty rates in recipient countries within a relatively short period of time. However, China has not established a specific evaluation index system for 'development effectiveness'. The lack of data makes it difficult to conduct an in-depth evaluation

of the effectiveness of China's foreign aid. Judging from the current domestic evaluation of Chinese aid, case studies are used to evaluate the concrete impact of an aid program on recipient countries.

Chinese scholars have analyzed the economic and social impacts of China's foreign aid on recipient countries. Huang, Xu, and Mao (2018) edited a case set on China's aid projects, including a case series on Madagascar General Hospital Project, China's Agricultural Technical Cooperation on *juncao* aid projects to Papua New Guinea and Fiji, Sino-Tanzania Village-based Poverty Reduction Learning Center and Joint Learning Center. These projects were found to have generated favorable economic and social impacts in recipient countries.

Chinese scholars have established econometric models to evaluate the specific effectiveness of China's foreign aid. Therefore, many Chinese scholars have studied the economic and poverty reduction effects, and most of the existing literature links foreign aid with trade and investment. Some scholars have found that China's foreign aid has increased recipient countries' economic growth, promoted their exports and enlarged FDI inflows. Zhu and her collaborator are the first Chinese scholars to study the effects of China's foreign aid from a combination perspective of trade and aid. Their relevant conclusions show that China's aid to Africa can significantly reduce recipient countries' export and import costs (Zhu & Huang, 2015), increase the total exports of recipient countries to China, significantly promote the economic growth of African recipient countries (Zhu & Huang, 2018). Liu and Tang (2018) found that China's aid to Africa has significantly increased bilateral trade scale between China and Africa. Sun, Xu, and Liang (2019) found that China's foreign aid has enabled African recipient countries to increase the proportion of exports that are appropriate to their level of development, and to reduce the proportion of exports that are not suitable for their level of development, and that China's foreign aid will help recipient countries' export structure adjust to a direction more suitable for the recipients' development level, which is conducive to promoting the healthy development of the recipients' economies. Wu and Dai (2019, pp. 32–35) found that China's aid to Africa has promoted Africa's export process upgrades in the global value chains, and the marginal effects on export upgrades of China's aid and FDI to Africa are complementary.

Some scholars have argued that China's foreign aid has a limited effect on recipients' trade development. Based on existing data, Xiong and Huang (2014) found that there does not exist a co-integration relationship between China's foreign aid and foreign trade. In other words, China's foreign aid does not promote recipients' foreign trade, and has little effect on recipients' growth. Dong and Fan (2016, p. 60) believe that China's combination of aid, trade and investment has promoted African local economies.

Their research found that overall, China's aid to Africa has significantly improved the level of social and economic development of host countries in the early stage, and created certain favorable conditions for foreign capital inflow; however, the effect of aid on investment is not sustainable, and the marginal efficiency declined over time. From the perspectives of Sino-Africa trade, investment, technology and experience transmission, tourism and other aspects, Zhang (2006, p. 66) affirmed the role of China's aid to Africa in promoting African economic development.

An important goal of foreign aid is poverty reduction. Zhang (2018) argues that China's poverty reduction cooperation model – combining aid and investment – helps poverty alleviation in Latin America, but that the poverty reduction effects of different types of aid are different. Other official funds, economic aid, infrastructure aid, science and education humanity assistance have significant poverty reduction effects. Xiong and Wu (2016) used dynamic stochastic general equilibrium (DSGE) to construct a three-sector international poverty reduction model including family, firm and government, and found that in the absence of technology shocks, positive aid volatility can reduce poverty, while negative aid volatility is not conducive to poverty reduction.

In addition, Chinese scholars have analyzed the role of China's foreign aid in promoting recipients' economic and social development from a theoretical perspective. For example, Huang and Zhu (2013, pp. 25–26) proposed the concept of 'knowledge cooperation' and argued that China can provide its rich and accumulated development knowledge and experience to countries which receive its aid, and other developing states, through South-South forms of knowledge cooperation and tripartite knowledge cooperation, thus promoting their economic and social development.

## 5. Conclusions

The global financial crisis that erupted in 2008 further increased the contradiction between international aid supply and demand. In the post-crisis era, global issues such as climate change, food security, energy and resource security, environmental pollution, major natural disasters and pandemics have become more prominent. At the same time, development and economic imbalances between developed and developing states have become increasingly serious. The gap between rich and poor is widening. China has provided a large scale of aid, and has the largest number of recipients among emerging donors. Emerging donors such as China should actively shoulder the necessary international responsibilities and help underdeveloped countries to eradicate poverty, improve their development capabilities, and promote the achievement of the UN SDGs. In recent years,

Chinese scholars have gradually increased their research on foreign aid, and universities and research institutions have gradually established specialized research institutions for international development, forming a Chinese school and a Chinese perspective of foreign aid.

First of all, regarding the model and motivations of China's foreign aid, Chinese scholars believe that China's foreign aid is very different from that of DAC countries. China's foreign aid is under the SSC framework, and has the nature and characteristics of SSC. It emphasizes equality, mutual benefits and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. In China's foreign aid, development finance such as preferential loans account for a considerable proportion of aid funds, including project aid and technical cooperation. The strong participation of emerging donors and their strength embodied in this process has challenged the existing international development assistance system dominated by developed countries, which no longer fully reflects the current status of diversified international aid entities and providers. Therefore, the reform of the international development cooperation management system is imminent.

Secondly, regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of foreign aid, the Western 'aid effectiveness' standard is not comprehensive enough. Foreign aid evaluation must also emphasize the 'development effectiveness' perspective, which pays greater attention to the role of foreign aid in promoting recipients' economic development and poverty reduction. China's foreign aid model is 'growth-driven', focusing on whether it can bring about 'development effectiveness' via direct economic growth, technological progress and poverty reduction in partner countries. An important part of international aid system reform is to re-constitute the aid effectiveness evaluation system, and to examine the effectiveness of foreign aid from both the perspective of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness, and from the perspective of aid process and aid impact.

Finally, in the future, the development of China's foreign aid system should, on the one hand, adhere to its own principles, focus on the role of aid in economic growth and poverty alleviation, and promote the transformation of the evaluation of international aid from 'aid effectiveness' to 'development effectiveness'. On the other hand, in terms of specific aid management and practices, Chinese foreign aid can learn from Western foreign aid management and promote the reform of China's foreign aid management system.

## Notes

1. Pan (2013, pp.95-97) analyzed theoretical research on China's foreign aid by searching CNKI (up to May, 2013). We disagree with her in the following two aspects: first, she regarded the articles on the reform and adjustment stage of China's foreign aid (e.g.,



Liu, 1998) as theoretical research; second, she thought that the theoretical research on China's foreign aid accounts for 20–40% of the total research. We believe that Pan (2013) confused the relationship between "China's foreign aid theory" (zhongguo duiwai yuanzhu lilun) and "theoretical discussion on China's foreign aid" (guanyu zhongguo duiwai yuanzhu de lilun tantao), so she analyzed a high proportion of theoretical research on China's foreign aid. We believe that Chinese scholars do not have much research on the theory of China's foreign aid.

2. The other two are "helping recipient countries build independent industries" and "teaching technology to other countries to achieve independence, not replace it".

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