

Burkina Faso

Cabestan, Jean-Pierre

Published in:
South African Journal of International Affairs

DOI:
[10.1080/10220461.2016.1271746](https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2016.1271746)

Published: 01/10/2016

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Cabestan, J.-P. (2016). Burkina Faso: Between Taiwan's active public diplomacy and China's business attractiveness. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 23(4), 495-519.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2016.1271746>

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent publication URLs

BURKINA FASO BILATERAL TRADE STATISTICS (with Taiwan)

Unit: US\$

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	Taiwan	Taiwan	Taiwan	Taiwan	Taiwan
Imports¹	13 208 000	20 735 000	9 910 000	6 554 000	11 888 000
Exports²	654 000	310 000	2 238 000	671 000	1 419 000
Total	13 862 000	21 045 000	12 148 000	7 224 000	13 307 000
Trade Balance³	-12 554 000	-20 425 000	-7 672 000	-5 883 000	-10 469 000

¹ Burkina Faso’s imports from Taiwan, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx

² Burkina Faso’s exports to Taiwan, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx

³ Trade balance between Taiwan and Burkina Faso, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx

BURKINA FASO BILATERAL TRADE STATISTICS (PR China)

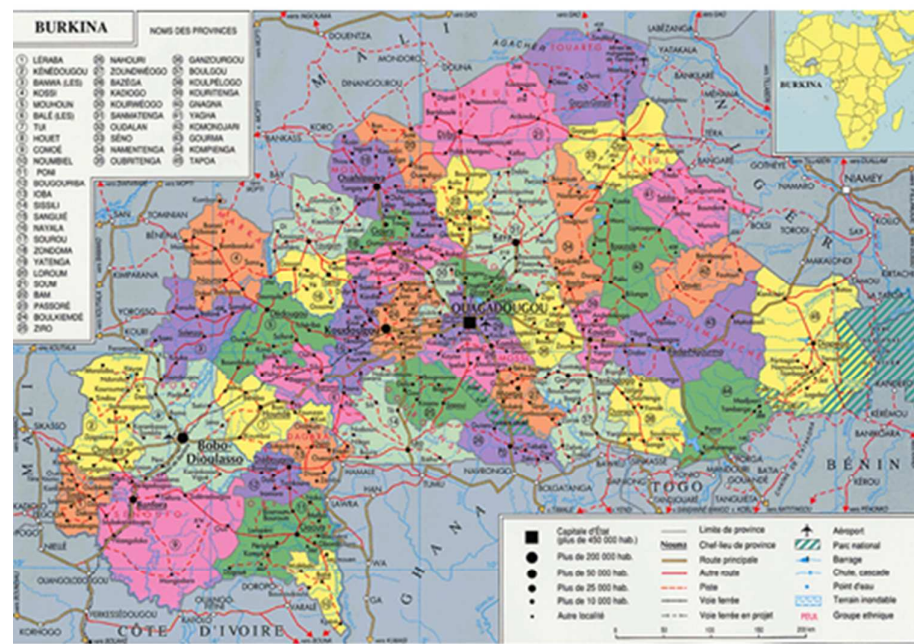
Unit: US \$

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	PR China	PR China	PR China	PR China	PR China
Imports¹	235 846 000	302 863 000	424 255 000	322 783 000	330 333 000
Exports²	4 597 000	69 369 000	138 659 000	32 791 000	64 729 000
Total	240 443 000	372 232 000	562 914 000	355 574 000	395 062 000
Trade Balance³	-231 249 000	-233 494 000	-285 596 000	-289 992 000	-265 604 000

¹ Burkina Faso's imports from PR China, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx

² Burkina Faso's exports to PR China, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx

³ Trade balance between PR China and Burkina Faso, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx



Burkina Faso between Taiwan's Active Public Diplomacy and China's Business Attractiveness

Abstract

Since both countries restored official relations in 1994, Taiwan's assistance to Burkina Faso has been quite generous, turning this country into a window, if not a model of Taipei's contribution to poor countries' economic and social development and, more importantly, public diplomacy. Taiwan's approach to official development assistance (ODA) has remained quite traditional, if not old-fashioned, closely linking its public diplomacy to its foreign policy objectives—keeping its diplomatic allies and enhancing its international space—and this in spite of the diplomatic truce reached with Beijing in 2008. Trade between both countries has remained very modest. But Taiwan's ODA represents a significant portion of the total assistance received by Burkina Faso every year.

Yet, in the same laps of time, because of China's rise and active "outgoing" strategy, as all African countries as well as developing nations that have kept formal links with Taiwan, Burkina Faso has developed a robust trade and business relationship with China. Chinese companies' presence in this country is also increasing, far ahead of their Taiwanese counterparts. As a result, as elsewhere in Africa and the world, normalization with China has become a domestic political issue in Burkina Faso. After the ousting of president Compaore in 2014 and the failed coup that took place the following year, the return to democracy and the November 2015 elections have made this debate more open and public. And while the new elected Burkinabe president, Roch Kaboré, has remained faithful to Taiwan and continues to publicly appreciate its assistance, it is far from certain that the political values that both Burkina Faso and Taiwan share will prevent the former to develop closer and eventually official relations with China. Consequently, it is unlikely that Taiwan's active public diplomacy and soft power in Burkina Faso will prevent it from being even more marginalised in a continent, as well as a developing world, that has become much more dependent upon the planet's second economic power and first trade nation.

Introduction

Burkina Faso is one of the three African countries that have maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China (ROC). The other two are Sao Tome and Principe and Swaziland.¹ However, Burkina Faso is Taiwan's largest and probably more important partner in Africa today. For how long? After Ms. Tsai Ying-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) came into office on 20th May 2016, this question has become more

¹ Broadhead, "Taiwan on diplomatic eggshells with three remaining African allies", *Post Magazine*, 6 December 2015, <http://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1886336/taiwan-diplomatic-eggshells-three-remaining-african-allies> (accessed on 19 May 2016).

pressing although it cannot be answered yet. In any case, it depends much more upon Beijing and the evolution of the relations across the Taiwan Strait than Ouagadougou or Taipei authorities. And the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s decision to normalise with the Gambia in March 2016, nearly three years after Gambian President [Yahya](#) Jammeh severed diplomatic relations with Taipei does not augur well for the continuation of the verbal "diplomatic truce" concluded by both sides after Ma Ying-jeou was elected [ROC president in 2008](#).²

Burkina Faso is one of the world's poorest countries. It is ranked 183th among 188 countries in terms of human development (2014). Its economy has grown at a 6% annual rate since the early 2000s (4-5% in 2014-15) but its population has increased very rapidly in the last two decades (+3.1% per year) to reach 17 million in 2016 against 7 million in 1994. Located in the heart of the Sahel region, it has been for a long time affected by desertification. An in the last few years, it has also become a target of Islam extremism and terrorist attacks, initially concentrated in its border areas with Mali and Niger but expanding to Ouagadougou (the Splendid Hotel and Cappuccino café) in January 2016. Moreover, Burkina Faso has gone through unprecedented political turmoil in 2014-2015: its president since 1987, Blaise Compaoré, was ousted from power in October 2014 after he expressed the intention to revise the country's constitution to stay in power longer; in September 2015, elements of the *Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle* (RSP, presidential security regiment) attempted a putsch but failed and the RSP was later dismantled; and eventually in November 2015, the first truly democratic presidential and legislative elections since 1978 took place, bringing Roch Kaboré, a former close but disenchanted ally of Compaoré, to the presidency.

As we will see in this article, since both countries restored official relations in 1994, Taiwan's assistance to Burkina Faso has been quite generous, turning this country into a window, if not a model of Taipei's contribution to poor countries' economic and social development [and, more importantly, public diplomacy](#).³ [Public diplomacy can be defined as "the conduct of foreign policy through engagement with international publics" by governments which activities are "primarily motivated by the improvement of their image with them"](#).⁴ Taiwan's approach to official development assistance (ODA) has remained quite traditional, if not old-fashioned as it is still largely disconnected from its companies' business interests; it does not particularly foster public-private partnership either as its main drivers are political and diplomatic, [closely linking up its public diplomacy to its foreign policy objectives—keeping its diplomatic allies and enhancing its international space—and](#)

² "Taiwan 'needs to protect its space' after China renews ties with Gambia", *Reuters*, 18 March 2016, <http://www.timeslive.co.za/world/2016/03/18/Taiwan-needs-to-protect-its-space-after-China-renews-ties-with-Gambia> (accessed on 19 May 2016).

³ Rawnsley G, *Taiwan's Informal Diplomacy and Propaganda*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000.

⁴ Cull NJ, "Public Diplomacy: The Evolution of a Phrase", in N. Snow & P. Taylor, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, London: Routledge, 2008, p. 19.

⁵ Alexander C, "Taiwan's Public Diplomacy", in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan*, London: Routledge, 2016, p. 546.

[this in spite of the diplomatic truce reached with Beijing in 2008](#).⁶ Trade between both countries has remained very modest. But Taiwan's ODA, [an essential tool of its public diplomacy](#), represents a significant portion of the total assistance received [by Burkina Faso](#) every year.

Yet, in the same laps of time, [because of China's rise and active "outgoing" strategy](#), as all African countries [and any other developing nations that have kept formal links with Taiwan](#), Burkina Faso has developed a robust trade and business relationship with China.⁷ Chinese companies' presence in this country is also increasing, far ahead of their Taiwanese counterparts. As a result, as elsewhere in Africa and the world, normalization with the PRC has become a domestic political issue in Burkina Faso. After the ousting of president Compaore in 2014 and the failed coup that took place the following year, the return to democracy and the November 2015 elections have made this debate more open and public. And while the new elected Burkinabe president, Roch Kaboré, has remained faithful to Taiwan [and continues to publicly appreciate its assistance](#), it is far from certain that the political values that both Burkina Faso and Taiwan share will prevent the former to develop closer and eventually official relations with China, [and the latter to be even more marginalised in a continent, as well as a developing world, that has become much more dependent upon the planet's second economic power and first trade nation. In other words, for a long time, the argument has been that, contrary to large and ambitious states that could not ignore China's growing geostrategic and economic might, small and poor nations were more ready to keep diplomatic relations with Taiwan because of the special benefits that they could expect from this relationship](#).⁸ But does this still hold? For how long can Taiwan's public diplomacy compete with and resist against China's increasing assistance and projects in neighbouring countries, or what Colin Alexander calls Beijing's "public diplomacy by proxy"?⁹ At the same time, in keeping as long as possible formal links with Taiwan, [is Burkina Faso not in a better position if not to hedge against China](#)¹⁰, at least to improve its position and bargaining power in the asymmetrical (but non-official) relationship that, [as most countries, it is compelled to have with the world only "emerging potential superpower"?](#)¹¹

⁶ On the various forms of development assistance and cooperation, cf. Campbell [B](#), Gabas [JJ](#), Pesche [D](#) & Ribier [V](#), eds., *Les transformations des politiques de coopération. Secteurs agricoles et miniers au Canada et en France*, Paris : Karthala, 2016. [Alexander C](#), "Public Diplomacy and the Diplomatic Truce: Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in El Salvador", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 2011, 7, pp. 271-288.

⁷ [Colin Alexander](#), *China and Taiwan in Central America, Engaging Foreign Publics in Diplomacy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2014, pp. 25ff.

⁸ [Taylor I](#), "Taiwan's Foreign Policy in Africa", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11 (30), 2002, p. 130.

⁹ [Alexander](#), "Taiwan's Public Diplomacy", *op. cit.*, p. 546.

¹⁰ [Kuik CC](#), "How Do Weaker States Hedge? Unpacking ASEAN States' Alignment Behavior Towards China", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25 (100), 2016, pp. 500-514.

¹¹ [Womack B](#), *China Among Unequals: Asymmetric Foreign Relationships in Asia*, New Jersey: World Scientific, 2010; [Brooks SG](#) & [Wohlforth WC](#), "The Rise and Fall of Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century. China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position", *International Security*, 40 (3), Winter 2015/16, pp. 7-

53.

This article first summarises the historical background of Burkina Faso-Taiwan relations. It then presents the major areas of Taipei's assistance to Ouagadougou as well as its distinct characteristics. In the following section, it compares Taiwan and China's trade and economic relations with Burkina Faso. And finally, it assesses the importance of the China issue in Burkinabe politics and the risks of a diplomatic switch in favour of Beijing. [It is partly based on field-work conducted by the author in Burkina Faso in February 2016.](#)

Historical Background

Burkina Faso (Haute Volta before 1984) is the only African country to have recognized Taiwan twice. In 1961, just one year after independence from France, its first president, Maurice Yameogo (1960-1966), a staunch anti-communist, established diplomatic relations with the ROC. But in the early 1970s, struck by severe drought, risks of famine and a measles epidemic, Upper Volta was approached by PRC Premier Zhou Enlai who offered it free food and vaccine. Soon after, in 1973, the then president, major general Aboubakar Sangoulé Lamizana, accepted to normalize with Beijing and sever official links with Taipei. In the 1970s, China offered US\$48 million credit and initiated several projects, in the agricultural and medical sectors that will come to fruition in the next decade.¹² These projects including rice cultures, the construction of hospitals, including the *Hôpital de l'Amitié* (Friendship Hospital) in Koudougou, well digging and an agreement between Xinhua News Agency and the Upper Volta Ministry of Information. One year after the coup that brought him to power and a few months after he had changed his country's name to Burkina Faso (the land of honest men), in November 1984, Captain Thomas Sankara paid an official visit to China. At the same time, Sankara, a Marxist, moved his country away from the West and closer to the Soviet Union and Cuba.¹³

After Sankara's long-term political ally, Blaise Compaoré, organized in 1987 a coup against him that killed him and decided a "rectification of the revolution", Burkina Faso remained close to the PRC: President Compaoré was the first head of state to visit Beijing after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. And the relationship was then promised to develop smoothly, as in April 1993, the Burkinabe Foreign Minister made an official visit to China. However, a few months later, in February 1994, Burkina Faso suddenly restored relations with Taiwan.

This change of mind was the [successful](#) result of Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui's new diplomatic offensive aimed at increasing, through financial aid or what has been called "check book diplomacy", the ROC's diplomatic allies and bringing back the country to the United Nations. [While, as Alexander suggests, "swing states" behaviours have little relations with Taiwan's public diplomacy¹⁴, it is difficult in the case of Burkina Faso to untie the incentives that Taipei then gave this country from Taiwan's broader foreign policy discourse and its institutions involved.](#)

¹² Shinn [DH](#), & Eisenman [J](#), *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement*, Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 247.

¹³ Cf. the website that still supports Sankara, http://www.capitainethomassankara.net/pages_ang/sankara_chronology.html (accessed on 19 May 2016)

¹⁴ Alexander, "Taiwan's Public Diplomacy", *op. cit.*, p. 551.

Since then, the relationship between Ouagadougou and Taipei has developed steadily: the diplomatic counteroffensive launched by Beijing in the late 1990s-early 2000s did not concentrate on Burkina Faso, a state regarded as less important than for instance Senegal or Chad that resumed relations with China in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Consequently, when Ma Ying-jeou was elected ROC president in 2008 and concluded a verbal “diplomatic truce” (*waijiao xiubing*) with China, Burkina was still one of the four African nations with official links with Taiwan.

The Key Characteristics of Taiwan-Burkina Faso Relations and Cooperation since 1994

What are the key characteristics of Taiwan’s relationship and cooperation with Burkina Faso?

Firstly, since 1994, Taiwan-Burkina Faso cooperation and relationship has been very much a top-down process politically supported and stimulated by both governments. For Taipei, it has emerged as a window of its development assistance in Africa and the whole developing world, Burkina Faso remaining the only significant African country keeping official links with Taiwan, [in other words a key success story of its public diplomacy](#). Ouagadougou, for its part, has considered its relationship with Taiwan as a long-term partnership [as if it is not only satisfied with the assistance provided by Taiwan but, in distinguishing itself from the other capitals of West Africa, particularly Abidjan, Bamako and Niamey, it wanted to slow down and better manage Beijing’s penetration \(see below\)](#). And as we will see, the political upheaval and changes that took place in 2014-2015 have not so far modified this approach.

The second characteristic is that Taiwan’s assistance to Burkina Faso is low-key, almost exclusively bilateral (as opposed to trilateral or multilateral) and, more importantly, very traditional in its approach to development, reminding what OECD countries and development agencies were privileging the 1960s and 1970s: medical assistance, agricultural projects, irrigation, model farms, human resources training, etc.

The third one is that, while economic relations have developed over the last two decades, there is very little trade between the two countries (US\$13 million in 2015) while China has become one of Burkina’s top trade partners (US\$395 million) (see below).

The fourth characteristic has more to do with the way Taiwan presents itself in Burkina Faso as in other countries with which it still has diplomatic relations: there it is known as the “Republic of China (Taiwan)” or “China-Taiwan”, feeding the risks of confusion with the PRC, as most Burkinabe have difficulties establishing a clear distinction between the Chinese from Taiwan and from the PRC, except with the [PRC Chinese who](#) start settling down on their own soil (cf. below).

Fifthly, as elsewhere in Africa (Senegal, Chad), in Burkina Faso, Taiwan took over some of China’s assistance projects and initiated some new ones. Among the former ones, Koudougou’s *Hôpital de l’Amitié* is probably the most striking one; and more generally, medical assistance has rapidly become one of the key features of Taipei’s action as Beijing’s before. Ironically, some of the agricultural projects started by Taiwan in 1970 and expanded by the PRC after 1973, as the development and irrigation of the Kou valley (1,260 ha), have

also been taken back and carried on by Taiwan.¹⁵ Among the latter, the most important and lasting projects have been vocational training, Chinese language teaching and support for Burkina Faso government's "national commitments". But as we will see, other forms of assistance have taken shape, most of them aimed at contributing to the development of rural areas (well digging, school building, solar lamps, tree planting, etc.). In any event, these elements of continuity highlight the similarities between Taiwan's assistance and China's aid programmes, particularly with the ones initiated during the Maoist era and have been if not abandoned but largely side-lined since then.

To organize this assistance, a Taiwanese-Burkinabé Cooperation Joint-Commission (*Commission mixte*) was established as soon as July 1994. Run by both ministries of Foreign Affairs, this commission meets every two years and decides both about the assistance's financial envelope as well as its main projects.

Taiwan's ODA to Burkina Faso is far from being negligible: between 1994 and 2012, it amounted to 200 billion West Africa CFA francs (thereafter CFA) or 305 million euros (US\$348 million). According to the ROC Embassy in Ouagadougou, on average, Taiwan has provided every year between 20 and 21 million euros to this country. This level of aid has remained very steady: for 2014-2015, the joint commission budgeted US\$42 million. This envelope includes both projects funding and gifts in kind (as computers).¹⁶ Taiwan's ODA to Burkina Faso represents a significant and actually growing portion (7.5% in 2014) of Taiwan's total aid envelope which amounted to US\$280 million in 2014 against US\$380 million in 2010 and 515 million in 2007.¹⁷ Consequently, Taiwan has clearly prioritized Burkina Faso.

By comparison, between 1973 and 1994, in 21 years, the PRC invested only 19 million euros in 36 projects¹⁸; and today former colonizer France's assistance to Burkina Faso amounts to 100 million euros a year, including around 60 millions euros from the French Development Agency (*Agence Française de Développement*, AFD).¹⁹

¹⁵ Kalissani C, "Agriculture: un fils de producteur raconte la vallée du Kou", *Lefaso.net*, 3 October 2012, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article50560> (accessed on 23 May 2016).

¹⁶ According to Xavier Aurégan, from 1994 to 2010, Taiwan's assistance to Burkina Faso amounted to 256 million euros, cf. Aurégan X, "Le Burkina Faso et les 'deux Chines'", *Outre-Terre*, 30, 4, 2011, p. 384.

¹⁷ *International Cooperation and Development Report 2014*, Taipei, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan), 16 April 2015, p. 6, <http://www.mofa.gov.tw/Upload/RelFile/17/262/f7a8056d-26f6-4fdf-80be-c2963619f7de.pdf> (accessed on 24 June 2016); Atkinson J, "Aid in Taiwan's Foreign Policy: Putting Ma Ying-jeou's Aid Reforms in Historical Perspective", *The Pacific Review*, 2014, 27, 3, p. 424, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.909524>

¹⁸ Aurégan, "Le Burkina Faso et les 'deux Chines'", op. cit., p. 383.

¹⁹ "L'activité du groupe Agence Française de Développement au Burkina Faso", Fiche pays, AFD, 2 February 2016.

As for all Taiwanese ODA projects, this assistance is managed by the International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF, 國際合作發展基金會, 國合會, *guoji hezuo fazhan jijinhui* or *guohehui*) of Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA).²⁰

Within this envelope, a small portion has been devoted to supporting Burkina Faso's "national commitments": 1.2 million euros (78 billion CFA) from 1994 to 2004 and 0.76 million euros (50 million CFA) in project from 2004 to 2014. The projects funded include school construction, teachers' and particularly women teachers' training, creation of health and social promotion centres and tree plantations.

The Main Areas of Taiwan's Assistance to Burkina Faso

Taiwan's assistance to Burkina Faso has given priority to the following sectors: agriculture modernisation and particularly rice production increase, medical assistance, vocational training and language training. Other forms of aid have also developed but they are all related to these for main areas of assistance.

Please insert a map of Burkina Faso around here

Agriculture: Towards Rice Autonomy?

As soon as Taiwan came back in 1994, it announced its intention to actively contribute to Burkina Faso's self-subsistence in rice, an idea which goes back to the 1960s when rice culture was introduced in this country. It has consecutively developed two major projects, one in Bagré between 1995 and 2009, promoting the culture of irrigated rice (*shuidao*) (21% of rice cultivated area and 54% of Burkina's national production), and another in Koungri on the Central plateau since 2001, introducing rain-fed (or upland) rice (*riz pluvial*, *ludao*) (9% and 5% respectively).

The first project took direct advantage of the completion in 1992 of the Bagré Dam on the White Volta, a large-scale project funded by the World Bank.²¹ Between 1995 and 2009, Taiwan developed 1,200 to 1,600 ha out of the 3,380 ha perimeter transformed into irrigated rice culture²². It trained local farmers and supplied seeds, fertilizers and equipment. Since

²⁰ ICDF annual reports can be found here: <http://www.icdf.org.tw/mp.asp?mp=2> ; Alexander C, "Development Assistance and Communication: The Case of the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund", *Global Governance*, 21 (2015), pp. 119–139.

²¹ IUCN, The Global Water Initiative and International Institute for Environment and Development, *Etat des lieux autour du barrage de Bagré, rapport final*, Ouagadougou: Initiatives Conseil International, October 2010, https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/etat_des_lieux_autour_du_barrage_de_bagre_au_burkina_faso.pdf (accessed on 26 May 2016).

²² Ambassade de la République de Chine au Burkina Faso, *Burkina Fao – République de Chine (Taïwan), 20 ans d'amitié et de solidarité et de nouvelles perspectives*, 1994-2014, Ouagadougou: Les Editions Lefaso, 2015,

then, small-scale cooperation has continued, centred mainly on the maintenance of the irrigation system, seeds improvement, and the involvement of two Taiwanese experts, a hydraulics specialist attached to Bagr p le, another World Bank project launched in 2011 and aimed at increasing economic activities in the area²³, and [an](#) agriculture engineer in charge of seed production. Taiwan also contributed to the construction of socio-economic infrastructure for farmers, including an “eco-touristic centre” (*Centre Eco-touristique de Bagr *).

The second project is more recent but more ambitious: it has allowed between 2002 and 2016 the development of rain-fed rice production on 22,000 ha. Between 2002 and 2013, it has involved 84,328 local farmers among them 48% are women (40,536). The 400 sites developed, many of them on lowlands, yielded a rice production of 55,763 tons in 2013, which then represented 20% of the national production. Taiwan’s assistance has also included the construction of infrastructures, a diversification of rice productions, still dominated by paddy as opposed to white rice, a modernization of [the](#) distribution system and technology transfers. Taiwan’s financial aid for this project amounted to 12 billion CFA (US\$18.3 million) in the first phase (2002-2007) and 11.15 billion CFA (US\$17 million) in the second phase (2009-2013). This project has also involved 7 Taiwanese experts, 5 based in Ouagadougou and two in Bobo Dioulasso.²⁴

In 2016, the Taiwanese mission claimed that its projects contributed to 30% of Burkina’s rice production. In any event, in these projects, productivity reached 4 tons/ha in Bagr  and 2 to 3 t/ha in the rain-fed paddy fields, as opposed to 1 t/ha or even less in other farms (Interview 1).²⁵

Taiwanese agricultural projects also encourage farmers to diversify their crops. For example, in Tintoulou, a village located half way on the road from Ouagadougou to Koudougou, local farmers cultivate potatoes and onions, in addition to rice, with the help of a Taiwanese expert who provided a pumping system operating with the support of solar-panel generated electricity (Interview 1).

Medical assistance

The two most striking Taiwanese projects have been the medical technical mission operating since 1996 in the Friendship Hospital in Koudougou, located 100 km west of Ouagadougou,

p. 12. This source provides contradictory figures regarding the amount of hectares developed by the Taiwanese cooperation.

²³ <http://www.banquemondiale.org/projects/P119662/burkina-faso-bagre-growth-pole-project?lang=fr> (accessed on 26 May 2016).

²⁴ Ambassade de la R publique de Chine, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁵ Most rice in Burkina is cultivated in lowlands (70%) that yield very little (43% of the national production), cf. Easypol (FAO), *Analyse de la comp titivit  de la filiere riz local au Burkina Faso, Rapport provisoire, Ouagadougou*: Minist re de l’agriculture de l’hydraulique et des ressources halieutiques, Secr tariat g n ral, Direction des  tudes et de la planification (DEP), October 2009, http://www.fao.org/docs/up/easypol/938/analyse-filiere-riz-local-burkina-faso_131fr.pdf

and the construction completed in 2010 of the University Hospital in Tengandogo (or Tingandogo) in the outskirts of the capital city.

As early as 1996, both governments signed an “agreement protocol on medical technical cooperation” aimed at improving the quality of healthcare provided to the population. But for a long time its main outcome was the medical mission dispatched to the *Hôpital de l’Amitié* in Koudougou.

The Friendship Hospital in Koudougou is a regional university hospital. In other words, it is a rather large and important institution. Taiwan’s technical mission is composed of 4 permanent staff (including two medical doctors, one anaesthetist and one biomedical technician) and 4 young staff who had chosen to do a two-year national service abroad instead of being drafted in the armed forces (two medical doctors, one dentist and one biomedical technician). It is led by Dr. Huang Chi-lin, an urologist and a former Tsoying-based Navy medical doctor who had already spent 18 years in Africa, including 15 in Burkina (as well as 1 in Guinea Bissau, 2 in Chad). They are paid by the ICDF and live in a dormitory next to the hospital where Dr. Huang’s wife looks after the whole team with the help of a local cook trained in Chinese cuisine and other servants. Since the attack against the Spondid Hotel in Ouagadougou in January 2016, they are protected by 5 gendarmes (Interview 7).

This team’s main mission has been two-fold: strengthening hygiene and public health; and training local personnel, particularly midwives and nurses. In addition since 1997, a Taiwanese subvention has been put in place to buy and supply medical equipment and materials as well as to increase the patients’ medical coverage. Hygiene and public health actions have included regular visits to remote villages of the region (every two months), a job that is perceived as particularly harsh by the young Taiwanese attached to the mission. Since 2011, the team has also given priority to selecting future local instructors who were trained in Taiwan for around three months (12 midwives and 12 nurses). Simultaneously, the team and the returned instructors trained 440 midwives, and 480 nurses until 2013. Since then, 300 midwives are trained every year. Moreover, in 2012, a biomedical engineer was added to the medical mission; he is assisted by 9 Burkinabe biomedical technicians trained for three months in Taiwan.²⁶

At the hospital itself, the Taiwanese team has also rehabilitated the paediatric service and established a psychiatric service. The Koudougou team has remained to date the most important Taiwanese medical mission in the country.

Launched in 2007 by the Burkinabe government and the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry, the University Hospital (*Centre universitaire hospitalier*) in Tengandogo is a much more ambitious project: it aims at localizing hospitalization and reducing the number of medical evacuations (to Dakar or Paris), in other words, at giving Burkina Faso the capacity to cure more cases of serious diseases and accidents.

²⁶ Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., p. 20.

Renamed between its opening in 2011 and 2015 *Hôpital national Blaise Compaore* (HNBC), this public hospital is a US\$70 million (40 billion CFA) national project mainly funded by a US\$60 million (35 billion CFA) loan from Taiwan's China Import Export Bank. Benefiting from a 5 year grace period and a low (2.25%) interest rate, this loan is to be reimbursed in 15 years (or 30 semesters) between 2011 and 2025. This project is also for Taiwan an unusual case of public-private partnership. According to the Taiwanese Embassy, an open tender was organized by the Burkinabe Ministry of Health and was won by Te Chang Construction (*Dechang Yingzhao*), a Taiwanese Taichung-based listed company (Interview 12).²⁷ However, the local media have questioned this procedure and claimed that the Taiwanese government had imposed its own company.²⁸ And later, the Taiwanese embassy recognized that the construction market had been directly awarded to Te Chang for a negotiated price of US\$52.4 million (*accord de gré à gré*) (Interviews 2 & 4).²⁹ In any event, both sides have recognized that 60 to 70% of the loan was used to build the hospital and buy Taiwanese equipment (Interview 2).

Renamed again in February 2015, a few months after Compaore's fall, University Hospital in Tengandogo³⁰, this two-storey hospital has started to operate much more slowly than expected and remains today riddled with problems. When it opened to the public in September 2011, only 3 services were operating: dermatology, endocrinology and neurology. A year later, the later one only was still active. And in February 2016, the emergency room, the radiology section, a mother-child pool and a laboratory were the only services open. The ophthalmology, odontology and traumatology services were supposed to start operating soon but no timeline was given. Similarly, on 250 of the 600 beds initially planned were then available. A lack of medical doctor and nurses is the main cause of these delays. However, the overall hospital personnel seems to have recently increased: 570 including 67 doctors in 2016 against 324 in 2011 and 250 in 2012, a drop caused by wage disputes (Interview 2).³¹

Another problem has been the overambitious Hospital Information System (HIS) established by the Taiwanese side, a team of four technicians dispatched by Puli Christian Hospital.³² Aimed at introducing a modern management system of the hospital, it has appeared too complicated and too hard to maintain for the Burkinabe side, and this in spite of the intensive two-month training in Ouagadougou and Taiwan of a few dozen local laboratory assistants, radiologists, computer specialists, and biomedical technicians (10 trained in 2016). As a

²⁷ Cf. also Te Chang Construction website, <http://www.tccon.com.tw/eng/about.html> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

²⁸ Ladj Bama Y., "Hôpital national Blaise Compaore: Les raisons d'une agonie prématurée", *Le Faso.net*, 20 August 2012, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article49702> (accessed on 30 May 2016).

²⁹ Te Chang Construction does not refer to a bid either, <http://www.tccon.com.tw/eng/about05.html> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

³⁰ "Burkina: L'Hôpital Blaise Compaore érigé en Centre hospitalier universitaire", *Burkina24*, 19 February 2015, <http://www.burkina24.com/2015/02/19/burkina-lhopital-blaise-compaore-erige-en-centre-hospitalier-universitaire/> (accessed on 30 May 2016). Blaise Compaore's bronze statue located outside of the hospital' main entrance was covered with a black plastic bag when I visited the place in February 2016.

³¹ Ladj Bama, "Hôpital national Blaise Compaore", op. cit.

³² According to the Taiwanese Team, it was the Burkinabe side which chose the Puli Hospital as management partner when visiting it in February 2009. Its size is similar (580 beds) (Interview 2).

result, management and information procedures have been simplified and a permanent team of four Taiwanese experts has been, as a support team, permanently attached to the hospital. Headed by Pau Teng Chun-you who has been since 2009 in Burkina Faso this team also includes a hospital administrator, Chen Szwei, especially in charge of training personnel on site. This Taiwanese support team operates according to a bilateral “University hospital management technical assistance project” (or contract) renewed every two years. It represents a cost of 600,000 euros per year for Taiwan’s ICDF (Interview 2 & 12).

The Taiwanese team also deplores the underuse of the medical equipment that was delivered, waste and maintenance problems. And more generally, the difficulties encountered by this project are far from being uncommon in developing countries and underscore the need to avoid transferring turn-key facilities and to adapt to the local conditions. Nevertheless, both sides have decided to continue to actively support this hospital project and present it as a window of their cooperation to the outside world. Recent political changes in Burkina Faso have not modified this approach. And for Taiwan, medical assistance has remained a clear priority of its cooperation with [and public diplomacy in](#) this country.³³

Vocational Training

Initiated in 2007, vocational training is a more recent project but it has become a well-publicized feature of Taiwan’s assistance to Burkina Faso. Officially called by Taiwan Vocational Training Strengthening Programme (*Programme de renforcement de la formation professionnelle*), it has been financed by ICDF [in](#) two consecutive grants: 1st phase (1997-June 2013): US\$60 million; and 2nd phase (June 2013-December 2016): 14 million euros (Interviews 4 and 5).

This programme [is](#) not only aimed at providing basic professional training in a particular area and in connection with the job market to more Burkinabe but also at training a larger number of local instructors who in the longer run would be able to replace the Taiwanese sent to this country. 13 centres, one by region, have been established since then, including in four vocational schools (*lycées professionnels*), located in Koudougou, Dori, Gaoura and Dédougou. In addition, two “pilot centres” (*centres de référence*) were opened, one in Ziniaré, 60 km northeast of Ouagadougou in 2011, and another one in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina’s second largest city, in 2015.³⁴ And between 2009 and 2015, around 350 new instructors received a one-year training (1,800 hours) in the Koudougou University and another 118 vocational training managers were trained in Taiwan for three months with the help of this programme [\(Interview 4\)](#).

In Ziniaré, technicians receive a more intensive one-year basic or additional training (1,800 hours) with the help of a dozen Taiwanese instructors in ten distinct areas, including auto and

³³ In addition, since 1994 Taiwan has distributed scholarships to 62 doctors and 5 hospital managers from Burkina Faso (Interview 3).

³⁴ Also called demonstration based vocational training centre and industrial vocational training centre, respectively, cf. *2015 International Cooperation and Development Fund Annual Report*, Taipei, ICDF, p. 26. <http://www.icdf.org.tw/public/Attachment/66111162215.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2016).

moto repair, woodwork, electricity, masonry, food and bread industry, and agricultural machinery maintenance.³⁵ In Bobo, with the support of 14 Taiwanese technicians, training (also one year long) has focused on spare part production and solar energy technology. In other centres, training lasts for three years but should be gradually reduced. All training programmes are sanctioned by a professional diploma (Interviews 5 & 11).³⁶

According to data provided by the Taiwanese mission, 80% of the 150 to 200 Burkinabe technicians trained every year with the support of this programme find a job (Interviews 3 and 4).³⁷ Even if this percentage may be a bit too optimistic, this vocational training programme is perceived by both sides as well adapted to the needs of the country and a factor of development and modernization.

Chinese Language Training

Chinese language training is a more recent feature of Taiwan's cooperation with Burkina Faso. It started in 2005 under the Chen Shui-bian administration, in a rather low-key manner, in the Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations (*Institut diplomatique et de relations internationales* or IDRI), an institution where then Burkinabe diplomats were trained (Interview 8 & 9). The idea was to capitalize on Chinese (mandarin) teaching to influence future members of the Burkinabe Foreign Ministry or elites. In 2008, after Ma Ying-jeou came to office, this programme was expanded and turned into a full-fledge "Chinese language teaching promotion" project (CLTP, *Promotion de l'enseignement de la langue chinoise*).

As a result, a Chinese Language Teaching Promotion Centre (CLTPC, *Centre de promotion de l'enseignement de la langue chinoise*) was created in 2011 in Ouagadougou. Open to the public and initially free, this centre offers ten-week teaching sessions of 40 hours (2 lectures of 2 hours per week). Enrolling around 100 students per session, it does not deliver diplomas but only level certificates. All together, 500 students are trained every year. In early 2016, the CLTPC included three Taiwanese teachers and a Taiwanese director, Chiang Cheng-chi, all paid by the ICDF and 180 students. The Centre's annual budget amounts to 300,000 euros.

³⁵ The Taiwanese subvention (6.7 billion CFA) has financed the construction (4.4 billion CFA) and the equipment (2.3 billion CFA) of the Ziniaré centre, cf. Ambassade de la République de Chine au Burkina Faso, op. cit., p. 8. It was built by a private Taiwanese infrastructure company called Overseas Investment and Development Corp. (OIDC), specialized in completing turn-key constructions in developing countries, cf. Doh KM, "Séjour du Premier ministre à Taïwan: Visite d'entreprises 'dignes d'intérêt' pour le Burkina Faso", <http://www.sidwaya.bf/m-11438-sejour-du-premier-ministre-a-taiwan-visite-d-entreprises-dignes-d-interet-pour-le-burkina-faso-.html> (accessed on 1 June 2016).

³⁶ In Ziniaré and Bobo: Brevet de Qualification Professionnelle (BQP), Brevet Professionnel de Technicien (BPT) and Brevet Professionnel de Technicien Spécialisé (BPTS). In the other centres, lower diplomas are delivered: Certificat de qualification professionnelle de base (CQB) and Certificat de qualification professionnelle (CQP). In the professional high schools, Certificats d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP), Brevets d'Etudes Professionnelles (BEP) and Professional Baccalaureats (BP) are delivered. Cf. <http://www.prfp.gov.bf/> (accessed 20 June 2016).

³⁷ At the end of 2015, the Ziniaré centre had already completed three pre-employment training classes with a total of 864 graduates. The employment rate of the first two classes was 70% and 77% respectively, 2015 *International Cooperation and Development Fund Annual Report*, op. cit., p. 26.

Since early 2016, the CLTPC charges modest tuition (5,000 CFA or US\$8 for three months) and registration (20,000 CFA or US\$30) fees to students in order mainly to stabilize attendance. The objective is that students master 2,500 Chinese characters in two years and 5,000 characters and reach level B2 in four years. Most attendants are university students but a few traders and business people also participate in the programme.

Simultaneously, the CLTP has introduced Chinese language teaching in Burkina's high schools (*lycées*) and universities. The CLTP partners include the National Institute for High International Studies (*Institut national des hautes études internationales*), an institution that succeeded the IDRI in 2015 but does not train any more diplomats, and the National School of Administration and Judicial Affairs (*Ecole nationale d'administration et de magistrature*) which has taken over this mission.

Finally, the CLTP has deepened Burkinabe diplomats' Chinese language training: each year, after an initial six-month language training in Ouagadougou, a few diplomats are sent to Taiwan for a longer period of time.

It is worth highlighting the way CLTP has been promoted by ROC diplomats under Ma Ying-jeou. On the one hand, trying to take advantage of China market's rise and attractiveness, Chinese language is presented as the "future language of the business world". On the other hand, adopting a rather ecumenical style, this program is officially aimed at "contributing to promoting Taiwanese and/or Chinese culture".³⁸ It is unlikely that the new Tsai Ying-wen administration would change this approach to Chinese language teaching, and so far it has not.

Other forms of assistance and cooperation

Other forms of assistance and cooperation first include education scholarships to study in Taiwan. Since 2000, 20 of them have been distributed every year to Burkinabe, against 5 in the 1990s (vocational and healthcare personnel trainings included). The offered training programmes focus on tropical agriculture, international trade and management, sustainable development and environmental protection, computer science and health management. In 2014, 100 Burkinabe students were studying in Taiwan and 68 in 2016 (Interview 3).³⁹ However, the number of Burkinabe receiving Taiwan's International Higher Education Scholarship has decreased since 2012: 1 in 2015, against 4 in 2013 and 8 in 2011 while Swaziland, for example, received 29, 12 and 4 respectively.⁴⁰

One of the most visible Taiwanese project has been "a lamp for Africa" (*une lampe pour l'Afrique*), the free distribution of five-hour autonomy solar lamps. Launched in 2011, this US\$2 million project is aimed at bringing evening light to more Burkinabe living in remote

³⁸ Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., p. 30.

³⁹ Yoda C, Ambassadeur du Burkina à Taipei: "Le modèle taïwanais est imitable chez nous, j'en suis sûr", *L'Observateur*, 2 June 2016, <http://www.observateur.bf/index.php/politique/item/5243-celine-yoda-ambassadeur-du-burkina-a-taipei-le-modele-taiwanais-est-imitable-chez-nous-j-en-suis-sure> (accessed on 10 June 2016).

⁴⁰ <http://www.icdf.org.tw/ct.asp?xItem=36832&ctNode=29876&mp=2> (accessed on 10 June 2016).

rural areas, particularly children and helping them completing their school homework. Since then 90,000 lamps have been distributed every year, including 184,000 in 180 schools. When Ma Ying-jeou visited Burkina Faso in 2012, [he](#) particularly promoted this programme, visiting a village that had benefited from it.⁴¹

This successful programme has been the opportunity of a rare non-official trilateral cooperation between the UNICEF, Japan and Taiwan: in 2015, UNICEF distributed 15,200 Taiwanese lamps to 40 schools, including 10,000 funded by the Japanese government through its embassy in Burkina Faso and the rest by Japan's National UNICEF Committee (Interviews 6 & 10).⁴² Since 2013, many of the lamps distributed are manufactured in an assembly line set up by Speetech Energy (*Xuande*), a Taiwanese private company, in Ouagadougou (see below).

The installation and distribution of solar panels, for example as street lighting, in Ouagadougou and a few other cities as Koudougou and Ouahigouya, and the construction of solar power stations have been another striking feature of Taiwan's cooperation. Since 2011, Taiwan allocated a 1 million euros annual budget to this project. In February 2012, the first photovoltaic solar power station was inaugurated within the compound of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Environment. The opening by Speetech Energy of a factory assembling solar products (panels, lamps, etc.) in July 2013 in Ouagadougou (Pissy area) has directly contributed to boosting this project. Supported by the Burkinabe Ministry of Mines and Energy and an investment of 999 million CFA (US\$2 million), this joint venture produces every year some 1,000 megawatts of products.⁴³ While it offers a good [and rare](#) example of public-private partnership, it is also a clever form of Taiwanese tied aid to Burkina Faso that is rather similar to what China is doing in other parts of Africa.⁴⁴

Three years later, Speetech Energy was about to complete in Ziga (Oubritenga) the construction of a 1.1 to 1.3 megawatt solar power station that should bring electricity to the

⁴¹ Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., p. 23.

⁴² https://twitter.com/unicef_burkina/status/659869299880894467 (accessed on 1 June 2016). The UNICEF also claims having distributed some 15,200 lamps in 2015 (against 5,198 in 2014) without indicating their origin, cf. *UNICEF Annual Report 2015 Burkina Faso*, no date, p. 8 http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Burkina_Faso_2015_COAR.pdf and http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Burkina_Faso_Annual_Report_2014.pdf (accessed on 1 June 2016).

⁴³ Balima [JT](#), "Energie solaire: la solution Speedtech Energy en marche au Burkina", *Le Faso.net*, 12 July 2013, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article55052>

⁴⁴ For example, Exclusive Solar, a subsidiary of [China's](#) New Era Investment Holdings (Pty) Ltd, initiated the Bright Future Plan to promote through donations the use of solar energy products in Namibia, especially in rural areas. Based in South Africa, it claims to manufacture its solar panels in this country, cf. "Chinese company donates solar products to Namibia", *Global Times*, 21 November 2014, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/893028.shtml> (accessed on 26 June 2016); likewise, Chinese company Sino Africa Medical Devices set up a plant in Uganda to manufacture long-lasting insecticide treated mosquito nets. At the commissioning of the factory, it donated mosquito nets, cf. Ssekijika [E](#), "Chinese firm sets up factory to manufacture mosquito nets", *The Observer*, 13 April 2016, <http://www.observer.ug/business/38-business/43642-chinese-firm-sets-up-factory-to-manufacture-mosquito-nets> (accessed on 26 June 2016).

village and also help supplying drinkable water from the Ziga dam to Ouagadougou.⁴⁵ Initially planned in April 2016 (Interview 3), its opening has been delayed until the summer of 2016. This project (around 1.9 billion CFA or US\$3.8 million) was mainly financed by Taiwan since Burkina Faso state company SONABEL contributed only up to 95 million CFA (US\$190,000) to it.⁴⁶

This is another interesting case of discreet multilateral cooperation (or at least coordination) between Taiwan and other donors, including [in this case](#) China (see below), which have been involved in the construction of large water pipeline and adduction project (104 billion CFA or US\$208 million) from Ziga to Ouagadougou and called Ziga II. Started in December 2015 and due to be completed in the first semester of 2017, this project is funded by the AFD, the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the Arab Bank for Africa's Economic Development and the OPEP Fund for International Development.⁴⁷

In this sector, it is actually hard to isolate Taiwan from the rest of the international community: this country and its companies participate in and co-sponsor all sorts of international events, as for instance the 2nd Africasolar 2015 Conference held in June 2015 in Ouagadougou and co-organised by the Burkina Faso Ministry of Mines and Energy.⁴⁸

Taiwan is far from being the only donor country installing solar panels in Burkina Faso or in Africa.⁴⁹ However, its industrial expertise and its government's priorities have made it a significant partner of this country in this sector.

Other forms of assistance have included since 1998 micro-credit to farmers and informal sector (US\$2.5 million budgeted in 2002 and US\$6 million disbursed until 2014). The reimbursement rate has been officially very high (97%). It has also included the planting of a 630 km long "green belt" (*ceinture végétale*) from Mansila (Yagha) to Tansila (Banwa) between 1998 and 2003 (cost: 983 million CFA among which 800 million CFA from Taiwan), the construction of a dam in Yakouta to improve adduction of drinking water to Dori (Séno) (achieved in 2004, cost: 2.5 billion CFA or 3.8 million euros fully covered by Taiwan) and, between 2004 and 2008, well-digging and irrigation projects.⁵⁰ However, in these last two

⁴⁵ <http://www.sidwaya.bf/m-11438-sejour-du-premier-ministre-a-taiwan-visite-d-entreprises-dignes-d-interet-pour-le-burkina-faso-.html> (accessed on 1 June 2016).

⁴⁶ DNF, 15 October 2014, <http://www.dnfburkina.com/actualites/conseil-des-ministres-du-15-octobre-deux-projets-de-lois-lun-contre-la-corruption-et-lautre-contre-la-peine-de-mort-adoptes>

⁴⁷ Koeta [O](#), "Eau potable au Burkina: Ziga II est lancé!" <http://www.burkina24.com/2015/12/08/eau-potable-au-burkina-ziga-ii-est-lance/> (accessed on 1 June 2016).

⁴⁸ A speaker from Taiwan's Tatung contributed a paper to the conference, <http://www.2ie-edu.org/africasolar-2015/> (accessed on 1 June 2015).

⁴⁹ Cf. for example, on Burkina Faso (but also Mali and Uganda), Maegaard [P](#), *Light Over Africa, Solar Future Plan for Solar Lighting in 10,000 villages and schools in Three African Countries*, 18 September 2015, Denmark; Danish Folkecenter for Renewable Energy, <http://www.folkecenter.dk/mediafiles/folkecenter/pdf/PM-solarFUTURE-18Sept2015-Ver-3.pdf>

⁵⁰ Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., pp. 72, 36, 40.

areas, targets have only been partially reached: 627 of the 1,000 projected wells were dug and only 3 of the planned 25 irrigation systems (or small dams) were built.⁵¹

More recently, starting in 2007, Taiwan has donated to Burkina Faso a large number of computers and electronic equipment, ironically some of them manufactured in China by Chinese companies as Huawei (Interview 8). First aimed at computerizing the National Assembly (2007-2008, 300,000 euros), it has become in 2009 a full-fledged programme of government modernization: 25 ministries and state institutions have so far benefited from it. From 2011 to 2014, the total cost of this programme was 800,000 euros.⁵²

Finally, as China but a much lower scale, Taiwan has been involved in the construction of stadiums and cultural centres (*maisons des jeunes et de la culture*) around the country. The two most prominent projects have been the *Palais des Sports de Ouaga 2000*, located in a recent Western extension of the capital city and completed in 2000, and the *Palais des Jeunes et de la Culture Jean-Pierre Guingané de Ouagadougou* in 2011. This latter project (total cost: 1.828 billion CFA) was both financed by Taiwan (1.062 billion CFA) and the Burkinabe government (766 million CFA). But contrary to China which often uses its own companies, Taiwan accepted to rely on local (Wend Panga Sarl, S'Art Décor), Senegalese (Beli Sacha Groupe) and French companies (Total Accès and Archi Consult as project manager) to realize this project.⁵³

Military Cooperation

Since 1994, there has constantly been a low-key and rather modest military cooperation between Taiwan and Burkina Faso. Here as well, we can observe some similarities with China's military diplomacy, in spite the differences of scale. This cooperation has deepened since 2008 when Burkina Faso in UN Peacekeeping Operations started to increase. The two major features of Taiwan's assistance have been aimed at improving the Burkinabe armed forces logistical capacity and training. For instance, paratroopers have received 30,000 battledresses, 300 parachutes and several hundred bullet proof vests (Interview 3).⁵⁴ Medical equipment has also been donated. And training has been offered to a few (2-3) Burkinabe officers every year in Taiwan for a short period (one to two months). And all together since 1994 15 of them have been trained for a longer period (6 months to four years including three month initial language training in Burkina Faso) (Interview 3).

Taiwanese aid has also included the donation of motorbikes to the Burkinabe Gendarmerie and two second-hand US-made helicopters. In 2016, Taiwan donated 35 pick-ups to the Ministry of Interior (*Ministère de l'Administration territoriale, de la décentralisation et de la*

⁵¹ Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., pp. 64, 66.

⁵² Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., p. 34.

⁵³ Diallo M., "Palais de la jeunesse et de la culture Jean-Pierre Guingané de Ouagadougou: Un joyau à la hauteur de la capitale de la culture africaine", *Le Faso.net*, 17 June 2011, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article42590> (accessed on 22 June 2016).

⁵⁴ Particularly of the Paratroopers Instruction Centre (Centre d'Instruction des Troupes Aéroportées, CITAP) and the 25th Paratrooper Commando Regiment (25^{ème} Régiment Parachutiste Commando), Ambassade de la République de Chine, op. cit., p. 26.

sécurité intérieure) which transferred them to other administrative units as the Gendarmerie, the Police and (seven of them) the Armed Forces.⁵⁵

In order to manage and consolidate this military cooperation, in March 2013, The Burkinabe Embassy in Taipei opened a “military mission” (*mission militaire*) headed by Defence Attaché Colonel Jean-Baptiste Parkouda.⁵⁶

Burkina Faso – Taiwan Economic and Trade Relations: A Weak Partnership

Economic and trade relations between the two countries have grown over the years but they constitute a weaker part of the whole bilateral partnership and have difficulties taking advantage of Taiwan’s active public diplomacy in Burkina Faso. Taiwanese business people and entrepreneurs’ presence in Burkina has remained modest. Moreover, they have been dwarfed by a deepening Burkina Faso–China economic relationship and Chinese presence.

Bilateral trade between Burkina Faso and Taiwan has indeed increased, reaching US\$21 in 2012 against US\$2.4 million in 1995.⁵⁷ However, in 2014, it went down to US\$7.2 million and only partly recovered the following year (US\$13.3 million). Bilateral trade has remained very unbalanced in favour of Taiwan: between 2004 and 2010, Burkina Faso imported from Taiwan on average US\$10 million every year while it exported to this country around US\$1.5 million, mainly cotton⁵⁸; and since then, Burkina Faso exports to Taiwan have first collapsed (US\$310,000 in 2012) and only partly recovered (US\$1.4 million in 2015) while its imports from Taiwan have fluctuated, partly influenced by the domestic instability of 2013-14 (US\$6.6 million in 2014 and US\$11.9 in 2015) (Cf. table 1).

Table 1 to insert here

The Taiwanese government has tried very hard to boost trade and investments. Its Embassy in Ouagadougou has developed close relations with the Burkina Faso Chamber of Commerce and Industry.⁵⁹ In 2010, its Foreign Ministry organised a Multisectorial International Fair in Ouagadougou. A year later, it created there a Trade and Investment Promotion Centre (*Centre de Promotion des Echanges Commerciaux et d’Investissement*) that since then has claimed to have eased the establishment of several Taiwanese companies in the following

⁵⁵ “Simon Compaoré et ses sept ‘Pick Up’ à l’Armée”, *Le Faso.net*, 11 May 2016, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article71056> (accessed on 20 June 2016).

⁵⁶ Ambassade du Burkina Faso à Taiwan, “Renforcement de la coopération militaire entre le Burkina Faso et la République de Chine (Taiwan): La mission militaire du Burkina Faso est ouverte”, 13 March 2013, <http://ambaburkina-tw.org/spip.php?article93> (accessed on 20 June 2016).

⁵⁷ Khan Mohammad G., “The Chinese Presence in Burkina Faso: A Sino-African Cooperation from Below”, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 43, 1, 2014, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Shinn & Eisenman, op. cit., p. 248.

⁵⁹ Cf. <http://www.cci.bf/?q=fr/search/node/Taiwan> (accessed on 20 June 2016).

sectors: construction, water conservancy, solar panels and agroindustry. In February 2016, it convinced 42 Taiwanese business people to take part in Africallia, West Africa's Enterprises Development Forum, held that year Ouagadougou. Taiwan was the largest foreign delegation, ahead of Tunisia (35) and Côte d'Ivoire (26).⁶⁰ Moreover, international professional fairs in Taiwan (*salons professionnels internationaux à Taiwan*) in various sectors (computer, aerospace and defence technology, green industries, innovative textile, etc.) are promoted on Burkina Faso's landing cards distributed to any visitor entering the country through the Ouagadougou Airport.⁶¹

However, results have been disappointing. No more than 40 Taiwanese business people live in Burkina Faso, including 5 trading companies and around 30 enterprises (as Te Chang Construction and Speetech, already mentioned, and also Kuang Jun Construction, Management and Technology Corp in water conservancy, and Golden Seed in the agribusiness).⁶²

All in all, the Taiwanese community in Burkina Faso counts between 70 and 100 people, including 9 diplomats and their family (20 all together), between 10 and 30 experts and cooperation personnel, 3 teachers, and 40 business people and entrepreneurs (Interview 3).⁶³

Besides, bilateral economic cooperation has witnessed several difficulties. Among them, the sustainability of projects after they have been transferred to the Burkinabe side has been a recurrent one. For instance, launched in 2006 by the Taiwanese government at a cost of 2.25 billion CFA (US\$3.9 million) and with a technical support from Germany's GTZ (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* or German Technical Cooperation), the project of transformation red sorghum into medical and consumption spirit (43°), called Spirigho, became a reality in 2009 when a factory was opened in Ziniaré.⁶⁴ It was then privatized when in July 2010 a Taiwanese-Burkinabe joint-venture company named Sorghum S.A. was

⁶⁰ 449 participants as well as 175 Burkinabe and 203 foreign enterprises from 22 countries participated in this forum. Ouédraogo N, "Pari Gagné pour Africallia 2016", *Le Faso.net*, 11 March 2016, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article70038> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

⁶¹ That was in particular the case when the author visited Burkina in January-February 2016.

⁶² Djarra B & Hsiao J, "The entrepreneurial spirit of Taiwanese in Burkina Faso", *The Microtheme Review*, 3, 9, 2014, pp. 197-204.

⁶³ "Coopération Burkina-Taiwan: 'Le domaine des échanges commerciaux est notre faiblesse', Shen, Cheng-Hong, ambassadeur de la République de Taiwan" (Interview of Taiwan's Ambassador to Burkina Faso), *L'Economiste du Faso*, 24 October 2014, <http://www.leconomistedufaso.bf/2014/10/24/cooperation-burkina-taiwan-le-domaine-des-echanges-commerciaux-est-notre-faiblesse-shen-cheng-hong-ambassadeur-de-la-republique-de-taiwan/> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

⁶⁴ "Au Burkina, le sorgho rouge s'invite à l'apéritif", *Commodafrica*, 5 January 2010, <http://www.commodafrica.com/05-01-2010-au-burkina-le-sorgho-rouge-sinvite-laperitif> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

created and took over its activities.⁶⁵ However, soon after, in spite of Taiwanese side financial and technical support, all activities stopped.⁶⁶

In the infrastructure sector, Taiwanese companies sometimes appeared underqualified to succeed and get contracts as the “*échangeur de l’est*” (Eastern Intersection) in Ouagadougou, a project financed by Taiwan.⁶⁷

Finally, the free supply of solar panels has not always been a success. For instance the 984 solar panels installed in 2008 in the Burkina Faso Presidential Palace have never worked. And their maintenance and more than anything else cleaning, particularly in the dry season, when l’Harmattan blows large quantities of sand, has been ill-planned and neglected (Interview 8).

Burkina Faso’s Growing Trade and Business Relationship with China

In contrast, trade between Burkina Faso and China has increased dramatically: amounting US\$5 million in 1995, it has centupled in 20 years to reach US\$563 million in 2013 (Cf. Table 2). Bilateral trade has significantly dropped the following two years partly because of domestic political unrest and more importantly of a drastic reduction of Chinese cotton imports.⁶⁸ China is today Burkina’s fifth client (behind Switzerland, Mali, Singapore and Côte d’Ivoire) and fourth supplier (behind Côte d’Ivoire, Togo and France).⁶⁹ Burkina Faso’s trade deficit with China has risen significantly to US\$290 million in 2014 and US\$266 million in 2015.

Table 2 to insert here

Representing around 5% of its total exports, Burkina Faso’s sales to China have long been dominated by cotton (US\$231 million in 2013 according to Chinese data)⁷⁰, this country’s second export item (19.3%) after gold (55.2%). But for reasons indicated above cotton exports have collapsed and, as a result, other exports items have increased their share

⁶⁵ Abdias Cyprien Sawadogo, “Transformation du sorgho rouge en alcool: La commercialisation du spirigho, officiellement lancée”, *le Faso.net*, 26 October 2010, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article39133> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

⁶⁶ “Coopération Burkina-Taiwan: ‘Le domaine des échanges commerciaux est notre faiblesse’, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Ibid.; “Coopération Chine-Burkina: Plus de 27 milliards de F CFA pour financer divers projets”, *Bayiri.com*, 8 April 2015, <http://bayiri.com/economie/cooperation-chine-burkina-plus-de-27-milliards-de-f-cfa-pour-financer-divers-projets.html> (accessed on 21 June 2016).

⁶⁸ China’s cotton imports dropped to their lowest in at least 9 years in 2015 after Beijing reduced the availability of low-tariff import quotas to boost consumption of domestic supplies, Patton D., “UPDATE 1-China 2015 cotton imports hit multi-year low, to drop more in 2016”, *Reuters*, 20 January 2015, <http://in.reuters.com/article/china-cotton-imports-idINL3N1542EN> (accessed on 22 June 2016).

⁶⁹ The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/bfa/#Exports> (accessed on 23 June 2016).

⁷⁰ And 101 million out of 116 million exports according to OEC data, http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/export/bfa/chn/show/2014/ (accessed on 23 June 2016).

including cashew nuts, bananas, medicinal plants, gold, zinc, manganese and sesame seeds (Cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Share of China's Cotton Imports in its Imports from Burkina Faso (in US\$)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
All Products	121 094 000	182 408 000	232 656 000	186 891 000	123 904 000	44 210 000
Cotton	116 699 000	175 659 000	231 121 000	186 824 000	115 997 000	17 330 000
% of Cotton	96.4%	96.3%	99.3%	99.9%	93.6%	39.2%

Source: http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx (accessed on 23 June 2016).

Representing around 10% (8.5% in 2014) of its total imports, Burkina Faso's imports from China are dominated by manufactured products (85%), including cars, tractors, electrical and pharmaceutical products; they also include grain, iron and steel. In other words, exchanges with China are starting to have an impact of Burkina Faso's economic development.⁷¹

Nonetheless, due to the absence of official relations, Burkina Faso-China economic cooperation has developed at the bottom and is still today dominated by grass-root agents as Chinese private entrepreneurs and traders. A growing number of Chinese enterprises, mostly private, have become active in Burkina Faso. Among them, in the telecom sector, Huawei and ZTE since 2007 and in the construction sector, China Geo-Engineering Corp. (CGC) International, Synohydro and China First Highway Engineering, to date the only three significant public companies present in this country.⁷² Other Chinese entrepreneurs are involved in the hotel and restaurant sector as well as trade, importing for instance an increasing quantity of Lifan motorcycles. Some Chinese companies cooperate with local partners in order to increase their chance to get contracts. This is the case of ZTE that works with local telecom company ONATEL (now mainly owned by Morocco-Telecom). This is also the case of CGC which has established a joint venture with Beser, a local engineering service firm.⁷³ While for diplomatic reasons, the Exim Bank cannot offer preferential credits to Burkina Faso, Huawei has been able to get support from this bank for financing there a

⁷¹ Sawadogo B, [Nana TJ](#), Natama M H, [Bama F](#), Tapsoba E & Zerbo K. , "Impact de l'expansion économique et commerciale de la Chine sur la croissance et l'emploi au Burkina Faso: une analyse en équilibre général calculable", [Ouagadougou: Partnership for Economic Policy Working Paper](#), 2015-03, [January 2015](#).

⁷² For instance, in 2012, these three companies unsuccessfully bid for an AFD-financed rehabilitation project of the road from Koupela to the Togolese border, cf. http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Procurement/Project-related-Procurement/Burkina_Faso_-_Projet_de_r%C3%A9habilitation_de_routes_et_de_facilitation_du_transport_sur_le_corridor_CU9_-_Koup%C3%A9la-Tenkodogo-Bittou-Cinkans%C3%A9-fronti%C3%A8re_du_Togo_et_de_la_bretelle_de_Mogand%C3%A9_-_LOT_3_-_Attribution_de_march%C3%A9s.pdf (accessed on 22 June 2016).

⁷³ "Burkina Faso: Situation à Rood Woko - Priorité au dialogue et à la concertation", *Allafrica*, 2 December 2009, allafrica.com/stories/200912220588.html (accessed on 22 June 2016).

US\$80 million fiber-optic contract. Chinese companies have also received funding from the European Investment Bank and the AFD. That was the case of CGC international for its involvement in the construction of 18 km of the Burkina ZIGA water supply project in 2011 (see above).⁷⁴

China is taking advantage of Burkina Faso's participation in Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) and West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) to penetrate the Burkinabe market, mainly through Ivory Coast and to a lesser extent Togo.

As a matter of fact, it is the Chinese Embassy and Consulate in Abidjan which is responsible of Chinese nationals established in Burkina Faso. As the number of Chinese companies established in Burkina Faso has increased, a growing number of Chinese has settled down in this country (600 in 2016). However, by comparison, this community has remained small and mainly concentrated in Ouagadougou (400 to 500 and 380 according to [Burkina Faso security](#)). Most of the other Chinese entrepreneurs and their family live in Bobo-Dioulasso or Ouahigoura. Originated mainly from Shanghai, Zhejiang and Fujian, Chinese migrants are in their majority male (30% of women) and young (between 25 and 45). They include the usual diverse profiles [found in Africa](#): entrepreneurs (majority), long-time residents, expatriates and adventurers.⁷⁵

In absence of any diplomatic representation, the Chinese government has encouraged the creation of 2005 of a Sino-Burkinabe Friendship Forum (*Forum d'amitié sino-burkinabé* or FASIB). This forum organizes annual meetings among business people of both countries and includes 60 active members. FASIB's honorary president is the former head of the Africa-Middle East Bureau of French nuclear fuel company Areva's international and marketing department, Zéphirin Diabré, who happens to [have been](#) the chief of the Burkinabe political opposition since 2012 (see below). More importantly perhaps, since 2011, FASIB has become the non-official organization that can issue Chinese visas to Burkina Faso citizens and residents (Interview 3 & 8).⁷⁶

Burkina Faso's 2013-2015 Political Unrest and the Solidity of Burkinabé-Taiwanese Links

As far as Taiwan's official relations with Burkina Faso are concerned, president Compaoré's fall in October 2014, has opened an era of uncertainty and even high risks. On the one hand, Compaoré was a strong supporter of the ROC and its return to the United Nations. He visited Taiwan ten times, the last time in October 2014, on the occasion of the ROC National Day

⁷⁴ CGC Int, "LOT6.5 cast iron pipelines constructed for Bourkina ZIGA water supply project", <http://cgcint.com/index.php/en/news/co-news/co-news-s/499-lot6-5-cast-iron-pipelines-constructed-forbourkina-ziga-water-supply-project> (accessed on 22 June 2016).

⁷⁵ Khan [Mohammad](#), "The Chinese Presence in Burkina Faso", op. cit., pp. 77-83.

⁷⁶ Chinese nationals' growing presence in Burkina Faso has compelled Beijing to show concern for the unrest against Compaoré, cf. "China calls for order in Burkina Faso", *China Daily*, 4 November 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-11/04/content_18867005.htm (accessed on 19 May 2016).

(10 October) and a few weeks before he was deposed. On his part, Ma Ying-jeou has invested a lot of political capital in Burkina Faso which he visited on two occasions (April 2012 and January 2014) and his relationship with Compaoré.

On the other hand, this regime change occurred one year after the Gambia's president Jammeh has decided to sever relations with Taiwan and normalize with China because of Taipei's refusal to give [its financial aid package](#) directly to the Gambian presidency rather than to each approved project. Although Beijing then did not accept Jammeh's invitation, it was for Taiwan a warning signal. Taipei also remembered that Niger in 1996 and Liberia in 2003 were "lost" under similar circumstances, a power change.

For these reasons, Taiwan has been keen to cultivate the new authorities, both the transition government between October 2014 and November 2015, and since then the elected president and his team.⁷⁷

In December 2014, Burkina Faso's transitional president Michel Kafando accepted to give an audience to the ROC Ambassador Shen Cheng-hong who received from him reassurances that the relationship would continue smoothly (Interview 3). In January 2015, Ambassador Shen met with Chérif Moumina Sy, Chairman of the National Transition Council, the interim assembly established after October 2014's popular uprising.⁷⁸ Sy was a friend of deceased Captain Sankara and has been a long time opponent to Compaoré. In the same month, Shen managed to have an audience with transitional Prime Minister and Defence Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida, a key actor of the October 2014 revolution -- former RSP's deputy commander, he then refused to open fire on demonstrators and became the interim president for three weeks before Kafando replaced him in late November. Shen's activism was useful since it allowed the ROC authorities to keep the relationship [intact and busy](#), particularly in preparing official visits to Taiwan. In April 2015, Ambassador Shen met again Chérif Sy and evoked the possibility of a travel to Taiwan.⁷⁹ But instead, in June 2015, it was transitional Prime Minister Isaac Zida who visited the ROC; it was its fourth visit there. He met with president Ma Ying-jeou and Prime Minister Mao Chih-kuo. He was shown many facilities, not only in the industrial, agricultural, fishery or health sectors but also of national defence nature.⁸⁰ In 2015, a large Taiwanese business delegation went to Burkina Faso [with the support of their](#)

⁷⁷ Kane [M.](#), "Burkina Faso-Taiwan relations, Post-Blaise Compaore", *International Policy Digest*, 26 May 2015, <http://intpolicydigest.org/2015/05/26/burkina-faso-taiwan-relations-post-blaise-compaore/> (accessed on 1 June 2016).

⁷⁸ Sy had also met Ambassador Shen in January and asked him to provide the NTC with computer equipment, *Le Faso.net*, 8 January 2015, <http://m.lefaso.net/spip.php?article62662> (accessed on 23 June 2016).

⁷⁹ Belemviré [M.](#), "Coopération Burkina-Chine Taïwan: l'ambassadeur Shen Cheng Hong chez Chériff Sy", *Les Echos du Faso*, 17 avril 2015, <http://lesechosdufaso.net/cooperation-burkina-chine-taiwan-lambassadeur-shen-cheng-hong-chez-cheriff-sy/> (accessed on 23 June 2016).

⁸⁰ "Le Premier ministre du Burkina Faso en visite à Taïwan", *Taiwan Info*, 28 June 2015, <http://taiwaninfo.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=231846&ctNode=1999>; Abga [TA.](#), "Burkina Faso-République de Chine Taïwan: sur les traces du sésame burkinabè", *Sidwaya*, 25 June 2015, <http://www.sidwaya.bf/m-6707-burkina-faso-republique-de-chine-taiwan-sur-les-traces-du-sesame-burkinabe.html> (accessed on 23 June 2016).

[government](#) in order to demonstrate the island's sustained interest in the Burkina Faso's economic development.

General Gilbert Diendéré (RSP commander and a close ally of Compaoré)'s coup attempt in September 2015 could only alert both Taipei and the small local Taiwanese community which did not have any choice but to wait and see (Interview 3).⁸¹ Fortunately, it rapidly failed and soon after the November 2015 national elections were an occasion for Taiwan to demonstrate his support both to Burkina Faso and its return to democracy. While Japan supplied vehicles, Taiwan provided a large number of computers (1 billion CFA or US\$1.7 million) to help preparing and organizing the ballot around the country.

Roch March Christian Kaboré's victory (nicknamed Roch) in the presidential race with 53.5% of the vote against Zéphirin Bagré (29.7%) was good news for Taiwan. During the campaign, Zéph, as he is locally called, openly supported normalization with Beijing for reasons that are easy to understand (cf. above). Moreover, according to diplomatic sources, he had received 4 million euros from the Chinese government to support his campaign activities and purchase cars (Interview 3).

However, the future of Burkina Faso-Taiwan relations remains uncertain. For one thing, Roch's party, the *Mouvement du Peuple pour le Progrès* (MPP or People's Movement for Progress) is short of 9 seats to enjoy an absolute majority in the National Assembly. As a result, in December 2015, it set up an alliance with other parties, including the Sankarists (*Union pour la Renaissance/Parti sankariste*, UNIR/PS) who are more inclined to switch back to the PRC.⁸² Although it holds only 5 seats in the Parliament the Sankarists are quite influential in the country. Probably to be on the safe side, ROC Ambassador Shen decided to meet with UNIR/PS chairman and National Assembly 1st Vice-President Benéwendé Sankara (no relation with Thomas Sankara) in April 2016 and organize a visit for him and a delegation of seven Parliamentarians to Taiwan soon after.⁸³

For another, while Zéphirin Diabré has been openly in favour of normalizing with Beijing, Roch has remained all along discreet about Burkina Faso's future relation with Taiwan and China. While Simon Compaoré (no relations with the deposed president), Minister of Internal Security and former Ouagadougou Mayor, is willing to keep a closer relationship with France than with China (Interview 8), Roch's adviser and MPP president of the National Assembly Salif Diallo once said that "cooperation with China is unavoidable". Francophile, Diallo is however very critical of the United States, a proclivity that may be dangerous for the country's relations with Taiwan. Besides, Burkina Faso's business community has clearly opted for China but its political and academic elites are more cautious, aware of the risks

⁸¹ Yen C, "Taiwan wary of Burkina Faso's political turmoil", Centre for Chinese Studies, 12 October 2015, http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CCS_Commentary_Taiwan_Wary_Yen_12-October-2015.pdf (accessed on 1 June 2016).

⁸² "L'UNIR/ PS a accepté l'offre d'alliance du MPP", *Le Faso.net*, 23 December 2015, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article68762> (accessed on 23 June 2016).

⁸³ <http://www.taiwanembassy.org/BF/ct.asp?xItem=699287&ctNode=9875&mp=416>; Radio Taiwan International, 18 April 2016, <http://english.rti.org.tw/m/news/?recordId=45811> (accessed on 23 June 2016).

attached, in their view, to a normalization with the PRC: the growing activities of Chinese enterprises bringing their own workers, the arrival of an increasing number of Chinese migrants that would fiercely compete with local in the petty trade and service sectors.⁸⁴ For these reasons, Ouagadougou may prefer to keep its relation with Taipei. Will it be possible?

On two occasions at least, Burkina Faso (as other Taiwan's [African allies](#)) was invited to China's FOCAC (Forum on China Africa Cooperation) as an observer, once in 2006 in Addis-Ababa, and more recently in December 2015 in Johannesburg, but each time it turned down the invitation and did not attend.⁸⁵ In other words, Ouagadougou has so far resisted to Beijing's sirens.

After Ms. Tsai Ying-wen's election as ROC president in January 2016, the Burkinabe authorities have continued to demonstrate their attachment to their close partnership with Taiwan. Burkina Faso Prime Minister Paul Kaba Thieba attended Ms. Tsai's inauguration on 20 May 2016 and took the occasion of his visit to Taiwan not only to meet with the new president but also to consolidate the bilateral relationship. Including Burkina's ministers of Agriculture and Education, his delegation visited several enterprises specialized in information technology and solar power.⁸⁶ [When meeting with Prime Minister Thieba, President Tsai noted that "diplomatic ties between Taiwan and Burkina Faso date back 22 years, and our two countries' cooperative relationship is very robust and friendly".⁸⁷ \[And as planned, the bilateral Joint Commission of Cooperation met in Ouagadougou in late September 2016, in the presence of Francophone Taiwan Vice-Foreign Minister Wu Chih-chung.⁸⁸\]\(#\)](#)

Nevertheless, the future of this close partnership depends less of Ouagadougou or Taipei than Beijing and its intentions towards Ms. Tsai. The recent deterioration of cross-Strait relations does not augur well for the longevity of this partnership. For the moment, Taiwan's international space has not really been affected, but on the first skirmishes, Taiwan's allies, and particularly Burkina Faso, its most valuable ally in Africa, may very well become the prime target of China's ambitions and its prime victim.

⁸⁴ *L'émergent*, 28 June 2015, <http://www.lemergent.net/?BURKINA-TAIPEH-OU-PEKIN> (accessed on 23 June 2016). However, some academics are also in favour of a recognition of the PRC, cf. for example the "open letter" sent by sociologist Issouf Diawara, former executive of the Burkina Faso students in France, to Roch on 12 May 2016, "Lettre ouverte à Roch: il faut renouer avec Pékin", *L'émergent*, 18 May 2016, <http://www.lemergent.net/?LETTRE-OUVERTE-A-ROCH-IL-FAUT>

⁸⁵ "African nations without diplomatic ties with China invited as observers to Beijing summit", The State Council, The People's Republic of China, 18 October 2006, http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-10/18/content_417123.htm (accessed on 26 June 2016); In December 2015, it was the only African country with Swaziland not to attend, cf. Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa, <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2015pq/pq483.htm> (accessed on 26 June 2016).

⁸⁶ Doh, "Séjour du Premier ministre à Taïwan", op. cit.

⁸⁷ <http://foreignaffairs.co.nz/2016/05/30/president-tsai-meets-burkina-faso-prime-minister-paul-kaba-thieba-and-congratulatory-delegation-from-united-states-house-of-representatives/>

⁸⁸ http://www.taiwanembassy.org/bf_fr/post/3829.html (accessed on 25 November 2016).

Conclusion: The Uncertain Future of an Atypical Relationship

In many ways, the Burkina Faso-Taiwan relationship has been atypical. It has been first of all an unusually solid and sustained diplomatic partnership in Africa, a continent that has been dominated since the late 1990s by China's foreign policy and economic activism, [arguably much more than Taiwan's partnerships in Central America or the Caribbeans](#).⁸⁹ The reason may be that Burkina Faso, [a small and poor country](#) is no Senegal or even Chad or Niger (Taylor 2002). It has not much to offer to the PRC apart from cotton and gold which it can buy anyway. Another reason has been Taiwan's own political and financial investment in the country. As we have seen, being Taiwan's only significant remaining partner in Africa, Burkina Faso has benefited from this status in getting a fair portion of Taipei's ODA [and of its overall public diplomacy's activities](#). It is true that the way Taiwan approaches its development assistance and cooperation projects has remain rather traditional, echoing and perpetuating what rich (and particularly OECD/CAD) countries' development agencies have stopped to do or doing less and also to a certain extent what China is doing elsewhere in Africa.⁹⁰ Conversely, with a few exceptions, Taiwan has not actively promoted public-private partnerships. However, if the trends observed consolidate and Taiwan wants to remain a significant development partner of Burkina Faso, it is likely to move faster in this direction in the future (Interview 3).⁹¹

More importantly, before as after the 2014-15 regime change, the Burkinabe authorities have on the whole been very satisfied of their relationship and cooperation with Taiwan. The Burkinabe society as well even if it tends to see the island as another China rather than Taiwan. Of course, Ouagadougou hopes to attract more investments and get more technology transfers from Taipei. But by and large it is willing to pursue this partnership. Chinese enterprises, migrants and products' bad image in the country and the fears that they generate among the society are playing a role in perpetuating this relationship (Interviews 3 & 4). Burkina Faso's inclination to be distinct and independent from its neighbours, particularly Côte d'Ivoire and Mali should not be dismissed either. And the local Western diplomatic community, especially the French [and the Americans which have special operation forces and a drone base in Ouagadougou](#), discreetly welcomes and supports Taiwan's official presence in this country (Interview 8). [There are therefore strong reasons for the Burkinabe authorities, while developing unofficial and pragmatic relations with China, to keep diplomatic links with Taiwan, not only because they benefit from this partnership and would](#)

⁸⁹ Alexander, *China and Taiwan in Central America*, op. cit.; Alexander, "Taiwan's Public Diplomacy", op. cit., pp. 552-555.

⁹⁰ Campbell et al., *Les transformations des politiques de coopération*, op. cit.

⁹¹ Public-private partnership is already part of Taiwan's ODA objectives, particularly in the health sector; but only a few such cases have been identified, in Burkina Faso as elsewhere, cf. *2015 International Cooperation and Development Fund Annual Report*, op. cit., pp. 22-24.

⁹² [In Burkina Faso, the US has a Special Operations Forces Liaison Element Team, a Joint Special Operations Air Detachment, and the Trans-Sahara Short Take-Off and Landing Airlift Support initiative which facilitates "high-risk activities" carried out by elite forces from Joint Special Operations Task Force-Trans Sahara. *The Nation*, 17 November 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-us-militarys-best-kept-secret/> \(accessed on 25 November 2016\).](#)

lose a lot, at least in the short term, if they switch to the PRC but also because this situation allows them to better negotiate, up to a point, the type of relationship that they want to develop with the later. In other words, while it cannot be qualified as a hedging strategy, Ouagadougou's policy partly corrects the blatant asymmetry of its relationship with Beijing.

Nonetheless, how can Burkina Faso resist China's pressure if the world's second largest economy and first trade power decided to put an abrupt end to the unwritten "diplomatic truce" with Taiwan and normalise? Its room for manoeuvre would be pretty narrow. As indicated, highly dependent upon and looking at Côte d'Ivoire, the Burkinabe business community is ready to cooperate to a larger extent with the PRC and is likely to push for a diplomatic switch. And if Beijing can offer more than Taipei, which is probable, any Burkinabe government would follow suit. Being used for many years of being assisted by rich countries' government agencies and NGOs, this country's political and intellectual elite, however attached to democratic values, is unlikely to resist much.

Finally, this is one of the sad ironies of the Burkina Faso-Taiwan's successful partnership: although both countries now share identical political values, the risks of a diplomatic change are higher than under Compaoré when Burkina Faso was under a semi-authoritarian and personal rule. In other words, Taiwan's active public diplomacy and soft power do not have much of an impact on the outcome of this on-going diplomatic game with China.⁹³

But, for the time being, Burkina Faso-Taiwan relationship offers an interesting example of what other Asian actors, particularly small and middle-powers, can achieve in Africa, in spite of China's growing imprint on this continent.

Interviews

Interview 1: Hsu Yi-yin, Taiwanese agriculture engineer, graduated from Ping-tung Science and Technology University (屏東科技大學), Tintilou, 5 February 2016.

Interview 2: Paul Teng, Project Chief, Biomedical Engineering Advisor, National Hospital Blaise Compaore Support Project, Tengadogo, 4 February 2016.

Interview 3: Bruno Shen Cheng-hong, ROC Ambassador to Burkina Faso, 2 and 4 February 2016.

Interview 4: Emilie Shao Yung-chieh, First Secretary, ROC Embassy to Burkina Faso, 4 and 5 February 2016.

Interview 5: Peng Ching-tung, leader of the Taiwanese mission, Centre de formation professionnelle de référence de Ziniaré, 4 February 2016.

⁹³ On Taiwan soft power, cf. deLisle J., "Taiwan and Soft Power: Contending with China and Seeking Security", in Cabestan JP & deLisle J. eds., *Political Changes in Taiwan under Ma Ying-jeou, Partisan conflicts, policy choices, external constraints and security challenges*, Abingdon, Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 265-286.

Interview 6: Marc Rubin, Country Director, UNICEF Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, 1 and 4 February 2016.

Interview 7: Dr. Huang Chi-lin, Head, ROC (Taiwan) Medical Mission, Koudougou Hospital, 5 February 2016.

Interview 8: Western diplomat posted in Burkina Faso, 1 February 2016.

Interview 9: Chiang Cheng-chi, Director of the Chinese Language Teaching Promotion Centre, 4 February 2016.

Interview 10: Tomoko Shibuya, Chief, Education Programme, UNICEF Burkina Faso, Email: 1 June 2016.

Interview 11: Isidore Bougouma, Chargé de mission, Service de coopération, ROC Embassy to Burkina Faso, Email: 9 June 2016.

Interview 12: Szwei Chen, Training Counsellor, National Hospital Blaise Compaoré Support Project, Tengadogo, Email: 20 June 2016.