Burkina Faso: Between Taiwan's active public diplomacy and China's business attractiveness

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To cite this article: Jean-Pierre Cabestan (2017): Burkina Faso: Between Taiwan's active public diplomacy and China's business attractiveness, South African Journal of International Affairs, DOI: 10.1080/10220461.2016.1271746

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2016.1271746

Published online: 23 Jan 2017.
Burkina Faso: Between Taiwan’s active public diplomacy and China’s business attractiveness

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ABSTRACT
Burkina Faso and Taiwan restored official relations in 1994, after which Taipei’s aid has been generous. Taiwan’s approach to official development assistance has remained largely traditional, closely linking its public diplomacy to its foreign policy objectives. Trade between both countries has remained very modest. In the same period, because of mainland China’s rise and active strategy of ‘going out’, Burkina Faso has developed a robust trade and business relationship with China. As a result, the pull to establish official ties with China (and thus end ties with Taiwan) has become a domestic political issue. After the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014, a failed coup and then the return to democracy as seen in the November 2015 elections, this debate has become more public. While Burkina Faso has remained faithful to Taiwan and continues to publicly appreciate its assistance, there is no certainty that the political values that both Burkina Faso and Taiwan share will prevent a Burkinabe move towards China.

Introduction
Burkina Faso is one of two African countries that have maintained diplomatic relations with Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China (ROC). The other one is Swaziland. Burkina Faso is Taiwan’s largest and probably most important partner in Africa today. The question arises, for how long? With the 2016 election in Taipei of Ms Tsai Ying-wen of the Democratic Progressive Party this question has become more pressing, as will be discussed. In any case, the answer depends for the most part on Beijing and the evolution of relations across the Taiwan Strait rather than on officials in Ouagadougou or Taipei. The decision of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to normalise relations 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 between the PRC and ROC after Ma Ying-jeou was elected ROC president in 2008 and the normalisation between Principe and Sao Tome and China in December 2016 has probably put an end to this truce.

Burkina Faso is one of the world’s poorest countries. In 2015 it was ranked 183 among 188 countries in terms of human development. Its economy grew at a 6% annual rate
from 2000 until 2014, after which it slowed to 4–5% in 2014–2015, but its population has increased very rapidly in the last two decades, averaging more than 3.1% growth 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. In addition, during the last few years, it has also become a target of Islamic extremism and terrorist attacks, initially concentrated in its border areas with Mali and Niger but expanding in the past year to central Ouagadougou, where patrons of the Splendid Hotel and Cappuccino café were targeted in January 2016. Moreover, Burkina Faso experienced 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 the two countries restored official relations in 1994, Taiwan’s assistance to Burkina Faso has been generous, turning this country into a window, if not a model, of Taipei’s contribution to poor countries’ economic and social development and, perhaps as importantly, Taiwan’s efforts at public diplomacy. Public diplomacy can be defined as ‘the conduct of foreign policy through engagement with international publics’ by governments where those activities are ‘primarily motivated by the improvement of their image with them’. Taiwan’s approach to official development assistance (ODA) has remained quite traditional, in that it is still largely disconnected from Taiwanese business interests; it does not particularly foster public–private partnerships. The main drivers behind Taipei’s ODA are political and diplomatic, closely linking its public diplomacy to its foreign policy objectives – that is, to maintain diplomatic allies and enhance Taiwan’s international space – and this in spite of the diplomatic truce reached with Beijing in 2008. Trade between Taiwan and Burkina Faso 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 lapse of time, because of China’s rise and active ‘going out’ strategy with developing nations that have kept formal links with Taiwan, Burkina Faso has developed a robust trade and business relationship with China. The presence of Chinese companies in Burkina Faso is also increasing, far ahead of their Taiwanese counterparts. As a result, as elsewhere in Africa and the world, normalisation with the PRC has become a domestic political issue in Burkina Faso.

After the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré 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. While the newly elected Burkinabe president, Roch Kaboré, has remained faithful to Taiwan and continues to publicly appreciate Taipei’s assistance, it is far from certain that the political values that both Burkina Faso and Taiwan share will prevent the former developing closer – and eventually official – relations with China. This would undermine the argument that, contrary to large and ambitious states that could not ignore China’s growing geostrategic and economic might, small and poor nations are more ready to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan because of the special benefits that they could expect from this relationship. Does this argument still hold? For how long can
Taiwan’s public diplomacy compete with and resist China’s increasing assistance and projects in neighbouring countries, or what Colin Alexander calls Beijing’s ‘public diplomacy by proxy’.\(^{10}\) At the same time, in maintaining for as long as possible its formal links with Taiwan, is Burkina Faso not in a better position, if not to hedge against China\(^{11}\) at least to improve its bargaining power in the asymmetrical (but non-official) relationship that it is compelled to have with the world’s only ‘emerging potential superpower’?\(^{12}\)

This article first summarises the historical background of Burkinabe-Taiwanese relations. It then presents the major areas of Taipei’s assistance to Ouagadougou as well as the distinct characteristics of that assistance. In the following section, it compares Taiwan and China’s trade and economic relations with Burkina Faso. Finally, it assesses the importance of the China issue in Burkinabe politics and the risks of a diplomatic switch in favour of Beijing. This article is partly based on fieldwork conducted by the author in Burkina Faso in February 2016.

**Historical background**

Burkina Faso (Upper Volta before 1984) is the only African country to have recognised Taiwan twice (Liberia recognised Taiwan three times including in 1989 and 1997). 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. However, 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 the nation free food and vaccine. Soon after, in 1973, then President Aboubakar Sangoulé Lamizana accepted the invitation to normalise relations with Beijing and to sever official links with Taipei. In the 1970s, China offered $48 million in credit and initiated several projects in the agricultural and medical sectors which came to fruition in the 1980s.\(^{13}\) These projects included the provision of rice cultures, the construction of hospitals such as the *Hôpital de l’Amitié* (Friendship Hospital) in Koudougou, the digging of wells and an agreement between Xinhua News Agency and the Upper Volta Ministry of Information. In November 1983, 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), President Thomas Sankara paid an official visit to the PRC. At the same time, Sankara, a Marxist, moved his country away from the West and closer to the Soviet Union and Cuba.\(^{14}\)

In 1987 Sankara’s long-term political ally, Blaise Compaoré, organised a coup that resulted in his death. In the ensuing ‘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. The bilateral relationship from then appeared to develop smoothly; in April 1993, the Burkinabe Foreign Minister made an official visit to China. Surprisingly, 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 ‘cheque book diplomacy’, the ROC’s diplomatic allies, with the aim of restoring Taiwan’s membership in the United Nations. While, as Alexander suggests, ‘swing state’ behaviours have little relation to Taiwan’s public diplomacy,\(^{15}\) it is difficult in the case of Burkina Faso to untie the incentives that Taipei gave the Burkinabe from Taiwan’s broader foreign policy discourse.
Since 1994, 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, which 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 Faso was still one of the four African nations with official links with Taiwan at that time (the number would drop to three after Gambia abandoned Taiwan in 2013 and to two after Sao Tome and Principe’s normalised with Beijing in 2016).

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? First, since 1994, the Taiwan–Burkina Faso relationship has been very much a top-down process politically supported and stimulated by both governments. For Taipei, Burkina Faso has become a showcase for its development assistance in Africa and the whole developing world, a key success story of its public diplomacy. Ouagadougou, for its part, has considered its relationship with Taiwan as a long-term partnership, apparently not only satisfied with the assistance provided by Taiwan but, in distinguishing itself from the other capitals of West Africa such as Abidjan, Bamako and Niamey, choosing to slow and perhaps better manage Beijing’s penetration of the Burkinabe economy. Furthermore, 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. One is reminded of what Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and development agencies were privileging in the 1960s and 1970s: medical assistance, agricultural projects, irrigation, model farms and human resources training, for instance.

The third characteristic is that, while economic relations have developed over the last two decades, there remains very little trade between Taiwan and Burkina Faso ($13 million in 2015), while China has become one of Burkina Faso’s top trade partners ($395 million in 2015; see Table 1).16 This will be discussed more fully below.

The fourth characteristic relates to 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

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Unit: $.

aBurkina Faso’s imports from Taiwan, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx
bBurkina Faso’s exports to Taiwan, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx
cTrade balance between Taiwan and Burkina Faso, http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx
of China (Taiwan)’ or ‘China–Taiwan’, feeding the risks of confusion with the PRC, as most Burkinabe have difficulty establishing a clear distinction between the Chinese from Taiwan and those from the PRC, except that the PRC Chinese have begun to settle in the country.17

Fifth, as elsewhere in Africa (Senegal, Chad), in Burkina Faso, Taiwan took over some of China’s assistance projects and initiated new projects. Among the former projects, 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 assistance, previously true of Beijing. Ironically, some of the agricultural projects started by Taiwan in 1970 and expanded by the PRC after 1973, such as the development and irrigation of the Kou Valley (1260 ha), have also been taken back and carried on by Taiwan.18

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’. However, other forms of assistance have taken shape, most of them aimed at contributing to the development of rural areas (such as the provision of wells, school buildings, solar lamps and trees for planting). In any event, these elements of continuity highlight the similarities between Taiwan’s assistance and China’s aid programmes.

To organise this assistance, a Taiwanese–Burkinabe Cooperation Joint Commission (Commission mixte) was established as early as July 1994. Run by the respective ministries of foreign affairs, this commission meets every two years and decides both the financial envelope of the assistance and its main projects.

Taiwan’s ODA to Burkina Faso is far from being negligible: between 1994 and 2012, it amounted to $348 million. According to the ROC Embassy in Ouagadougou, on average, Taiwan has provided between $23 and $24 million to this country every year. For 2014–2015, the joint commission budgeted $42 million. This envelope includes both projects funding and gifts in kind (such as computers).19 Taiwan’s ODA to Burkina Faso represents a significant proportion of Taiwan’s total aid budget: Taipei gave Burkina Faso 7.5% of its ODA in 2014.20 Taiwan has clearly prioritised Burkina Faso.

By comparison, in the 21 years between 1973 and 1994, the PRC invested only $22 million in 36 projects21 and today former coloniser France’s assistance to Burkina Faso amounts to $114 million a year, including around $68 million from the French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement, AFD).22

As for all Taiwanese ODA projects, this assistance is managed by the International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF)23 of the Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.24

Within this envelope, a small portion has been devoted to supporting Burkina Faso’s ‘national commitments’: $1.4 million (78 billion CFA) from 1994 to 2004 and $0.87 million (50 million CFA) from 2004 to 2014. The projects funded include school construction, teachers’ and particularly women teachers’ training, the 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 increasing rice production, medical assistance, vocational training and language training. Other forms of aid have also developed but they are all related to these four main areas of assistance (see Figure 1).
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. Taiwan has since developed two major projects, one in Bagré between 1995 and 2009, promoting the culture of irrigated rice, and another in Kougri on the central plateau since 2001, introducing rain-fed (or upland) rice. 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. Between 1995 and 2009, Taiwan developed 1200–1600 hectares (ha) out of the 3380 ha perimeter transformed into irrigated rice culture. It trained local farmers and supplied seeds, fertilisers and equipment. Since then, small-scale cooperation has continued, centred mainly on the maintenance of the irrigation system, seed improvement and the involvement of two Taiwanese experts, a hydraulics specialist and an agricultural 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 Bagré).

The second project is more recent but more ambitious: it has allowed, between the years 2002 and 2016, the development of rain-fed rice production on 22,000 ha. This project has involved 84,328 local farmers, among whom 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 infrastructure, a diversification of rice production –
still dominated by paddy as opposed to white rice – and a modernisation of the distribution system and technology transfers. Taiwan’s financial aid for this project amounted to $18.3 million in the first phase (2002–2007) and $17 million in the second phase (2009–2013). This project has involved seven Taiwanese experts, five based in Ouagadougou and two in Bobo Dioulasso. In 2016, the Taiwanese mission claimed that its projects contributed to 30% of Burkina Faso’s rice production.

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, however, have been the medical technical mission operating since 1996 in the Friendship Hospital in Koudougou, located 100 km west of Ouagadougou, and the construction completed in 2010 of the University Hospital in Tengandogo on 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 provision for the Burkinabe population. For many years, 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, a large and important institution. Taiwan’s technical mission is composed of four permanent staff (including two medical doctors, one anaesthetist and one biomedical technician) and four 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), under the leadership of Dr Huang Chi-lin, a former Tsoying-based Navy medical doctor who had already spent 18 years in Africa. They are paid by the ICDF and live in a dormitory next to the hospital. Since the attack against the Splendid Hotel in Ouagadougou in January 2016, they are protected by five 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 are trained in Taiwan for around three months (12 midwives and 12 nurses). The team and the returned instructors had trained 440 midwives and 480 nurses by 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 nine Burkinabe biomedical technicians trained for three months in Taiwan.

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 localising hospitalisation 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.

Renamed briefly between its opening in 2011 and 2015 Hôpital National Blaise Compaoré, this public hospital is a $70 million national project mainly funded by a $60 million 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 over 15 years 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 organised by the Burkinabe Ministry of Health and was won by Te Chang Construction (Dechang Yingzhao), a Taiwanese Taichung-based listed company (Interview 12). However, the local media have questioned this procedure and claimed that the Taiwanese government had imposed its own company. Later, the Taiwanese Embassy recognised that the construction contract had been directly awarded to Te Chang for a negotiated price of $52.4 million (Interviews 2 and 4). In any event, both sides have recognised that 60–70% of the loan was used to build the hospital and buy Taiwanese equipment (Interview 2).

Renamed University Hospital in Tengandogo again in February 2015, a few months after Compaoré’s fall, 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 three services were operating: dermatology, endocrinology and neurology. A year later, only neurology was still active. In February 2016, the emergency room, the radiology section, a mother–child pool and a laboratory were the only services open. Services in ophthalmology, odontology and traumatology were supposed to start operating soon but no timeline has been given. Similarly, only 250 of the 600 beds initially planned were then available. A lack of medical doctors and nurses was reported as the main cause of these delays. However, the overall hospital personnel seems to have recently increased: staff numbered 570 as of February 2016, including 67 doctors, against 250 in 2012.

Another problem has been the overambitious hospital information system established by the Taiwanese side, a team of four technicians dispatched by Puli Christian Hospital. Aimed at introducing a modern management system for 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 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.

The Taiwanese team also deplores the underuse of the medical equipment that was delivered, as well as waste and maintenance problems. The difficulties encountered by this project are far from 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 on 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.\textsuperscript{38}

**Vocational training**

Initiated in 2007, Taiwan’s Vocational Training Strengthening Programme (Programme de Renforcement de la Formation Professionnelle) has become a well-publicised feature of Taiwan’s assistance to Burkina Faso. It has been financed by ICDF in two consecutive grants: a first phase (1997 to June 2013) – $60 million; and a second phase (June 2013 to December 2016) – $16 million (Interviews 4 and 5).

This programme is aimed not only 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 will be able to replace the Taiwanese sent to this country. Thirteen centres, one per region, have been established, including four in vocational schools. In addition, two ‘pilot centres’ 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.\textsuperscript{39} Between 2009 and 2015, around 350 new instructors received a one-year training (1800 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 (1800 hours) with the help of a dozen Taiwanese instructors in 10 distinct areas, including auto and motor repair, woodwork, electricity, masonry, food and bread industry, and agricultural machinery maintenance.\textsuperscript{40} 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 and 11).\textsuperscript{41}

According to data provided by the Taiwanese mission, 80% of the 150–200 Burkinabe technicians trained every year with the support of this programme find a job (Interviews 3 and 4).\textsuperscript{42} Even if this percentage may be a little optimistic, this vocational training programme is perceived by both sides as well adapted to the needs of the country and a factor in development and modernisation.

**Chinese language training**

Chinese language training in Burkina Faso started in 2005 under the Chen Shui-bian administration, in a rather low-key manner, through the Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations, where Burkinabe diplomats were trained at the time (Interview 8 and 9). The idea was to capitalise 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-fledged ‘Chinese language teaching promotion’ project (CLTP, Promotion de l’enseignement de la langue chinoise).

As a result, a Chinese Language Teaching Promotion Centre (CLTPC) was created in 2011 in Ouagadougou. Open to the public and initially free, this centre offers 10-week teaching sessions of 40 hours (two lectures of two 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, all paid by the ICDF and 180 students. The Centre’s annual budget amounts to just over 300,000 euros. Since early 2016, the CLTPC charges modest tuition ($8 for three months) and registration ($30) fees to students in order mainly to stabilise attendance. The objective is that students master 2500 Chinese characters in two years and 5000 characters 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 Burkinabe high schools (lycées) and universities. The CLTP partners include the National Institute for High International Studies and the National School of Administration and Judicial Affairs. 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, taking advantage of China’s attractiveness as an emerging economic powerhouse, Chinese language is presented as the ‘future language of the business world’. On the other hand, adopting a rather ecumenical style, this programme is officially aimed at ‘contributing to promoting Taiwanese and/or Chinese culture’. Thus far, the new Tsai Ying-wen administration has not changed this approach to Chinese language teaching.

**Other forms of assistance and cooperation**

Various other forms of assistance and cooperation are ongoing. For instance, Taiwan offers scholarships for study in Taiwan. Since 2000, 20 such scholarships have been distributed every year to Burkinabe, against five 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; in 2016 there were 68 (Interview 3).44

One of the most visible Taiwanese projects has been the free distribution of five-hour autonomous solar lamps, under the banner of *une lampe pour l’Afrique*. Launched in 2011, this $2 million project is aimed at bringing evening light to more Burkinabe living in remote rural areas, particularly helping children to complete their school homework. For the past five years, 450,000 lamps have been distributed, 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.45 The lamps project is the fruit of rare non-official trilateral cooperation between UNICEF, Japan and Taiwan: in 2015, UNICEF distributed 15,200 Taiwanese lamps to 40 Burkinabe schools, including 10,000 funded by the Japanese government through its embassy in Burkina Faso and the rest funded by Japan’s National UNICEF Committee (Interviews 6 and 10). Since 2013, many of the lamps distributed are manufactured in Ouagadougou on an assembly line set up by Speetech Energy (*Xuande*), a Taiwanese private company (Interview 3).

In another example, Taiwan has funded the installation and distribution of solar panels, often for street lighting, in Ouagadougou and a few other cities such as Koudougou and Ouahigouya. The construction of solar power stations has been another striking feature of Taiwan’s cooperation. Since 2011, Taiwan has allocated $1.14 million annually 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 $2 million, this joint venture produces some 1000 megawatts of products annually.\footnote{While it offers a good and rare example of public–private partnership, it is also a form of Taiwanese ‘tied aid’ that is rather similar to what China is doing in other parts of Africa.} While it offers a good and rare example of public–private partnership, it is also a form of Taiwanese ‘tied aid’ that is rather similar to what China is doing in other parts of Africa.\footnote{In 2016, Speetech Energy was about to complete in Ziga (Oubritenga) the construction of a 1.1–1.3 megawatt solar power station that should bring electricity to the village and also help supply drinkable water from the Ziga Dam to Ouagadougou.\footnote{This project costing around $3.8 million was mainly financed by Taiwan.}}

In 2016, Speetech Energy was about to complete in Ziga (Oubritenga) the construction of a 1.1–1.3 megawatt solar power station that should bring electricity to the village and also help supply drinkable water from the Ziga Dam to Ouagadougou.\footnote{Another illustration of Taiwan’s effort to be part of multilateral assistance to Burkina Faso was its participation (and partial funding) of the conference of Burkina Faso’s partners organised in Paris on 7–8 December 2016, to finance its $26 billion 2016–2020 ‘National Economic and Social Development Plan’. Apart from Burkina Faso’s other ‘diplomatic allies’ including France, the United States, Canada, Luxembourg and Italy, participants included the World Bank, the UN Development Program, the European Union, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.\footnote{Taiwan is far from being the only donor country installing solar panels in Burkina Faso or in Africa.\footnote{Other forms of assistance have included since 1998 micro-credit to farmers and the informal sector totalling $6 million disbursed up until 2014. The reimbursement rate has been officially very high (97%). Taiwanese ODA to Burkina Faso has also included the planting of a 630 km long ‘green belt’ from Mansila (Yagha) to Tansila (Banwa) between 1998 and 2003, the construction of a dam in Yakouta to improve adduction of drinking water to Dori (Séno) and, between 2004 and 2008, well-digging and irrigation projects.\footnote{However, in these last two areas, targets have only been partially reached: 627 of the 1000 projected wells were dug and only three of the planned 25 irrigation systems (or small dams) were built.}}}

In another interesting case there is discreet multilateral cooperation (or at least coordination) between Taiwan and other donors, including China, involved in the construction of a large water pipeline and adduction project worth $208 million, running from Ziga to Ouagadougou and called Ziga II. Started in December 2015 and due to be completed in the first half of 2017, this project is funded by France AFD, the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the Arab Bank for Africa’s Economic Development and OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) Fund for International Development.\footnote{More recently, starting in 2007, Taiwan has donated to Burkina Faso a large amount of electronic equipment, ironically some of which was manufactured in China by Chinese companies such as Huawei (Interview 8). First aimed at computerising the National Assembly (2007–2008), this programme became in 2009 a full-fledged effort to modernise government: 25 ministries and state institutions have so far benefited from it. From 2011 to 2014, the total cost of this programme was $912,000.}
Finally, as in the case of China but on a much smaller scale, Taiwan has been involved in the construction of stadiums and cultural centres around the country. The two most prominent projects have been the *Palais des Sports de Ouaga 2000*, located in an 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 $2.8 million) was financed jointly by Taiwan and the Burkinabe government. However, contrary to the practice of China which often uses its own companies, Taiwan relied, on purpose it claimed, on local companies (Wend Panga Sarl, S’Art Décor), as well as Senegalese (Beli Sacha Groupe) and French companies (Total Accès and Archi Consult as project manager), to realise this project (Interview 3).57

**Military cooperation**

Since 1994, there has been constant though 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 of the differences of scale. This cooperation has deepened since 2008 when Burkina Faso started to increase its role in UN peacekeeping operations. 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).58 Medical equipment has also been donated. Training has been offered to a few (two or three) Burkinabe officers every year in Taiwan for a short period (one to two months). Since 1994, 15 of these officers have been trained for a longer period (six 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-up trucks to the Ministry of Interior, which transferred them to other administrative units such as the gendarmerie, the police and the armed forces.59

In order to manage and consolidate this military cooperation, in March 2013, The Burkinabe Embassy in Taipei opened a ‘military mission’ headed by Defence Attaché Colonel Jean-Baptiste Parkouda.60

**Burkinabe-Taiwanese 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. Hence Taiwan has a less active public diplomacy in this regard. The presence of Taiwanese business people and entrepreneurs 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 $21 million in 2012 against $2.4 million in 1995.61 However, in 2014, it went down to $7.2 million and only partly recovered the following year ($13.3 million). Bilateral trade has remained very unbalanced in favour of Taiwan: between 2004 and 2010, Burkina Faso imported from Taiwan on average goods worth $10 million every year while it exported to this country goods worth around $1.5 million, mainly cotton.62 Since then, Burkina Faso exports to Taiwan collapsed, declining to $310,000 in 2012, partly recovering ($1.4...
million in 2015), while its imports from Taiwan have fluctuated, partly influenced by the domestic instability of 2013–2014 (see Table 1).

The Taiwanese Embassy in Ouagadougou has worked to boost trade and investments, developing close relations with the Burkina Faso Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In 2010, the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry organised a multisectoral international fair in Ouagadougou. A year later, it created a Trade and Investment Promotion Centre in the Burkinabe capital, which since has claimed to ease the establishment of several Taiwanese companies in the following sectors: construction, water conservancy, solar panels and agribusiness. In February 2016, 42 Taiwanese business people took part in Africallia, West Africa’s Enterprises Development Forum, held that year in Ouagadougou. Taiwan presented the largest foreign delegation, ahead of Tunisia (35) and Côte d’Ivoire (26). Moreover, international professional fairs in Taiwan in various sectors (e.g. computers, aerospace and defence technology, green industries, innovative textiles) are promoted on Burkina Faso’s landing cards distributed to any visitor entering the country through the Ouagadougou Airport.

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

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

In addition, 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 challenge. For instance, launched in 2006 by the Taiwanese government at a cost of $3.9 million and with a technical support from Germany’s technical agency, GTZ, a project to transform red sorghum into medical and consumption spirits (43°), called Spirigho, became a reality in 2009 when a factory was opened in Ziniaré. It was then privatised when in July 2010 a Taiwanese–Burkinabe joint-venture company named Sorghum S.A. was created and took over its activities. However, soon afterwards, in spite of Taiwanese side financial and technical support, all activities stopped.

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. For one, 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 to $5 million in 1995, it has multiplied by 10 over the past two decades to reach $563 million in 2013 (see Table 2).

Bilateral trade dropped off significantly over the 2014/2015 period, partly because of Burkino Faso’s political unrest and owing to reduced demand in China leading to a
drastic reduction in Chinese cotton imports.\textsuperscript{71} China is today Burkina’s fifth largest import-
ing trade partner (behind Switzerland, Mali, Singapore and Côté d’Ivoire) and its fourth
largest supplier (behind Côté d’Ivoire, Togo and France).\textsuperscript{72} Burkina Faso’s trade deficit
with China has risen significantly, to $290 million in 2014 and $266 million in 2015.

Representing around 5% of its total exports, Burkina Faso’s sales to China have long
been dominated by cotton ($231 million in 2013 according to Chinese data),\textsuperscript{73} this coun-
try’s second export item (19.3%) after gold (55.2%). However, for reasons indicated above,
cotton exports have collapsed and, as a result, other export items have increased their
share, including cashew nuts, bananas, medicinal plants, gold, zinc, manganese and
sesame seeds (see Table 3).

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 and
electrical and pharmaceutical products; imports from China also include grain, iron and
steel. It is evident from this list that exchange with China has an increasing impact on
Burkina Faso’s economic development.\textsuperscript{74}

 Nonetheless, owing to the absence of official relations, economic cooperation between
Burkina Faso and the PRC has developed unofficially, and is still today dominated by grass-
roots agents in the form of 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, are Huawei and ZTE (Zhongxing Semiconductor Co) since 2007 and
in the construction sector, China Geo-Engineering Corp (CGC) International, Synohydro
and China First Highway Engineering. To date these are the only three significant public
companies present in this country.\textsuperscript{75} 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 of getting contracts. This is the case with ZTE, which works with
local telecom company ONATEL (now mainly owned by Morocco-Telecom). This is also
the case for CGC, which has established a joint venture with Beser, a local engineering
service firm.\textsuperscript{76} While for diplomatic reasons, the Chinese Exim Bank cannot offer preferen-
tial credits to Burkina Faso, Huawei has been able to get support from this bank for

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Burkina Faso bilateral trade statistics (PR China)}
\begin{tabular}{lrrrrr}
\hline
\hline
Imports\textsuperscript{a} & 235,846,000 & 302,863,000 & 424,255,000 & 322,783,000 & 330,333,000 \\
Exports\textsuperscript{b} & 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 balance\textsuperscript{c} & $-231,249,000$ & $-233,494,000$ & $-285,596,000$ & $-289,992,000$ & $-265,604,000$ \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

Unit: $.
\textsuperscript{a}Burkina Faso’s imports from PR China, \url{http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx}
\textsuperscript{b}Burkina Faso’s exports to PR China, \url{http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx}
\textsuperscript{c}Trade balance between PR China and Burkina Faso, \url{http://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Share of China’s cotton imports in its imports from Burkina Faso (in $)}
\begin{tabular}{lrrrrrr}
\hline
\hline
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 \\
\% Cotton & 96.4% & 96.3% & 99.3% & 99.9% & 93.6% & 39.2% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{71}J.-P. CABESTAN

\textsuperscript{72}J.-P. CABESTAN

\textsuperscript{73}J.-P. CABESTAN

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\textsuperscript{79}J.-P. CABESTAN

\textsuperscript{80}J.-P. CABESTAN
financing a $80 million fibre-optic contract in Burkina Faso. Chinese companies have also received funding from the European Investment Bank and the AFD. That was the case for CGC international for its involvement in the construction of 18 km of the Burkina ZIGA water supply project in 2011 noted earlier.\footnote{77}

China is taking advantage of Burkina Faso’s participation in the \textit{Economic Community of West African States} and the West African Economic and Monetary Union to penetrate the Burkinabé market, mainly through Ivory Coast and to a lesser extent Togo (Interviews 3 and 8). As a matter of fact, it is the Chinese Embassy and Consulate in Abidjan which is responsible for Chinese nationals settling in Burkina Faso. As the number of Chinese companies established in Burkina Faso has increased, a growing number of Chinese have settled down in this country (600 in 2016). However, by comparison with Chinese communities in other African states, this community has remained small and mainly concentrated in Ouagadougou (between 380 and 500 according to Burkina Faso security). Most of the other Chinese entrepreneurs and their family live in Bobo-Dioulasso or Ouahigoura. Originating mainly from Shanghai, Zhejiang and Fujian, Chinese migrants are in the majority male (70%) and young (between 25 and 45). They include the usual diverse profiles found in Africa: entrepreneurs, long-time residents, expatriates and adventurers.\footnote{78}

In the absence of any diplomatic representation, the Chinese government encouraged the creation in 2005 of a Sino-Burkinabe Friendship Forum (\textit{Forum d’amitié sino-burkinabé} or FASIB). This forum organises annual meetings among business people of both countries and includes 60 active members. FASIB’s honorary president is Zéphirin Diabré, the former head of the Africa–Middle East Bureau (international and marketing department) of the French nuclear fuel company Areva. Diabré also happens to have been the chief of the Burkinabe political opposition since 2012, a matter discussed more fully below. More importantly perhaps, since 2011, FASIB is the non-official organisation that can issue Chinese visas to Burkina Faso citizens and residents (Interview 3 and 8).\footnote{79}

**Burkina Faso’s 2013–2015 political unrest and the question of Burkinabe–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 risk. On the one hand, Compaoré was a strong supporter of the ROC and its return to the United Nations. He visited Taiwan 10 times, the last time in October 2014, on the occasion of the ROC National Day (10 October) and a few weeks before he was deposed. For 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 in his relationship with Compaoré.

On the other hand, this regime change occurred one year after Gambian President Yahya Jammeh decided to sever relations with Taiwan and normalise 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 transition in leadership. For these reasons, Taiwan has been keen to cultivate relations with the new authorities, both the transition government between October 2014 and November 2015, and since then the elected president and his team.\footnote{80}
In December 2014, Burkina Faso’s transitional president Michel Kafando agreed 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. 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 deputy commander of the RSP, he had refused to open fire on demonstrators and became the interim president for three weeks before Kafando replaced him in late November of that year. 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 with Chérif Sy and evoked the possibility of a visit to Taiwan. Instead, in June 2015, transitional Prime Minister Isaac Zida visited the ROC; it was his 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 and health sectors but also related to national defence. In 2015, a large Taiwanese business delegation went to Burkina Faso with the support of their government in order to demonstrate the island’s sustained interest in Burkina Faso’s economic development.

The coup attempt of General Gilbert Diendéré (RSP commander and a close ally of Compaoré) in September 2015 left both Taipei and the small local Taiwanese community no choice but to wait and see (Interview 3). Once it had failed, and soon after the November 2015 national elections, Taiwan had the opportunity to demonstrate strong support both for Burkina Faso and for its return to democracy. While Japan supplied vehicles, Taiwan provided a large number of computers (worth $1.7 million) to help prepare and organise the voting around the country.

The victory of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (nickname Roch) in the presidential race, with 53.5% of the vote against Zéphirin Bagré’s 29.7%, was good news for Taiwan. During the campaign, Zéph, as he is locally called, openly supported normalisation with Beijing for reasons that are easy to understand, noted above. Moreover, according to diplomatic sources, he had received $4.6 million from the Chinese government to support his campaign activities and purchase cars (Interview 3).

An international dimension must be added here: since the outbreak of the war and the French military intervention in Mali in 2013, Western countries, particularly France and the US, have been more involved in regional security. While the French government was much implicated in the failure of Burkina Faso’s coup attempt and supported a smooth transition towards democracy, the Americans now have special operation forces and a drone base in Ouagadougou. As a result, both countries, and in particular their diplomats posted in Burkina Faso, discreetly welcome and support Taiwan’s official presence in this country (Interview 8).

However, the future of Burkinabe-Taiwanese 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 nine 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 Rennaissance/Parti sankariste, UNIR/PS) who are more inclined to switch back to the PRC. Although they hold only five seats in 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 Benèwendé Sankara (no relation with Thomas Sankara) in April 2016 and organise a visit for him and a delegation of seven Parliamentarians to Taiwan soon after.87

Furthermore, while Zéphirin Diabré has been openly in favour of normalising with Beijing, Roch has remained all along discreet about Burkina Faso’s future relationship with Taiwan and China. While Simon Compaoré (no relation 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’. A Francophile, Diallo is however very critical of the United States, a proclivity that may be dangerous for the country’s relations with Taiwan. In addition, Burkina Faso’s business community has clearly opted for China but its political and academic elites are more cautious, aware of the risks attached, in their view, to a normalisation with the PRC: these include the growing activities of Chinese enterprises bringing their own workers and the arrival of an increasing number of Chinese migrants that would fiercely compete with locals in the petty trade and service sectors.88 For these reasons, Ouagadougou may prefer to keep its relation with Taipei. Will it be possible?

On two occasions at least, Burkina Faso has been invited (as were other African allies of Taiwan) to China’s Forum on China–Africa Cooperation as an observer, once in 2006 in Addis-Ababa, and more recently in December 2015 in Johannesburg. Each time, Burkina Faso has turned down the invitation and opted not to attend.89 In other words, Ouagadougou has so far resisted 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 Faso’s ministers of agriculture and education, his delegation visited several enterprises specialising in information technology and solar power.90 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’.91 As planned, the bilateral Joint Commission of Cooperation met in Ouagadougou in late September 2016, in the presence of Francophone Taiwanese Vice-Foreign Minister Wu Chih-chung.92

Nevertheless, the future of this close partnership depends less on Ouagadougou or Taipei than on Beijing and its intentions towards Ms Tsai. The recent deterioration of cross-Strait relations does not augur well for the longevity of their diplomatic truce. Burkina Faso, its most valuable ally in Africa, may very well become a prime target of China’s ambitions to intensify its offensive against the Tsai Administration. The defection of Sao Tome and Principe in December 2016 has confirmed that this danger is real.

**Conclusion: the uncertain future of an atypical relationship**

In many ways, the Burkinabe-Taiwanese 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 so than Taiwan’s partnerships in Central America or the Caribbean.\(^93\) The reason may be that Burkina Faso, a small and poor country, is no Senegal or even Chad or Niger.\(^94\) It has not much to offer to the PRC apart from cotton and gold, both of which it can buy anyway. From another perspective, continued loyalty from Burkina Faso has been due to 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 efforts in public diplomacy. It is true that the way Taiwan approaches its development assistance and cooperation projects has remained rather traditional, echoing and perpetuating early practises of the rich countries’ development agencies (and particularly the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee), and also to a certain extent China elsewhere in Africa.\(^95\) 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).\(^96\)

More importantly, before as after the 2014–2015 regime change, the Burkinabe authorities have on the whole appeared very satisfied with their relationship and cooperation with Taiwan. Of course, Ouagadougou hopes to attract more investment and garner more technology transfers from Taipei, but by and large it appears willing to pursue this partnership. The negative image of Chinese enterprises, migrants and products in the country and the fears that they generate among the society are playing a role in perpetuating this relationship (Interviews 3 and 4). Burkina Faso’s inclination to be distinct and independent from its neighbours, particularly Côte d’Ivoire and Mali, should not be dismissed either. Western countries’ growing strategic interest in the region have also made them quite supportive of the perpetuation of Burkina Faso’s official links with Taiwan.

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 stand to lose a great deal, 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 latter. 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 decides to demand normalisation of relations? Room for manoeuvre would be pretty narrow. As indicated, the Burkinabe business community, highly dependent upon and looking to Côte d’Ivoire for its lead, is ready to cooperate to a larger extent with the PRC and is likely to push for a diplomatic switch. If Beijing can offer more than Taipei, which is probable, any Burkinabe government would be likely to follow suit. Accustomed over many years to assistance from rich countries’ government agencies and non-governmental organisations, Burkina Faso’s political and intellectual elite, however attached to democratic values, is unlikely to resist much.

Finally, in one of the sad ironies of the Burkinabe–Taiwanese successful partnership, although both countries now share identical political values, the risks of a diplomatic shift are higher now 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 may not in the end have much of an impact on the outcome of this on-going diplomatic game with China.  

However, for the time being, the relationship between Burkina Faso and Taiwan remains in place, almost unique in Africa, in spite of China’s growing imprint on this continent.

Notes


23. 國際合作發展基金會, 國合會, *guoji hezuo fazhan jijinhui* or *guohehui*.


29. Productivity reportedly reached 4 tons/ha in Bagré and 2–3 tons/ha in the rain-fed paddy fields, as opposed to 1 ton/ha or even less on other farms (Interview 1). Most rice in Burkina is cultivated in lowlands (70%) that yield very little (43% of the national production), cf. Easypol (FAO), *Analyse de la compétitivité de la filière riz local au Burkina Faso, Rapport provisoire*. Ouagadougou: Ministère de l’agriculture de l’hydraulique et des ressources halieutiques, Secrétariat général, Direction des études et de la planification (DEP), October 2009, http://www.fao.org/docs/up/easypol/938/analyse-filiere-riz-local-burkina-faso_131fr.pdf


36. 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).

37. 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 (Interviews 2 and 12).

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


42. At the end of 2015, the Ziniare centre had already completed three pre-employment training classes with a total of 864 graduates. The employment rates of the first two classes were 70 and 77%, respectively, 2015 International Cooperation and Development Fund Annual Report, Taipei, ICDF, p. 26, http://www.icdf.org.tw/public/Attachment/66111162215.pdf (accessed 1 June 2016).


47. 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


65. That was in particular the case when the author visited Burkina in January–February 2016.
75. 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 22 June 2016).

81. 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](http://m.lefaso.net/spip.php?article62662) (accessed 23 June 2016).


96. 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
Note on contributor

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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 professionelle de référence de Ziniaré, 4 February 2016.

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, 1 June 2016.
