

Sharing experience for a better world

Peking University institute helps promising leaders from developing countries learn from China's development path

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In a September 2015 speech at the United Nations headquarters in New York, President Xi Jinping announced a series of programs that China would make available to other developing countries, including projects in poverty reduction, agricultural cooperation, trade promotion, environmental protection, health and education.

In addition, during the speech to the High-Level Roundtable on South-South Cooperation, he announced: "China will also set up an academy of South-South cooperation and development."

Yao Yang, a professor of economics at the National School of Development of Peking University, said his school was honored to jump into action after Xi's speech. South-South cooperation refers to coordination between developing countries.

The Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development, an English-language graduate school at the university, was established to give promising leaders from developing countries the opportunity to learn about, and analyze in depth, China's economic development experience.

Yao, who is now executive dean of the institute, said the school will concentrate on economic development, in contrast with Western organizations that tend to focus on international relations and government management.

"We are going to focus on economic development, so economists are the backbone of our faculty. I think that is more pertinent for developing countries, where raising incomes is the most pressing issue."

Fu Jun, the institute's academic dean, emphasized that developing countries are important to China's economic future. "To link different parts of the world together, you need to have connections at the physical dimensions, at the economic institution dimension, and also at the dimension of ideas. This program is at the dimension of ideas, the exchange of ideas, and people-to-people contact," he said.

Fu kicked off the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development's second year with a discussion of a key issue that permeates the curriculum: How do you find the correct balance between the state and the market?

"Why do we need to have a state?" Fu said. "When you read Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, there are hundreds of pages in that book on the role of the state. Serious economists argue that the market is efficient. They never claim that it is perfect. So the implicit message



Students of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development, a graduate school at Peking University, come from 23 developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



Fu Jun, academic dean of the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development, speaking at the opening ceremony of the institute's second year in Beijing.

is that markets themselves cannot work without institutions. Where do we draw the line between the market and the state?"

Yao said the institute offers a unique opportunity for students to learn from China's experience.

"Our faculty has a unique combination of knowledge. All are trained in the US or other countries. In the meantime, we know China well. We have studied China for our lifetime, so we have a good combination. We believe that the Chinese experience is pertinent for other developing countries. But don't get me wrong — we don't want students to simply copy the Chinese experience."

He said he expects students to be

able to decide which parts of the Chinese experience are most useful for their own countries.

Yao also emphasized the quality of debate at the school, with faculty ranging "from the ultraright to the ultraleft".

"Students can listen to all sorts of voices and opinions," he said. "That is their choice, whether they are going to choose market-oriented or government-oriented policies."

The institute's curriculum covers four policy domains: Development and poverty reduction, innovation and education, population and health, and climate change and the environment. The course covers topics including leadership skills and microeconomics.

Students also conduct field studies in rural areas, special economic zones, coastal cities and interior parts of China. For example, they visit Xiaogang village in East China's Anhui province, where a group of villagers started China's reforms by secretly agreeing to divide their collective farm into private plots. The students are asked to analyze the risks and incentives that were faced by the villagers.

Current students at the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development come from 23 developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. They all work in the public sector or for nonprofit organizations.

Several students plan to tie their experiences at the institute with future work related to the Belt and

Road Initiative, the China-led plan to revitalize the ancient Silk Road trading routes, or the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the development bank set up to provide infrastructure funding.

Nasser Alsaqsi, from Oman, said: "We in the Middle East depend on oil and gas, but these will vanish someday. What I want to understand is how China survived without what we have in terms of raw materials. I really want to reform the backward philosophy of my country. We need to open up to foreign direct investment."

Yousaf Malik was sent to the institute by his employer, the secretariat for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in the Pakistan Ministry of Planning and Reform. His agency is responsible for dealing with China's National Development and Reform Commission and with Chinese companies that invest in Pakistan.

He said that Chinese loans to his country are particularly effective because they give the money directly to the company, whereas the International Monetary Fund (IMF) gives money to the government, which can be lost as a result of corruption.

"IMF projects tend to go on and on and on," he added, "but the Chinese projects are held to a deadline. We also have a free hand to choose our own projects with Chinese money, but not with the IMF."

Kamila Sitchanova, from Kazakhstan, said that in 2015 her country adopted a strategy similar to the Belt and Road Initiative. She works in the

international cooperation division of the State Revenue Committee in Kazakhstan and focuses on cooperation between Kazakh and Chinese customs. China is sponsoring her department's efforts to set up automatic checkpoints along all of her country's borders.

Thandanani Wah Ziqubu, a 27-year-old from South Africa, has worked for the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs and is a member of the Communist Party of South Africa. He has had trouble finding work because of South Africa's high unemployment rate.

He emphasized the opportunities for people to work and contribute in China. "The culture and the education they receive promote that culture of working and of participation from each and every person."

Nipuna Thibbutumunuwa, from Sri Lanka, is a member of the Communist Party. He said: "Since 1953, the Chinese and Sri Lankan governments have had very close relationships, such as free trade agreements, investments and student exchange programs."

Thibbutumunuwa noted that during the civil war, which ended in 2009 after 26 years, China supported Sri Lanka by providing humanitarian aid, military training and the latest technology. "Even after the war, as you can see, there's massive development happening in Sri Lanka. China came forward and lent a helping hand by investing in Sri Lanka in all sectors, such as infrastructure, health, transportation and so forth."

Edwin Mollel, an economist who works on policy and planning at Tanzania's Foreign Ministry, said: "China shares the same path as my country. They started from a humble background and have made tremendous achievements. I would like to learn the lessons on exactly what they did to get where they are."

"We can copy the leadership style that focuses on knowing where you want to go and carefully planning how to get there gradually, with the commitment of the leaders to lift citizens out of poverty and embracing technology at the forefront."

"Why can't Tanzania do that? We have the brains. All we need is the capacity and the leaders behind us."

Fu, the dean, said that the strength of the course comes from China's 40 years of experience of reform.

"It is very focused, very intensive," he said of the course. "It includes a lot of public policy management skills. So, the idea is to elevate not only intellectual clarity but also managerial skills. We understand that whatever policy a country designs has to have intellectual insight and a level of sensitivity to the local conditions."