

How much 'Soft Power' does China have in Africa?

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Abstract

The paper consists of three parts:

The first is conceptual and deals with a critique of the way the concept of 'soft power' has been extended beyond its original use by Joseph Nye in his book from 1991 *Bound to Lead*. Especially the paper questions the way the concept has been taken over by Chinese academics and policy makers.

In relation to this the three aspects of power suggested by Todd Hall 'Institutional Power', Reputational Power', 'Presentational Power" is being suggested to be combined with Steven Lukes' three dimensions of power – decisions, non-decisions, and ideology, as well as with Michael Mann's 'IEMP-power model', and finally with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital'. The argument is that these models will be more appropriate to understanding the power elements of Chinese engagements in Africa.

These arguments serve as a background to the second part, which consists of concrete analyses of how Chinese investments and initiatives in communication and media in Africa do not really fall under a facile soft power strategy, but rather must be analysed in a broader context of communication investments, media cooperation and cultural image building. In this context it is referred to the political as well as the economic aspects of the 'going out strategy'. This will be linked to an analysis of the relationship between what are primarily business ventures and what falls under other forms of Chinese public image building in Africa – e.g, journalism and media enterprises. Thus the connection between business and state initiatives will be assessed. References will be made to the role of Huawei and ZTE as well as StartTimes as communication enterprises in Africa. The latter will be assessed as an example of an actor involved in the migration from analogue to digital television in Mozambique. The media company that will be assessed is CCTV.

The paper ends with a preliminary attempt to situate these elements within an alternative power analysis, and pointing to challenges for the Chinese African engagements when it comes to building what is so loosely referred to as 'soft power'.

Key words: soft power, power analysis. Chinese involvement in Africa in Communications, media, culture.

'Soft Power'

I have over the past years read so many references to ‘soft power’ in discussions about foreign cultural initiatives and exports and public diplomacy initiatives that I have become increasingly suspicious of the concept. This is particularly the case in the context of descriptions of Chinese cultural, media and public diplomacy drives. Since the proclamation of the ‘going out’ policy the concept has been defined and analysed very differently. It is easy to wave the magical wand that signifies ‘soft power’ when trying to come to terms with the implications and importance of culture and media in the international struggle for influence. An important objection has been that ‘soft power’ is being used differently in disparate contexts.

There are many reasons for the catchiness of the phrase. It has great rhetorical power by being an oxymoron, which is a figure of speech that juxtaposes seemingly contradictory elements. That the concept also utilises the binary opposition between hard and soft, does not make it less attractive. One is invariably forced to ask what then is “hard power”? There are already many books and articles that have titles that include “soft power”.¹ The House of Lords has a Select Committee on Soft Power.² The fancy and popular high class magazine *Monocle* publishes an annual soft power surveys of the countries of the world.³ There is a French Internet journal that is called “Soft Power”.⁴ It is by the way significant that in France they use the English term. Is ‘soft power’ really useful as an analytical term for understanding international power relations and public diplomacy strategies of the 21st century.

¹ A very superficial check on Amazon.uk revealed that by searching under the phrase “soft power” 32 different books with the phrase in its title turned up on the first seven pages that Amazon displayed.

² <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/31/soft-power-britain-losing-grip-lords-policy> (last accessed Oct. 31. 2014)

³ <http://monocle.com/film/affairs/soft-power-survey-2013/> (last accessed March 3, 2014)

⁴ ““Soft Power” est le magazine global et bi-média des industries créatives et des médias de France Culture.” <http://www.franceculture.fr/emission-soft-power-12-13> (last accessed Feb. 19. 2014)

As it is well known Joseph Nye first introduced the term in his 1990 book *Bound To Lead. The Changing Nature Of American Power*.⁵ The term has since been discussed so frequently and at such length that I am not going to present this discussion and the context of the creation of the term here. Policy makers often refer 'soft power' to as a practical term for political action and strategy. It is being employed in order to promote the standing of countries in the world, often as a kind of tool for bringing about understanding at top-level between political elites. This is something that Joseph Nye himself refers to in the latest book where he points out that at high level meetings there is a form soft power being exercised when a nation mobilises resources through their government elites and this creates attraction for the nation that employs its resources and influences the elites of other nations to a degree that fulfils the interests of the first nation, or both. An example this form of elite soft power can be illustrated by what goes on at the annual January meetings of The World Economic Forum in Davos. Another Example is the African American Summit in Washington at the beginning of August 2014, as well as EU African summits. All of them have followed on the Chinese African FOCAC summits, which began in 2000, and take place every third year.

However, does this really turn soft power into a useful analytical category? This is a question that among others Todd Hall has poised.⁶ Hall argues that even if a term is widely used within practical politics it is not necessarily a suitable analytical term, as it tends to lack a proper conceptual framework. This often becomes clear when one tries to relate the concept to public diplomacy strategies and practical political initiatives that are

⁵ Nye, Joseph (1990). *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. New. York (Basic Books). Nye has since discussed the concept further in the book that is titled after the concept in 2004 *Soft Power. The Means to Success in in World Politics*, and latest in *The Future of Power* from 2011. In the last book Nye also combines hard and soft power to what he identifies as "Smart power". The definitions Nye uses for the term vary a bit from context to context and from book to book, but in the latest book he defines it thus: "[...] soft power is the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes."

⁶ Hall, Todd (2010) "An Unclear Attraction: A Critical Examination of Soft Power as an Analytical Category." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, 2010. 189 – 211. <http://cjjp.oxfordjournals.org/content/3/2/189.full.pdf> (last accessed Jan 24. 2014)

brandished as building on soft power. Because it is not evident how this is related to a broader vision of what are the real power elements in these initiatives. Thus soft power has come to imply everything from tours of athletes from one country to another to foreign aid and emergency assistance. The very fluffiness of the practical use of the term undermines its analytical value.

However others who have analysed the term have come to other conclusions. One of those who have analysed the concept most thoroughly in order to find the answer to whether the concept can aid our understanding of power as such and whether it can be a useful analytical tool for political scientists is a young Norwegian political scientist Sigrid Sandve Eggereide.⁷ Her conclusion is that soft power refers to an element of power that cannot otherwise be explained nor be reduced only to side effects of hard power, or economic power. It contributes to the understanding of a full spectrum of power, and may be characterised as the “third element of power”. Maybe it is here a systematic examination of the implications of the wide use of the term should start, namely by trying to find out how the different elements of power as an analytical concept relate to each other.

The Idea of Attraction

One of the objections that Hall has to soft power as an analytical term in Nye’s theory is his “[...] idea of attraction as the primary mechanism behind the effects he attributes to soft power.”⁸ Halls complaints are in many ways related to that it is difficult to associate this with the question of how Nye’s three main categories of soft power – ‘culture, political ideas and policies’ with necessity can produce an attraction that will help a country in the pursuit of its foreign policy. This again has to do with the vague implications of culture,

⁷ Eggereide, Sigrid Sandve (2012) *Facing the Intangible, Unobservable and Immeasurable: A Conceptual Analysis of Joseph Nye’s Soft Power*. Master Thesis in Political Science. NTNU. (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) Trondheim. <http://ntnu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:561318/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (last accessed Jan. 24. 2014)

⁸ Hall op.cit. p. 190

and whether political ideas are bound to be attractive to those they are supposed to influence, and policies is an equally amorphous term as culture.

Hall puts his critique in the form of two questions with three answers:

First, does the behaviour that actors exhibit towards designated soft power resources signify attraction? Second, if attraction does exist, does it actually produce favourable policy outcomes for states that enjoy its benefits? The preliminary answers appear mixed at best. First, whether or not it is the cultural elements of high and low culture goods or exchanges that make them attractive is not apparent. Even if they are understood as generating an attraction, there is still no clear link between this and support for a particular state's foreign policy. Second, as it pertains to political values, soft power as an analytic category is in itself highly problematic, given the fact it is interwoven with discursive struggles over political identity. What is more, the desire to emulate another state's perceived 'political values' does not necessarily signify wholehearted backing of its foreign policy. There is an important distinction between actors that 'want what you want' and that 'want what you want them to want'. Finally, on the question of attraction and how it relates to support for another state's foreign policy, it is difficult to disentangle evidence of attraction from its claimed outcome, which could easily have other causes.⁹

Now Hall does not claim that it is unimportant to try to come up with alternatives to hard power. His problem is that just to posit a dichotomy such as soft and hard power rather than clarifying the issues obscures what is at stake in relation to international power strategies. Thus Hall proposes that instead of talking of soft power, one should think of power strategies within different arenas. He discusses this in relation to institutional power, reputational power, and representational power. He specifies this through some definitions:

1. [...] institutional power as the options available to state actors according to their membership and relative position within specific international organizations which enable those states to exercise influence within them."¹⁰
2. Reputational power may be exemplified by: "A reputation for being economically successful, for instance, might give a state more of a say in

⁹ *ibid.* p. 207

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 208

the creation of development models. Being known as a neutral broker could qualify a state to intercede as arbitrator in a conflict.”¹¹

3. “[...] representational power is defined in a more limited and concrete fashion as the ability of states to frame issues, advance their own interpretations, and consciously seek to shape the beliefs of others. Sources and tools of representational power include public diplomacy, propaganda and information control.”¹²

Other Concepts of Power

1. Steven Lukes

This implies that the utilisation of “soft power” as a broad concept in so many different contexts lumps together many dissimilar policies, strategies, phenomena in areas ranging from government policies, over business investments to cultural undertakings. Rather than clarifying strategies that governments and non-governmental actors use in order to gain influence, this mystifies, because the focus on power disappears. This again points in the direction of relating the role power plays in a relationship between intended and non-intended consequences. This again may be seen in the light of how Steven Lukes¹³ launched the idea of the three dimensions of power – decisions, non-decisions, and ideology.

Lukes’ first dimension of power concentrates on what kind of behaviour is involved in the making of decisions on issues where there is a conflict of interests that expresses policy preferences. The second dimension deals with how it is possible to influence decisions by shaping the agenda and that this can take place also through more subtle means than overt decisions in relation to policy preferences. The ideological dimension deals with that people sometimes acts without being coerced in ways that appear contrary to their most basic interests. Thus the powerful through an omnipresent ideology transform the powerless so they behave according to the interests of the powerful. This again is linked to the issue of how to create hegemony. Here

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 209

¹² *ibid.* p. 210

¹³ Lukes, Steven (1974 originally, here 2005) *Power: A Radical View*, Basingstoke (Palgrave Macmillan).

Lukes is influenced by Antonio Gramsci's way of perceiving hegemony as something linked to cultural contradictions and concepts and shaped and maintained by groups, institutions and organisations. In relation to the role of media and cultural policies and programmes what is of particular importance is the power to shape perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way as to ensure the acceptance of a certain roles in an existing order or social process. This of course is essential for the analysis of how the attempt to create hegemonic media power is at play in international relations. China's 'soft power' ambitions may be explained as an attempt to challenge western hegemony when it comes to international relations.

2. Michael Mann

To move on to another model for power analysis Michael Mann has in his famous IEMP model identified four elements of power. They are:

Ideological Power implies the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices with others.

Economic Power originates in the organisation of human productive activities and deals with economic relations. These are powerful because they combine the intensive mobilisation of labour with very extensive circuits of capital, trade, and production chains, providing a combination of intensive and extensive power and normally also of authoritative and diffused power.

Military Power might be defined as the social organisation of concentrated and lethal violence. This is the area of coerciveness whether it is aimed at maintaining order in the own society or as well as a defence against other states.

Political Power has its roots in how individuals are organised and coordinated. It is the centralised and territorial regulation of social life. Political power deals with how states have the capacity to exercise different forms of power coercively and symbolically. The basic function of government

is the provision of order over this realm.¹⁴ Symbolic power supports the authority of the state through the diffusion of interpretations of reality and the cultivation of social institutions that contribute to strengthening the legitimacy of the state both on relation to its own citizens and internationally.

3. Pierre Bourdieu

This is closely related to yet another way of looking at power namely the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's at time cryptic definition cultural capital exists in three forms. The first is what is called the 'embodied state', which briefly may be described as cultivation of culture so that it becomes part of a person, or a class, or social group. The second property is what Bourdieu calls the objectified state, which may be said to consist of cultural objects (art etc.) and media. The third property is the institutionalised state, which consist of cultural institutions such as academies, universities, publishing houses, museums, and art and music arenas.¹⁵

Furthermore Bourdieu also worked with the concept of symbolic power. In such a perspective it is necessary to situate power in a communicative situation where the institutions involved possess different amounts of 'symbolic power'. This means that communication of power involves the ability to convince people that some interpretations of society are more valid than others. Those with relatively high symbolic power thus dominate the visions that people support and conform to. Through the utilisation of the cultural codes ideological consensus is being created around a dominant interpretation of the world. Symbols serve some interests rather than others. Consequently those who control symbols and cultural codes have political power.

¹⁴ See: Hall, John A. & Ralph Schroeder (eds.) (2005) *An Anatomy of Power. The Social Theory of Michael Mann*. Cambridge (CUP).

See also: <http://understandingsociety.blogspot.no/2013/03/michael-mann-on-power.html> (last accessed Jan.25. 2014) for a brief definition of the elements in the IEMP model.

¹⁵ See: Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge (Polity Press) and Bourdieu, Pierre (1986) "The Forms of Capital" In Richardson, J.G. (Ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood), p. 241-258.

The concept of symbolic power is particularly important in relation to the power of the media. Nic Couldry¹⁶ has defined the power of the media as “[...] the concentration in media institutions of the symbolic power of “constructing reality” (both factual representations and credible fictions) [...] and “[...] as the complex outcome of practices at every level of social interaction”. This involves both the production and the reception of media content, which means that the power of media has to do with how the world is being defined through the meaning of media products. This may be called the definitional power of the media. And it is not equal to political and economic power. But as media is an important political and economic institution they obviously do also have political and economic power. The question is how to relate the symbolic or definitional aspect to the other forms of power. Symbolic power thus involves the ability to construct visions and interpretations of reality. It is important because it draws in the other main forms of power and how they may influence the contents of media and the contest over access to and status of various media productions and material. This again is central for the power of the media to define how social and political and cultural phenomena are being interpreted.

Rather than sticking to soft power as a concept in for analysis of the Chinese presence in Africa in communications, media, culture, and the image of China in Africa, and Africa in China, it might be more fruitful to take the point of departure in Todd Hall's three forms of power, Steven Lukes' power dimensions combined with how Michael Mann in his “IEMP model” has identified the different types of power, as well as Pierre Bourdieu's theories about cultural capital and symbolic power. It seems to me that his concept of ‘cultural capital’ might be useful in an analysis of China's relationship to Africa in the area of communications, media and culture. There is no doubt that China is trying to match its economic capital with cultural capital. The question is whether this is successful.

¹⁶ Couldry, Nic (2000) *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age*. London. (Routledge) p. 4.

Power is a product of interest and control. Thus it might be more useful to analyse for instance the many Chinese enterprises in Africa not as expressions of power as such, but rather as ways of exercising interest in different areas and to achieve some sort of control which again may lead to a situation of power. In order to provide a different perspective it may be fruitful to have a look at what Michael Mann in his “IEMP model” has identified as the different types of power, and then to relate this to that they all relate to the recent Chinese advances in Africa (as well as the role of colonial powers earlier), and that except for crude military power, they all have aspects that may be characterised as ‘soft’ as well as ‘hard’. It should, however, be borne in mind that in China’s steadily closer political relations with African states, there is also the Chinese hope that this will result in support for China’s military interests in for instance in the East and South China Seas. In our research on “The Voice of China in Africa”¹⁷ we deal with ideological, economic and political power, and we do so through an institutional, reputational and representational prism.

Chinese ‘Soft Power’

I have been particularly intrigued by why the Chinese scholars and policy makers have found the term ‘soft power’ so useful. Can it have something to with its loose connotations, and that it one the hand signifies power, and on the other hand it does not really. And does it really fit well into the way that the Chinese going-out policy has been characterised? In our context the most important example of such an approach would be the FOCAC meetings¹⁸ between Chinese and African political leaders. There is no doubt that these meetings may be characterised as a central element of Chinese ‘soft power’ policies towards Africa.

¹⁷ <http://www.cmi.no/research/project/?1686=voice-of-china> (Last accessed Nov 3. 2014)

¹⁸ Five “Forum of China-Africa Cooperation” meetings have so far been held every three years between 2000 and 2012. Three in Beijing, two in Africa – Ethiopia and Egypt. The next will be in South Africa.

A significant part of Chinese ‘soft power’ initiatives has been concentrated around big international events – the 2008 Olympics, the construction of prestige buildings in Africa – national stadiums, airports, parliamentary buildings, presidential offices etc. But as among others Joseph Nye has pointed out¹⁹ there has to be consistency in such efforts, and that has to do with what is happening internationally and on the big arenas and what is happening in China domestically and on smaller arenas. There is a paradox that while elsewhere big cultural stars such as artists and authors are seen as important elements of a country’s image building, China seems to have a ambivalent attitude to this. A case in point is China’s arguably most famous contemporary visual artist Ai Weiwei, who is more or less a persona non grata to official China. His many international exhibitions are never mentioned in Chinese media. One example is his powerful 2014 exhibition at the infamous prison island Alcatraz, which is a powerful statement on political prisoners.²⁰ It is interesting to compare his status with that of the great pianist Lang Lang, who is not controversial, and therefore acceptable as part of official China’s public diplomacy initiatives.

Chinese politicians and thinkers use the concept of soft power to communicate the Chinese “Going out Strategy”, and to allocate resources in order to create a favourable propensity for China in the international arena. The soft power discussion in China dates back to the democratisation setbacks in China in 1989. China strained to break away from international alienation after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. The concept of soft power was alluring to Chinese political ears. The terminology presented liberal political values not as a moral imperative but as pragmatic advantages for a state. Chinese political intellectuals needed a road to reconcile the “particularism” or “socialism with Chinese characteristics” with the “universalistic value” held by the mainstream international society.

²⁰ <http://time.com/3427078/ai-weiwei-alcatraz/> (last accesses Oct 31.2014)

Wang Hu-Ning, one of the major brainpowers of President Jiang Ze-Min, analysed the transition of power and the propensity of international soft power in the article "Culture as a form of national power: Soft Power".²¹ China's quest was to regain a beneficial status in its interstate relations. To do so, China first needed to align itself to international perceptions of valid soft power. Wang distinguished between four elements of soft power: 'Industrialism', 'scientificism', 'democraticism', and 'nationalism'. Wang called for a strategic planning of the country's soft power that could respond to international trends and thoughts.

Chinese academia began an intellectual quest to distinguish American soft power from Chinese soft power. American soft power was hegemonic assimilation and cultural imperialism. Chinese soft power was generically reflexive and benign, compatible with the Chinese interpretation of Marxist socialist theories providing a theoretical formality for China's peaceful rise, which eventually were used to contend the 'China Threat Theory'. Many Chinese writings point out that the Chinese soft power is related to traditional Chinese cultural values found particularly in Confucianism. This involves winning respect through virtues, benevolent governance, peace and harmony and by suppressing differences. This is being combined with the principles of Chinese foreign policy – multilateralism, economic diplomacy, non-interventionism.²²

The then Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, at the third Annual Meeting of the New Champions of the World Economic Forum (WEF) 10 September 2009 made implicit references to the four dimensions that are detectable in Chinese policy initiatives and pronouncements of interest. These are also found in more elaborate academic texts and policy documents. First there is a dimension of good will. Chinese soft power implies no threat. It is a civilised intentional force. It is meant to be an emblem of Chinese generosity and

²¹ Wang Hu-Ning (1993) "Zuowei guojia shili de wenhua: Ruan quanli" (Culture as national power: Soft power), *Journal of Fudan University* 3.

²² See: Mingjiang Li (ed) (2009) *Soft Power. China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*. Lanham. (Lexington Books)

unselfishness. It intends to increase the chance of world peace instead of aggravating conflicts and poverty. Secondly 'so-called Chinese soft power' is area-specific. The less developed countries, those in Africa and Asia, are the prioritised targets of China's good-will intentions. There is a special territorial focus as regards Chinese 'soft power' concerns. Thirdly there is an ideological identity. Premier Wen's pronouncement refers to a pan-development identity, including ideological emphasis on south-south cooperation and an anti-hegemonic narrative. These may sound like a cliché but those narratives are very real to the Chinese government. They are important sources of rhetoric and ideology in both domestic and international settings. The fourth and the most forceful dimension, is that of economic power. Financial engagements in Africa come both through the form of aid and the form of market entrance. China, with its surging economic capacity and international influence, will move in to fill the vacuum left by the traditional actors in Africa affected by the global financial crisis.

It is interesting to note that Wen's statement seen in the light of the wider discussions of Chinese soft power policies touch upon three of Mann's IEMP power elements: Ideology, Economy, and Politics. It may also be interpreted in the perspective of Hall's three sources of influence. The Premier makes reference to the UN, and China's and Africa's institutional roles there. He plays on reputational values in referring to the building of railways and providing medical aid to Africa. And finally he refers to public diplomacy through meetings such as at the World Economic Forum, and by referring to the Millennium goals and thus the representational role.

There is no doubt that the concept of 'soft power' has become a hot topic in Chinese practical policy debate as well as academic analyses. This has a manifold background linked to among others China's increasing strength economically and its rising influence in international relations, as well as the growing interest in the Chinese development model particularly in Africa. There is a clear perception in China that the country must present an image to

the world that is related to more than economic power and increasing political and military ambitions.

It seems as if that there are two dominant Chinese ways of analysing the role of 'soft power' in Chinese politics. One seems to emphasise a wider perspective encompassing more clearly political elements that among others include a promotion of the Chinese model of development as well as Chinese participation in multilateral diplomacy, overseas aid programmes, involvement in peace-keeping and conflict solution. This approach focuses on how 'soft power' initiatives are linked to state policies.

The other school of thought is centred on culture in a wide sense of the word as the most important element in soft power initiatives. This leads to another quite odd concept, namely 'cultural soft power', which of course is a pleonasm. This has resulted in increased state funding for a diverse range of cultural initiatives – such as large-scale events such as the 2008 Olympics, exhibitions; Confucius institutes; cultural exchange programmes; support for Chinese film export. Related to this is the expansion in Chinese international media initiatives through CCTV, Radio China International, Xinhua, *China Daily*, journalists' exchange programmes. Neither of the approaches, however, seem take much into account what private organisations and enterprises contribute to a wider agenda in this area – telecommunication companies, the film and entertainment industry. This is interesting since the international debate on soft power regards culture and communication products as essential elements in a comprehensive soft power strategy. Thus it seems that in spite of the great interest in developing a soft power strategy for China, the elements of such a policy still are rather disparate. This may have to do that Chinese analysts increasingly find that concept itself limiting.²³

²³ See: Glaser, Bonnie S. & Melissa E. Murphy (2009) "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics. The Ongoing Debate." Chapter 2 from McGiffert, Carola (ed) (2009) *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States*. A Report from the CSIS Smart Power Initiative. Washington (CSIS)

See: http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090310_chinesesoftpower_chap2.pdf (Last accessed Jan 26. 2014)

But it also has to do with that public diplomacy initiatives and soft power perception to a very large degree is linked to cooperation with civil society. Here China is a disadvantage because in Chinese ideology civil society is not really an element, and both in China and in Africa, it is the state that is the actor – not CSOs or NGOs. An amusing illustration of this is what was revealed in a “Lunch with Interview” with the prominent Brazilian politician and philosopher Roberto Mangabeira Unger in the weekend edition of *Financial Times* Oct. 3. 2014.

We gossip about the Bric countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), part of his portfolio under Lula, and Unger swings his legs over the side of his chair. “The Russians were the only ones willing to be daring,” he says. “The Chinese and Indians were timid.” He credits himself with pushing Beijing to internationalise the renminbi currency as a way of unseating the US dollar’s pre-eminence, although he is no fan of the Chinese. “Chinese speeches are so saccharine; we had to sit through so many. Beijing once propounded a conference of Bric NGOs. Ours, they said, will be the Chinese Communist party.” Unger guffaws with infectious mirth. “So absurd.”²⁴

Incidentally on New Years Day 2014 the first Chinese non-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of soft-power initiatives – China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA) was set up. It is to mobilise and coordinate “social resources and civilian efforts” to contributing to “promoting China’s soft power”.²⁵

African Engagements

Looking at the Chinese so-called ‘soft-power’ engagements in Africa there are certain characteristics that stand out, and which are in line with the over-all soft power engagements of China. It is often difficult to distinguish

²⁴ Rathbone, John Paul (2014) “Lunch with the FT: Roberto Mangabeira Unger” *Financial Times* Oct. 3, 2014. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/73226246-48a7-11e4-9d04-00144feab7de.html#axzz3FplHL3CO> (Last accessed Oct 10. 2014)

²⁵ <http://thediomat.com/2013/01/destined-to-fail-chinas-soft-power-offensive/> (Last accessed Jan. 26, 2014)

between which elements in the Chinese presence that may be characterised as an expression of what type of power – ideological, economic, military, political.

China's development assistance to Africa, which takes many forms – loans and direct economic support, health, agriculture, education, training, academic, infrastructure construction, culture, and media is an important element in the Chinese general engagement with Africa. Some of these projects are linked to economic investments; others have the form of direct assistance. Aid is growing but the Chinese development assistance to Africa is still much below what traditional donors provide. And it will remain so in the foreseeable future. However, it should be mentioned that it is not easy to acquire reliable statistics of the aid provided by China, because aid figures remain a state secret and only a minimum of information is provided. However, it should be borne in mind that Chinese assistance at times is more grass-root oriented than other donors' assistance. But it is also more directly aimed at government, and it does not involve NGOs. It is also clear that aid is a tool of China's foreign policy, but this is also the case for other donor countries.²⁶ Thus development assistance is an essential element of the Chinese soft engagement in Africa. It is politics, but it is also ideology. In the perspective of a combination between political, ideological and military power it should be mentioned that Chinese troops as of June 2013 take part in the peacekeeping mission in Mali, as well as in peace keeping initiatives in South Sudan.

The principal source of China's increasingly positive image in Africa is linked to economic engagements of many kinds – not only mega-projects and investments in extractive industries, construction, infrastructure, and finance. But also small and medium scale Chinese economic presence in trade, agriculture contribute to the image of a partner who sees Africa as a continent

²⁶ See Brautigam, Deborah (2009) *The Dragon's Gift. The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford (OUP) for a comprehensive discussion of the issue of Chinese aid to Africa. Among others p. 171 – 172.

of the future, and did so also at the time when the image in the West of Africa was “The Hopeless Continent” as was the infamous cover story of an issue of *The Economist* in 2000.²⁷ The radical rise in trade between China and Africa is obviously an economic power element, but it also contributes to strengthening the ideological and political power of China. China’s trade with and investments in Africa are growing, and in the process of overtaking EU and US. In 2013 the trade was standing at over US \$170 billion.²⁸

It is interesting to note that it is not only China that serves as new player in this configuration and compete with China as regards a positive image. In 23 March 2013 *The Economist* reported:

African elites see China as their biggest partner among emerging countries, but by no means the only one. Brazil, Russia and India (also in the BRICS club), as well as Turkey, South Korea and several others are following China’s path. Indian companies rack up deals worth about a third of Sino-African trade, and some estimates see that proportion rising to 50%.²⁹

In the same article it was also reported that a growing number of Africans thought that the Chinese created jobs, transferred skills and spent money in local economies. A BBC poll³⁰ on attitudes towards countries found that China in general was viewed positively in Africa – Senegal (73% positive), Nigeria (68%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (59%), Kenya (59%), Tanzania (53%), Ghana (46 %), Zimbabwe (34 %), and South Africa (34 %). The results for Zimbabwe and South Africa are interesting because in Zimbabwe China is seen as a strong supporter of President Mugabe, and he is a very divisive figure in the country, in addition there have been conflicts between Zimbabwean workers and Chinese businesses. In South Africa civil society and the press are strong and there has been criticism of Chinese businesses from

²⁷ *The Economist*, May 13th, 2000. Incidentally 5 months before the first FOCAC meeting in Beijing.

²⁸ Ernst & Young’s attractiveness survey. **Africa 2013**. Getting down to business. P. 3.

²⁹ “More than Minerals” *The Economist* 23. March. 2013.

<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21574012-chinese-trade-africa-keeps-growing-fears-neocolonialism-are-overdone-more> (Last accessed Jan 26, 2014)

³⁰ http://www.globescan.com/news_archives/bbc06-3/ (Last accessed Jan 26, 2014)

among others the strong trade unions. Chinese products have been regarded as undermining South African industry e.g. textile.

An important element of the Chinese economic role and also image building strategy towards African countries is concessional loans for major and conspicuous construction projects. One example is the loan provided to Angola in 2004 and 2007 by China's Exim Bank for reconstruction of infrastructure – roads and railways. Once the loan had been negotiated and approved Chinese companies started undertaking the work, bringing its own materials, equipment and workers.³¹ There are many infra-structure projects of the same kind all over the continent. A more recent and less spectacular example is the construction of the new presidential offices in Maputo. They were inaugurated on 24 January 2014. The report in the very government supportive newspaper *Domingo* the following Sunday is revealing. The headline says that the new building will contribute to the self-esteem of Mozambicans. In the report it is written that the building is the fruit of the co-operation between China and Mozambique, but not that it was financed through a loan. And the article mentions that 5000 Chinese and Mozambican workers were involved in the construction.³²

China's economic engagements are related to diplomatic initiatives aimed at cultivating African support for China's foreign policies. In this the principle of non-interference is emphasised. This is often regarded as a sign of mutual respect, even if it may also lead to international and also often domestic perceptions of China being soft on dictators, as has been the case in Sudan and Zimbabwe. China has also been consistent with this attitude in that it has supported the African criticism of the International Criminal Court in relation to the cases against President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto of Kenya.

³¹ Campos, Indira & Alex Vines (2007) "ANGOLA AND CHINA. A Pragmatic Partnership". Working Paper Presented at a CSIS Conference, "Prospects for Improving U.S.-China-Africa Cooperation," December 5, 2007
http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080306_angolachina.pdf (Last accessed Jan. 26, 2014)

³² *Domingo* 26 de Janeiro de 2014.

Finally, China emphasizes the win-win aspect of its engagement in Africa. This approach finds support in Africa for a number of reasons. First, there is appreciation for China's pragmatism and the idea that it comes to Africa as a business partner, not to proselytize or offer charity. Second, the perception is that economic self-interest is more likely to ensure sustained engagement than will humanitarian impulse or intermittent crisis diplomacy. Finally, the win-win notion implies that Africans are free to negotiate the terms of the arrangements, and that China will be responsive to African demands.³³

Three Case Stories

In a wider analysis of what is implied by Chinese 'soft power' strategies the role of communications enterprises and media initiatives play a central role. But also if we move beyond to more elaborate models for power analysis such elements are essential for a comprehensive understanding of China's presence in Africa. Here we are going to take a look at three of the most prominent Chinese ventures in Africa and also worldwide. They are Huawei and ZTE in telecommunications investments, StarTimes as an example of digital broadcasting activities, and CCTV as a model for Chinese media expansion.

1. Huawei and telecommunications

Africa is among the world's fastest-growing mobile phone markets and the investments involved in this represent a major growth area and so do other communications technologies. Chinese companies have increasingly come to be in the forefront of this development as suppliers of technology and infrastructure. The growth of the mobile phone business is just one element of the importance of communications industries for development in Africa. Many have pointed out how the demand for mineral resources and agricultural products from India and China has been a driving force behind the growth in African economies since the millennium. Other driving forces such as

³³ Cooke, Jenifer C. (2009) "China's Soft Power In Africa". Chapter 3 in McGiffert (2009) op.cit. Some of the arguments here leans on this article.

urbanisation and the growth in consumerism and need for services are also essential. In this context there are two elements that are of special importance – financial credit and telecommunications. Particularly in the latter sector Chinese companies have gone into Africa full force.

In an article in August 2014 *The Economist* wrote “In Africa Huawei is everywhere and welcome almost everywhere, [...]”³⁴ And indeed two Chinese ICT and communication enterprises dominate the market for telecommunications infrastructure in Africa. These are the privately owned Huawei and the state owned ZTE, which were number one and six among the world’s biggest telecommunications equipment vendors in 2013.³⁵ When it comes to the world’s top companies as regards integrated communications producers they are not that high up. ZTE is number 7 and Huawei is number 8. When it comes to the biggest mobile phone manufacturers ZTE is number five and Huawei is number 6, but at 7 and 8 we also find Chinese companies – Lenovo and TCL Communication, and at 10 yet another Chinese manufacturer Yuolong.³⁶

However, in Africa Huawei and ZTE are the two biggest actors on the continent. They often compete in the same markets and team up with different mobile telephone providers. An example is Mozambique where ZTE cooperates with the biggest operator MCell, which also a part of the state telecommunications company TDM. Huawei cooperates with the second network Vodacom, the Mozambican branch of the South African mobile communications company, which has branches over most of Africa. It is in this context interesting to note that of all Chinese mergers and acquisitions of Chinese overseas investments between 2003 and mid 2010 14 per cent were in the sectors of telecommunications, media and technology.³⁷

³⁴ *The Economist* Aug 4th 2012. “The company that spooked the world”.

³⁵ <http://www.lightwaveonline.com/articles/2013/08/huawei-ericsson-cisco-top-10-phonetics-telecom-vendor-scorecard.html> (last accessed Aug. 10. 2014)

³⁶ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/slideshow/mobileplayers/10-biggest-mobile-phone-makers-globally/itslideshowviewall/21858976.cms> (last accessed Aug. 10. 2014)

³⁷ Huang Wenbin & Andreas Wilkes (2011) Analysis of approvals for Chinese companies to invest in Africa’s mining, agriculture and forestry sectors. (Working Paper 81) Center for

Huawei's business in Africa provides 15 per cent of its total global revenue for 2013 of \$39.6 billion,³⁸ and for ZTE the African contribution was 12 per cent of approx. 12.2 bill. \$ in 2013.³⁹ It should be noted that 2013 was a difficult year for ZTE, and that it suffered several backlashes also in Africa. Both companies are active all over the continent – in more than fifty countries. They have particularly contributed to the development of 3G and 4G networks, as well as having constructed fibre optic and e-government networks in more than 20 countries. Both companies have training centres in several African countries and are making a point of that they are providing education for Africans in technical areas and sales and management according to Huawei's own estimates for more 10.000 people. The employees are a mixture of Chinese and local staff, but it is worth taking note of that the staff in charge technical operations and development and thus the basic technological architecture, evolution and maintenance mainly are Chinese. While there are some attempts at giving the African branches of the firms a local characteristic, there is no doubt that all important decisions are taken at headquarters in China. On the other Huawei has stated “[...] that in a few countries, African nationals hold the General Manager position (second most senior executive of country operations) and some of them have stock options.”⁴⁰

The main business of the companies is in infrastructure development, but in many countries they have also entered the mobile phone market. Huawei has its '4Afrika' smartphone that was developed in cooperation with

International Forestry Research CIFOR. Jl. CIFOR, Situ Gede, Bogor Barat 16115, Indonesia. P. 9.

³⁸http://www.gsmarena.com/huawei_announces_2013_financial_report_revenue_grows_by_8-news-7582.php (Last accessed Aug.10. 2014)

³⁹ <http://english.caixin.com/2014-03-27/100657616.html> (Last accessed Aug. 10. 2014)

⁴⁰ Zadek, Simon, Chen Xiaohong, Li Zhaoxi, Jia Tao, Zhou Yan, Kelly Yu, Maya Forstater, and Guy Morgan. 2009. Originally published “Responsible Business in Africa: Chinese Business Leaders' Perspectives on Performance and Enhancement Opportunities” by AccountAbility and the Enterprise Research Institute, Development Research Centre of the State Council of P.R. China (DRC-ERI), November 2009, available at www.accountability21.net. Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative Working Paper No. 54. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. P. 46.

Microsoft, and it is reported that its IDEOS smartphone has 45 per cent of the market share in Kenya. Such phones are targeted toward university students, developers and first-time smartphone users. Otherwise ordinary mobile phones still have a strong market on the continent, but the price for smartphones is dropping not least because of cheap Chinese products from Huawei and ZTE as well as from Lenovo. The Chinese phones are constantly priced lower than those of other companies such as Samsung and Apple from 15 to 40 per cent under the international competitors.

The key competitive advantage of the Chinese companies seems to be their pricing, as well as financing structures. Here the role of the China Exim Bank is very important. The majority of the contracts that Huawei and ZTE have won in Africa has come about because they have been able to provide financing in the form of loans that their competitors often have not had access to. This is particularly the case where large public contracts are involved. In most of the cases the state-owned Chinese banks directly provide funds to the host government for the equipment sold by the Chinese company. Chinese companies often have an advantage because the precondition for the finance is that Chinese companies shall be the providers. One example of this is how StarTimes Software Technology won the contract for the digital broadcast migration in Mozambique.

Another example involving Huawei and ZTE is from Ethiopia. In July 2013 the Ethiopian government ended ZTE's monopoly of supplying telecom equipment to the country. It was Huawei that became the other operator. The two companies split the contract for the next phase of the network's development. They were provided with financing, which their competitors – Ericsson and Alcatel Lucent SA could not match.⁴¹ It belongs in this context

⁴¹ Dalton, Matthew (2014) "Telecom Deal by China's ZTE, Huawei in Ethiopia Faces Criticism". *Wall Street Journal*. Jan 6, 2014. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303653004579212092223818288> (Last accessed Aug. 10.2014)

that Chinese export-credit financing volumes are far higher than from other countries, and that quite an important part of this financing has been geared towards technology and infrastructure projects particularly as these now to an increasing degree are moving to the forefront of Chinese African investments.⁴² However, it should be noted that quite a few of the big contracts that have involved ZTE and Huawei have come in for scrutiny and have been suspended due to irregularities or suspected irregularities particularly because competition rules have been flouted. This has been the case in among others Zambia, Kenya, Uganda. In addition there have been serious allegations that both Huawei and ZTE have contributed to the ability of African governments to monitor digital communications networks. Concerns have particularly been voiced in relations to countries with authoritarian regimes like Ethiopia. And as it was written in an article in *Foreign Policy*: “Huawei's deep involvement in African networks could only further China's economic expansion on the continent. It could give the Chinese an edge in almost any business deal or security matter on the continent.”⁴³

In spite of misgivings such as the above there is little doubt that Chinese investments in telecommunications have been an important factor in the general development of the continent. Telecommunications expansion may have contributed as much as one per cent to African per capita GDP growth. Thus Chinese investments in technology transfer have an important economic aspect as well as making an input to the knowledge and communication situation of the countries. People with access to the Internet through smartphones and ICTs whether they are made in China and elsewhere are better informed than those who only rely on traditional forms of communication. It might be true that Huawei is a big brother, but it also

⁴² See: <http://www.ibtimes.com/chinese-money-africa-directed-away-oil-toward-other-sectors-1584805> (Last accessed Aug. 10. 2014)

⁴³ Reed, John (2013) “Africa’s Big Brother Lives in Beijing. Is Huawei wiring Africa for surveillance? Or just for money?” *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2013. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/07/30/africas_big_brother_lives_in_beijing_huawei_china_surveillance (Last accessed Aug. 10. 2014)

opens up to all forms of knowledge that may contribute to the undermining of authoritarian systems and to creating knowledgeable citizens.

In a power analysis perspective the expansion of telecommunications is primarily involved an aspect of economic power, but with elements both of coercive power (surveillance) and media/symbolic power (increased communication and information access). Using Hall's concepts telecommunication industries involve both representational and reputational aspects.

2. The case of StarTimes

StarTimes⁴⁴ represents one of the most spectacular Chinese success stories in Africa. Pang Xinxing founded it in 1988 in Beijing as a wholly privately owned company. In the beginning it concentrated on business in China in broadcasting services. It is reportedly the largest Digital TV system integrator, technology provider and network operator in China. However, it was when it started establishing operations in Africa 2002 and founded Star Africa Media Co., Ltd. in Rwanda as the first African country with a full subsidiary in 2007 that it really established it self as a major international player. It has specialised in Digital Terrestrial Television and has benefitted from the decision by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) that countries with the exception of a few territories should complete the migration from analogue to digital television broadcasting by June 17, 2015. In this process StarTimes has managed to place itself in the forefront by offering cost effective services and set-top boxes as well as being able enter into agreements with governments and public broadcasters about being responsible for the migration.

⁴⁴ Background material for what I write about StarTimes exist in many different sources, often not easily accessible. The most important have been company reports such as Dataaxis Report on *Operator Profile of StarTimes Africa*, (2013) (<http://dataaxis.com/operator-profile-startimes-africa/>) Last accessed Nov. 3. 2014) and The Balancing Act. *Analogue To Digital Migration in Africa*. (2013) (<http://www.balancingact-africa.com/reports/dtt-analogue-to-digi>) (Last accessed Nov. 3. 2014)

It has also helped that Ministry of Culture has identified the StarTimes as a “Cultural Exports Key Enterprise”, as well as being the only private Chinese company that has been authorised by The Ministry of Commerce to go into foreign projects in the Radio & TV industry. It also has the advantage of having close relations with The Export-import Bank of China, which among others provided the company with a \$163 mill loan in 2012 to help it expand its operations in Africa. In June 2014 it received an additional loan of \$60 million for the same purpose. It is also advantageous for the company that China-Africa Development Fund is supporting it. The Fund is also the second largest stockholder of StartTimes. So far it has provided \$220 million to its African operations, and there are other fresh funding possibilities.

StarTimes has a three-tier subscription system in Africa consisting of three bouquets. The prices per month vary from country to country, but in 2013 it was for instance in Uganda UGX 30,000 for the basic bouquet (36 channels) UGX 33,000 for the classic bouquet (46 channels) and UGX 60,000 for the Unique bouquet (51 channels). The package use has been estimated for the whole continent in the following manner: 85 per cent of the subscribers using the basic bouquet, 10 per cent the classic, and 5 per cent the unique bouquet. The subscription fees for StarTimes are in general lower than for its competitors such as MultiChoice, DStv. It has also benefitted from privileged agreements with governments. At the moment StarTimes has businesses in 23 different African countries, and currently has network operations in 12 countries in relation to the migration from analogue to digital.

14 July 2014 StarTimes Media announced that it would create an African headquarters of 20.000 square meters in Nairobi, which would serve as a centre for TV and film production and distribution on the continent. One of the main tasks of the centre would be to dub its productions to African languages. It would also house a digital TV research and developments centre. The centre is aimed at fulfilling the demands from steadily more African countries for increased local contents. This is among others the case in Kenya where the goal for its radio and TV stations is to fulfil a quota of at least two

thirds local content. The plans for the centre is linked to plans to introduce more Chinese programmes to the continent, something that was emphasised by the fact that the announcement took place at the same time as the launch of the Beijing Television Series Exhibition, which is aimed at promoting a series of Chinese TV series, films and documentaries to African media and audiences

The model for how StarTimes operates in Africa may be described in the following manner. First it establishes itself as a company with local partners often in a minority position. It starts by offering cheap subscriptions through set-top-boxes that offer access to digital television and many more channels and higher quality than the analogue possibilities that exist. At the same time the company enters into negotiations with state broadcasters and governments aspiring to obtain the contract for being the provider of digital migration before the deadline of the closing down of analogue signals have been reached. This model has generally worked well. It has come up with some problems in some countries such as Zambia, where in September 2013 the government tender for the digital migration project with StarTimes was cancelled due to suspected irregularities in the bidding process. Ironically it was the Chinese companies ZTE and Huawei that launched the complaint. However in April 2014 StarTimes won back the contract after it had been re-advertised. The company has also been criticised for selling out dated first generation decoders DVB-T, instead of the adopted second generation DVB-T2 decoders in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda.

The story of how StarTimes won the contract for the migration in Mozambique illustrates the many intricacies of media and communications investments and relations between China and Africa.⁴⁵ April 1, 2014 the Mozambican Ministry of Transport and Communication signed an agreement for 133 million dollars with Startimes Software Technology for undertaking the migration from analogue to digital television in Mozambique. The contract

⁴⁵ The story of StarTimes in Mozambique builds on reports in the Mozambican press, and investigative reports by Centro de Integridade Publica (CIP) <http://www.cip.org.mz/> (Last accessed Nov. 2. 2014)

was not signed after open tender. The reason being that the Exim Bank of China provided a loan for the project on the condition that the agreement was signed by the Ministry of Transport and Communication with StarTimes Software Technology. The day after the deal it was announced that a new company TMT SA consisting of Radio Moçambique (RM), Televisão de Moçambique (TVM) and Telecomunicações de Moçambique (TDM) would be responsible for the transmission of the digital signals. The three companies are all state entities and there has been severe criticism from private operators within the sector that they have been excluded from the process and have not been informed about the technical and organisational aspects of it. This is serious so much the more as the company responsible for the distribution of the signals may cut off or block or delay the signals for all channels.

In addition there is an enterprise in Mozambique that is called StarTimes Mozambique, which is owned 85 per cent by a company registered in Mauritius called SDTV Holdings, and 15 per cent by the Mozambican company Focus 21, which is owned by President Guebuza's family and his youngest daughter Valentina is the director of StarTimes Mozambique. The role of StarTimes Mozambique is to provide the equipment for the daily running of the services in the country – subscriptions, importation and distributions of the set-top-boxes etc. Thus while it is true that the three companies involved in the migration from analogue to digital television in Mozambique – namely StarTimes Software Technology, StarTimes Moçambique and TMT SA – are separate units, they are also closely related.

It belongs to the new strategy of StarTimes Moçambique to increase its public image up to the time of the digital migration. There will be more publicity campaigns, not only in relation to the migration process itself, but also to promote the StarTimes trademark and services. One example is that the company will sponsor the new Mozambican football academy named after the great Mozambican footballer Mario Coluna. StarTimes also sponsor the national football team and use it in its promotional campaigns.

StartTimes is an example of the wielding of economic power both in its own right but also by the business deals the company has entered into with African and political interest. Thus it is related to political power. As it serves as a conduit for Chinese media StarTimes also has considerable ideological and symbolic power.

3. CCTV and Media Power

CCTV (China Central Television) figures prominently on StarTimes' list of channels that they offer in all their bouquets, and they are high up on the menus. This is the case for both the CCTV 4 (News) and CCTV 9 (documentaries). When CCTV launched its African services on 11 January 2012, it was not only an element in CCTV's international expansion, but also an aspect of the extension of a Chinese media strategy for Africa, and also integral part of making Nairobi the hub of Chinese media ventures in Africa. This of course coincides with that international media organisations have chosen the city as their African headquarters. Thus Chinese media to an increasing degree have become part of a broad international media presence in Africa. In comparison to other international actors on the African media scene Chinese media and in particular CCTV have access to vast financial resources.

In 2006 China Radio International (CRI) moved its African broadcasting venture headquarters from Paris to Nairobi cooperating with Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. It broadcasts on FM and provides 19 hours daily programming in English, Chinese and Kiswahili. The move to Nairobi also meant that CRI increased its coverage of the continent – broadcasting both in European languages English and French – and in African languages Hausa and Kiswahili as well as Arabic. CRI also has offices in Cairo, Lagos and Harare. It broadcasts on shortwave and has numerous AM and FM relays. In addition CRI is on Internet, webcast, and provides apps. CRI covers all types of programmes, news, entertainment, cross-cultural issues, dealing with China and Africa in diverse manners. On December 14 2012 *China Daily* also

launched its weekly African edition in English, which is available on paper and Internet and as an app with video content. Its editorial office also is in Nairobi. The Chinese news agency Xinhua, which has had its African central bureau in Nairobi since 2006, now has correspondents in most African countries either in the form of permanent branch offices (28 at the end of 2012) or stringers.

CCTV may be regarded as the flagship for the Chinese media and news expansion in Africa. Currently CCTV Africa has three main programmes – a one-hour daily newscast “CCTV Live”, a weekly half an hour debate and talk and reportage programme “Talk Africa” and a half an hour weekly documentary and features broadcast “Faces of Africa”. In addition to being on the CCTV News Channel and partly on CCTV 9, they also come an especially designed app “I Love Africa”. There are plans to expand the coverage to establishing a 24 hours African News Channels focusing on the continent along the lines of for instance the Portuguese RPT África or France 24. That is to broadcast a mixture of especially produced African programmes and the general menu of CCTV news, but with a distinct African identity. By expanding in this manner the hope is to become a prominent competitor to the big international TV News channels – BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera.

Quite a lot has been written about the relationship between the Chinese journalism and media regime in China and the way CCTV among others conducts its journalistic work on African issues. While there are certain aspects of the coverage that are supposed to follow a principle of providing “good or positive news” there is also quite clearly very professional and often critical way that CCTV reports on the continent. Obviously this presupposes a certain balancing act. There are issues that obviously are touchy particularly if they are of a highly politicised nature. This is particularly the case in relation to countries that China has especially close relationships to, and where China has clear interests economically and politically in the stories that are being covered.

In order to check this particular aspect of CCTV journalism I looked at the coverage of U.S.-Africa Summit in Washington DC from August 3 till August

6 2014, which might have been treated as an event involving the competition between China and the US over influence. It was among others interesting to see how it was reported at length about how American businesses looked to the continent, as well as the challenges for and advantages and disadvantages that the U.S. faces in Africa illustrated by interviews by CCTV's American journalists with experts on US African relationships. The exclusion of Zimbabwean President Mugabe from the summit was covered in a reportage by a stringer in Harare with an interview with a ZANU-PF spokesman. The punch line was that President Muagabe's visit to China later in the month probably would be more important for Zimbabwe than the summit in Washington. All in all the coverage did not really differ much from the way the event was treated by other international news broadcasters.

CCTV Africa has more than 100 people in total working in its Nairobi office, of which there are a majority of Africans and other journalists, and probably around 30 to 40 Chinese journalists and technical staff. The channel has made a point of recruiting prominent and highly competent African anchors and reporters, and in all interviews, including those we had with them, they emphasise the professionalism that is the mark of the channel and that they are free to report as they wish. The production standards are high and do not differ from those you find in other high-end international newscasts. Now it should be remarked that news and contemporary reportage and feature magazines keep extremely standardised formats and where very difficult to veer from what is the basic arrangements and forms of presentation.

CCTV's broadcasting approach must be seen in the context of the broad Chinese media strategy for Africa. It includes three main elements. The *first* is linked to a broader context of China's expansion on the continent, and the way this has been reported and analysed in the past decade or so. Here both internationally and in African media and discussions there have been critical analyses and reports about the role of Chinese businesses and political advances. It is obvious that both as regards the negative reports about Chinese

business practices and labour relations as well as the broader Chinese new formidable investments and economic and political and social interests there has been a felt need to establish alternative images of China's African presence. This is again linked to that African journalism in spite of that much of it is marked by a certain degree of self-censorship and caution particularly in government media, strives to be critical and investigative. In this perspective the international image of Chinese media practices⁴⁶ is not a model to emulate.

The *second* perspective is the attempt to create a new way of reporting Africa, which may serve as alternative to the negative coverage that for many years was that standard fare of Western news from the continent often focusing on conflicts, war, famine, and poverty. Now it is of course difficult to avoid conflicts in journalism, but on the other hand there has also been a strong case being made by Western media scholars and journalists that the coverage of Africa has been skewed towards the negative and with a clear Northern slant. An example is the glorified role that international and Western aid organisations and workers have been given also in the interest of raising funds. In such a perspective CCTV's so called 'positive reporting' and the additional attempt to avoid too critically political analyses may be interpreted as being both a new way of telling African stories with another perspective, as well as promoting a Chinese form of journalism. Now this has been a problem because with such an intensively politically and critically interested public that exists in Africa, this may be seen as shying away from the problems.

The *third* element which is an interesting one⁴⁷ is to regard the journalism practiced by CCTV Africa as a way of trying out other journalistic standards and practices than those which one can find coming out of Beijing.

⁴⁶ China is for instance reported to be number 175 of 180 countries as regards the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders for 2014. (<http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>) (Last accessed Aug. 08. 2014) Behind all African countries except Somalia and Eritrea.

⁴⁷ This point of view is being proposed by Iginio Gagliardone. See Gagliardone, Iginio (2013) "China as a persuader: CCTV Africa's first steps in an African mediasphere." *Equid Novi*. Volume 34 (3) 2013.

Now it should be mentioned that also the coverage from CCTV Beijing in the last years have been more open than previously. Maybe CCTV Africa can be seen as a kind of journalistic laboratory for new forms of news dissemination with a Chinese perspective. If this is the case it also represents a challenge in the struggle over how to interpret not only Chinese but also other major interests in African markets and economies. Be they from other BRICS countries or from the traditional Western actors in Africa.

While it is clear that it takes time to build a stable audience, it is also a question whether CCTV has been able to penetrate the African market for news. The studies that have been done of TV audiences in Kenya show that for instance for the period April – June 2013 CCTV had not reached any significant audience in the country. It did not figure among the ten most popular channels, where the smallest had only 1 per cent.⁴⁸ Now it may be a consolation for CCTV that neither of the other international channels figured on the list. There has been a very limited and preliminary study done of how CCTV is being perceived, and it showed that some viewers from the very narrow sample accessed the channel and they found it attractive.⁴⁹ It is also interesting to note that these were viewers who accessed digital TV on other set-top boxes than DSTV, e.g. StarTimes. It is obviously too early to conclude whether African audiences have taken to CCTV as an important news source for the understanding of Africa and Chinese African relations, but there is on the other hand no doubt that the competition for audience attention and thus for cultural and ideological power in the area of TV is fierce.

CCTV is the prime example of Chinese media power in Africa. Its main role is to enter the power game about definitional power in relation to

⁴⁸ See: Kenya Audience Research Snap Shot: Quarterly Tracking Q2 2013 (April - June). (<http://www.share-pdf.com/d83a1ade54334887be1c82b0fd508d96/KARF%20Q2%202013%20NMG.pdf>) Last accessed Aug. 08. 2014)

⁴⁹ Gorfinkel, Lauren, Sandy Joffe & Yu-Shan Wu (2014) "CCTV's Global Outreach: Examining the Audiences of China's 'New Voice' in Africa", *Media International Australia*. June 2014. (<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=353905839712858;res=IELLCC>) (Last accessed Aug. 08. 2014)

presenting a Chinese agenda for understanding Africa, China and international politics. Its main adversaries are obviously the big international news broadcasters CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera. An interesting aspect to its struggle for symbolic power is linked to whether CCTV will be able to really create room for itself in the competition for African publics between the increasing numbers of TV Channels – national, South African, as well as global.

The Narrative of the Search for ‘Soft Power’

As a summing up of the issues raised earlier both as regards the applicability of ‘soft power’ for a power analysis of China’s communications, media and public diplomacy, I will introduce an analytical figure for the understanding of the situation. It builds on the narratological theories of A. J. Greimas and is called the actantial model.⁵⁰ Originally it was launched as a model for understanding structures of narratives in literature. It is, however, also useful as a way into the role of different forms power understood as narratives. The point of departure for this model is that all stories can be structured according to three actantial oppositions, which each form the axes of the narrative. The first is called the axis of desire, which has two components – a subject and an object. The subject desires the object. The second axis is one of power and the elements are helper(s) and opponent(s). The helper (s) assists the subject in achieving the object of desire and the opponent(s) prevent the same from happening. The third axis is one of transmission and consists of sender(s) and receiver(s). The receiver is the element that initiates the quest. Sender elements are often also receiver elements. And subjects may function as receivers.

An actant does not necessarily have to be a character as we usually think of it in stories. Thus an actant may be a person or another sort anthropomorphic being, or it can be a concept. Actants can be individuals, but

⁵⁰ A.J. Greimas introduced this in his seminal book from 1966. GREIMAS, A. J. (1966), *Sémantique structurale*, Paris, (Presses universitaires de France). English version: GREIMAS, A. J. (1983), *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. D. McDowell, R. Schleifer and A. Velie, Lincoln (Nebraska), (University of Nebraska Press).

also collectives like a community or a nation. It is important to distinguish between three different functions. The first is the actant, the second the actor and the third the role. The actor is the concrete character in the story, with a name and psychological or social characteristics. The role is the social function of the actor. A single element – actor and role – may be found in one, several, or even all actantial classes. An actor can be contained in several actants from different classes such as subject and helper or subject and receiver simultaneously. Several actants from the same class may also perform separate actions in the analysis.⁵¹

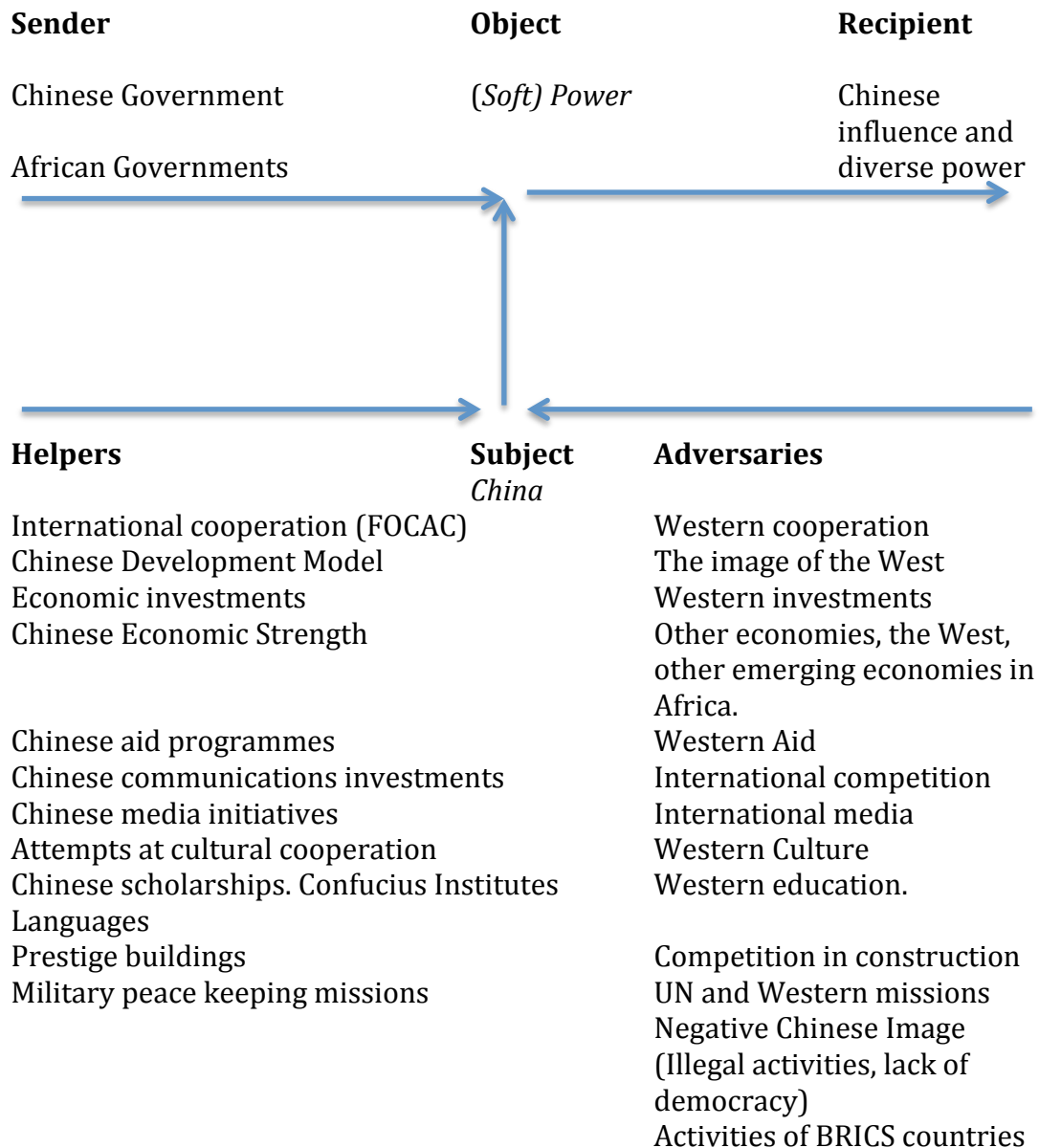
A power analysis of China in Africa is particularly instructive when combined with Michael Manns IEMP model, but also the other three power models can fit. When we apply the analytical model to the narrative of China's desire for 'soft power', China is the subject, and the object is soft power. The recipient is Chinese influence and also its diverse forms of power aided by soft power initiatives. The sender is the Chinese government as well as cooperating African governments. The helpers for this quest are many: FOCAC and other international political cooperation in BRICS etc. contribute to political power. In Hall's model these are examples of 'institutional power'. According to Lukes it would be power based on decisions. The Chinese development model provides ideological and symbolic power. China's economic strength is the core of the country's economic power, not only in Africa, but internationally. Investments in construction projects and investments in extractive industries mainly serve the economic power and to a certain degree political power. Chinese investments in Africa represent a combination of power based on decisions by the state and non-decisions when private enterprises are the inceptants. The latter is particularly the case with smaller Chinese enterprises. Chinese aid programmes are an important element for both for ideological and political power. All of the above

⁵¹ For a fuller introduction to the principles of actantial narrative analyses see: Hébert, Louis. "The Actantial Model". <http://www.signosemio.com/greimas/actantial-model.asp> (Last accessed Oct. 2. 2014). See also: Hébert, Louis (2007) *Dispositifs pour l'analyse des textes et des images*, Limoges, (Presses de l'Université de Limoges).

contribute to what Hall would call 'reputational power'. Communications investments contribute to economic, ideological and political power. Media initiatives, cultural cooperation and Confucius institutes build cultural capital, and are elements in the ideological and political power. Building a positive image through prestige buildings help to increase ideological and political power. These are elements of 'representational power'. The beginning of military peace-keeping missions may be seen as an initial part of military power.

The adversaries may be lined up according to the same form of power perspectives. Western powers have in general more cooperation with Africa than China, and thus more political power. The image of the West in Africa is to a certain degree marked by ambivalence – colonialism, imperialism – but in general it must be said to provide a stronger ideological force than the Chinese model as such. China is economically strong in Africa and it has an economic power that is most impressive. Chinese aid programmes are, however, much smaller than Western ones. The role of Chinese telecommunications companies is one of the areas where China in Africa really provides power almost at the same level as the West. But here also African actors are building strength. When it comes to media power, western media are much stronger than the Chinese attempts to build its media in Africa, not only through TV and radio channels like BBC, but also as regards popular media products, which again contribute to a formidable Western cultural power. American popular culture, for example Black American music, is dominant. While China is expanding its educational presence, there is no doubt that Western universities have much more prestige and power. The advantage of the previous colonial languages over Chinese is formidable. Prestige buildings give China an edge, but also here there is competition. Western military influence in Africa is far more powerful than China's. China also has a negative public image to overcome linked to illegal activities in poaching and illegal logging and perceived corruption. The lack of democracy and inability to cooperate with civil society also contribute to a Chinese ideological power

deficit. Finally the other BRICS countries particularly India are powerful economic adversaries, as are South Korea and Japan.



Challenges

There is no doubt that China is up against formidable challenges when it comes to confronting the hegemony left by the colonial powers in Africa. This emphasises the importance of viewing power in a relational perspective. There is no doubt that the previous colonial powers and the US have an

influence in Africa through language dominance, inherited institutional frameworks – political, educational, artistic, popular culture – that far surpasses any form of cultural and media power strategies that China can launch. But China is also faced with competition from other ‘new’ powers in Africa that in this context have great advantages – India, through its diaspora and long presence on the continent, and Brazil through language and cultural links to Lusophone Africa. In such a relational perspective China’s power strategies may be up against internal contradictions when it comes to harmonising the attempts to wield economic, political and ideological power at the same time.

There are some aspects of soft-power policies that China seems to have problems with and it concerns the relationship to civil society organisations and the independent media. China focuses on dealing with governments and related institutions first, and then businesses, but to a little or no degree with actors in civil society. In African countries political space is expanding, hence the role of China is being increasingly debated and Chinese presence and engagement challenged. Civil-society groups have stood up against Chinese businesses and interests and pressured their governments to intervene in particular aspects of Chinese engagements.⁵² One case is a strike against the Chinese company (China Road and Bridge Corporation) building the ring road around Maputo and the bridge between Maputo and Katembe, because the company had flouted regulations concerning work contracts. The workers got support from The Ministry of Labour, and the company was ordered to issue proper work contracts.⁵³

Another more amusing story is the report that was brought by Xinhua on the march to honour President Guebuza on his 71st Birthday January 18 2014. The news agency wrote: "around 250,000 people, including members and sympathizers of Frelimo are participating in the march, which kicked off from the Eduardo Mondlane Statue to the Independence square in the capital

⁵² See Cooke op.cit.

⁵³ *Domingo* 19 de Janeiro, 2014. p. 19.

city of Maputo." The ironic truth is that even the Mozambican government media did not report that there were more than 3000 people present.

There is more to the Chinese African engagement in media, communication and culture than creating a form of 'soft power' as opposed to 'hard power' or 'economic power'. It must be seen as part and parcel of China's steadily increasing interests in the continent in areas such extractive industries, construction, agriculture, finance, and increased aid. It involves Chinese government agencies as well as private companies and cultural organisations. People can get confused when studying China's involvement in Africa, because it is so multifaceted and fragmented. Nevertheless much of it is underpinned by conspicuous and consistent state support, and thus it also part of a wider power strategy as outlined above. Applying Steven Lukes' categories, it involves clear *decisions* that must be seen as part and parcel of the Chinese multi-layered strategy in relation to building political influence and support for its foreign policy strategies; acquiring raw materials and building a strong economic presence in Africa – soft loans; large-scale construction projects in the form of infrastructure – roads and railways, and prestige buildings – national stadia, parliaments, presidential offices; aid initiatives – health programmes; cultural and educational policies – Confucius institutes.

It also involves the dimension of 'non-decision' and shaping of agendas in that the so-called Beijing consensus and the Chinese model of development with a liberal market economy, state interventions, and an authoritarian political system leading to very high economic growth holds is an important agenda setter for political and development strategy debates. And finally as regards the ideological dimension international Chinese media have expanded greatly in the past decade – not only in Africa – but also to a very great degree on this continent – CCTV; China Radio International; Xinhua with offices in virtually all countries; *China Today*. Linked to this there have been established exchange programmes for African journalists. Chinese popular TV programmes have been broadcast with success in African countries. A kind of

straddling between economic and ideological engagements are the considerable investments that have taken place in communications industries. Huawei and StarTimes are good examples. Now these ventures are in no way comparable to the ideological hegemony wielded by Western media in Africa, they are, however, indications of that the struggle over ideological interpretations is heating up.

When we come to Mann's IEMP model the issue is also a bit fuzzy. Ideologically China has had some influence through its development model and as a provider of aid. But when it comes to knowledge of Chinese ways of life and culture the influence is minimal. This has partly to do with the language issue, but also that popular culture from the US, the former colonial powers, Brazil and India have much more influence than Chinese attempts to enter this arena. As a curious apropos on January 28, 2014, BBC reported that there was a state sponsored initiative to promote China's cultural "soft power" through pop music by heavy sponsoring of the singer Ruhan Jia and trying to turn her into a world star.⁵⁴

As regards economic power there is no doubt about Chinese importance in Africa as well as the rest of the world. When it comes to military power in Africa the China's presence is negligible, though the presence in the international peace keeping forces in Mali as well as Chinese anti-pirate operations outside Somalia may indicate a change. China has important political power in Africa through its close relationships to African governments and as result of its economic influence, but it is up against problems when it comes to the relationship of politics of civil society.

And finally does China possess cultural capital in Africa. Here the question arises whether its economic capital, which is the driving force, has been translated into symbolic power and cultural capital. In Bourdieu's terms there has been little embodiment of Chinese culture in Africa. As regards what Bourdieu calls the objectified state of cultural capital that is in artistic

⁵⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25910722> (Last accessed Feb. 19, 2014)

products of all kinds, China lags behind. Except for practical goods in the area of technological gadgets etc., which definitely are of importance for media and communication. But as regards content China does not figure prominently. Finally except for the Confucius institutes, and some exchange programmes in the area of journalism and research cooperation, China does not have a strong institutional presence when it comes to cultural capital.

As the above actantial analysis indicated the question is how much cultural and symbolic capital China really possesses outside its own borders? There is still a long way to go before China wields the “soft power” so many Chinese politicians and academics foresee, and maybe this has to do with the lack of analytical strength the concept has and the fluffy way it has been employed in Chinese discussions and policy pronouncements. Instead of looking at power in a holistic and integrated manner the debate has fragmented the issue.

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