

# An analysis of China Central Television's Talk Africa Debate Show

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Paper presented at the international conference  
China and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy

CHINA AND AFRICA  
MEDIA, COMMUNICATIONS  
AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY



Organised by the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) (Norway) in cooperation with Institute of  
Journalism and Communication Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences\*

\* Center for Global Media & Communication Studies hosted the conference in association with  
the Kede College of Capital Normal University

10 - 11 September 2014  
Beijing

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# **An analysis of China Central Television's Talk Africa Debate Show<sup>i</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

The current paper seeks to undertake a comprehensive analysis of CCTV Africa's current affairs debate show, *Talk Africa*, with a view to 1) a descriptive explanation of how its topics and episodes morph into themes and frames 2) its emergent patterns and trends and, 3) what we learn about the experts selected as the talk show's guests or interviewees.

In literature, the fact of Chinese media<sup>iii</sup> making a recalibrated comeback into Africa in the mid 2000s after a nearly four-decades of rather muted interest has been reiterated (for instance Banda 2009). *Xinhua News Agency* (XNA), *China Radio International* (CRI, initially known as Radio Peking), the *People's Daily* and *Beijing Review* (initially known as Peking Review and today's publisher of *China Africa* magazine) either had a presence in, or beamed on to the continent from the formative days of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The remaining state-run Chinese media (*China Central Television* – CCTV and *China Daily*) made their maiden forays onto the continent only at dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While it is fair to note that *China Central Television* (CCTV) and *China Daily* may have covered African issues from mainland China for some time, an argument that they trailed their above-mentioned counterparts in pursuing an Afro-focus can be made. For, XNA has had an uninterrupted presence on the continent since 1956 only fluctuating in line with econo-political dynamics in China. CRI and *Beijing Review* have had dedicated African editorial content since the early 1960s, though they have on occasion (such as the Cultural Revolution (1966-1978) period and the immediate post opening up period (roughly 1978-1989)) severely cut back on matters African reporting (Xin 2009:366-367, Wu 2012:12, Liang 2010:267). The *People's Daily* has had a more or less similar trajectory. By contrast, StarTimes, the private but state-linked (Shubo and Ronning 2013:3) digitalization and pay TV firm broached the continent via Rwanda in 2007 (Wekesa and Zhang 2014:4) followed shortly by CCTV Africa entry in 2011<sup>iv</sup> and *China Daily* 2012 – that is less than a decade ago.

Distinctions between the various Chinese media remains work in progress given the often monolithic lumping together of “Chinese media in Africa” as if they operate by a seamless logic or have had a similar historical trajectory on the continent. It is indeed true that the big six Chinese media that operate under the direct purview of PRC's party-state apparatuses have shared goals and orientations. However, this should not be construed to mean that they are mirror images of each other.

It will be sufficient though by no means exhaustive to offer a transient distinction here: the re-launch of XNA and CRI by way of setting up African bureaus in Nairobi, Kenya in 2006 did not elicit as much attention as did the launch of CCTV Africa in January 2012 and China Daily Africa Edition in December 2012 (launched early 2013). What evidence can we adduce to back up such a claim? In their paper on CCTV Africa's adoption to the African mediasphere, Wekesa and Zhang (2014:6-11) found that no less than global media conglomerates such as *CNN*, *BBC*, *Al-Jazeera*, *VoA*, *Deutsche Welle*, *New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *The Guardian* (UK) ... to mention but a few, latched onto the launch of CCTV Africa as a major news story. A quick internet search shows that no such media coverage was directed toward XNA and CRI's re-activation.

An analysis of heightened popular media coverage of CCTV Africa and China Daily Africa maiden insertion into the African mediasphere would further suggest that focus was trained much more on CCTV than China Daily. Going into the factors impelling analysts to focus more on CCTV and less on China Daily is beyond the remit of this paper, thus, a question for further research. Probably following in the footsteps of the interest generated by CCTV's launch and analysis by counterpart Western and African media, China-Africa communications scholars have also exhibited a bias toward CCTV rather than say XNA, CRI, China Daily and China Africa magazine studies. CCTV Africa studies have been undertaken by Wekesa and Zhang (2014); Xiaoling (2013); Gagliardone (2013). After a careful search for academic journal works on studies on Chinese media in Africa, we find that XNA and People's Daily are the two other media institutions specifically analysed (Xin 2009; Liang, 2010), with no explicit studies on China Daily, CRI and StarTimes in accessible literature. It is equally noteworthy that other works that have focused on other China-Africa communications in recent times have used CCTV as a major springboard or plank for their intellectual exertion.

If ever there was a motivation to devolve away from CCTV Africa and diversify to analysis of other Chinese media, the lion's share of CCTV-centricity in academic literature should be it. Yet, borrowing from the tenets of the grounded theory, the fascination with the dazzle of CCTV Africa in popular press and academia would suggest that CCTV is the Chinese media in Africa for which knowledge and information is most sought at this point in time and in advance of widening the net.

### **CCTV Africa in CCTV structure**

CCTV Africa is not a standalone broadcaster but one that is embedded in CCTV's all-encompassing set up, a behemoth which boasts over 18 channels broadcast in Chinese language in mainland China, incorporating CCTV international which beams outside of China to a global audience. CCTV Africa – as part of what we may refer to as the 'international division' – is the Africa region brand just as there are Arabic, Russian, Spanish, French and American regional arms as well as a London bureau that

serves Europe generally. This is an important point to note because narrowcasting on CCTV Africa risks distracting from the fact that it has overt and covert back and forth linkages with what we may refer to as its 'parent' establishment. Indeed, a review of literature suggests a gap in how all CCTV platforms interlink, thus, another potential further research area. It will be enough to point out here that CCTV Africa, as we shall see below, is snagged within CCTV News – the English platform broadcast from Beijing – with its programs appearing at slotted periods among other news, talk and feature programs. If you took a holistic view, you would see CCTV Africa not just as the African regional brand of CCTV but also as part of a suit that include the aforementioned language offerings in addition to twenty other programs among them the self explanatory 'China 24' and 'Asia Today' or features such as 'New Money' and 'Travelogue'. Evident from this fleeting comment on the multifaceted extensions of CCTV is a problem for China-Africa communications scholars. For instance, what insights can we gain from the similarities and differences in CCTV Africa's programming and editorial inclinations as contrasted from content from its American, Arabic, Chinese or Russian offerings?

The challenge with comparative analyses from one CCTV program to another or a multichannel analysis is somewhat lessened when one narrows down to in-house variances – in our case, CCTV Africa – although this is not altogether unproblematic. CCTV Africa has five principle programs namely: *Africa Live* (news and current affairs); *Faces of Africa* (features); *Talk Africa* (topical debate and talk show); *Match Point* (sports) and *Global Business Africa* (economics and finance). Of these five programs, *Africa Live*, *Talk Africa* and *Faces of Africa* have been in existence since the launch of CCTV Africa in January 2012, while both *Global Business Africa* and *Match Point* premiered in July 2014 as enhancements on the business and sports segments of the news bulletin, *Africa Live*. In addition, CCTV Africa occasionally screens special reports and special features which would ideally require a different analytical treatment.

Because it deals with unfolding news events and happenings, *Africa Live* is arguably the lynchpin of CCTV Africa, a fact backed by its being aired twice a day. Intriguingly, an analysis of *Africa Live* has defied earlier suppositions that it would unintelligently serve a propaganda role for Chinese interests in Africa or overly beam positive narratives of Africa; instead commentators have concluded that it is more subtle in burnishing a superlative image of China in Africa than was initially supposed (Wekesa and Zhang, 2014; Gagliardone 2013; Xiaoling 2013). Analysis of the relatively recent *Global Business Africa* program indicates that it pursues an agenda similar to that of *Africa Live*, namely, focus on African economic affairs with only a trickle on China's involvement. With regards to the features program, *Faces of Africa*, Wekesa and Zhang (2014) concluded that it is the one that best exemplifies CCTV's tagline of being 'True Voice for Africa', by dint of exclusively focusing on Africa features without even a single episode diverting to a Chinese or any other nation's topic. A quick viewing of

*Match Africa*, the sports program indicates that it will likely take the format of *Faces of Africa*, namely, exclusive focus on African sports with no single episode bringing in Chinese sports prowess.

### **Talk Africa**

The genre that stands apart in terms of content and inclination is *Talk Africa* the current affairs debate and discussion program. While, like *Faces of Africa*, *Talk Africa* is a deliberate show as the topics and interviewees are selected a priori, the point of departure is that it's mostly based on the hot topics coming out of the news coverage (*Africa Live*). The fact that the editors decide on one topic rather than another from among any number of daily chunks of news events unfolding in Africa or those happening elsewhere but with a link to Africa presents fodder for understanding CCTV's motivations.

The promotional synopsis of CCTV'S *Talk Africa* states that it 'is a 30-minute weekly talk show that discusses current affairs in Africa on the platform of CCTV Africa' (CCTV 2014). It seeks to among other objectives, cover Africa's 'tremendous economic and political growth' with the hindsight of 'negative reports about the continent' thereby 'changing [the] negative perception of Africa by showcasing the continent as a potential investment destination' (CCTV 2014). The framers of the program suggest that it would however not focus on positive portrayal of the continent alone but it would 'provide a platform for open and frank discussions and deep reflection on issues that affect the continent whether political, social or economic' while 'generating 'valuable suggestions, recommendations and solutions that implementers may find useful' (CCTV 2014). The program is hosted by veteran Kenyan journalist Beatrice Marshall.

Against the above background, the question to pose is: What therefore are the emerging themes, patterns that can be gleaned from a content analysis of CCTV Africa's *Talk Africa*?

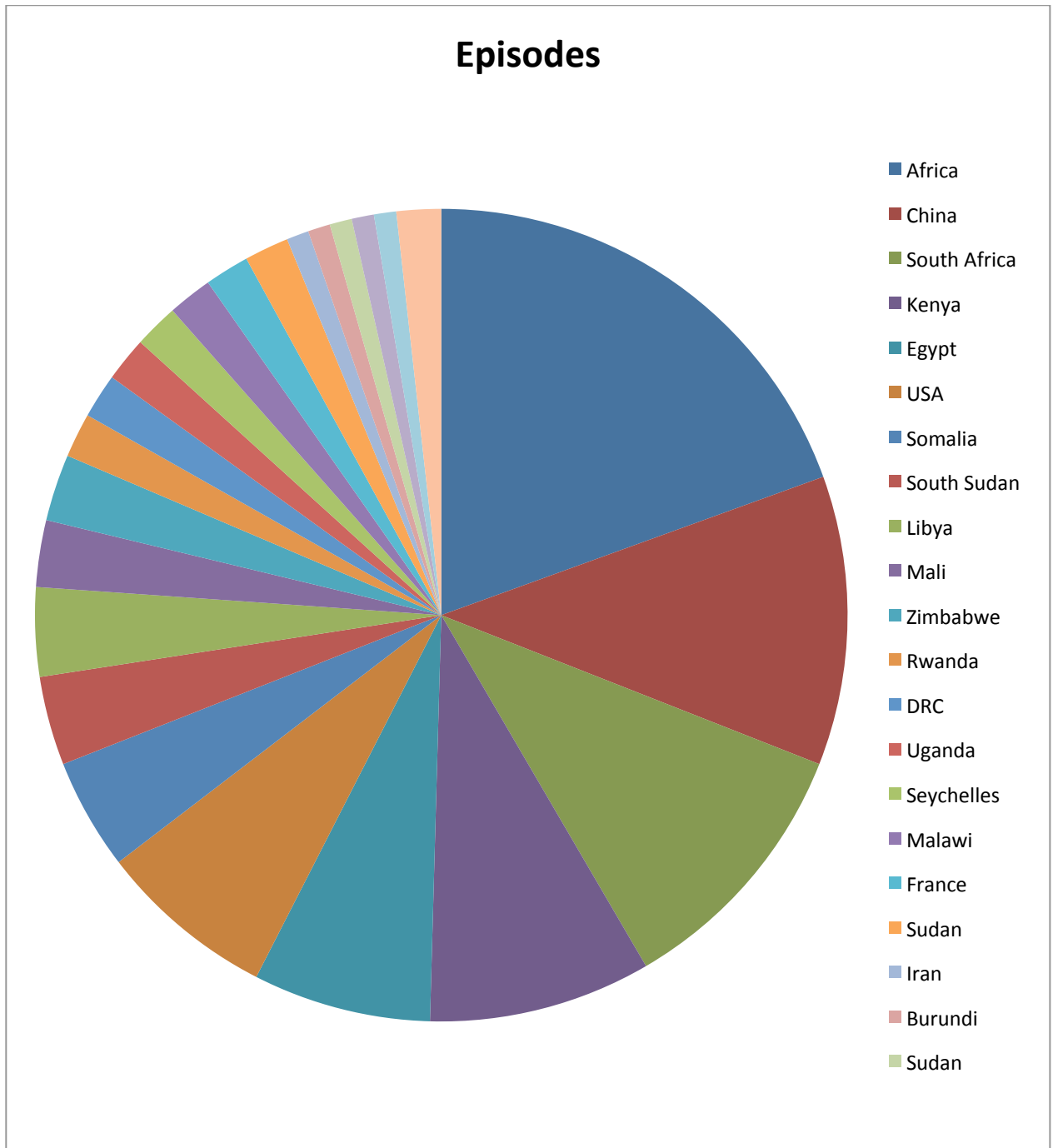
### **Data and content analysis**

To help us explain *Talk Africa* with a measure of incisiveness, we used a content analysis-cum-discourse analysis in a bid to peel off the layers that constitute the programs' nearly three years of broadcasting. We use Kerlinger's definition as quoted by Wimmer and Dominick (2000:135) thus: Content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables".

We collected all the 113 episodes accessible in the online archives of *Talk Africa* aired from July 8 2012 to August 31 2014. These episodes are therefore our main units of analysis. These episodes represent the complete field of coverage of *Talk Africa* since inception, thus assuring the external

validity of the current work. Internal validity is achieved by undertaking extensive analysis of the units internally and from one unit to another.

Patterns of coverage: What is the frequency of coverage of nations?



Themes related to 21 countries and Africa (which we here consider a standalone entity) was covered. We can conclude that CCTV Africa indeed sees Africa as “one place” given that the editors allocated 19 percent or 22 episodes – the highest – to Africa-wide topics. After “collective Africa”, China comes second with an 11 percent frequency, closely followed by South Africa with 10.6 percent. Kenya has 8 percent followed by Egypt at 7 percent. The US is the sixth most debated nation at 4 percent followed by Somalia, Libya and South Sudan in that order. Rather insignificant in terms of frequency is debate on topics relating to Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Malawi, Ghana, Burundi and Sudan all of which appear thrice, twice or just once. Interesting to note is the inclusion of France and Iran, which join China and USA as the only four non-African countries that are discussed.

### **Media Frames and Countries**

Our first interest is to follow up on the question as to why and how Africa, China, South Africa, Kenya, Egypt and USA attract higher time allocation than the rest. Drawing on Wekesa and Zhang’s (2014:20-23) use of the news/media framing as an analytical concept for the study of CCTV Africa, we took the approach of slotting the country-by-country analysis into ‘economics, conflict and geopolitics’ frames. But before we return to the selection of conflict and economic frames, it is well to further comment albeit briefly on media framing.

We find framing a useful concept for the current paper because, as seminally defined by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974, it calls to mind its close and constitutive concepts of classification, organization and schema that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify and label’ experiences (Pan and Kociski 1993:56). Among the many variations of definitions of media framing, we find the following particularly attuned to this study: ‘organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world’ (Reese 2001: 11).

Communication scholars of the framing persuasion hold that two of the most common frames in media texts are economic consequences (simply economics in our case) and conflict frames. In short, economics is here understood not to mean econometrics but as a short-hand for ‘as a preoccupation with the bottom line, profit and loss’ while conflict is not necessarily situations of warfare (although war is not precluded) but ‘the disagreement between individuals, institutions, or countries and emphasize points of divergence between conflicting parties’ (de Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001). We hasten to add that the conflict frame is not only about disagreements, but even when a problem is on the way to being resolved, it still remains within the conflict frame.



In addition to conflict and economic frames, we offer a third frame – geopolitics. Wekesa and Zhang (2014:20) operationalized the geopolitical frame as a frame that ‘relates to topics on relations between African nations and international players, be they other nations and regions or global institution’.

## **Africa**

Although our scheme settles for geopolitics, economics and conflict as the three key analytical frames, an amendment has to be made with respect to the debating of Africa-wide issues. This is precisely because “Africa” presupposes geopolitics in the sense that the discussion topic is one that addresses an issue between many nation-states. Thus, it is more useful to dispense with the geopolitical frame and focus only on the economic and conflict frames in the specific case of Africa.

A discourse analysis based on the salience of either the economic or conflict frame indicates that the topics are framed overwhelmingly towards the economic than the conflict frame. Of the 22 episodes, 17 steer towards economics while 5 tend towards conflict. Obviously some of the episodes bear an interplay between economic and conflict frames. However, based on the concept of salience, that is, more sentiment, tone and argument towards one side rather than the other, it can be concluded that the anchor – Beatrice Marshall – and her guests see Africa more from economic prisms and less from conflict prisms.

On the economic continuum, a sample of the episodes would include: *New face, same problems* (5/8/2012) which is a debate surrounding the ascendancy of South African Nkosasna Dlamini-Zuma to the position of African Union Commission chairpersonship replacing Gabonese Jean Ping; *Can Africa trade with Africa?* (5/5/2013) during which the host laments the many hurdles that militate against intra-Africa trade and *Africa’s bulging cities* (3/8/2014) based on the host’s interview with a senior UN-Habitat official on the basis of a report warning of an urban demographic time bomb as many African abandon rural homes and cram into informal settlements in cities. *Africa Rising: Myth or fact* (13/1/13) sees discussants dichotomise the afro-pessimism versus afro-optimism debate.

The most compelling conflict framed debates are those in which the host and her guests seek to see Islamic fundamentalism-inspired terrorism in places like Somalia, Nigeria, Mali and Libya as a continental rather than single-country problem. Peacekeeping and the dilemma of democratic elections as both a bone and bane of the continent are also salient threads in the conflict frame.

A key point to note is that most of the Africa-themed talk shows are shot on location at the African Union during head of state and government jamborees. Apart from CCTV Africa boasting the necessary resources to send crew to Addis Ababa to cover these events the other point of note is that CCTV Africa is able to line up interviewees in the top echelons of the African Union.

In the final analysis, the Africa dimension of *Talk Africa* makes an effort to shine a light on the brighter side of things over Africa's many challenges in what some have labelled CCTV's positive or constructive journalism.

## **China**

As with the "Africa" shows, all the 13 episodes focused on China naturally fall into the geopolitical category, not merely because the China-Africa theme is ipso facto geopolitical, but doubly because the interviewees assess China's presence on the African continent *vis-à-vis* the so-called "traditional partners", most notably, the US.

We mentioned above that talk shows are bound to be selected in a much more deliberate way than the case is with straight news coverage. It is with the China-related topics that this pattern of conscious selection is most evident. We here capture the episodes; *Change of guard in China* (18/11/2012) and *Change of guard in China* (3/3/2013) in the exact way they are labelled to demonstrate that they were selected to coincide with the two-phase passing of party and state political power from former president Hu Jintao to current leader Xi Jinping.

The second set of episodes run back-to-back and relate to the March 2013 visit by then newly elected president Xi's visit to Africa (*President Xi Jinping visits Africa* (24/3/2013); *Economic and political implications of President Xi's African tour* (7/4/2013)). The third set of episodes (five in total) also runs consecutively on the occasion of Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Africa: *Chinese premiers visit to Africa* (4/5/2014; 6/5/2014; 9/5/2014; 12/5/2014; 18/5/2014).

Between them, the above three sets of episodes account for slightly over half of the China talk shows with the mix of African and Chinese interviewees in studio in the Nairobi and Beijing studio concurring about the benefits of China-Africa relations on those occasions. The interesting point to note is that in one of the shows, Premier Li is himself a guest at the Nairobi studios, in coverage replete with pomp and ceremony. On the occasion of Premier Li's appearance as a studio guest, two discussion show conventions are breached: he speaks in Chinese language and his words translated and there is no real engagement with the anchor, rather he delivers a speech.

All the China talk shows are framed in a heavily economic frame, emphasizing the benefits for Africa (and secondarily China). The two conflict frame topics that relate to China are indeed a salutary in that they are about China's role in peacekeeping in places such as Sudan, Liberia and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Two points are worth noting here. One is that whilst non-China shows demonstrate dissonance and even outright disagreements within certain limits, all but one of the shows that relate to China is

thumbs up for the image of China. Indeed even the exceptional show (*China in Africa* 30/9/12) does not necessarily take an entirely negative turn, but it differs from the others in the sense that one of the guests (Alfredo Hengari, an analyst at South African Institute of International Affairs) pushes for African agency in the relations rather than waiting for Chinese benevolence. Secondly, at only 13 episodes out of a total of 113 shows and notwithstanding the fact that China has the highest frequency, it is clear that CCTV Africa has strategically avoided overplaying China topics until and unless there is a momentous development in China or a high level visit is on the cards.

### **South Africa**

At first glance, South Africa seems to have a high frequency of debate. On closer examination however, it becomes evident that a substantial number of episodes relate to former president Nelson Mandela during his illness (*Get well Madiba* 23/6/2013); birthday which is celebrated as UN peace day (*Happy Mandela day* 21/7/2013) and eventual passing (*Nelson Mandela 1918-2013*, 8/12/2013; *Fare thee well "Madiba"* 15/12/2013).

We would place the episodes relating to Mandela in the geopolitics frame for three reasons 1) the fact of his being cast as a global icon rather than merely a South African national a fact bolstered by the fact that interviewees are multi-national rather than merely South African; 2) the fact that two episodes heavily rely on the global-nature of Mandela's funeral with speeches by global leaders – including Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao – taking the bulk of show-time. If the Mandela-as-global-icon factor is considered, episodes relating to South Africa plummet from 12 to 8, that is, below the number of shows dedicated to Kenya and at par with shows tackling Egyptian and American issues.

Considered alongside Mandela-primed topics, two other geopolitical frames (*South Africa's soft power in Africa* (28/4/13); *Tit-for-tat diplomacy* 16/3/2014) make geopolitics more preponderant than the economic and conflict frames. However, while the Mandela episodes mould "soft power" for South Africa, the remaining two geopolitical frames are less explicitly so, with the former episode revolving around positive and negative factors in the shift in South Africa's foreign policy toward Africa while the latter relates to a diplomatic row between South Africa and Rwanda.

Of the remaining six episodes four are an interplay between economic and conflict frames based as they are on South Africa fractious labour and mining conflicts (*South Africa Marikana mine tragedy* 20/8/2012; *South Africa at crossroads* 16/9/2012; *South Africa labour standoff* 8/9/2013; *Illegal mining in South Africa* 23/2/2014). Here we see a liberal critique on issues as diverse as economic inequality and marginalization and bad governance, hardly positive for South Africa's image. What perhaps ameliorates the situation is the interview with minister in The Presidency Jeffrey Thamsanqa

Radebe during which salience is placed on forward looking economic plans ahead after the re-election of President Jacob Zuma (*Zuma's transition plan 15/6/2014*).

From the foregoing, CCTV Africa neither shies away from handling controversial issues nor does it seek to burnish a gloss over these issues in the tradition of sunshine journalism. This stands in contrast to debates relating to China, as we saw above, which are, far from being non-controversial in nature, actually state-related and framed optimistically. A parallel we can draw between China and South Africa debates is that when a high level official is interviewed (the case of premier Li Keqiang and the South African minister above), the framing takes a turn for the upward-looking.

## **Kenya**

The overwhelming majority of Kenyan episodes are about the country's electioneering and political leadership (*Kenyan presidential elections 17/2/2013; Kenya elects new President 10/3/2013; Political transition in Kenya 17/3/2013; Kenya change of guard 14/4/2013; President Kenyatta lays it bare 9/6/2013*). On the surface, these episodes may seem domestic to Kenya and therefore not worth the extensive coverage by a CCTV Africa that conceives of itself as a continental broadcaster. Closer examination reveals the geopolitical underpinnings informing this selection in that the presidential candidacy of Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto (and their eventual triumph at the ballot) was mired by their indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity. Indeed the matter of ICC cases is further bolstered by two more episodes (*Kenyan cases big test for ICC 15/9/2013 and Kenyan cases expose ICC soft underbelly 20/10/2013*). This brings the total number of geopolitical-conflict frames to 7 out of a total of 9.

Discourse analysis on how this hot topic within and without Kenya is debated shows a proclivity towards hosting interviewees supportive or opposed to the arraignment of the Kenyan president and his deputy at the Hague-based ICC. These balanced episodes are five and are underlined by vibrant debate bordering on the emotional. Two episodes are however decidedly those opposed to the ICC cases. One is an interview with President Kenyatta himself and the other being by two anti-Rome Statutes international activists on the sidelines of an African Union special conference during which African leaders more or less railed at the international community (read the West) for ostensibly targeting African leaders with sanctions and international legal action. While these episodes are decidedly geopolitical, they also fall in the conflict frame. The other conflict framed episode is the unpacking of factors fuelling terrorism based on an attack on a shopping mall in Nairobi while the last conflict episode is fairly innocuous given that it is about the passing of a law to relax the practice of polygamy in Kenya.

We can conclude that as in the case of South Africa's labour and mining challenges, CCTV Africa demonstrates an ability to discuss hot-button issues and does not necessarily seek out experts who would give countries such as Kenya a sanitized image. Equally, we can conclude that as in the case with South Africa, interviews with an official as high up as the president provides a countervailing voice on geopolitical issues.

It is however quite interesting that Kenya should hog so much debate-time relative other countries in similar and sometimes more dire need for public debate on challenges. The inclusion of a matter as inane (from an Africa-wide perspective) as family law goes further to bolster the view that Kenya perhaps enjoys more CCTV Africa airtime than its African counterparts on account of CCTV Africa's location in Nairobi, the capital.

## USA

It goes to confirm the inevitability of the US as an influential power that it should be the fifth most debated country on CCTV Africa. Even more significant is the fact that US episodes – quite unlike other countries in the top quartile – are much more discursive and diverse. This far in the current analysis, we have seen that the coalesced set of Africa-wide episodes revolve around the Africa Union meetings; China episodes relate to leadership transition and high level visits; those dealing with South Africa revolve around the theme of unrest in the labour and mining while those about Kenya are about presidential elections and the question of the International Criminal Court. By contrast, no one of the eight US-primed topics handles a single event or issue. All the episodes are however unified by the frame in which they fall, geopolitics, and within this mega-frame, interplay of economics and conflict.

How does China feature in US-primed topics? The first point of consideration is the whole theme of China-US competition for the heart and soul of Africa. Three of the episodes are about the visits to Africa by former secretary state Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama (*Storm over Hillary Clinton's Africa trip* 12/8/12; *Obama returns to Africa* 30/6/13). It is during debates on this visit that we see the guests take the perspective that the US is intensifying interest in Africa as a means of challenging China's pole position as the continent's most important economic partner, a theme repeated in yet another episode in which the US hosted African heads of state (*US-Africa summit* 10/8/14). Another episode in which the US (and NATO) comes under heavy criticism relates to its 2011 military intervention in Libya, an intervention seen as having led to the ongoing (as of this writing) turmoil in the Arab Maghreb (*US 'cowboy' diplomacy in Libya* 29/6/14). Taken together with two other episodes critical of the US ("*I have a dream*" speech lives on 1/9/13; *US military footprints in Africa* 20/1/13) we can conclude that debates on the US have little "soft power" for the US but inclined to subtly shower up China's image as a potential force for good on the continent. Probably

the two episodes during which the interviewees are not in a US-bashing position are one where a philanthropic guest is interviewed and the one about the re-election of President Barack Obama.

## **Egypt**

It is with Egypt that we begin to see debates focussing on political turmoil as the country went through the political after-shocks of the so-called Arab Spring. All but one of the seven Egypt episodes are about the violence accompanying power struggles (*Egypt under Morsi* 9/9/12; *What next for Egypt?* 7/7/13; *Egypt in delicate transition* 14/7/13; *The Morsi trial* 10/11/13; *Egypt back to the ballot* 27/4/14; *Sisi wins landslide* 1/6/14). All these episodes fall in the conflict frame, as does the only other non-Egypt-specific show (*Row over the Nile* 28/7/13), during which high level officials from Ethiopia, South Sudan and an expert from Egypt converge on the long standing River Nile riparian rights topic.

Evidently, the Egyptian political developments, just as in the case of the Kenyan election, take a geopolitical angle with the guests taking differing standpoints on matters such as the place of Egypt in the Arab/Middle East world and the role of the US' role in the unfolding developments. The geopolitical nature of the debates can also be seen in the selection of interviewees, coming as they do from Washington, Beijing, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Beirut and Cairo.

Notably, no single episode on Egypt falls in an economic frame category but as with the South African and Kenyan episodes, the discussions are freewheeling enough for us to conclude that they are primed for open debate rather than glossing over matters.

## **Somalia, Libya, South Sudan, DRC**

The tenor of armed conflicts rises substantially with Somalia's five episodes; Libya's four episodes (NATO intervention, the killing of Muamar Gaddafi and subsequent civil war); South Sudan's four (internal civil war and conflict with Sudan); DRC's two (eastern Congo civil war sucking in Rwanda and Uganda) and Mali's two (the drama of Tuareg rebel campaign – in addition one more on France's military intervention). Looked at in addition to Egypt's eight episodes, these brings the total number of armed-conflict-inspired discussions to a total of 22 episodes. Although perhaps necessitating further future research, we see that most of the armed-conflict episodes relate to what has been variously referred to as Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic extremism; insurgency and terrorism among other labels.

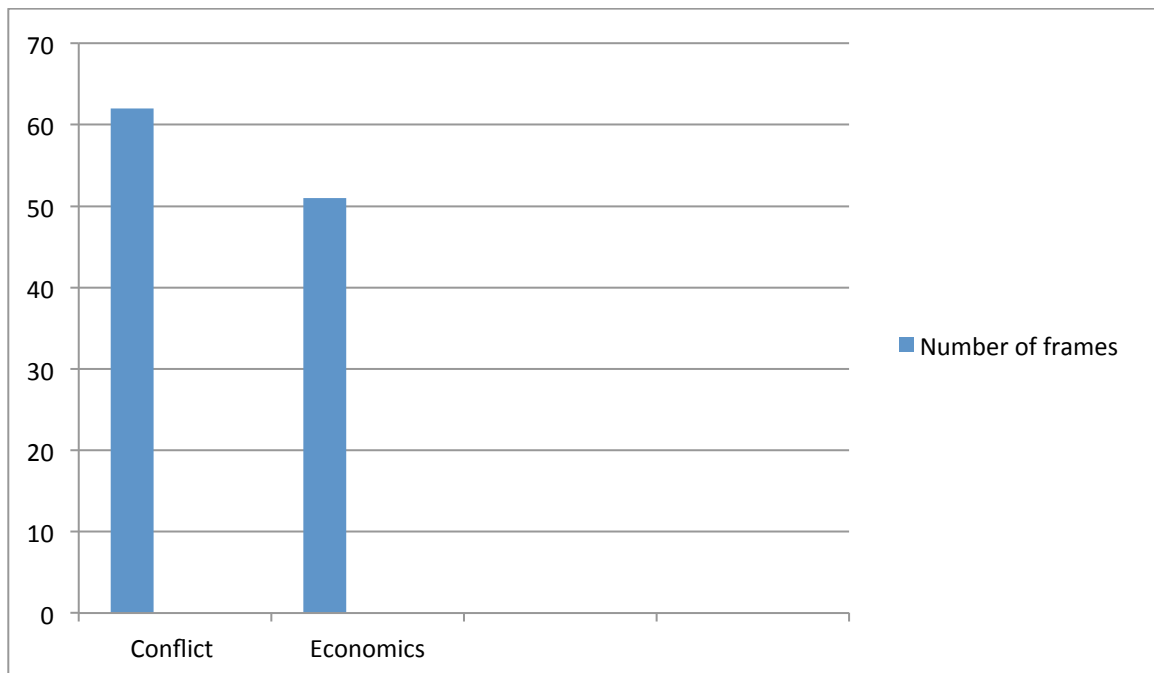
## **Conflict versus economic frames**

As saw above in the cases of Africa, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Libya, South Sudan, DRC, Mali and as we shall further illuminate graphically below, the salience is very much on conflict rather than

economic framing. Further details that we can adduce to uphold *Talk Africa's* framers' penchant for conflict framing can be seen in an end of year round up show (moments of the year in Africa 12/30/12) in which conflict episodes relating to situations in the fore-mentioned countries are by far predominant compared to economic frames.

It is worthwhile pointing out that in terms of using the framing approach, our categorization scheme is such that every single episode or unit of analysis must fall in either the conflict or economic frame in order to achieve parsimony and mutual exclusivity. As an exemplification, episodes to do with former South African President Nelson Mandela's illness and eventual death may appear to be neutral, that is, they appear not to fall in the economic or conflict frame. However, we determine them more economic than conflict because of the absence of points of disagreement. Analogously, units of analysis to do with the South African labour unrest may seem to be more in the economic category than in the conflict frame. However, in our coding scheme, we put the labour unrest episodes in the conflict frame because the points of disagreement are more salient than economic considerations of profit and loss. Moreover the geopolitics frame is not only prominent throughout the content but it appears to imbue just about every episode, thus we determine that it serves a frame interplay function than it is a standalone frame. We therefore leave out geopolitical frame from the frame measurement.

On the basis of the definition and coding scheme above, we find that conflict frames are more preponderant than economic frames, although not with a huge margin.



Further, themes in the conflict frame split into various strands and forms of conflict. It is evident from the episodes that ongoing or contemporaneous political turmoil turning into full blown war or street skirmishes and/or extensive instability attracts much more debate than conflicts of the non-armed-conflict variety. The conflicts of non-armed variety include schisms between states and conflicts based on historical happenings such as the commemoration of the 1994 Rwanda genocide or the Kenyan post election clashes of 2007/2008 winding into International Criminal Court prosecutions to mention but two. The armed-conflict frames stand at 20 out of 62 episodes while the non-armed conflict frames, which can be split even further collectively account for 42 episodes. Space does not allow for a more nuanced analysis of armed versus non-armed conflict coverage but suffice it to point out that armed-conflict episodes carry the day on the conflict framing end of the category.

When looking out for thematic threads, it is evident that the conflict frame shows much more decipherable patterns than does the economic frame. In other words, the economic frame shows much less variety in its topics and therefore less thematic or topical coherence in comparison to the conflict frame. Nonetheless, a delineable pattern in economic frame category is that China-related episodes are predominant and positive, but that they also tend towards the 'Africa Rising' theme, one in which the continent, either as a whole or individual nations (for instance Ethiopia and Seychelles) is seen to be on an optimistic growth path.

### **China in other countries**

In addition to media framing approaches that clearly indicate that China is conceived of in the debates from a positive-economic dimension than a negative-conflict dimension, a key realization is that China makes its way into other episodes that are not China-specific. In addition to the 13 exclusively China-primed episodes, a content analysis of the one-year period between August 2014 and August 2013<sup>v</sup> shows that China is inserted into 20 other episodes that are not expressly China-related (that is, episodes that focus on other countries). This insertion is perhaps an indication of the subtle strategy in which CCTV's *Talk Africa* advertently or inadvertently does public diplomacy on behalf of China in furtherance of the objectives for which it was established. Some examples include episodes in which former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton is criticized by interviewees for making the following indirect jab at China during a lecture in Senegal in August 2012: 'The days of having outsiders come and extract the wealth of Africa for themselves leaving nothing or very little behind should be over in the twenty first century'.

As far as inclusion of China in non-China-primed episodes is concerned, we can make out journalistic strategies deployed in the news production process. The main strategy is what media scholars refer to variously as agenda setting, priming and framing as seen in background reports foregrounding the



debates, in which a topic seemingly unrelated with China begins with or captures China in its course. An illustration would be *Ebola crisis* (17/08/14) which begins with shots showing a China Air aeroplane taxing at airports in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone with medical supplies and personnel meant to assist these countries in their battle against the deadly virus. The aeroplane's motion on the runway is accompanied with the voice over of Katerina Vittozzi, CCTV Africa correspondent in Liberia explaining how China is not only assisting the three countries but also the fact that China has been sending medical teams to Africa for a long time. The three minute background report that sets the stage for discussions winds up with an interview with Zhang Yue, Chinese ambassador to Liberia extolling the assistance along solidarity lines followed by Liberian foreign minister Sylvester Grigsby expressing gratitude for the assistance. The discussion is followed by a Chinese medical expert – Liu Xiayun – providing further perspectives on Chinese “medical diplomacy” to Africa before the debate proper proceeds with a Kenyan medic and an African activist based in Washington mostly lamenting Africa's burden of disease as guided by the anchor.

In another “agenda setting” example, the anchor/host, Beatrice Marshall, opens the episode with following discourse: ‘critics are reeling out all sorts of tags to refer to China's presence in Africa ... scramble for Africa, neo-imperialism, neo-colonialism, yellow peril ... but is there substance in the attacks’. These two examples should suffice, but it is worth pointing out that these cues via background reports at the beginning or in the course of the shows imply an effort by the producers to inculcate a Chinese perspective in the shows.

### **High level guests**

Equally important is the fact of the comparatively high number of Beatrice Marshall, the anchor's, exclusive interviews with African presidents: Sudan's Hassan Omar El-Bashir; South Sudan's Salva Kiir Maryadit; Ghana's John Dramani Mahama; Burundi's Pierre Nkurunziza; Somalia's Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud; Kenya's Uhuru Kenyatta; Nigeria's Goodluck Jonathan; Gabon's Omar Bongo Odimba; Malawi's Joyce Banda and Peter Mutharika and Seychelles's James Michel<sup>vi</sup>. The number of presidential interviews is a feat given that securing presidential interviews is often a difficult journalistic task. In addition, there is quite a good number of interviews with high ranking officials at the levels of diplomats and statesmen including former UN secretary general Koffi Annan, Achim Steiner, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Executive Director and former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo to mention but three. Contingent on the fact of CCTV Africa securing these top-level-official-guests, often in their state houses/palaces, we make the finding that most of these prized interviewees have a kind word for China's role in their countries or the continent at large. Interestingly, a close textual analysis shows that in some instances, the high level guests

speak in favour of China on their own volition but when they don't; the anchor is more likely than not to directly or indirectly nudge them towards their commenting on China.

### **Expert discussants**

Crucially, the profile of experts selected to discuss current affairs issues provides a link between *Talk Africa* – a journalistic platform – with other social sciences. Over the period July 8 2012 to August 31 2014 CCTV *Talk Africa* sought out the views and opinions of 161 experts from across the world and across the 113 episodes. Even without the benefit of a comparative analysis with other global and African broadcasters, this goes to confirm CCTV Africa's human, financial and technological resource prowess given that a number of broadcasters have, to the contrary, been cutting back on such a global news production ventures.

Certain patterns that emerge when one considers the experts invited to share views on this public sphere arena. The bulk of the experts are from universities and think tanks in and out of Africa who join the debates through studio, video and teleconferencing. Followers of the China-Africa academic field would recognize intellectuals who have made intellectual contributions to the field. Senegalese Adama Gaye, author of '*China-Africa, the Dragon and the Ostrich*' is for instance takes a stand supportive of China on the occasion of former US secretary of state's criticism of China. Gaye's position is interesting in that when he appears on CCTV, he is inclined to support China-Africa relations, but an online investigation on his appearance on other platforms such as France 24 (26/03/2013) shows that he is more sophisticated – positive on some points and (especially) negative on others. The other China-Africa scholars who give nuanced viewpoints to the China-Africa relations during diverse periods and topics include Johns Hopkins University professor Deborah Brautigam and George Washington University professor for African ambassador David Shinn whose books, *The Dragon's Gift* (2009) and *China in Africa* (2012) respectively, have become must-reads for students of Sino-Africa engagements. The other interviewees who have written on China-Africa issues include Hannah Endiger from Frontier Advisory, the Johannesburg consultancy that majors in China-Africa business and Lu Jinghao who worked at the same firm and has contributed a paper showing stereotypes online by Chinese netizens based in Africa (Lu and Cobus 2013). The other China-Africa expert is Africa Policy Centre's Peter Kagwanja who has written on Chinese hard power and soft power in Africa. Former Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe, South Africa who is also former Chinese envoy on African Affairs would fall in the category of China-Africa intellectuals by dint of his many works in the field as well as his current adjunct lecturer position on African studies and Peking University. He Wenping, the director of African studies at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences appears 5 times on China-related shows but a quick peep into the other CCTV Africa genres shows that she is the outstanding voice on Chinese perspectives on Africa. A further observation is that all

the 11 Chinese experts are associated with state-run think tanks or entities in contrast to experts from other countries who are more likely to be affiliated with semi-autonomous universities or “independent”<sup>vii</sup> think tanks of which the fairly familiar Chatham House of UK and Institute of Security Studies of South Africa contribute several experts especially on matters peace and security. Equally significant to note that Chinese experts are called in to discuss topics relating to China and hardly on themes that devolve away from China issues.

28 of the 161 interviewees appear more than one time, an indication that their viewpoints are perhaps more sought after than the rest, notwithstanding other potential constraining factors such as the impossibility of undertaking high-level interviews frequently. Of the 28, we elect to focus on those selected four or more times with a view to understanding their profiles; the topics for which they are selected to proffer perspectives and the consistency of their selection. Our focus on those who appears four or more times is merely in the interest of space but future research could indeed seek other variables for analyses on the expert selection.

Professor Israel Kodiaga, a director with the African Centre for International Studies is the most frequent discussant appearing 8 times, all of them at the CCTV Africa Nairobi studios. We can speculate that his appearances are logistically convenient in that he is based in Nairobi and a studio guest is standard practice in the talk shows’ conventions. However, a further loose discourse analysis would suggest that he is selected because of the optimistic view he takes on matters to do with China-Africa relations. Indeed in one episode (China in Africa 30/9/12), he is the lynchpin against counterpoints by another frequent interviewee, Alfredo Hengari (appearing 5 times), who treats China’s presence in Africa with both pessimism and optimistic. Indeed Hengari (researcher at South Africa Institute of International Affairs) comes across as favoured by the guest booking team probably because of his insistence on African agency in Africa’s development, a perspective shared by other experts who take stock of Africa’s economic resurgence while pointing out the continent’s constraints and failures.

Sayed Mohamad Marandi is a professor of American studies at Tehran University, Iran, who comes on board via videoconferencing on three occasions from Tehran (and once from Beirut), to discuss North Africa and Middle East Affairs. His appearance between July 2012 and June 2014 leaves no doubt that he is critical of the role of the US and the West in Iranian, Egypt and Libyan affairs including economic sanctions and military action. To discuss the challenges of North Africa and Middle East, Marandi is often joined by Peter Kagwanja, president of Africa Policy Centre and Khaled Mozoud Dawoud, an Egyptian commentator and Edmund Ghareeb, a Washington analyst, all of them concurring on the a putative Western meddling in the region. This perspective may have no

direct bearing on Chinese interests, but the point is that China's policy of non-interference in the affairs in the sovereignty of African countries can be inferred.

In this brief summary of the leading experts by number of appearance, we can conclude that the most favoured analysts are those that direct their ire at the US and the West.

### **Further research**

The gist of this paper has been to 1) describe *Talk Africa's* topics and episodes and their attendant themes and frames 2) decipher emergent patterns and trends and, 3) comment on selection of expert-discussants. Future research could take a more theoretical approach in a bid to make sense of what all these tropes mean. For instance, research could focus on how the findings of this paper can be interpreted from the perspective of CCTV as a Chinese foreign policy instrument. This would be a media diplomacy approach in which states use the media for instance 'to express interest in negotiation, to build confidence, and to mobilize public support for agreements' (Gilboa 2002: 741).

A further concluding point to make is that CCTV Africa's *Talk Africa* is but a small fraction of an extensive network. How does *Talk Africa* blend with other CCTV Africa programs; in turn, how does CCTV fit in with other CCTV international programs and channels; furthermore, what picture emerges when we assess CCTV's output alongside other Chinese electronic and print media outlets; ultimately how can we view the Chinese state-party "media going out" strategy of which *Talk Africa* is a small part against Chinese political, economic and cultural interests in Africa? Exploring these production-cum-reception threads suggests that further research could take a political economy of communication perspective. This could go a long way in explicating the power relations, negotiations and contestations undergirding Chinese media in Africa. We would argue that the nature of *Talk Africa* as a deliberate and ideologically loaded program provides an entry point, in the words of Robert Merton, a middle range pathway, into wider considerations. This is indeed work in progress.

### **Primary content source**

CCTV Africa: <http://cctv.cntv.cn/lm/cctvafrica/>, accessed between July 2 2014 and October 10 2014

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<sup>i</sup> This paper is based on the author's presentation at the China and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy conference in Beijing, September 10-11 2014, organized by Chr. Michelsen Institute (Norway), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Kede College of Capital Normal University

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<sup>iii</sup> By Chinese media we here mean Chinese media directly under the purview of the state-party rather than other Chinese media that have a looser association with the party-state

<sup>iv</sup> Evidence suggests CCTV signed up correspondents to cover South Africa in 2011, which should be distinguished from the commencement of CCTV Africa broadcasts in early 2012

<sup>v</sup> This is a textual analysis of a linear sample period and further research could go the full length to undertake textual analysis of more episodes

<sup>vi</sup> The author's observation is that some of the earlier presidential interviews including those on the late Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni and Rwanda's Paul Kagame may not be in the electronic archives

<sup>vii</sup> Independent is a relative term here given the political economy perspective that institutions are products of the society in which they operate, which societies are in turn linked to states