

CMI REPORT

R 2013: 2

China in Africa: Soft power, media perceptions and a pan-developing identity

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April 2013

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Abstract

China is currently implementing a full-fledged ‘Going ,Global’ strategy, particularly in Africa. Chinese engagement on the continent is all pervasive and spearheaded by summit conferences and flanked by a surge of Chinese state-own media houses and state-funded cultural institutions. This report seeks to contextualize the Chinese media and culture policies and to examine their ideological constituents. An important component of ‘soft power’ as understood by Chinese policymakers is to utilize non-governmental forces, and build citizen diplomacy. Thus mobilizing and educating the Chinese about the strategic importance of Africa has been on the government’s agenda. The report discriminates between various narratives on China-Africa relations and issues emerging from the Chinese press from 2002 to 2011. The conclusion drawn from examining this half-orchestrated, half freestyle media chorus is that, China has been employing domestic media to engage public support to buttress its expansion in Africa. Thus to build a positive image of Africa in China must be seen as a component of the mainly economic Chinese relations with Africa.

Introduction

The discussion on *Soft Power* in China can be dated back to 1992, the year that Joseph Nye's book (1990) *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* was translated into Chinese under the title *Can the United States Lead the World*. Wang Hu-Ning, a leading political scientist and one of major brainpowers of Jiang Ze-Min,¹ sparked Chinese academia's interest on this concept with his elaboration in a seminal article "Soft Power: Culture as a form of national power". He argues that unlike hard power soft power is non-monopolistic and diffusive. It cannot be monopolised by the nation-state or state-corporations. Culture and information can only be disseminated in order to provide incremental power over the receiver². To localize the concept and to graft it to "the Marxist socialist theories of Chinese characteristics"³ Chinese academia engaged in a nearly collective effort to distinguish American soft power, which they labelled as hegemonic assimilation and cultural imperialism, from a Chinese soft power, which they characterized as by no means aggressive but generically reflexive and benign.⁴ That being said, Chinese scholars urge that restrictions on civil society to be lifted, since China's lack of voluntary associations and NGOs has drastically hindered the development of citizen diplomacy that can serve as a critical agency in building up China's soft power⁵.

One characteristic of soft power is that it enlists the power of the society as opposed to that of the state. Therefore the reaction from the Chinese general public and the media is of crucial importance. This paper ends by examining the role of Chinese media in interpreting China's Africa strategies

The all-pervasive commitment

There are mainly three tiers of Chinese actors involved in Africa: the central government, provincial governments and big Chinese based multi-national companies. There is a major transition in China's Africa investments from being government-driven to corporate-driven, in which private companies play an increasingly significant role. The engagement of the three tiers of actors seems to concentrate on five sectors: extractive industries, construction projects, financial service, farming and telecommunications, albeit in some countries this order can be reversed or run in parallel.

The initial impetus behind China's extractive industrial engagement in Africa was to secure raw materials for its own industries. Then through the growth and international expansion of the Chinese economy and industries, investments in big construction projects followed.

¹ Former General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party (1989 – 2002) and President of the Peoples Republic (1993 – 2002)

² Wang, Huning (1993) "Soft Power: Culture as a form of national power" *Fudan Journal* (Social Science), Vol.3.

³ Cao,Dong (2009) "Review on Soft Power Studies of recent years" *West Development* issue 12; Jia,Haitao (2008) "Analyzing the conceptual and theoretical framework of Culture Soft Power", *Linnan Journal*, issue 2. Xiao,Yongming & Zhang, Tianjie (2010) "Review and Prospects on Culture Soft Power Studies in China", *Hunan University Journal* (Social Science), vol.24. Quoted in Xu,Shaomin (2010) "Criticism of Soft Power Studies in China: 1990-2009", *Chinareform.net.*

⁴ *ibid*

⁵Zhang, Pei (2008) "Transition of International System and the Construction of China's Soft Power ", Forum of Internation Issues, 2008 Winter issue. Quoted in *ibid*

This increased financial presence on the African continent had as a consequence that the next sector of the China's Africa involvement was in the area of finance. The first foothold of Chinese banks in Africa was established in 2000 by the Bank of China, who seized the opportunity to open a branch in Johannesburg and now covers business in twenty African countries. Another strategy is expansion by acquisition, which is adopted by the Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), who in 2008 bought in a 20.1% stake of The Standard Bank Group of South Africa (SBG). As the largest shareholder of SBG ICBC has been able to through cooperation agreements advance its service for Chinese enterprises in Africa.⁶ SBG estimated that the steady internationalisation of China's renminbi will see at least 40%, or \$100-billion, of China's trade with Africa being made using the currency unit by 2015.⁷ Finance and industry, being described as "the two legs that carry China going out"⁸, have indeed built up the interdependence of China and Africa.

After that followed interest in areas where the investments were not so capital intensive and more varied, but linked to China's immediate needs at home, as well as possibilities for Chinese migration and establishment of outlets for Chinese commodities. While China denounced the rumour that the Chinese government eagerly purchased land in Africa⁹, farms owned by Chinese entrepreneurs began to mushroom in Africa since the turn of the century.¹⁰ According to media estimates¹¹ the number of Chinese migrants in Africa are 750,000. No official statistics are available so far because Chinese people living in Africa come from a variety of backgrounds: immigration, migrant workers, business cooperation, and marriage.¹²

Finally with the increased quality of the Chinese communication industry the fourth area of involvement is in telecommunications and media. Chinese companies Sagem, Hua Wei and ZTE are active in equipment supply and network construction.¹³ In this way they have benefited from low-interest loans from the Chinese government. Another example is that the China Great Wall Industry Corporation has been contracted by the Nigerian government to build the NigCOMSat1 communications satellite. Chinese communication industry companies have also won important contracts in Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya.

⁶ Standard Bank, 20 September 2011, "Standard Bank Group and ICBC announce cooperation agreements to support China's growing trade with emerging markets", URL: http://www.standardbank.com/Article.aspx?id=-108&src=m2011_34385466 (last accessed 05.03.2012)

⁷ Afribiz.com, 09 August 2011, "Africa Trade Using China's Currency Set to Reach US\$100 Billion, Says Standard Bank", URL: <http://www.afribiz.info/content/africa-trade-using-chinas-currency-set-to-reach-us100-billion-says-standard-bank-press-release> (last accessed 05.03.2012)

⁸ *Chinese Entrepreneur*, November 2011, "Entering Africa: The Bank of China Digging Gold in Africa", URL: <http://money.163.com/11/1217/20/7LGLKN8A00253B0H.html> (last accessed 05.03.2012)

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (September 22, 2011), "MOF: There was no ground for the rumour that China has purchased land in Africa", URL: http://www.gov.cn/xwfb/2011-09/22/content_1954173.htm (last accessed 10.12.2011)

¹⁰ For pledges in agriculture infrastructure and experts-aid, see Asian Times, 02 October 2009, "China's eye on African agriculture" URL: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/KJ02Cb01.html; For Chinese private enterprises investing in farming in Africa, see

¹¹ *Business Circle*, November 13 2009, "Africa: The Next Immigration Heaven for the Rich", URL: [HTTP://MEDIA.CAISTV.COM/HTML/2009-11-13/169631.shtml](http://media.caistv.com/html/2009-11-13/169631.shtml), (last accessed 10.12.2011)

¹² For an analysis of this development using Zambia as an example see: Yan Hairong and Barry Sautman "Chinese Farms in Zambia: From Socialist to "Agro-Imperialist" Engagement?", *African and Asian Studies* 9 (2010) 307-333

¹³ *The 21st Century Business Herald*, (February 10 2007). "Hua Wei and ZTE marched into Africa's telecommunication market". URL

http://cohesive.blog.hexun.com/45866632_d.html (last accessed 10.12.2011), see also Hellström, Jerker (2009), *China's emerging role in Africa*, Swedish Defence Research Agency.

Value sharing, cultural dissemination and multifaceted dialogues

The turn of the century saw new trends in China's foreign affair policies spring up. Rebuilding its humanitarian cause, promoting economic diplomacy, cultivating cultural and citizen diplomacy, China seemed to run its soft power programme in Africa on the fullest and most comprehensive scale. It took the initiatives to impose its role of agenda setting in African affairs by hosting the formal Sino-African triennial conferences.

At the state level, the FOCAC 2000 meeting set the tone for China-Africa relationship in its official statement, which declares, "FOCAC is a framework for collective dialogue between China and African countries on the basis of equality and mutual benefit and that to seek peace and development is our common objective."¹⁴ Unlike the past twenty years of China-Africa relations with little ideological instilment, this declaration brings back a value system to the relationship where parties share the same belief and priorities.

Mutual-Development and *non-interference* can be understood as the two pillars holding the ideological superstructure that accommodates its subscribers. The declaration proclaims:

Countries that vary from one another in social system, stages of development, historical and cultural background and values, have the right to choose their own approaches and models in promoting and protecting human rights in their own countries. Moreover, the politicisation of human rights and the imposition of human rights conditionalities on economic assistance should be vigorously opposed as they constitute a violation of human rights.¹⁵

The declaration stresses, "economic and social factors are at the root of political instability, social tensions and frequent conflicts in Africa".¹⁶ China, by assuming its obligation in assisting African countries, first seeks to fit in the role of regional patron that was traditionally taken by Western countries, even though the new model of interaction is termed "a new partnership within the framework of South-South co-operation".¹⁷ Secondly China seeks to implement multifaceted dialogues and citizen diplomacy. Since the first Chinese medical team was sent to Algeria in 1963, "deploying doctors as medical ambassadors to Africa" has been a revered tradition of diplomacy that continued in spite of the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution¹⁸. With or without aspiring to soft power, China's medical aid to Africa has put on a new face, when Premier Wen Jiabao in his 2006 visit to Africa announced a half million US dollar of donation to NEPAD for its nursing and midwife training programme in Tanzania and Kenya, indicating that China was concerned with assisting in meeting Africa's most severe challenges.

In the strategy of cultural dissemination the 21 Confucius Institutes (CI) and 4 Confucius Classrooms (CC) that were inaugurated in 17 African countries play a central role. Up to October 2010, The CIs

¹⁴ FOCAC (2000), "Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation", URL: <http://www.focac.org/eng/ltada/dyjbzjhy/DOC12009/t606796.htm> (last accessed 07.03.2012)

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ China.org.cn,(August 11 2011) "China deploys medical ambassadors to Africa", URL:http://www.china.org.cn/international/intoafrika/2011-08/11/content_23188502.htm

(last accessed 08.03.2012)

and CCs used up four million US dollar in reaching out more than 7170 students¹⁹. There is a steady increase of CIs in African universities. CIs' curriculums contain more than language learning. They celebrate traditional Chinese festivals, run exhibitions, and provide hobby courses and public talks. Several CIs reveal the use of Chinese learning by organizing job fairs where students can network with local Chinese companies. These institutes provide positive Chinese experiences to thaw Africans who were suspicious of the Chinese invasion. The management of CIs are usually by Chinese expatriates as well as executive cooperating board members from local educational institutions²⁰. The staffing of teachers combines appointment by hire and recruiting volunteers from back home and local communities. Most teachers with CIs are young volunteers who have sat for special qualification exams before being sent to Africa.²¹

By being actively committed to Africa's professional education China has fostered agencies in spreading Chinese initiatives and advocacy, with an emphasis on influencing African NGOs and think tanks, as useful resources to draw on if multilateral dialogues are to be promoted. Since 2000, China has emerged as a major player in human resource cooperation with Africa, taking the existing China-Africa education and training programmes to a new level.²² From 2000 to 2007, 20,000 students from 52 African countries had studied in China, 60% of them taking Chinese scholarships. The 2006 FOCAC saw China promised to raise the number of scholarships to 4000 heads annually. 2700 African students on Chinese scholarships studied in China, 57.3% in postgraduate studies, and many majored in education, economics, management and international politics, unlike older generations of Africans studying mainly agriculture, medicine and languages.²³

Besides the degree courses, short-term training programs in media and communication are equally if not more noteworthy. Since 2001, a spate of seminars and workshops for African journalists and media officers has been organised, with contents dedicated to sharing China's achievements and advanced experiences. An annual workshop hosted by the State Council News Office and MOC usually takes in around 50 participants. After their two-week tour in China, many attendants found themselves expressing that they experienced of real China was "absolutely different from what was imagined and reported", encouraging China to undertake more self-promotion.²⁴

China's media presence in Africa has increased in the last three years. The country's major media representative, Xinhua News Agency added five more branches in 2011: English branches in Gaborone, Kigali, Port Louis and Accra and one French branch in Bamako, to its African Headquarters and 18 previous branches. Manpowered by 60 journalists and 400 local staff, Xinhua's Nairobi headquarters dispatches in every month around 1800 pieces of news in English, 2000 in French, 2200 pictures and 150 pieces of video clips, surpassing its counterparts in Associated Press (AP), Reuters and Agence France Presse (AFP) in term of the quantity of news releases. Xinhua's other moves include boosting the local sales of its contents. It launched a mobile newspaper in Kenya,

¹⁹ Xu lin's speech at the Joint Seminar by the State Council and United Nation Training Research Center, July 5 2010. URL: <http://www.counsellor.gov.cn/Item/7258.aspx>, (last accessed 10.12.2011)

²⁰ Hanban.org.(n.d) "Constitution and By-Laws of the Confucius Institutes" URL: http://english.hanban.org/node_7880.htm (Last accessed on 06.03.2012)

²¹ Hanban.org. (n.d) "About Volunteers" URL: http://english.hanban.org/node_9802.htm (Last accessed on 06.03.2012)

²² King, Kenneth, (2009) "China's cooperation in education and training with Kenya: a comparative analysis", UKFIET Conference on International Education and Development, 15-17 September, 2009. Oxford.

²³ *People's Daily*, (February 02 2009) "Substantial Achievement in China-Africa Education Cooperation and Exchange" URL: <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/8768394.html> html (Last accessed on 06.03.2012)

²⁴ Xinhua News Agency, (July 25, 2011) "42 African news officers and mainstream media chiefs finished their exchange program in China", URL: <http://news.163.com/11/0725/10/79Q73D8L00014JB5.html> (Last accessed on 06.02.2012)

SMS services in DR Congo, outdoor screens in Harare and Johannesburg. It ran photojournalism workshops and environmental campaigns in Kenya, Mali, Zimbabwe and Congo. By giving media exposure to African leaders and ministers, Xinhua cultivates contacts within African governments and NGOs, which at the same time can help not only the sales of their content to local media, but also establishing their status back home as the most credible agency in bringing African news to China.

Radio has been an indispensable means of transmitting soft power, especially in a continent where half of the countries have over 30% illiteracy rate. In February 2006, China Radio International (CRI) launched its first overseas FM radio station in Nairobi with a schedule of daily programming for 19 hours in English, Kiswahili and Chinese, covering majorly “China's economic, social and cultural development”²⁵. It has added two more offices in Lagos and Harare, sending localized programs live from its Nairobi studio shared with Kenya Broadcasting Corporation.²⁶

China encounters problems and obstacles in building its soft power. Li (2008) summarizes that China observers describe the present state of China's soft power and its future development as worrisome. Some argue that soft power, rather than Gross Domestic Product or military force, constitutes the main gap between China and the developed countries. This is attributable to China's shortcomings as regards domestic institutions, inadequate research, low level of education, less-than-perfect national image and decline of sense of national identity and social cohesion.²⁷ Human rights groups and activists accuse China of countering the liberal-democratic model in Africa and thus presenting a threat to good governance and democratic development of the continent.¹⁶ This is centred on the issue of how the Chinese development model is authoritarian and corporatist and non-transparent. It is thus feared that it will benefit authoritarian and non-transparent regimes as well as fostering increased corruption.

China's strict control with media and the Internet is not helping when it attempts to offer media aid to Africa. An editorial of the Zimbabwe Independent writes: “China has a record of jamming transmissions that it finds unpalatable and passing on this technology to its friends”²⁸, in a comment on the Zimbabwean Media, Information and Publicity minister's gratitude to China's donation of broadcasting equipment. The newspaper argues that what Zimbabwean media need is a reform that allows for more voices to be heard across the country, and the dysfunctional governmental media sector empowered by China's aid can hardly be seen to foster such a development.

News media and public perception

Comparing two surveys on average Chinese people's perception of Africa could shed some light on the role of media in shaping public opinion of Africa at the cognitive level. In 2006, a week prior to the opening of the third FOCAC meeting, *China Youth Daily*, the official organ of the Communist Youth League, teamed up with Sina.com, the biggest Chinese Internet news portal and hosted a survey titled “Do you know Africa? ”, to which there were 5,119 answers. Unsurprisingly, the majority

²⁵ *GOV.cn* (2006) “CRI launches first overseas FM radio station “, URL: http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-02/28/content_212957.htm (Last accessed on 06.03.2012)

²⁶ HC360.com (2009) ACE built CRI's Live Studio in Kenya, URL:<http://info.audio.hc360.com/2009/03/06083871477.shtml> (Last accessed on 06.03.2012)

²⁷ Li, Mingjing (2008) “China Debates Soft Power”, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 2, 2008, 287–308

²⁸ *The Zimbabwe Independent* (17 December 2009) “China won't help: local Zim media scene deserves attention” URL: <http://www.journalism.co.za/china-wont-help-local-zim-media-scene-deserves-attention.html> (Last accessed on 08.03.2012)

(71.7%) knew very little about Africa and 10% confessed they knew nothing at all, while 18.3% of the voters claimed they were very knowledgeable of Africa²⁹.

Media seem to be the most important link between the Chinese public and Africa. When asked: "From where do you get to know about Africa? (Multiple choices)" "Press and the Internet" ranked in the first place (21.3%) among the ten options, closely followed by "Film and Television" (21.1%), "middle school textbooks" (18.3%) and "Sports and Games" (16.3%).

The informants tended to associate Africa with "Poverty and Underdevelopment" (15.9%), AIDS (14.5%), Wildlife (15.2%) and "Africans are gifted in sports" (13.8%). Most people (18.6%) would use keyword "Hunger" to summarise their understanding of Africa, 17.9% "Primitive", 16.5% "War and Disturbance", 15.2% "Developing", 7.7% "Friendly", 7% "Passionate", 5.2% "Energetic", 5% "Green", 4.3% "Prosperous", 2.5% "Civilization".³⁰

When asked "what do you want to do in Africa, if possible?" an overwhelming majority of 50.2% voter chose "Tourism", while 17.2% showed interest in investment and doing business, 13.5% in cultural exchanges, 12.5% in volunteering. In measuring people's political inclinations, the survey only asked a very modest question: "Are you interested in the FOCAC Beijing Conference?" 54% answered: "I know a little", 37.7% are "very concerned" and 8.3% "did not know it at all."

Three years later, at the eve of the Fourth FOCAC conference in the Egyptian resort Sharm El-Sheikh, a similar survey was launched on the website of the *Global Times* (Chinese version), a popular newspaper under the *People's Daily*. 5,672 answers were collected. The most striking change, when compared with the 2006 survey, is the way through which people get to know about Africa. 71.5% of the informants got to know Africa through news reports, 24.6% through films and books. Remarkably, 1.9% chose "from my personal experience", an option that was non-existent in the 2006 survey. 1.3% answered that "have no way to know at all". The result compared with the 2006 survey that reports media influence as 21.3%, shows greater density of media coverage of Africa during the past three years, which indeed contributed to the public's improved knowledge of Africa. 36.7% of the respondents claimed they knew about Africa, while "do not know about Africa" remained the answer from the majority (63.3%)³¹.

Did the impression toward Africa also change? Possibly not. When asked "What is the first thing in your mind when Africa is mentioned?" 54.3%, the largest group chose the option "laggard economy, skinny, starving children", "lions, zebras and exotic primitive landscape" ranked the second place (19.7%), while "frequent warfare, and Somali pirates" was also one of the strongest impressions (12.2%).

In measuring people's political inclinations, the 2009 survey was able to pose questions in a more direct manner. It asked: "How do you view China's current policies in Africa?" 87.7% of the respondents supported China's policies toward Africa, showing an overwhelming attitude of consent, with two very minor groups choosing "do not support" (5.5%) and "do not care" (6.8%). This result must be considered within the context that the *Global Times*'s website is the one of the online bases for Nationalists and Leftists. In answering the question "How do you understand the criticism from the West to China-Africa co-operation?" 48% decided the cause lies in that the West is worried about their own interest in Africa, while 28% attributed it to that the ghost of colonial mindset is still doing

²⁹ *China Youth Daily* (November 3 2006), "China Youth Daily's Survey: Do You Know Africa?" URL: <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2006-10-31/104511379447.shtml> (Last accessed on 06.02.2012)

³⁰ *China Youth Daily & Sina.com.cn*, Survey Result (2006), "Do you know Africa?" URL: <http://survey.news.sina.com.cn/voterresult.php?pid=12342> (Last accessed on 06.02.2012)

³¹ *Global Times* (November 6 2009) "Survey: What Importance Africa has for China", URL: <http://world.huanqiu.com/roll/2009-11/624768.html> (Last accessed on 06.02.2012)

its tricks, and 24% thought jealousy toward China-Africa partnership gives rise to hostility. When asked: "In your opinion, what is the most important role Africa plays for China?" 53% replied "political supporter", 27% "business partner", and 19% "energy provider". Most people (63%) believe that China should further economic co-operation with Africa, and deem Africa as "a rising world power" (69%).

Can the results from such surveys help us understand what kind of role Chinese media play in China's Africa involvement? The Chinese mediascape is an increasingly diverse one, proffering a media spectrum with a wide span. Orthodox party dailies and market-driven metropolitan dailies co-exist with glossy magazines tailored to the tastes of middle-class readers. Patriotic populist press and liberal press share the front line of newspaper stands. The diversity of media ecology is reflected in the coverage of China's Africa engagement while the Party-state's guide line can also be observed from the main trend of the media reportage on China-Africa issues.

Searching for keywords among major websites of the national press 167 pieces of news stories and op/Eds on China-Africa issues have been found in a wide range of media outlets including *the Global Times* (militant populist press, accentuating nationalism and patriotism), the *Liberation Daily* (the conservative orthodox Party Press), the *People's Daily* (the orthodox Party press), Xinhua News Agency (the official press agency that practices professionalism and participates into global media competition), the *China Youth Daily* (the central governmental press with liberal standing), the *Beijing Youth Daily* (the *Beijing News* (Liberal press), the *Southern Weekly* (a liberal newspaper famed for investigative journalism).³²

Major weekly magazines cover China-Africa stories too. Titles emerging in the search include *China Newsweek* (run by China News agency, with a focus on domestic and international hard news stories and in-depth reporting), *Sanlian Weekly* (a popular weekly that often features independent interpretations of cultural, societal and current affair issues), *Southern Wind Window* (a popular weekly that often provides synthesized analysis on politics and foreign affair issues, with a liberal if not critical standing).

Many of in-depth feature stories on Chinese enterprises and investors were run by business media, ranging from the *First Financial Daily* (business press, with authoritative/conservative standing) the *21st Century Business Herald* (business press with liberal standing) and Caixin media (business news media featured with rigorous investigative journalism), among other financial papers.

Obviously, reporting on Africa and China-Africa issues has been encouraged since the first FOCAC conference, so as to bridge the gap between the general Chinese public and the continent faraway. This is not an easy job, as for readers in China, events that took place in Africa, even China-related could be too remote to have any relevance for them. Hence creating a sense of relevance to overcome the sense of distance stands at the heart of the process of constructing newsworthiness for those news stories and articles. Newsworthiness legitimates a story as proper news. What Schudson called a *news peg*³³ is known as *news pivot* (xinwen dian) among Chinese journalists. In searching for *news points*, a Chinese journalist is trying to strike a balance between the imposed guidance and the reader's

³² See Tong, Jingrong, (2006) Social Discourse of Journalistic Professionalism in the Chinese Context, *The Chinese Journal of Communication and Society*, 1, and Peng Xiaoyun,(2011)"The Ongoing Transition: Where is the hungry News Idealism?"*Chinese Journalist*, Issue 12; About South Weekly and its investigative journalism, read Deng,Ke □ 2006 □ *Back Stage*, South Daily Press.

³³ Schudson, Michael, (1984) "Deadlines, Datelines, and History" in Manoff & Schudson eds. *Reading the News*, Panthenon Books

interest.³⁴ The skill set of locating *news pivot* is highly valued in the Party's papers, and is by no means underestimated in the market-driven press where managing and maintaining a good relationship with government is a daily necessity. Once a good news pivot is established, it will be highlighted in the title and dominates the story. "The story could now stand by itself", as veteran Chinese journalists would say.

Twelve categories of stories

The classification of the 167 news stories rests upon each story's organisation around its news pivot pronounced in the title and the narrative. Twelve types of such thematic approaches have been identified. In the following we will concentrate more on some than on others, because we regard some of them as providing more information about the Chinese attitude to Africa than others, and those that we treat in more detail are also those that reveal more of multifaceted understanding of the China Africa relationship.

The first category is "*The story of Historical Connections*". It reports on China's long history of connections with Africa. One example is a report titled "Africa's oldest map was found in the Forbidden Palace" (*Beijing Youth Daily*, February 22, 2002) was a story reporting on the oldest map of the African continent, created in China in 1389, which was on public exhibition in Cape Town. What is interesting about this report is that it focuses on the long historical relationship between African and China, and thus uses the long history of Chinese sea journeys as a pivot for putting a contemporary understanding of China-Africa relations in a broader context. And this is an interpretation that fits well into a South-South relational model.

The second category is "*The story of Success*", which deals with Chinese personal success stories in Africa. Typically a report on how a young man from Hubei province mining started out twelve years earlier selling groceries in Kenya and via computer selling ending up as the sole agency for Changhong Television in Kenya. By the end of the story, the protagonist concludes with the following message: "Don't see Africa as a land of poverty, nor as a land covered by gold. Investors are more welcomed here in comparison to merchants and peddlers." (*Changjiang Times*, 5, July 2007).

A company's success can be treated as personal success too. In "Entering Africa: Visiting overseas project of Shanghai Design Group" a feature story on expanding markets in Africa of Shanghai's construction companies in Angola (*The Liberation Daily*, 29 October, 2011), The report portrays two persons: the Chairman and a project manager of the Group. A quote from the Chairman conveys the confidence for company growth: "The time has gone when we can solely rely on a domestic market. We must enter into international competition of high-end services, so as to contribute to the rise of China in the international division of labour." The project manager gives his own testimonial of personal growth: "Before coming to Angola, I was only an ordinary designer of water and waste water engineering system. This project educated me into a well-rounded manager of many business processes."

"*The Story of Opportunity*" category differed slightly from *the stories of Success*, *stories of opportunity* tend to cast an optimistic perspective upon Africa's future, transforming uncertainties into opportunities, as loudly manifested in their titles: "Angola's Economic Miracle can not be missed" (*People's Daily*, 28 August 2008), "Selling Water could make good business" (Business Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Angola, 1 March 2008), "Africa's Opportunities in the Global Crisis"

³⁴ On news pivot on work, Xu Anguo & Wang Yuqin (2008) "How to catch news pivot in writing news" *China Journalist Daily*, March 6 2008 ; Wang, Jie & Chen, Che (2004) "Catching News Pivot in a big background", *Journalism Frontier*, Issue 9.

(Caixin.net, 15 September 2011). These news stories rely heavily on authoritative sources that seem to share a rosy view of Africa's future.

Sources that are not in favour of investment in Africa are usually not included and caveats are usually nonexistent in this type of stories, with an exception being "Angola's economic miracle can not be missed" (*People's Daily*, 28 August 2008), where a paragraph points out the Angolan government had poor records in terms of transparency and corruption. The core messages of these stories are salient enough: Africa is a land of opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs.

"*The Story of China's Peaceful Ascent*" emphasises Chinese generosity, altruism and responsibility. Topics handled in this category comprise China's aid to Africa (*People's Daily*, 3 August, 2011), China's peace corps (*China Youth's Daily* 20 November 2009), the Chinese Poverty-reduction Foundation (*People's Daily*, 12 November, 2011), and young Chinese volunteers (*China Youth's Daily*, 19 May 2011) doing good deeds in Africa. In this type of storytelling, Africa and Africans are usually presented as grateful recipients, who play a passive role in China-Africa relations.

Caijing, the leading financial weekly, on 21 October 2011, reviews the achievements of "China-Africa's cooperation" in trade, investments and infrastructure construction. The article draws on a senior official from the Ministry of Commerce, stressing China's generosity in every of the six paragraphs. The story is titled "Two thirds of Africa's infrastructure construction was funded by China", and the lead reinforces the message, which can be a little contradictory to the term "cooperation" dotted all the way throughout the story.

The *Southern Weekly*, on 25 July 2007, stressed the central importance Africa has for China's peaceful rise. This is the lead: "China has changed the development model of Africa in a way that is different from the Western model, and at the same time clears the road for its own peaceful rise."

The article then develops into three sections of argumentation: Africa Looking East, The Disturbed West, and The Rise of Africa's Strategic Importance. The logic runs like this: Africa begins to look East after fifty years of looking West in vain. China and Africa is a perfect match, because Africa has oil and other natural resources, which are needed in China. And China has a surplus of production capacity and an effective, indigenous development model, which Africa needs. Entering the modern world, every superpower in their rise has faced similar problems: bottlenecks of energy shortage and surplus of production power, which had been answered, without exceptions, by waging wars and acquiring overseas colonials. China, on the contrary, solves the quest in a creative and peaceful way, by fostering genuine ties of strategic partnership with Africa. China has stressed on many occasions that its cooperation with Africa in energy and resources is based on mutual needs, which help Africa to transform its strength in resources to advantages in development and global competition. As a matter of fact, China's extensive involvements in Africa give rise to the promotion of Africa's strategic status in relation to the developed world.

"*The stories of Partnership*" tend to argue that the relationship between China and Africa is that of a strategic partnership. Their official tone can be judged from titles of the stories: "From Brothers of Hardship to Strategic Partners: China and Africa build up New Strategic Relationship" (*China Features*³⁵, 19 September 2006), "FOCAC: The Bandung Spirit of the new era" (*China Newsweek*, 20 November 2006) "China and Africa Promote the New Strategic Relationship via Non-governmental Sectors" (Xinhua.net, 11 November 2011). It can be concluded that for some reason defining the China-Africa partnership in perspective is either restricted to a limited number of central media agencies, or is not enthusiastically taken up by media that are less close to the political nexus.

³⁵ The English language magazine is a Xinhua affiliate that provides feature stories for overseas media.

“*The Story of the Development Model*” can be illustrated by a interview with Xie Boyang, the vice president of the China-Africa Business Council, done by the *21st Century Business Herald* (28 May 2010). The conversation is condensed into a title: “China’s road of low-cost development is a better fit for Africa”.

Until Huawei, a Chinese private company entered the African market in 1998 Africa’s telecommunication industry was dominated by Western multinational corporations like Ericsson and Motorola. 12 years later, market competition triggered by Huawei and other Chinese private companies have changed the situation completely. The cost of telecommunication equipments and rates has plunged drastically. The example of Huawei’s impact on Africa’s telecommunication was placed in the lead to foreground Mr Xie’s opinions. In the interview, Xie maintains that China’s development model based on 30 years of experience is a better fit for Africa, compared to the Western model that is technologically more advanced but with a cost higher than what Africa could afford. Xie also urges private companies to be far-sighted and conscientious in doing business in Africa.

In this category of stories, experts from academia and industry, African politicians and representatives from international organisations are being called upon to give their testimonials. Mark Mobius, the CEO of Franklin Templeton’s Emerging Markets Group, writes an article for *China Financial Information* called “China Pushed Forward the Development in Africa.” (cfi.cn, 31 August 2011) He confidently assures that “As a developing country, China’s model proves to be successful. On the top of that, China has the funds that Africa urgently needs for its infrastructure projects.”

“*Stories of Refutation and Clarification*” comprise articles on China-Africa relations dedicated to confront hostility and criticism from the outside. This type of articles has been run in a wide spectrum of media, ranging from the Party’s papers, market-driven papers, and business papers. *The Global Times* seems to be the newspaper most engaged in challenging western criticism. Within three months, it published four news stories under this category: “African media objected to warning from Western countries, maintaining they have no right to caution Africa against China” (10 November 2009), “African human rights organisation complains about a Chinese company for inhumane working condition, something we refute” (29 January 2010), “French media with acrid comments on China funding the construction of The African Union building” (2 February 2010) “South Africa attempts to investigate ’exploitation of Chinese workers in a Chinese factory’”(3 February, 2010). In addition to *People’s Daily*, Xinhua News Agency and their affiliates in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou have been involved in countering Western criticism.

This type of news stories follows a pattern. It usually starts with a brief recap of an accusation from certain western media or organisations challenging the Chinese government or enterprises then followed by a refutation from an authoritative source, usually a scholar, or a spokesperson of the Chinese government or an African politician.

“*The stories of Corporations*” deal with how Chinese companies are doing in Africa. A new development after 2010 is that journalists from leading media organisations were dispatched to Africa to do their assignments as a commitment from the media to respond to public curiosity on the topic. This public interest has been growing through the years. The *Southern Weekly* published a feature article called “African development that goes beyond controversial: China’s existence in Zambia unveiled”(8 April 2010), as the second part of a series reportage “China’s real existence in the world”. The journalists interviewed managers of local Chinese companies, such as NFCA that was mining the Chambishi copper mine. In addition it quoted the secretary of Zambia Congress of Trade Unions, local staff of a Chinese garments store, the director of Policies & Research Bureau of the opposition party UPND, an editor of Radio Phoenix, an engineer from the half-deserted Tanzania-Zambia railway and a peddler in the market of Kapiri Mposhi. The story was well written, balanced and nuanced. It concludes, “For ordinary Zambians, the image of China is far from perfect. Local people told us frankly that in their mind, China is associated with cheap, low-quality products and low wages.”

Expressing similar concerns but using a different register, the *Global Times*' report on "A turbulent Africa tests Chinese companies" (11 May 2011) focused on how African countries had discovered that the continent had become the experiment laboratory for overseas investments of Chinese companies. Such companies faced the challenges of volatile political situations, a poorly developed infrastructure and occasional accusations of the Chinese exploitation by Western media. The story presents Chinese companies as industrialists committed to long-term investments, hiring local workers and providing more choices to local economy. Chinese development initiatives would be centred on coordinating, more ambitiously, upstream and downstream enterprises to form a vertical integration, so as to reduce costs and risks.

Farming and charity were also regarded as newsworthy topics. The *South Weekly* (8 April 2010)'s "Run a farm in Africa", and the *Economy and Nation Weekly* (8 October 2011)'s "The Story of Private enterprises farming in Africa" both are reports with on-site interviews and impressive photographs. Stories investigating myth and fraud are found in this category. The exposure of the so-called "Baoding village" (*China Newsweek*, 10 November 2007) and fund-raising for a dubious China-Africa Hope Foundation (*Southern Weekly*, 25 August 2011) are good examples of watchdog journalism.

However, business media such as the Caixin News Group ran the best stories of this category. In recent years, the Caixin News group has been committed to covering China-Africa issues intensively. It hosted a summit meeting on the topic, sent journalists to Africa and commissioned multi-national investigations. A good example would be its series of stories on 17 October 2011 exposing China International Fund (CIF), a deal broker between China and several African countries. The editor notes that journalism students at Columbia University started "looking into CIF and its various business ventures around the world" in 2010 and gave Caixin the permission to use their work. Meanwhile, Caixin reporters conducted and completed a parallel probe in Beijing and Hong Kong that traced CIF's controversial activities in Angola, as well as its links to the Chinese government. Portions of this report, which also appeared in this edition, were based on a previously undisclosed Ministry of Commerce study with surprising conclusions. (Caixin.net, 18 October 2011)

Most stories in this category are underpinned by interviews with multiple sources and painstaking research, aspiring to high-quality investigative journalism. However not all of the stories of this category are sufficiently well researched, partly due to lack of resources.

"*The Stories of Africa*" intend to provide a bird's-eye view of Africa or particular African countries for Chinese readers. The focus is more on Africa and the approaches often anthropological. Interestingly, stories under the category are mostly syntheses of western media reports. For example, the *South Weekly*'s coverage of the famine on the Horn of Africa is possibly a rehash of existing reports without credits to where they originally were published. *The South Metropolitan Daily* covered the famine by publishing an article by a communication officer from the American foundation Mercy Corps. However Chinese media were trying to improve their readers' understanding of Africa by using telephone interviews or catching the opportunities when African politicians visited China. Most of the stories are those of sadness, conflicts and despair. The titles suggest the content: "No Heroes in Hotel Rwanda" (*China Newsweek*, 21 June 2006), "Kenya: The Fragile African Role Model" (*China Newsweek*, 21 January 2008), "Africa, the scar of the world's conscience" (*Liaowang East Weekly*, issue 5, 2005), "The Desperate Horn of Africa" (*Southern Weekly*, 8 August 2011)

"*Personal Experience Stories*" centred on reports from Chinese journalists visiting and even staying in Africa. Stories of this category tend to display insights, revelations and to show a more personal face of Africa. Noteworthy is that it is increasingly common that websites of traditional media begin to encourage their journalists to keep online journals, which turn out to be a popular element of the sites. By sending its staff writers to Africa, Caixin media provides a number of sketches of African people and their life with the personal touch of the reporters.

Reflections and initiatives can also be observed from these personal accounts. In 2010, a veteran Chinese journalist wrote a provocative article arguing: “China needs its own voice in the African media scene” (*East Morning Post*, 2 June 2010). He expressed his concern that when he travelled in Africa, all news about China was “second-handed” from Western media. It seems that to strengthen mutual understanding appears to be an increasingly prioritised agenda in China’s Africa strategies.

“*The Stories of Prudence*” are often opinions and editorials. The tenet is to warn the potential investors and industrialists to be on guard against the tough African investment environment. *International Commerce Daily*, a newspaper affiliated to the Ministry of Commerce, published admonitions from officers and experts from the Ministry of Commerce on “Entering Africa”. Security issues rank as number one among all concerns (22 September 2011). Risk management, seems to be the most prevalent caveat presented by most these articles. A Caixin analysis, quoting a Tsinghua professor of International Relations, advice Chinese enterprises investing in Africa to identify risks from three aspects: political unrest, threat of terrorism and urgent public safety risk.

The category of “*Story of Accountability*” comprises only one article that. The *China Newsweek*, on 2 December 2009, published a commentary “Cancelling Africa’s Debt, Whose word counts?” written by a law professor from Beijing University. The article argues that without the intervention of the National People’s Congress, the majority’s interest could not be realised through the government’s fiscal arrangements, such as the one on debt relief for African countries.

State directives

It is more than obvious that governmental directives are behind the media reports on China-Africa issues. Still, we can also conclude that the media narratives are driven by different forces and that they meet various needs and demands: some of them are apparently prescribed by authority, such as *the stories of China’s peaceful ascent*, *the stories of success* and *the stories of partnership*. Some of them intend clearly to meet external criticism and misunderstandings, such as *the story of refutation*. Others are motivated by curiosity of the media organisations themselves, such as *the stories of corporations*. Some try to help the public to make sense of Africa, such as *the stories of Africa* and *the stories of personal experiences*. Others again fulfil the role of the media to be vigilant, such as *the stories of prudence* and *the story of accountability*.

Chinese media on the one hand, following instructions from the Central Propaganda Department, have been educating the public about the importance of building up soft power internationally and exporting the Chinese development model to Africa. This is in itself a way to mitigate grievances and to buffer cries for political reform at home. In these media discourses *Development* has been lauded as something of ideological importance and can be prioritised over democracy and universal human rights. This rather rough argument provided the press with plenty of angles: a nationalistic chanting for the rise of China, the emergence of an international united front against imperialism embodied by U.S and NATO, a sense of status resulted from economic achievements as if it equals social advancement. The various angles underpinned a Pan-developing identity that can serve as a common political ground to share with African countries.

On the other hand, even though the tendency to question the aid to African countries from the State’s Treasury remains very weak, there are liberal and market-driven media that found themselves mining African stories, digging up fraud and spotting rogues.

The Chinese media seem to tend to rely on governmental sources and official interpretations in the early stage of foreign coverage. This is perhaps to a much greater degree than the media of other countries in the case. But when many kinds of social groups and forces are involved, the voices in the media begin to diverge and to develop new and independent perspectives. In general, a recurring tune can be identified from this half-orchestrated, half freestyle media chorus, which constitutes China’s

effort to mend its way by engaging more extensively and thoroughly in Africa, at least to the extent that other international actors on the African continent do.

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INDEXING TERMS

China

Africa

China is currently implementing a full-fledged 'Going , Global' strategy, particularly in Africa. Chinese engagement on the continent is all pervasive and spearheaded by summit conferences and flanked by a surge of Chinese state-own media houses and state-funded cultural institutions. This report seeks to contextualize the Chinese media and culture policies and to examine their ideological constituents. An important component of 'soft power' as understood by Chinese policymakers is to utilize non-governmental forces, and build citizen diplomacy. Thus mobilizing and educating the Chinese about the strategic importance of Africa has been on the government's agenda. The report discriminates between various narratives on China-Africa relations and issues emerging from the Chinese press from 2002 to 2011. The conclusion drawn from examining this half-orchestrated, half freestyle media chorus is that, China has been employing domestic media to engage public support to buttress its expansion in Africa. Thus to build a positive image of Africa in China must be seen as a component of the mainly economic Chinese relations with Africa.