



China in Africa: The Soft Power of Media Development

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Abstract

Mass media has not only changed the mode of information-sharing but has also changed the mode of policy, foreign policy-making and people-to-people contact in being used as a means of soft power. This paper focuses on Chinese investment in the media sector of African countries and explores what motivates China's huge investments in the African media landscape. The study is descriptive, based on primary and secondary sources of literature. Methodologically, it uses qualitative research through content analysis of 'soft power politics' and 'public diplomacy' theories. China's media development assistance in Africa is a manifestation of the Chinese strategy of soft power politics and the application of public diplomacy. This study claims that China's media development assistance programme is helping Africa to develop its media infrastructure, techniques of broadcasting and cultural exchanges, which influence African public opinion and offer media content that is entirely different from Western-dominated media groups. In return, this helps China to promote a positive image and win the hearts and minds of people on the African continent.

Keywords: Africa; China; development assistance; media; public diplomacy; soft power

Résumé

Les médias de masse ont, non seulement, modifié le mode de partage de l'information, ils ont transformé le mode de politique, d'élaboration de la politique étrangère et de contact entre les peuples, dans leur utilisation comme moyen de *soft power*. Cet article porte sur les investissements chinois dans

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le secteur des médias des pays africains et explore ce qui motive les énormes investissements chinois dans le paysage médiatique africain. L'étude est descriptive et basée sur des sources documentaires primaires et secondaires. Sur le plan méthodologique, elle utilise la recherche qualitative à travers l'analyse du contenu des théories de la « politique de *soft power* » et de la « diplomatie publique ». L'aide chinoise au développement des médias en Afrique est une manifestation de la stratégie chinoise de politique de *soft power* et d'application de la diplomatie publique. Cette étude affirme que le programme chinois d'aide au développement des médias soutient l'Afrique dans le développement de son infrastructure médiatique, ses techniques de diffusion et ses échanges culturels, qui influencent l'opinion publique africaine et offrent un contenu médiatique totalement différent de celui des groupes médiatiques dominés par l'Occident. En retour, cela aide la Chine à promouvoir une image positive d'elle-même et à conquérir les cœurs et les esprits des peuples du continent africain.

Mots-clés : Afrique ; Chine ; aide au développement ; médias ; diplomatie publique ; *soft power*

Introduction

In the past, it took days to spread news from one part of the world to another. Today, advances in communication mean that an event occurring in one part of the world can be broadcast to the rest of the world in the blink of an eye (Nassanga and Makara 2014). Given the importance of global media and China's history of engagement in Africa, which dates back to the Cold War era, China has invested millions of dollars in Africa's media industry. This has increased in the twenty-first century, particularly in initiatives around media co-operation. With the signing of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, the later initiation of the Beijing Action Plan (2006) and the finalisation of the Johannesburg Action Plan (2016), the development of media institutions and training of journalists (sponsored by China) in Africa has been greatly boosted.

In the last few years, the institutionalisation of China and Africa in the media landscape has received much publicity. The strengthening ties between the two regions are due to some concrete policy measures. Using a strategy of *soft power* politics and public diplomacy initiatives, China is trying to create a positive image of itself in the world. More specifically, through the hydra-headed network of Chinese media actors, like Xinhua News, China Radio International (CRI), China Central Television (CCTV) and *China Daily*, China is trying to present a benign image of itself in Africa (Yanqiu 2014).

As part of the grand political and economic aspirations of the Belt and Road Initiative, China is investing a huge amount of money in Africa and other parts of the world (Lim and Bergin 2020; Tangen 2020; Thusu 2018). In addition, the various Chinese media players are trying to make the Chinese public aware of Chinese efforts in Africa's digital media industry. The growing interaction between China and Africa also has the objective of removing the 'China Threat Theory' that is propagated by Western media (Cavlak 2019; Chahine 2010; Zou 2021).

The ties between China and Africa are viewed differently by different scholars. Some perceive China as a neocolonial and neo-imperial power, trying to extract Africa's resources (Makara 2016; Robinson 2018; Umejei 2020). Others perceive Chinese investments in Africa, whether in the media industry or other businesses, as deeply motivated by economic interests (Nassanga and Makara 2014). The increase in number of Chinese firms in Africa is nothing less than the result of China's 'Open Up' policy (Nassanga and Makara 2014). Yanqiu (2014) highlighted how China has been active in the communications industry of African countries, and in particular Chinese firms have invested in the media and digital communication industry of southern African countries to create a softer image of China (Jenkins 2021; Jiang, Li, Ronning et al. 2016; Wu 2014). Chinese political and economic interests in Africa are also challenging the hegemonic power of the US, which is of concern to some who view China as a violator of human rights—its censorship of press freedom is well known (Grassi 2014: 5; Matanji 2022). However, there is a gap in the literature that could reflect another perspective. This study intends to fill this gap by focusing on China's media development assistance for African nations and the promotion of Chinese soft power politics.

Research Methods

In its review of the literature, this paper explores the topic in detail, using the methodology of qualitative research through content analysis. Primary as well as secondary sources of information were consulted, including relevant books, policy papers, journals, briefing papers and annual reports. In addition, inductive and deductive approaches were applied. It is important to highlight that only state-sponsored media actors in China were used for the analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The study seeks to answer the question of how China's media development assistance programme and strategy of soft power politics has shaped the media landscape in Africa. It draws on the theories of soft power politics and public diplomacy as a framework. Its efforts in this regard are very timely. According to the theory of soft power politics, China is trying to create an attractive force to help it achieve its goals (Lin 2017; Rodrigue 2018). The interaction of Chinese and African broadcasters, Chinese assistance to African media networks and capacity-building of African journalists meet the tenets of the theory of public diplomacy. In addition, the establishment of Confucius Institutes, scholarships, academic and think-tank exchanges are meant to portray a positive image of China, which is the essence of the theory of public diplomacy.

Soft Power Politics

The 'soft power' theory of Joseph Nye came to prominence in the late 1990s and is viewed as a supplement and improvement to international relations (IR) theory. The concept emanated in the aftermath of Cold War global politics as an alternative to the philosophy of realism, which emphasised the acquisition of hard power. Nye (1990) believed that culture, policy and sense of values were becoming more useful in international relations and should be adopted by countries. These new sources of power in combination are known as soft power (Lin 2017).

In his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990a), Nye defines soft power as 'the power which guides the capabilities, culture, ideology and social system of other countries' (Nye 1990a: 69). This was the original definition of the term. Nye believed that soft power could affect popular behaviour (1990b: 169). In daily politics, dictatorial countries use force, whereas democratic countries use their attraction to change the behaviour of other states. Soft power uses a sense of values to create attraction. Thus, Nye held that soft power could help to realise its goal through attraction instead of through violence or temptation. It is a country's culture, political ideals and foreign policy that create the attractiveness. Soft power is enhanced when it is seen by other states as legitimate (Lin 2017).

In traditional IR theory, population, territory, natural resources, the size of a country's economy, military force and political stability are commonly known as the sources of power. Power is defined as the ability to alter the behaviour of others to get what you want. Nye (2008) cited

American historian Arthur Schlesinger, who maintained that power is the ability to attract and move the opinions of others. And such power was used by Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy, among others (Wu 2014). Three forms of power are recognised: coercion (the stick), payment (the carrot) and attraction (soft power) (Nye 2006). Notwithstanding Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Russia's Wagner Group intervention in the affairs of several African countries, in contemporary international politics, providing military and security support by all means to conquer territories is losing its value. Geography, population and raw materials are also growing less important as sources of power (Nye 1990b). In contrast, technology, economic resources and education are becoming more relevant in international relations. Co-operative relations mark today's world and it is hard for nations to go to war. The notion of militarisation and security is becoming less relevant today because of the interconnectedness of the states in multiple sectors. Such interconnectedness is termed 'complex interdependence' by Keohane and Nye (Singh, MacDonald and Son 2017). Besides this, the creation of knowledge communities and networks has increased the importance of soft power. Countries also manifest soft power in the form of an overwhelming volume of information and communication, which itself is a symbol of power in this digital world.

In the contemporary world system, the realisation of goals by attracting co-operation through communication and skilled leadership is also soft power. In other words, it is the power of attraction (Kokkinos 2012). Nye (1990b) also maintains that the power to change the behaviour of states lies not in resources but in soft power. Soft power is a staple of democratic politics. The attractive personality of a leader, culture, political values, institutions and policies of a country establishes preferences for a state. All these values play a role in creating legitimate or moral authority. Hence, soft power is one of the factors that influences the behaviour of other states. Persuasion and the ability to move people by argument are essential to it (Nye 2008).

Soft power is co-operative power because states might support other countries whose agenda in world politics they value. In this scenario, the appeal of the agenda-setting and policy formulation of a state makes other states join hands with it. This nature of soft power is known as 'the second face of power' (Nye 2004). Hence, the state that sets an agenda for a global cause is valued by other states, because of soft power (Nye 1990b).

The soft power of a state depends on three sources: political values, culture and foreign policy (Nye 2008). Political values are the core element, for they express the political ideals of a country; culture is the support element,

because it has an important influence on the country; foreign policy is the method because it is through this that a country advocates its universal ideals and their concrete measures. All three resources are interlinked and interconnected (Lin 2017).

Culture is the active manifestation of soft power. A country's culture is followed if it has attraction and penetration. Though culture is intangible, it has immense power to change the behaviour of other states. In international politics, even sports and entertainment play an essential role in the promotion of culture. The development of democratic values by Western countries and the broader acceptance of such ideals are because of the attraction and penetration of these values globally (Lin 2017).

Similarly, the political ideals of a country are represented in a country's political values which enjoy international recognition. The propagation of liberal ideals by Western countries has global influence. These ideals are followed because they serve a country's economic and social system. If the preferred ideologies stop serving a country's interests, this would result in a collapse of the legal and political system.

The third source of soft power, foreign policy, represents the advocated international and diplomatic ideals of a country. The foreign policy of a state helps to fulfil that country's international strategic goals. If the foreign policy of a country represents general long-term interests, it will attract the attention of other countries in a very short span of time. In contrast, narrow and short-sighted foreign policy lacks this value of attraction on a global level. The foreign policy of a country will have great appeal if it conveys essential benefits that are also shared by others (Lin 2017).

In international politics, some objectives are easily achieved with soft power, such as the promotion of democracy and human rights, and some objectives are established through hard power, such as the control of borders with standing armies. Nevertheless, both soft power and hard power have some flaws. Nye suggests the use of another strategy, called smart power. It is a combination of hard and soft power and integrates both forms of the desired outcome in world politics (Nye 2004; Kokkinos 2012).

Public Diplomacy

The concept of public diplomacy is as old as the history of international relations. According to Hocking and Melissen (2015), the history of public diplomacy can be traced to ancient Rome, ancient Greece, Byzantium and Renaissance Italy, civilisations that were very well acquainted with the use of diplomatic practices (Hukil 2015). Public diplomacy is a political activity, whereby governments of different nations try to establish relations

with each other. It is the skill and practice of statecraft at the international level. With advances in the means of communication it has changed its form, but the essence of diplomacy still rests on interdependence and ease of communication. In contemporary times, public diplomacy is the practice of governments to maintain relations with other nations of the world by creating a positive image of themselves through the activities of education, broadcasting, cultural exchanges and the use of modern media.

The term 'public diplomacy' was used for the first time in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, who was the dean at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University (Hukil 2015). Various scholars have defined the term in different ways. According to the Edward R Murrow of the Center of Public Diplomacy:

Public diplomacy deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as between diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the processes of inter-cultural communications. (Kayani and Rehman 2015)

The importance of public diplomacy has multiplied with advances in the field of information technology (IT), which today is considered a power. The nations that have influence on global communications systems are more powerful than those that do not. Knowledge about global crimes, diseases, environmental issues, migration, population explosion, famine, natural disasters, etc. makes public diplomacy much more relevant and vital. Through public diplomacy, information about these issues can be gathered broadly and serve as a tool for planning, policy formulation, information-sharing, the prevention of conflicts, mediation and management, networking, communication-building and understanding and enhancing the political will of national leaders (Tseng 2009).

In addition, public diplomacy helps in understanding the cultures of the world. In the conduct of international affairs through public diplomacy, news media, academics, students, youth groups, technologists, artists, cultural organisations, community and regional entities and private enterprises play an important role (Wu 2014). An efficient and effective public diplomacy is necessary to ensure long-term and two-way communication (Tseng 2009).

The operationalisation of public diplomacy must be differentiated from traditional diplomacy and propaganda. Though these terms are sometimes used as synonyms, in fact they are different in their meaning and scope.

Traditional diplomacy is conducted between governments. It is limited to the interaction between officials of respective countries. Public diplomacy, however, deals with not only international governments but also individuals and organisations. Christopher Ross (2003) pointed out that public diplomacy is a multidimensional enterprise where non-state actors and foreign publics play an increasingly prominent role.

The difference between public diplomacy and propaganda lies in the fact that propaganda is based on information that could be true or false. In other words, it could be disinformation, which lacks credibility (Nye 2008), unlike public diplomacy, which aims to communicate directly with a foreign audience to create change in their thinking. The content of public diplomacy involves activities related to education, information and culture. Mass media and broadcasting are the channels of public diplomacy, but these also include the cultural and scientific exchange of students, scholars, intellectuals and artists, participation in festivals and exhibitions, building and maintaining cultural centres, teaching languages and establishing local friendship leagues and trade associations (Tseng 2009).

Nye (2008) proposed three dimensions of public diplomacy: daily communication, strategic communication and the development of a lasting relationship. Daily communication involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions. Strategic communication consists in developing a set of simple themes, just as in a political or advertising campaign. The development of lasting relationships involves developing connections with key individuals, through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences and access to media channels (Singh *et al.* 2017). All three dimensions help in creating a country's attraction, which results in the achievement of various outcomes for a state. If policies are designed narrowly with self-serving interests and projected in an unskilled manner, this could result in tarnishing the image of a country (Nye 2008).

According to Nye, public diplomacy influences the behaviour of others. It is an instrument that the government uses to mobilise soft power (Chahine 2010). The state draws the attention of other nations through the use of broadcasting, educational and cultural exchange programmes, public information and political action (Hukil 2015). Recognising the intricate link between public diplomacy and soft power, Shambaugh (2015) – a veteran political scientist – describes soft power as ‘a magnet that pulls and draws others to a nation simply because of its powerful appeal by example’. Soft power is a society's capacity to attract others and public diplomacy is an instrument in the hands of government to persuade others (Hartig 2015).

Results and Discussion

The presence of Chinese media in Africa and the relationship between the African continent and China has roots in the pre-Cold War era. In 1958 China initiated its media engagement in Africa by opening the New China News Agency in Cairo. In 1963 and 1964, during his visit to Africa, the Chinese premier, Chou, enumerated eight principles for the long-term relationship between China and Africa. These principles are followed even today and serve as a guideline for the technical and economic relationship between Africa and China (Jinyuan 1984). In 1967, Radio Peking started transmitting twenty-one hours of weekly service in English in East Africa. In addition, translations of Chinese poems, quotations of Mao Tse Tung and the magazine *China Pictorial* were made available in Africa during the Cold War era (Leslie 2016).

With the end of the Cold War, the influence of Chinese media in Africa increased and changed outlook. The formal engagement of Chinese media on the continent began in 2000 with the establishment of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The forum stressed the development of media infrastructure. For example, in 2000, Xinhua provided satellite equipment for a television station in Uganda; in 2004 China assisted Gabon in building its national broadcasting station. Under the auspices of FOCAC, in 2006 forty-eight African countries joined China in the Beijing Action Plan (2006–2009). The plan charts three key aspects of African media: African media institutions, the practice of journalism and African journalists. The plan also highlights five areas for media intervention: enhanced contact between news media for promoting mutual understanding; multilevel exchanges and co-operation; reporting and coverage of news media by both sides; the arrangement of workshops for African correspondents in China; and the improvement of telecommunication infrastructure in African countries. In addition, during FOCAC 2006 summit, China called on the international community to help Africa fight the problems of hunger, disaster, poverty and debt reduction to meet the Millennium Development Goals (Leslie 2016). Beijing also published China's African Policy document which exclusively outlined the engagement of Chinese media in Africa. The document maintains that:

China wishes to encourage multi-tiered and multi-formed exchanges and cooperation between the media on both sides, to enhance mutual understanding and enable objective and balanced media coverage of each other. It will facilitate the communication and contacts between relevant government departments to share experiences on ways to handle the relations with media both domestic and foreign and guiding and facilitating media exchanges. (Wu 2014)

Also in 2006, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) policy document was launched to enhance co-operation between the respective media sectors. In the subsequent year, French-speaking African journalists were given training at China Media University which aimed to provide African journalists with first-hand experience of the workings of the media sector in China (Wu 2014). The fourth summit of FOCAC was held in Sharm el Sheikh (Egypt) in 2009. That summit's focus was on strengthening co-operation in the priority areas, with an emphasis on economic and social development (Xinhua 2009).

The Beijing Action Plan meeting held in 2018 under FOCAC was a landmark development for Chinese media engagement in Africa in that it institutionalised the communication and co-operation of Chinese and African media with the formation of the China–Africa Press Exchange Centre. The aim of establishing such a centre was to enable African foreign journalists based in China to observe and report on China (Wu 2014). The action plan provided for the establishment of the China–Africa Radio and Television Cooperation Forum. The plan also called for the full participation of China in African film and TV festivals and exhibitions to promote the African entertainment industry. In addition, the plan envisaged facilitating co-operation in the publication of literature related to fields like medical care, health, agricultural technology, culture and education (Wu 2014).

Institutionalising the engagement of Chinese media in Africa, the Johannesburg Action Plan (2016–2018) was formulated. The action plan postulated enhancing people-to-people co-operation and proposed training and capacity-building for 1,000 African media professionals each year. Further, the plan called for the digitalisation of African radio and TV services and industrial development in Africa. It was also agreed that both sides would provide films and TV programmes to each other's national broadcasting agencies to further long-term co-operation in the media sector. Moreover, the action plan stated that Chinese enterprises would donate books to African libraries and higher secondary institutes to promote Chinese language learning. In addition, a forum on China–Africa Publishing Cooperation would be held at a suitable time and would be institutionalised later as a sub-forum of FOCAC (Jiang et al. 2016).

Over time, China has developed in-depth media exchanges with African states. It has strengthened collaboration in creating audiovisual content, news coverage, training media-related professionals and advanced media technologies. Beijing is helping African media to develop information production and broadcasting facilitation and capacity, with the slogan

‘Smart Africa’. Under the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, China and Africa will enhance exchange and cooperation on publishing and share the stories of cooperation and friendship between China and Africa with books as the media (Ministry of Commerce of China 2021).

Chinese Media Actors and Inroads into the African Media Landscape

China uses multiple channels to reach the African continent, key among them being the central government, provincial governments and Chinese-based multinational companies (Kokkinos 2012). Discussing the activities of all these actors is beyond the scope of this paper, but in the following paragraphs we give an overview of China’s media engagement on the African continent.

In 2015, China enhanced its international communication capacities by investing approximately USD 6.6 billion (Hartig 2015: 87) towards expanding media outlets and broadcasting services across the globe (Yanqiu 2014). The following section highlights the role of several state-owned media channels in Africa: Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI) and press and publication organisations. Apart from state-owned media platforms, private media companies like Star Times are also active on the continent. Due to the limitations of this paper, only state media actors are discussed.

Xinhua News Agency

Xinhua is the most significant news agency in China, being the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and therefore has a highly influential role in the hierarchical media system of China. Since it is under the command of the State Council, Xinhua serves as a torchbearer for other media outlets when it broadcasts news on politically sensitive events. It broadcasts round the clock. In 2010 the English TV channel, China Xinhua News Network Corporation (CNC World), was launched with the aim of competing against international counterparts like BBC and Al Jazeera. However, it failed in its goal of creating a positive image of China in the West, because the West considers Xinhua a propaganda tool of the CCP. However, China succeeded in building its soft image in the South (Hartig 2015). Currently, Xinhua operates 200 stations at home and abroad and broadcasts in fifteen languages to more than half the world’s population. In 2021, the services of Xinhua were being used by 8,000 media institutions across the globe (Huaxia 2021) in eight languages (Chinese, English,

French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and Japanese), transmitting the content to almost 80,000 subscribers worldwide. Xinhua employs about 10,000 employees worldwide (AFP 2023).

Xinhua News Agency was the first Chinese media organisation to start operations in Africa, in the 1950s (Gagliardone and Geall 2014) and supported African news agencies during the liberation struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955 the first delegation from Egypt visited China, and Chinese journalists reciprocated during the Cold War era (Li and Ronning 2013a). Today, Xinhua News has wide coverage on the African continent, which also feeds into local media (Grassi 2014). Xinhua covers most of the African news stories that other media networks ignore, such as positive investment opportunities in Africa, tourism and stories of local leadership (positive journalism) (Grassi 2014), whereas the Western media presents the role of China through a stereotypical lens and focuses on the negative aspects of China (parachute journalism) (Grassi 2014; Xiang 2019; Xiaoling Zhang 2016). However, the credibility of Xinhua News is doubted because of its affiliation with CCP (Li and Ronning 2013b; Umejei 2020).

Several Xinhua News African bureaus were set up in the 1980s, but the number has soared in recent years. Presently in Africa, there are more than thirty Xinhua bureaus with sixty journalists, employing more than 400 local employees (Li 2017: 107). Xinhua has also signed MoUs with Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria to share its content (Grassi 2014).

After the formation of FOCAC, a number of new initiatives were undertaken to encourage people-to-people contact and enhance the integrated management of media resources in Africa (Jiang et al. 2016). Under the auspices of FOCAC Xinhua helped Uganda develop satellite equipment in 2004 (Wu 2014). In 2006, Chinese Media University welcomed more than twenty radio and TV journalists representing fifteen African countries. In the upcoming year, a two-week workshop was organised by Chinese Media University which trained more than thirty journalists from French-speaking African countries (Gagliardone, Repnikova and Stremlau 2010).

In April 2011 Xinhua reached another milestone in the African media landscape when it initiated a partnership with a Kenyan mobile operator to provide news feeds for mobile subscribers (Yanqiu 2014). It also started an SMS service in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and outdoor screens in Harare and Johannesburg. Kokkinos (2012) claimed that, regarding the quantity of news, Xinhua surpassed its counterparts, Associated Press (AP), Reuters and Agency France Presse (AFP).

China Central Television (CCTV)

China Central Television (CCTV) is the national TV station of China and one of the most important news sources for the Chinese. Along with TV programmes, CCTV has a range of multimedia operations which include movies, newspapers and internet channels. CCTV is the primary channel that transmits the news of the outside world to the Chinese public and, similarly, the global audience learns about China through CCTV. It operates six international channels in six different languages—Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. The English-language channel CCTV News is known as CCTV 9; it broadcasts round the clock. Since 2012 CCTV has become thoroughly global, expanding its business in new media platforms like Internet TV, Mobile TV, Bus Mobile TV and Internet Protocol TV, provided by CCTV.com. Its signals can be received everywhere in the world. The extent of this coverage is possible through co-operative agreements with 241 media outlets in 140 countries and regions. CCTV has also invested in keeping correspondents in nineteen locations and has bureaus on most continents (Hartig 2015).

As a national TV channel, CCTV aims at spreading Chinese culture, values, language and diplomacy around the world. With the help of CCTV the Chinese government is trying to use Chinese soft power (Yanqiu 2014; Li 2017: 109). In its global outreach, CCTV launched its first overseas news broadcasting station in Nairobi in January 2012. CCTV Africa is a unique initiative for CCTV because it is its only non-African news channel that gathers news from the continent and broadcasts it globally. The establishment of CCTV Africa also provides news feeds to metropolises such as London, Washington DC and Moscow, which helps to represent the soft power of China in different parts of the world (Wu 2014; Jiang et al. 2016). CCTV Africa presents stories that not only highlight issues of corruption and problems of governance but also focus on Africa's developmental problems, through programmes like 'Africa Live, Talk Africa and Faces of Africa' (Yanqiu 2014). These programmes can be watched in twenty-five African countries (Grassi 2014). More than 100 journalists are employed at its headquarters, most of them Africans representing different nationalities (Leslie 2016).

CCTV Africa presents African news stories that are different from those in the mainstream Western dominated media but also has a special focus on China (Jiang et al. 2016). The West has inherently different socioeconomic interests and questions China's engagement in Africa, whereas the Chinese media actors follow a strategy based on Chinese diplomacy and balance the Western criticism by spreading a positive image of China to the rest of the world (Xiaoling Zhang 2016; Armel 2021). The mission statement

of CCTV Africa is to: ‘[...] provide a platform for its Chinese audience to understand Africa better and promote the China–Africa friendship so that the real China can be introduced to Africa and the real Africa can be presented to the world’ (Li and Ronning 2013a).

In addition to reporting news on Africa and China, CCTV Africa has partnerships with national TV broadcasters to host their content—for example, it signed a MoU with the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) to broadcast CCTV Africa’s news programmes (Gagliardone and Geall 2014). Regarding journalism exchange, CCTV Africa is contributing significantly towards the media landscape of Africa (Jiang et al. 2016). Another initiative of CCTV Africa is the mobile TV service known as ‘I Love Africa’. This initiative is part of a series of efforts to digitalise the media landscape of Africa (Leslie 2016).

China Radio International (CRI)

China Radio International (CRI), formerly known as Radio Peking, was founded in 1941. It is owned and operated by the state. CRI broadcasts 1,500 hours of programmes each day in forty-three foreign languages, four Chinese dialects and five Chinese minority languages (CRI 2019). CRI launched its online services in 1998. In February 2006 CRI launched its first FM radio station abroad and started broadcasting on 91.9 FM directly from Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. By the end of May 2009, CRI operated a total of twenty-one FM or MW radio stations abroad, as well as eighteen different radio stations on the internet. In addition, China Radio International’s website, CRI-Online, is currently available in forty-four languages. This makes CRI-Online the website with the greatest diversity of languages in the world (CRI 2019).

In the African media landscape, CRI also played an active role in the liberation movement of African nations. Transmission in Africa began in 1956 (Grassi 2014) and by 2007 it had established editorial departments in English, French, Arabic, Hausa and Swahili at its Beijing headquarters. In 1967, Radio Peking transmitted twenty-one hours of service weekly in English in East Africa. In 2006, CRI launched its first overseas FM radio station in Nairobi. CRI Nairobi broadcasts different programmes related to China’s economic, social and cultural development, for nineteen hours, in English, Kiswahili and Chinese languages. It also sends its live localised programmes to Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) (Kokkinos 2012; Grassi 2014). CRI now has offices in many African countries, like Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Tunisia, South Africa and Niger, where it broadcasts news on shortwave radio and the internet (Grassi 2014; US-China Institute 2021).

With the formation of FOCAC, the engagement of African journalists in China and their training and capacity-building has increased significantly. Further, co-operation in broadcast advertisements has seen an upward trend, which has led to an enhancement of trade and infrastructure development in the African media industry (Nassanga and Makara 2014). The Johannesburg Action Plan (2016–2018) led to China helping Africa in digitalising radio and TV services. The initiative is welcomed by Africans for building the capacity of African journalists and their employability through training by Chinese think tanks and academic institutes.

Like CCTV and Xinhua News Agency, CRI also strives to present the soft image of China and change the negative perception of China (Jiang et al. 2016). In 2011 Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC) launched the first Chinese soap opera translated into Kiswahili by CRI. This programme aimed to promote Chinese popular culture in Africa, as expressed in the Beijing Action Plan (2013–2015) (Li and Ronning 2013b).

China Daily

China Daily is a national English-language newspaper that was founded in 1981. The main purpose of this publication is to create a more positive image of China in mainstream Western media. Over time the China Daily group expanded its market beyond China and now prints in thirty-four overseas sites (China Daily, 2023).

The launch of *China Daily Africa* in 2012 marked a significant point in China and Africa's relationship in the media landscape. This publication is also known as *Voice of China* and *Window to China*. It sends news and information about Chinese politics, economy, society and culture to its readers all over the world (Mboya 2015). China Daily is published from its Johannesburg and Nairobi offices and is printed by Nation Media Group, the largest media company in East Africa. The Monday to Friday editions contain twenty-four pages and sixteen pages are added to the Saturday and Sunday editions, which are circulated throughout the continent (Yanqiu 2014).

The launch of *China Daily Africa* in 2012 was aimed at giving coverage to Sino–African relations and improving communication and co-operation between China and Africa, which implies that another objective was to encourage greater Chinese involvement in the continent (Grassi 2014). The comments and views published in *China Africa Daily* are contributed by many international readers including those from China and Africa (Wu 2014). This feature makes a unique contribution to the African media landscape. Before the launch of this daily publication only the Western media view of China was presented to Africa and it was not without bias.

However, the image of China presented by *China Africa Daily* is a projection of the Chinese understanding and its interests and thus, according to Mboya (2015) the image and standing of China has improved on the continent.

Other print media include the China Foreign Language Publishing Bureau, commonly known as the China International Publishing Group (CIPG), which was established in 1993. It supervises the activities of ten publishing houses and is one of China's leading international publishing companies. CIPG targets foreign audiences through the publication of books, magazines and websites. It publishes 200 titles per year, with the aim of creating a soft image of China (Hartig 2015).

Criticism of the Chinese Media Development Assistant Programme

The engagement of China in Africa, especially in its media landscape, has led to much criticism from scholars and authors. These opinions can be summed up in two narratives – the political and the economic – as discussed below.

The Political Criticisms of Chinese Engagement in Africa

China's increased engagement in Africa is perceived differently by different stakeholders. Some scholars view China's presence as a continued form of colonialism and neocolonialism mainly motivated by imperialistic designs (Gagliardone et al. 2010; Yanqiu 2014). Another view, stated in Nassanga and Makara's (2014) study 'Perception of Chinese Presence in Africa as Reflected in the African Media', suggests that due to the increasing pressure of China's population and the scarcity of its resources China and Chinese firms have adopted the strategy of 'open up', 'go out' and 'go global' (Nassanga and Makara 2014).

Fackson Banda (2009) claims that the intervention of Chinese media in Africa is 'part of China's long history of anti-colonial and anti-imperialism struggles'. In contrast, the Chinese presence in Africa is seen favourably by Melnyk (2021) and Matanji (2022), who state that Africa perceives that China will help to focus attention on long-neglected areas such as infrastructure development, market competition, business partnerships, strengthening Africa's capacity to conquer diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS, and promote economic growth (Gill, Huang and Morrison 2007). There has been an exponential investment in Africa's natural resources and the presence of Chinese firms in countries like Angola and Sudan is very evident (Gagliardone et al. 2010). For these reasons, Africans view China favourably, unlike the Western perception of China as a land-grabber, resource-extractor or neocolonial power (Nassanga and Makara 2014).

The Politico-economic View of Chinese Engagement in Africa

There are multiple political explanations for China's presence on the African continent. The strengthening ties between China and Africa are viewed by the West as the rise of the 'Beijing Consensus', an approach that is more relaxed and guided by the policy of non-interference. The Western world operates on the principles of the 'Washington Consensus', which is based on much stricter rules and the principle of intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. Chinese investments in African markets are perceived as a threat to Western donors who grant loans on strict conditionality criteria, whereas the Chinese do not ask for compliance with human rights or an agenda of good governance (Nassanga and Makara 2014), nor do they push for a policy with strings attached (Gagliardone and Geall, 2014). Due to the peculiar style of Chinese investment in Africa, Western countries characterise the model as based on rapid economic growth, centralisation and containment of democratisation forces (Gagliardone et al. 2010). The success of the Chinese model in Africa is viewed as the rise of South–South co-operation marked by mutual benefits and a win-win situation (Axelsson 2009; Gills 2016).

Some intellectuals view Chinese engagement on the continent as one of give and take, where China needs resources and Africa needs cheap Chinese-manufactured products, ranging from clothes and jewellery to electronic devices. The entry of Chinese firms in Africa is viewed as a threat to Western interests which once dominated Africa but are now being replaced by Chinese multinational firms (Nassanga and Makara 2014). In the context of the presence of Chinese businesses in South Africa, Yu-Shan Wu comments in the article 'China's Media and Public Diplomacy Approach in Africa: Illustrations from South Africa' that the presence of Chinese media in South Africa serves multiple purposes, most significant being the use of the press as a tool of public diplomacy (Jiang et al. 2016). The huge export of Chinese media technology and technical know-how to Africa has led to comments that it is a new mode of dependency (Banda 2009). A perfect example of such a dependency relationship is China's provision of much media technology to Uganda (Nassanga and Makara 2014).

Beijing claims that its media expansion and support to African media is the continuation of China's soft power strategy along with resource diplomacy, student exchange and foreign aid (Gagliardone and Geall, 2014). This approach came to prominence in 1999 when China decided to 'Go Global' and incorporated this policy into its Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001–2005). The aim implied by this policy intervention was to encourage Chinese enterprises to invest overseas, improve competitiveness and secure an international business presence. Moreover, the policy implied the target

of improving public opinion in the world (Gagliardone and Geall 2014). In analysing the presence of Chinese media in the African media landscape, it would seem that it is the direct result of the Chinese policy of going global. Whether through state-run media like Xinhua News, CCTV, CRI, China Daily Africa or private media companies like Star Times, the objectives of all these initiatives are to present China's soft image (Yanqiu 2014), counter the anti-Chinese narrative of Western media in Africa and offset the China threat theory (Hartig 2015).

According to the FOCAC manifesto, the third phase of FOCAC (2015–2021) was to see the establishment of multiple sub-categories of China–Africa co-operation. These included the China–Africa People-to-People Forum, China–Africa Youth Leaders Forum, China–Africa Think Tank Forum and China–Africa Media Cooperation Forum. These civic activities obviously underscore Chinese soft power in Africa (Yu 2022). China enjoys media business in Africa because it exerts not only the Chinese version of business model but also shapes the minds of Africans by removing the negative perception of China (Li and Ronning 2013a).

Conclusion

China's media development assistance in Africa is a manifestation of the Chinese strategy of soft power politics and of promoting a positive image of itself. As prescribed by the theory of soft power, technology, economic resources and education are used to create the power of attraction. This is what China is doing in Africa to achieve its goals, particularly through the power of communication and co-operation. China serves its interests in Africa by using its skills of public diplomacy to develop the latter's media infrastructure. Some studies point out that Chinese media channels are more popular in Africa than the Western media, mainly sponsored by the USA. But since these studies are limited to a few cases we cannot generalise. It is clear, though that there is a hybridisation of journalism.

The Chinese government has invested heavily in Africa's digital communication industry and has supported the interaction between Chinese media firms with African counterparts. The coverage of African news stories by Chinese media actors also indicates Chinese interest in the domestic affairs of the African states. The formation of multilateral forums like FOCAC, the Beijing Action Plan and the Johannesburg Action Plan reiterate the institutionalisation of Chinese ties with various African states. Moreover, in the bid to improve its image, China has hosted thousands of African journalists in capacity-building training and workshops. These growing ties between the two regions are viewed with scepticism by the

Western powers, which project China as a neocolonial and neo-imperial power, engaged in the economic exploitation of the resources of Africa. At this stage, given that Africa is such a large and varied continent and that there is no comprehensive study that could be used as a barometer to authenticate Western claims against Chinese media, it is difficult to testify who is right about China's aims. Its development assistance in Africa is motivated either by promoting Chinese soft power or by Chinese imperialist designs (as claimed by Western media). Nevertheless, China is presenting an alternative to the Western media, is covering what is not reported by the Western media, and influences African public opinion by providing a benign view of China. There is more than one perspective and the world needs to know the positive side of China's grand designs, such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the revival of the Old Silk Road tradition.

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