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Special issue on
ELECTRIC SHADOWS:
MEDIA IN EAST ASIAN/AFRICAN RELATIONS

Bob Wekesa
The Media Framing of China’s Image in East Africa:
An Exploratory Study

Jaroslaw Jura, Kaja Kaluzynska
Not Confucius, nor Kung Fu:
Economy and Business as Chinese Soft Power in Africa

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the Cases of China and South Africa

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Lonely Nights Online: How does Social Networking
Channel Chinese Migration and Business to Africa?
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Editor’s introduction

By Cobus van Staden*

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The flow of media between East Asia and Africa is a largely untold story. Whereas it sometimes seems that the only thing growing faster than Asia-Africa trade and investment is reporting on Asia-Africa trade and investment, this intensive coverage finds it difficult to step outside of its own assumptions and to discuss itself as media. Tracking, describing, analyzing and critiquing the increasingly complex relationship between East Asia and Africa has developed into a burgeoning scholarly field and a competitive journalistic beat. However, those following this growing field are frequently exasperated that after more than two decades of mounting column inches, many half-truths are stubbornly repeated in the popular press and many more questions remain unasked. This edition of African East Asian Affairs turns the focus on the role of media in East Asia-African relations. In particular, we have brought together scholars busy developing new, exciting ways of analyzing the frontiers of Asian-African media engagement and the role it plays in mediating the wider economic and strategic relationship between these two regions.

Accounts of bilateral relations and infrastructure, mining and financing deals

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have so far played a major role in scholarship about the growing engagement between East Asia and Africa, while the wider socio-political forces that mediate these exchanges remain relatively under-explored. I hasten to say that it is not my intention to criticize the former approach. Describing the terms and effects of these political and financial developments is crucially important work and the findings of these scholars have both shaped the field within which we work, and reflect the importance of Asia-Africa relations in the global economy. However, I also feel that not exploring the underlying social reality within which these developments occur and the way that discourse shapes their logic risks reducing the actors to ciphers or monoliths.

The problem is that identifying the forces structuring this underlying reality, finding ways to analyze them and measuring their effect is a complex endeavour. There is a reason why “Africa” and “Asia” remain such valuable shorthand, because once we split them into the billions of individual Africas and Asias engaged in the transactions that constitute “Africa-Asia engagement”, we risk drowning in discourse. Yet, the fact that concepts like soft power, national influence and public diplomacy are nebulous don’t make the role they play in facilitating the mining, infrastructure and logging contracts constituting Asia-Africa engagement any less important. In fact, one could argue that they not only create the political environment within which such deals become possible, but also that their very nebulousness stands in interesting contrast to the level of government resources spent on them.

Due to various historical factors, the East Asian powers driving the current expansion of East Asia-Africa relations have limited hard power options in Africa. Compared to the presence of US military bases in countries like Ethiopia, as well as France’s relatively frequent military action on the continent, China is largely constrained by its long-standing dogma of non-intervention, as is Japan by its peacetime constitution. In addition to these policy constraints, the exercis-
The use of hard power in foreign climes remains an unattractive option for these powers, due to its expense, logistical complications and inevitable international backlash. At the same time, despite the worrying flare-ups of violence in areas like the DRC and the Sahel, the World Bank estimated that a third of Sub-Saharan countries had economic growth rates of 6% or higher in 2012. Asian investment is playing a significant role in the region’s current focus on economic growth, resource beneficiation and infrastructure development. We therefore find ourselves in a moment when economic ties and closer relationships are being pursued by both sides. That said, this deepening of the relationship has also led to a debate about whether its structure is economically sustainable – an issue prominently raised by South Africa’s President Jacob Zuma in his speech at the opening session of the 5th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing in July 2012. One could argue that as the economic engagement between East Asia and Africa grows in complexity, intangible factors mediating this relationship will come to play a more fundamental role.

For this reason it becomes crucial to focus in more detail on what constitutes relations between states. A state is more than its government, and for each picture of a ministerial handshake one sees the relationship between East Asia and Africa described as neo-colonial. For researchers to gain more insight into what constitutes the core of East Asia-Africa relations, and how citizens on both sides perceive this situation, it is necessary to immerse themselves in media. Yet the act of immersion isn’t enough. We need the tools to sift through the masses of media produced every day in order to clarify what is being expressed. Providing a few tools for the job and case studies of such analyses in action is the goal of this edition of African East Asian Affairs.

Up to now, Africa-Asia media exchange has flown under the radar: From the Cold War, when Japanese animation was shown on apartheid-era South African state TV, and martial arts films from Hong Kong sold a new model of post-
colonial glamour to the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, to the current expansion of Chinese state-owned media like CCTV and Xinhua to African markets and the growing participation of African in globalized online consumption of media from Japan and South Korea (for accounts of some of these developments, see Prashad, 2003; Van Staden, 2010, 2011; Wu, 2012). The history of African consumption of East Asian media is important as an under-examined part of the larger history of cultural globalization and East Asia’s part in it, but also because governments like those of Japan and the People’s Republic of China are taking the role of media in foreign policy increasingly seriously, as evidenced by the expansion of Chinese state-owned media and the Japanese government’s Cool Japan campaign.

However, this immediately brings up a host of new complications. Just as Asia-Africa relations are in a state of unprecedented flux, so is the mediasphere. Historical bastions of Western media have over the past few years simply evaporated or have curtailed their foreign reporting. We have seen the popularization of user-generated online media, and attempts to meld the prestige of a famous masthead with the economics of blogging. In addition, the last decade and a half has also seen the rise of non-Western 24-hour television news giants like Al-Jazeera and CCTV. The rapid expansion of the latter has drawn particular attention in Africa. This is not only because it challenges the traditional hegemony of Western broadcasters on the continent, but because its presence in Africa is explicitly linked to correcting perceived unfair Western portrayals of China’s role in Africa (Ngomba, 2012; Wu, 2012). CCTV is certainly not the first non-African state-owned broadcast entity on the continent and it is also not the only service purporting to correct perceived negative reporting about a state’s foreign policy. For example, France 24 states its mission as “to cover international current events from a French perspective and to convey French values throughout the world.” However, the launch of CCTV, as well as the enhanced presence of the state-owned news agency Xinhua and China Radio International, drew atten-
tion to the fact that the Chinese government felt that the growing economic engagement between Africa and China had to be bolstered by positive perceptions. However, it is easy to overstate the significance of this move. In the first place, CCTV and Xinhua aren’t specifically ‘targeting’ Africa – their African expansion forms part of a worldwide expansion strategy (Branigan, 2011). In addition, China has maintained a media presence in the form of Xinhua bureaus and radio broadcasts in Africa from the Cold War. What changed is not the fact of the presence itself, but its scale and its tenor. Cold War Chinese media broadcasts were quite propagandist and frequently included invective against Western imperialism and Soviet ‘revisionism’ (Hutchison, 1975). However, since the 1990s CCTV has reflected China’s turn towards business and investment while also being influenced by increasing commercialization of the media within China (Zhao, 2000). In addition, since investing in a large production facility in Nairobi, CCTV Africa has worked to develop more African content, and has hired many Kenyan staff members (Jacobs, 2012). When focusing on broadcast content, the description of CCTV as representing China or the Chinese government is oversimplified. Rather, it is competing with other international and local media outlets in an increasingly crowded African media space while remaining extremely sensitive to issues directly relating to China, controversial news topics such as Tibet, and Chinese interests in individual African countries. In this sense, the Chinese press is trying to play an unfamiliar role in Africa – not only to report African news to Chinese audiences at home, but also to represent Africa to African audiences while competing with local and international press. This is a difficult task for any news operation – doubly so when media is viewed as a form of state-based soft power. For example, in August 2012 Zhong Jianhua, the Chinese special envoy to Africa, criticized Chinese journalists for “not reporting on Africa in an effective way” (Yang, 2012)

Another, more central, concern with making the debate about Chinese media in Africa only about the expansion of state-owned media is that despite the elevat-
ed symbolic status these companies occupy as organs of state and their historical role as the tealeaves one reads to try to understand behind-the-scenes Beijing, it is yet unclear how wide their influence is really felt in Africa. CCTV Africa and China Daily Africa are both still recent arrivals and much research is still needed regarding their actual efficacy as both sources of news and influence. The expansion of state-owned media in Africa cannot be seen in isolation from what seems to me the more fundamental Chinese contribution to the African mediascape – the expansion of internet and mobile phone networks by companies like Huawei and ZTE. The provision of affordable smartphones and internet access isn’t only leading to the expansion of the African mediasphere, it is providing both Africans and Asian migrants to Africa radically new tools of self-expression. We are standing at the dawn of a revolution in Africa’s powers of self-narration, and a significant part of this shift is due to this kind of data network provision.

This shifting landscape presents new challenges and opportunities for researchers interested in looking at the fine grain of the Asia-Africa relationship. In this edition of *African East Asian Affairs* we offer new perspectives on the role media is playing in mediating and directing this relationship. We aim to contribute not only specific case studies, but also to point out methodological tools open to those interested in gauging the way media undergirds this intercontinental relationship.

Our first two articles suggest two separate methodologies for dealing with reporting about China in online newspapers and portals.

Bob Wekesa’s article *The Media Framing of China’s Image in East Africa: An Exploratory Study* uses framing theory to examine the coverage of China in four East African newspapers. Referring to the cognitive context within which readers position and interpret pieces of information, framing theory presents a useful approach to newspaper coverage. This is particularly because it goes beyond
simply asking whether the coverage in question is objective or not. Leaving aside the thorny issue of whether objectivity is truly an achievable goal in journalism, putting objectivity at the center of the enquiry also forces the researcher into the role of adjudicator, which is not the most relevant position for someone focusing on the issue of national influence. Wekesa makes the point that in the realm of national image, perception and believability is a more relevant attribute than truth. His division between strong frames (indicating high levels of believability in either a positive or negative context) and weak frames (indicating higher levels of ambiguity, complexity or ‘objectivity’) provides researchers with a way to ascertain what the effect of China coverage in the African press will be on perceptions of China in East Africa. His conclusion that despite the presence of critical coverage, the majority of articles on China lean towards both positive and economic/business framing complicates easy assumptions about China’s image among ordinary Africans.

This method stands in contrast to Jaroslaw Jura and Kaja Kaluzynska’s computer-aided quantitative methodology in their paper *Not Confucius, nor Kung Fu: Economy and Business as Chinese Soft Power in Africa*. They conducted both word frequency and word adjacency surveys of articles and reader comments about China from Angolan and Ghanaian online newspapers and portals. Their findings present a surprising challenge to received ideas of soft power. Joseph Nye (1990) famously argued that US soft power is primarily generated through cultural influence and a reputation for democracy and human rights – a soft power model that has had significant influence on Asian diplomacy in Africa and elsewhere. Jura and Kaluzynska find a distinct lack of interest in Chinese culture and history among African journalists and readers. In contrast, they find that Africans are singularly focused on China’s business success. They come to the conclusion that in contrast to Nye’s classification of economic might as hard power, in the case of China, reporting on economic development should be seen as an under-explored aspect of soft power.
The first two papers analyze online newspapers. Despite drawing on newspapers and portals from different parts of Africa, and using quite different methodologies, their findings are remarkably similar. Both studies reveal that the aspect of Chinese engagement in Africa that draws the most attention from the African press is economic engagement. The fact that, despite differences in region and method, both studies confirm this point presents compelling evidence that should inspire new ways of thinking about Asian soft power expansion in Africa. At the same time, the focus on how journalists frame China-Africa relations also implies a focus on elite expression. Despite the fact that reader comments are an increasingly important aspect of online news, the analysis of newspaper provides an important view into elite decision-making.

Yet, the rapid expansion of social networking in both China and Africa is changing this landscape and our second pair of papers provides contrasting ways of approaching this influence. Yu-Shan Wu’s paper *The Political and Diplomatic Implications of Social Media: the Cases of China and South Africa* gives us a bird’s-eye view of the expansion of social media in China and Africa, particularly focusing on South Africa. She asks what the impact of rapidly proliferating social networking is on the relationship between the citizens and governments of these respective countries and to which extent social media represents a new channel of communication between them. Contrasting the use of social media in mediating citizen-government interactions in China and South Africa, she argues that despite the Chinese government’s restrictions on certain online expression, Chinese social media has evolved into a space for innovative negotiation between the state and citizens. Netizen comments aren’t necessarily ignored in China and in some cases they have led to change. In contrast, the rapid increase of South Africans participating in social networking has not led to a similar level of engagement from the South African government. This is not only due to a certain lack of interest from the majority of South African leaders, but also because South African users tend not to use social media for direct political ex-
pression to the same extent as their Chinese counterparts. However, due to the rapid adoption of smartphone technology and Africa’s current tendency to leapfrog over stages of technological evolution, this might change. She concludes by looking ahead at the possible impact of the rapid growth of social networking on China-Africa diplomacy.

Wu’s overhead assessment of large trends in social media and diplomacy in the China-Africa space gives way to Jinghao Lu and my article *Lonely Nights Online: How Does Social Networking Channel Chinese Migration and Business to Africa?* We looked at social networking’s mediating role at the grassroots level, particularly as regards to how it influences migration and business development. By concentrating on Chinese small and medium enterprises in Ghana, we attempted to provide researchers with a broad outline of which modes of social networking play particularly significant roles in drawing Chinese migrants to Africa and building business ties between China and Africa. We also point out some of the opportunities and challenges facing researchers interested in looking at the various corners of Chinese social networking. In the second place, we analyzed the conversations taking place on Chinese-language online forums, highlighting three main themes in the larger conversation among Chinese considering migrating to Africa. By providing translations of some of the discussions falling under these themes – discussions of business and job opportunities, discussions of professional and romantic relationships with Africans and discussions of the African landscape – we hope to open a wider conversation about the role of social networking in China-Africa migration - an issue that deserves a lot more attention.

These papers constitute initial steps in what will hopefully become a wider consideration of the role of media in general and new media in particular in the East Asia-Africa relationship. Our intention was not only to raise new questions, but also to start readers’ thinking about other lacunae in this field. These include
questions around media consumption patterns among Africans and Asian migrants to the continent, the role of fandom in perceptions of different East Asian countries among Africans, the integration of African media consumers into transnational consumption communities dominated by East Asian production hubs, and the role of social networking in facilitating African migration to East Asia.

We hope this volume will prove useful not only to researchers interested in Asia-Africa relations but also to those focused on media’s dual power to both create new diplomatic opportunities and to close them down. We hope that in this way we can complicate and enrich the discussion of the influence of media in Asia-Africa relations.

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The Media Framing of China’s Image in East Africa:
An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Sino-East African relations are very significant for the continent. These tightening, multilevel and overarching relations are to a certain extent dependent on the accumulation of perceptions among East Africans about China. China-Africa social science literature has pointed out that China has both a favourable and unfavourable image in East Africa. These studies however exhibit a certain level of vagueness from a communication perspective in so far as they lack empiricism. This exploratory paper investigates the media image of China in East Africa with a view to determining positive, negative and weak perceptions by applying a content analysis approach. I use a media framing model to investigate China’s image as represented by four Nation Media Group English-language newspapers during 2011. As an exploratory study, the paper discusses some of the issues raised by the analysis, presents tentative findings and proposes further research directions.

Predictions touting the imminent consignment of print media to history by new

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media (OECD, 2010, Newspaper Death Watch, 2007, Poynter Institute, 2011) do not take cognizance of the fact that mainstream newspapers have re-invented themselves through online platforms (The Economist, 2012; Reiss, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2012), effectively blurring the line between their print and online versions. Indeed, while hardcopy newspapers are in decline in the West, they are showing double-digit growth in Africa and Asia (Christian Science Monitor 2010; NMG 2011).

Online or print, newspapers remain relevant as a platform for the social elite (see Holihan, 2008 for instance) compared to radio and TV. Elites’ decisions are visited on the populace in a top-down, “two step flow” as theorized by Lazerfeld (discussed in Baran & Davies, 2009, citing Lippmann, 1922; see also, Mills, 1956; Chomsky & Herman, 1988).

Many images of China exist depending on which issues and individuals are involved (Peng, 2004). In order to identify how some of these images manifest in Africa, I have analysed the coverage of China in East African newspapers in 2011. Framing theory can serve as an approach to understand the media image of China in East African newspapers (Li & Chitty, 2009).

**Framing concepts**

Framing as a field was conceptualized in 1974 by the sociologist Erving Goffman, as the classification, organization, and interpretation of life experiences (Pan & Kociski, 1993). Framing is about mental codes of experience in relation to a particular organized mode of cognitive perception and response to complex situations. Frames denote clusters of ideas that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label experiences. Drawing on Graber (1988), Entman (1993) says frames are close to concepts such as categories, scripts, or stereotypes that connote mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ information processing. This cognitive-inclined definition sees frames as an
illumination of the precise way in which influence over human consciousness is exerted by the transfer of information.

For Morley (1976) cited in Reese (2001) framing is the “basic conceptual and ideological ‘framework’ through which events are presented and as a result of which they come to be given one dominant/primary meaning rather than another”. Drawing on successive framing scholars, we can delineate the traits of a news frame as persistency/frequency/consistency, selection/placement, unique contextualization, inclusion/exclusion/insertion, emphasis/elaboration (Gitlin, 1980; Kahneman & Tversky 1981, 1986; Gamson & Modgiliani’s, 1987; Tankard, et al. 1991, Entman, 1993; Pan & Kociski, 1993; Reese, 2001; Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001). Texts (for example, newspaper articles) advocate certain ideas (Pan & Kociski, 1993) and researchers have identified common ‘central ideas’ or news frames such as human impact/interest, attribution (of responsibility), powerlessness, economics (consequences), moral values/morality and conflict (Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Neuman et al. 1992).

Entman (1993) seminally conceives of framing as the selection of aspects of perceived reality, making them salient in a text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal relationship, moral evaluation, and/or treatment. News framing has been theorized as involving sources, journalists and audiences and as a process that happens within four locations: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and culture; leading to encoding, interpreting, retrieving, constructing and processing news (Pan & Kociski, 1993; Entman, 1993).

From the above definition of framing, I find the theory relevant to investigating how East African newspapers portray China. I would therefore start my research from the following hypothesis: media framing of the image of China in East Africa is more or less balanced between negative and positive perceptions because of the interplay of both negative and positive media frames.
Generic and specific framing

There are relaxed or unrestricted versus purist, strict or reductionist approaches to framing analysis. The field can be divided into two ideal-typical categories: specific and generic framing (Druckman, 2001; Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001; Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams & Trammell, 2005). Specific framing is best suited to small, narrow and explicit issues, events and case studies and is thus less suited to a subject as broad and complex as the image of China in East Africa. I would argue that a generic, thematic turn of framing is best suited to this study because our aim is to understand how East African newspapers portray China in a general sense rather than focusing on a single theme.

Weak and strong; negative and positive frames

One can distinguish between weak and strong frames by drawing on the insight of Chong & Druckman (2007) that “frequent exposure to a frame will increase the accessibility and availability of considerations highlighted by the frame”. This will explain why certain headlines contribute either strongly or weakly to China’s image.

The strength of a China frame in a newspaper article or articles increases with its perceived persuasiveness. Weak China frames in newspaper articles are typically seen as unpersuasive, whereas strong China frames are compelling for instance on the basis of tone and word choice (Druckman, 2001). The analytic focus in the data segment of this study falls on 1) How weak or strong the positive frames are and 2) how weak or strong the negative frames are. In other words, frames can be either very positive or not very positive and very negative or not very negative.

The assumption here is that strong frames result when the choice of codes leave little or no doubt that the frame is manifestly and patently negative or positive to the desired image of China. We assume that anybody interested in the positive
image of China would see the headline as unequivocally positive and applaud it or the same individual would see the headline as negative and cringe. In addition to Chong & Druckman’s dichotomy between positive and negative on the basis of persuasiveness, we consider weak frames as those in which both negative and positive frames vie for prominence or are lucidly evident; where there is an apparent ambiguity and ambivalence, and where it is not immediately possible to decide whether strong feelings or perceptions can be elicited either way.

In this paper I will test to which degree weak and strong, positive or negative frames are discernible in East African newspapers’ coverage of China.

**Methodology**

I use a quantitative, content analysis approach to systematically and objectively analyse and describe China coverage in East African newspaper texts (Kerlinger, 1986 cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). The sample is the four Nation Media Group (NMG) newspapers namely, *Daily Nation* (general daily news, Kenya), *The Citizen* (general daily news, Tanzania), *Business Daily* (business and finance Monday to Friday, Kenya) and *The EastAfrican* (niche market and specialized weekly, EAC region). *The Daily Monitor* of Uganda is the only NMG English print title omitted because of access limitations. By using private/commercial newspapers, we aim to find out how they portray China un-swayed by officialdom.

Pan & Kociski (1993) have pointed out that headlines are the most powerful framing devices in news items. My analytical units are all the headlines that have the word/code “China” or an explicit ‘Chinese’ element such as a national icon or place in them for the period of January to December 2011. This is a sufficient sample for an exploratory study that limits the danger of sampling errors (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

Founded in 1959, the Nation Media Group (NMG) is publicly listed on the Nai-
robi Securities Exchange. According to my interpretation of the data on their website, the company approaches monopolistic tendencies in East and Central Africa (NMG, 2011). It’s a multimedia company made up of over fifteen subsidiaries across the fields of newspapers, broadcasting, digital media, printing, courier services, transportation and ecommerce platforms (NMG, 2012) with operations in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa. In 2011 the company registered a turnover of Kshs11.25 billion (US$967.5 million), an increase of 17.1 per cent on the back of the profitability of its newspaper circulation and advertisement revenue (NMG, 2012).

Two of the most common framing categories that scholars have described in previous research and which I use in this study are economic consequences and conflict frames (Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001). The conflict frame relates to “the disagreement between individuals, institutions, or countries and emphasize points of divergence between conflicting parties” while the economic consequences frame is seen as a preoccupation with the ‘bottom line, profit and loss (Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001).

These two categories are wide enough to pinpoint the image of China in NMG publications. To support my content analysis, I developed a code sheet with the following elements: date, headline, economic (consequences), conflict, positive, negative, and weak. In addition, I developed a second category to specifically look at the following newspaper sections: ‘hard news’, ‘soft news, ‘opinion’, and ‘business’.

In quantitative communication research, scholars usually create categories or typologies for the purpose of undertaking newspaper content analysis. This makes the analysis clear in that the content, in this case headlines, must fall into certain slots as laid out above. This is as opposed to qualitative research where the soundness of arguments is the main methodological focus. We can look at categories as the slots we use to sort the vast amount of content available to us.
Placing the content into these slots (for instance economic, conflict, hard news, positive, weak, etc), enable us not only to analyse it in terms of quantity but also to manipulate it in various ways. This allows us an empirical understanding of the perceptions and portrayals of China in East African newspapers.

Results and Discussion

How do the four NMG newspapers contribute to the positive, negative and weak media framing of China in East Africa?

Figure 1: Coverage per newspaper (the numbers in each segment denote the number of headlines in each newspaper from January to December 2011).
The Citizen has the highest number of China headlines followed by Business Daily, Daily Nation and EastAfrican.

The EastAfrican (EAN)

Comparatively, The EastAfrican has the lowest number of “China” codes, the overwhelming majority of which are economic consequence frames. It contributes only 6 per cent to the total number of positive frames and 0 per cent of negative frames. It has the highest percentage of positive frames of the four newspapers at 65 per cent while its negative and weak frames account only for 35 per cent. On average therefore, The EastAfrican is the most important newspaper to China’s media image in terms of positive portrayal but the least in terms of frame frequency.

Daily Nation (DN)

Daily Nation is relatively balanced in frame selection between economic consequences and conflict frames. Overall however, it has more negative than positive frames, at 58 per cent and 43 per cent respectively, making it the newspaper that contributes the most to a negative media image of China in East Africa.

Overall, Daily Nation contributes 16 per cent to the total positive frames and 31 per cent to the negative frame, this being a high percentage of negative frame equivalence considering that it is ranked third in terms of frequency of reporting.

Of the four newspapers, Daily Nation is the only one that placed a negative China frame on its front page during the period analysed (Chinese firm loses Rwanda media license, April 24). The selection of this headline and its prominence can be seen as an attempt to highlight a negative depiction, particularly considering that Daily Nation ideally targets a Kenyan rather than Rwandan readership. Ordinarily this headline would not have made the front page. The article is
about *Star Times*, a Chinese firm, that won a Kenyan government contract for digital signal distribution for which *Daily Nation*’s parent company, NMG, had also bid. NMG also published editorial articles critical to China, and citing the case of the tender – a matter unfolding at the time of finalizing this paper. Other articles on this specific topic are illustrative: *Chinese firm to control media signal* (July 20), *Chinese firm loses Rwanda media license* (July 22 – apparently a carry-over from the April headline above), *Contracting the services to a Chinese signals firm is capitalism gone amok* (July 22), *Why is it risky for state and China to control media* (July 24), to mention only a few.

Newspapers are not only pure conduits of news but also businesses and may see China as a competitor. For this reason their framing is occasionally self-serving rather than detached and objective. It would not be a stretch to expect that the ‘Chinese media going out strategy’ will equally be framed as Chinese media entering into competition with East African media. Commercial East African media conglomerates such as NMG may also have business partners and interests in other fields who might feel the heat of Chinese companies’ closing deals especially with African companies and these interests could also find their way into headlines, as a number of headlines in this study affirm.

At the peak of negative valence, the framing concepts of persistence and equivalence are the most discernable in *Daily Nation*, for example: *China warns over detained artists’ image* (May, 1), *China frees rights lawyer but another disappears* (May, 6), *Defiant Christians petition China parliament on rights* (May, 13), *China boosts security in protest-hit region* (May, 28).

**Business Daily (BD)**

*Business Daily* stands out as the newspaper with the highest number of economic consequences frames over conflict frames probably on account of being a business journal. The positive frames are roughly half more than the negative
frames. *Business Daily* therefore has a higher equivalence of positive economic consequence frames and an equally high per capita rate of negative frames.

*Business Daily* has the second highest frequency of China framing of the four newspapers contributing 41 per cent of the positive framing and 39 per cent of the negative framing. An analysis of the headlines indicates the proclivity to dramatic framing of otherwise ‘dry’ economic themes. Examples include: Fundraising pressure piles on Chinese banks (January 17), Ambitious US firms wary of upsetting China (January 20), Kenya-China bilateral trade hits record KShs 144 billion [$1.6 billion] (February 24), Chinese firm tightens grip with Telkom Kenya KShs 4 billion [$46.7 million] deal (March 18), Chinese in panic buying of salt (March 22), India tightens trade link with SA as it competes against China for major investments in Africa (April 19), China’s tighter ties with EAC signal new scramble for regional business (May 10), China tightens links with ‘rich’ Africa to feed thriving economy (June 1), China Apple frenzy triggers smuggling (July 26), Japan faces off with China over mega infrastructure deals (August 15), US shrugs off China’s threat in trade (August 19).

**The Citizen (TC)**

Consistent with being the newspaper with the highest number of China codes of the four newspapers, *The Citizen* of Tanzania also has the highest number of positive and negative frames. However, internally, *The Citizen* has a positive rating of 49 per cent while the negative frames within the newspaper account for 37 per cent. The rest is made up of weak frames. The only positive front-page article within the analysed group of headlines is from this newspaper: *Tanzania, China in $3 billion mining deal* (September, 22). This is followed by consistently positive units.

Though generally positive, *The Citizen* also carries negative headlines; *Tanzania travellers cry foul over China visas* (January 24) for instance, followed by the
resolution of the matter in short order; China embassy extends visa application days (January, 31).

National image

The findings indicate that the image of China in East Africa is a complex matter that cannot be settled using a negative-positive dichotomy scale alone. Certain aspects of Chinese engagement serve to boost a positive image while others have the opposite effect. Because media framing of China is not linear, the emergent picture is also a potpourri of competing images, for instance with Daily Nation placing a critical story on its front page in July 2011 only for The Citizen to run with a positive front page article a few weeks later in September 2011.

How often do the newspapers portray China within specific frames?

![Figure 2: Newspaper section categorization: Hard news, soft news, opinion and business (note that vertical axis represents the number of headlines)](image-url)
The two general news newspapers (*The Citizen* and *Daily Nation*) exhibit the highest frequency in the hard news category. The hard news section is labelled as news, international news, regional news, news in-depth, top news, county news, and so on. The margin between the hard news sections and the business news section is however not too wide. The business section, quite proximate to the economic consequences frame comprises units to do with economics, finance, investments, et cetera.

Soft news and opinion section units register comparatively lower reportage. *Business Daily* chalks up the highest number of opinion units at nearly half the total. The soft news category (‘soft touch’, human interest features, sports news and entertainment) is the least frequent. This section would perhaps be the most amenable to soft power and cultural diplomacy but the reality is that China coverage here is relatively paltry. Educational exchange, sports, cultural and entertainment events and high-level visits are favourably framed. However, most instances of cultural contact between China and East Africa are negative, such as when Chinese cuisine is framed as bizarre or when a love affair between a Chinese contract worker and a Kenyan woman sours.

Diplomatic initiatives that could be considered ‘soft power’ are turned into competitive, and potentially ‘hard power’ perceptions as evident in the headlines: *China names envoy to Comesa in race for Africa trade* (Business Daily, July) and *China signs trade pact with EA in race for resources* (Business Daily, November). Just when does soft power represent “a power of attractions” and when it is smart or hard power becomes quite a slippery conundrum.

**China’s global firsts**

China’s image takes a positive turn in units that position it according to global rankings. The athlete Li Na stands out as regards to this kind of positive attribution. Other ‘global first’ frames can also be categorized as competitive frames,
in that they relate to China outpacing or being on course to outpace the US economically, and as having already ‘beaten’ Japan. However, China’s global firsts are not that popular with EAC media at the level of headlines.

**Country level analysis**

The issue of China’s relations with other nations constitutes a fairly popular frame for newspapers. Of the 11 countries appearing with China in headlines, the US has the highest number of units confirming the competitive framing perspective of China-US relations in East Africa. This is particularly salient for economic frames. My findings suggest that media framing of China and the US in Africa is slightly in favour of China. However, weak frames are substantial in the China-US classification when compared to other kinds of data categorization - showing that the East African media can be ambivalent towards competition between China and the US. This further suggests that the East African media have their own independent views on this competition.

Other important nations linked with China in headlines are Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe, in that order. The frames in these headlines oscillate between Chinese investments, framed positively and conflicts between East African small-scale traders and Chinese immigrants, framed negatively. Another frame of proximity is the relationship between China and her Asian neighbours; Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines. The balance at this level of classification tends to turn more negative than positive and invariably focus on Asia-Pacific/South China Sea geopolitical dynamics.

**Elite framing**

Chinese leaders like then-President Hu and Premier Wen, contribute positively to the image of China with no negative framing directly attributable to them. Whenever Chinese leaders are framed negatively, they are not mentioned by name, with the newspapers settling for the amorphous “Chinese leader” attribu-
tion. The mention of presidents Bashir of Sudan and Mugabe of Zimbabwe by name is framed more ‘weakly’ rather than outright positively or negatively. The negative framing of China’s relationship with Sudan is also portrayed using the amorphous “Sudan leader” wording. The highest frequency of negative framing of China’s image by attribution is in combination with US President Barack Obama and then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and invariably centres on human rights themes. Articles featuring opposition groups in China and quoting political dissidents are all negative.

What are the recurrent frames with an impact on the positive, negative and weak media image of China in East Africa?

![Figure 3: Economic consequences and conflict; positive, negative and weak (note that vertical axis represents the number of headlines)](image)

The economic consequences frame or, more simply, economic themes occupy the lion’s share of all the frames. This means that EAC media reports on China
mostly focus on economic matters relating to profit and loss, trade and investments, various types of aid and engagement in the commerce and industry sectors. Economic consequences frames also contribute the most to the positive image of China.

Chinese companies are generally conflated with ‘China’ as a nation state/country with most headlines not mentioning Chinese companies by name but rather predominantly using the phrase “Chinese firm”. It is also evident that Chinese companies could cause negative framing, especially in a competitive environment and more so where African firms may be vying for deals with Chinese firms. Thus the conception of Chinese firms as an extension of the Chinese state is both an opportunity and a risk for China’s image. Data analysis shows that only Huawei, the Chinese Exim Bank, Bank of China and Lenovo are directly mentioned, only one time in each case. The exception is Huawei, which is mentioned twice.

Conflict frames to do with governance, politics and democracy are less frequent than economic consequences frames. When we only consider the image of China as it relates to the conflict frame, independent of the economic consequences dimension, it emerges that the negative conflict frames are predominant in comparison to positive conflict frames.

Positive, negative minus weak economic consequences and conflict

Assuming that weak headlines are relatively moot to the extent that they are unpredictable without additional primary research, I experimented by removing them from the analytical field, ending up with data from units categorized as explicitly negative or positive, which yielded intriguing results.

Positive economic consequence units were the overwhelming majority, making up nearly half of the total. This left the remaining half to be shared by negative economic consequences units and positive and negative conflict units. When the
positive economic consequences category and positive conflict category are looked at as one, they account for nearly three quarters of the headlines in the strong frame, thus contributing immensely to the positive image of China. This seems to indicate that when the East African press frame China strongly, they tend to do so in a positive way. At the same time, the ambiguity inherent to weak frames remains a grey area that demands more primary research to clearly ascertain the attribution of positive and negative weights.

Trends and patterns

Positive units fluctuate much more than the negative and weak units, while the weak frames show a stable trend throughout the study period. We also see the three categories (positive, negative and weak) rising and falling in a generally similar pattern, yet positive and negative units tend to fluctuate more violently.

The positive frames peaked in March. This is the period of the most marked positive construction of the image of China by the media. An analysis of the units during this period shows that all four newspapers favourably reported on the Chinese government’s evacuation of its nationals from Libya during the 2011 civil war. The Libya crisis is framed in action-packed headlines depicting China as a country taking responsibility for its Diaspora (for instance, China keen to show it cares about workers in Libya, The Citizen, March 2011).

During this peak month there was a focus on high-level visits in Daily Nation and Business Daily as well as headlines that frame China’s global economic growth, investments in East Africa, the prosperity of Chinese citizens and so on. Positive valance units in the conflict category are also heightened in this period. For instance, China’s scrapping of the death penalty for thirteen non-violent crimes, a development reported in three of the four newspapers.

The positive category dramatically dips from its peak in March to its lowest level in April. Three plausible explanations for this are the conclusion of the
evacuation of Chinese citizens in Libya leading to less positive units, more negative reporting on a Chinese media firm’s competition with NMG for media contracts in Kenya and Rwanda, and a ‘coincidental’ increase in negative headlines such as *China supporting dictators at the expense of Africans* (Business Daily, July).

May is the peak of the negative reporting, with headlines invoking emotion and moral values rendered metaphorically. Most of the negative equivalence is centred round political issues within China such as dissidence, human rights and internet governance issues. The four newspapers predominantly sourced these articles from news agencies, most often from Agence France-Presse. This confirms the hypothesis that East African media are likely to follow Western media models. It is evident that the four newspapers rely heavily on Western news agencies, particularly Associated Press which in the analysed data is the main supplier of news to all the newspapers, accounting for 158 headlines out of the total 476. Does this reliance on the so-called “wire services” inadvertently advance what Alden (2006) refers to as a “Western discourse of fear”? It’s noticeable that while a good number of the headlines from the agencies are positive or neutral, the bulk of the headlines on controversial issues involving China, such as human rights, friction with neighbouring countries and international and internal political dynamics, are sourced from the Western news agencies. Reuters, the other significant news agency is main source from which the specialized journal, *Business Daily*, selects the headlines, no doubt on account of Thomson Reuters’s stature as a global financial data provider. In view of the framing concept of persistency and frequency and given the preponderance of Western News agencies in supplying news to East African newspapers, the need arises for further research.
Is China’s overall media image in the EAC positive, negative, or weak?

![Bar chart showing positive, negative, and weak headlines](chart.png)

**Figure 4: Overall positive, negative, weak (note that vertical axis represents the number of headlines)**

The study finds that the image of China in East Africa is positive rather than negative or weak. The margin between negative and weak is also not overwhelming. However, when we compare positive and weak codes, the margin is substantially bigger. As we explained above, framing theorists tend not to take into account the possibility of neutral frames, only weak ones. In other words you cannot have perfectly balanced or non-existent feelings about China. For instance if we assume that there is an East African reader who has not heard about China at all, to the extent that a China headline draws absolutely no feel-
ings from him or her, this hypothetical reader would frame the article in an extremely weak sense rather than completely neutrally.

An average reader who sees a ‘weakly framed’ headline, that is, one that is neither explicitly negative nor unequivocally positive may either have a positive or negative perception. Thus we may assume that weak frames can be read as positive or negative depending on the reader’s prejudices. China enthusiasts will see a weak headline only in positive light; China-bashers will see a weak headline only in negative terms. Weak frames can therefore be seen as positive or negative depending on the disposition of the reader. Thus, when we contextualize weak frames in relation to positive and negative frames, we see that the image of China equally fluctuates from potentially very positive to potentially negative.

In addition, as we have seen in previous sections, readers are likely to be in favour of China in certain circumstances or topics and to disfavour it on others. To illustrate this point, consider the headline: *Mama Clinton says: Africa, declare independence from China, India* (*The EastAfrican*, June). We consider this a negative headline because China seems destined for criticism regardless of the fact that a reader enthusiastic about China might take a position critical to Clinton favourable to China. We thus categorize this headline in the negative category along with, say, *Chinese chicken farmers ruffle Zambian feathers* (*Daily Nation*, February). *Is Kenya ripe for marriage with China?* (*Daily Nation*, October) is a weak headline to the extent that it is a rhetorical and ambivalent headline in league with a headline such as *Chinese firm tightens grip with Telkom Kenya Sh4 billion deal* (*Business Daily*, March). The use of the word ‘grip’ would indicate a quite negative perception, except that the segment referring to a KSh 4 billion [$46.7 million] deal lends a positive tone. This is a hefty figure by Kenyan standards – thus the presence of negative and positive attributes renders the headline ‘weak’ in line with definition of the parameters for this paper.
It is worthwhile to look at another headline that may be considered weak: *The tiger and the dragon in hot race to woo Africa* (*The EastAfrican*, May). Would readers see competition between China and India in Africa as good or bad? On the one hand, Africa would ultimately benefit from the competition through investment. On the other, a reader could be critical of two Asian powers turning Africa into their battlefield – why can’t the dragon and the tiger conduct their ‘hot race’ in Asia? Another reader may be enthusiastic towards either China or India to the extent that in his/her mind, only one of these countries can be good for Africa. These and other ambivalent considerations inform the conception of weak frames as opposed to clearly negative or positive frames.

On the other hand, *Chinese firm to inject $3 million in coal, iron ore project* (*The EastAfrican*, February), *Hu pledges a peaceful and cooperative China in 2011* (*Daily Nation*, January), *Tanzania and China sign $1bn gas pipeline deal: Reuters* (*The Citizen*, September) and *Tanzania ,China sign $3 billion goal and iron ore contract* (*The Citizen*, October) are examples of positively framed articles, even though they can be read otherwise by China critics. A perceptive reader with a nuanced view of the value of Chinese investments in Tanzania could raise legitimate criticism regarding various aspects other than the link to China thus resulting in a negative perception of the story. This notwithstanding, the balance of perceptions of these headlines is conceived as positive for the purposes of this paper considering that I use a face value definition of positive, negative or weak perceptions.

**Conclusion**

Our conclusion is resonant with Wesserman (2011) findings, that is, a more or less balanced image of China is discernible in East African media. Although my findings are that the media image of China is more positive than negative, I also found that the margin between positive and negative framing is not too wide. If the framing were significantly positive or negative, I would have concluded that
my findings differ from my hypothesis. In broad terms, my conclusion affirms my hypothesis that: media framing of the image of China in East Africa is more or less balanced between negative and positive perceptions because of the interplay of both negative and positive media frames.

Framing analysts concur that constraints such as newsroom routines, deadlines and news values influence journalists to make spur-of-the-moment decisions in their selection of news items, which in turn tends to lead to the advancement of certain ideas (Entman, 1993). By selecting news agency copy, choosing how to fill pages or how to bring readers ‘juicy stories’ journalists may develop frames of mind about China that would only change through what Druckman (2007) calls a reorientation of thoughts. This calls to mind the conception of journalists as readers, in this case readers of the news agencies from which they persistently draw international news.

The main innovation of this paper is to bypass the issue of journalistic neutrality in favour of the concept of weak frames in line with established framing theorists’ view that frames must be available and accessible in the memory of an audience in order to elicit a response (Scheufele & Iyengar, forthcoming). Since the conception of weak frames creates a loop on the positive-negative image scale, I have tended to consider weak frames as either negative or positive. This model could be found relevant in exploratory, descriptive studies that seek to look at national image as the starting point for in-depth research. In addition, the model proposed here could be used to initiate further research drawing on interviews with news producers and consumers.

Regardless of the margin between positive and negative perceptions of China in East Africa, my findings are that China is generally seen in positive rather than negative light. Because the media is a microcosm of and indeed a reflection of the society in which it works, one can argue that in 2011 East Africans’ perceptions of China were generally positive. The second major finding is that China’s
image in East Africa is both quantitatively and qualitatively inclined towards pragmatic, economic considerations.

End Notes

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Bibliography


Not Confucius, nor Kung Fu:
Economy and Business as Chinese Soft Power in Africa

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The Chinese presence in Africa is a fact that cannot be ignored by anybody interested in China, Africa or in international affairs in general. Various explanations are given for the source of China’s success on the continent. Pang (2009) emphasises Chinese foreign policy: its engagement in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Chinese doctrine of international relations – the so-called Beijing consensus as the main reason why many African governments have decided to tighten their relations with China.

Some others, like Bräutigam (2010), Rotberg (2008), and so on, emphasize economic factors: Chinese economic aid, engagement in infrastructure development and its ability to start and conduct business in a difficult African business environment.

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Finally, Versi (2007) argues that the perception of China and the Chinese, is different and better than that of the West and the Westerners (or, at least, at the beginning of the Chinese expansion period). Although some Western countries, due to their colonial presence in Africa, possess much more experience related to the region, they are definitely perceived by Africans from the perspective of colonial history\(^2\). In contrast, China might be perceived as a country that also suffered during the colonial period and now (due to its contemporary economic success) might be seen as a kind of ‘elder brother’ whose path should be followed by Africa. This image of China, as an alternative to the Western powers both in terms of actions and expectations, is emphasized by the Chinese authorities as well as promoted by African leaders (Breslin, 2009, p. 831).

Many of the issues mentioned above seem to fit into the popular discourse concerning Chinese soft power success. This term, introduced by Joseph Nye, refers to a particular nation's ability to attract or seduce other countries rather than to force them to do something (Nye 1991, pp. 31-32).

Nye, while talking about sources of soft power, refers mostly to a particular country's culture, political values and foreign policy (Nye, 2004, location 299). We feel that this concept, although important and influential, could create a serious bias if it is treated as universally true over different cultures, eras and circumstances. This is due to the above-mentioned limited characterization of soft power sources as well as a lack of precise definition. Recently some scholars, especially those focused on Chinese soft power development (see for example Kurlanzig 2008 and Li 2008) have underlined the limitations of Nye’s approach in its classical form - particularly in the case of the Chinese expansion in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia.

The main aim of this article is to discuss the limitations of Nye's definition of soft power. We would like to emphasize other sources of soft power not mentioned by Nye, namely business, economy and development. We have to re-
member here that although Nye took note of these factors, he classified them under the category of economic power (2004,) therefore omitting the fact that the image of the Chinese as potential investors may also attract people. We would argue that in this context, the business and development-related tools of soft power are very important, especially in the case of poor, underdeveloped countries. They are probably even more important than freedom and democracy, which Nye characterized as some of the most important American soft power tools. Lum et al (2008) applied this kind of expanded interpretation to the economic constituents of Chinese soft power in South-East Asia. Chinese scholars also tend to supplement Nye's traditional soft power tools with the story of China's economic success and its image as a global economic power (Li, 2008). Breslin (2009, p. 287) also pointed out that in the South Asian context, the Chinese economic system is a source of Chinese soft power. Along with its economical success, China’s development model is also indicated as an important source of the Chinese soft power, not only in developing countries, but also in the US (Li and Worm, 2010).

We applied this thesis to information derived from the content analysis of articles published in the online editions of Zambian and Angolan newspapers and Internet information portals, supplemented by comments from Zambian and Angolan internet forum users. In this study we used the above-mentioned sources as indicators of China’s spheres of attractiveness. We attempted to check whether such factors as Chinese culture, language, Confucius Institutes, martial arts and other perceived sources of Chinese soft power that are promoted by the Chinese government, are present and how popular they are in the Zambian and Angolan media discourse and among the Internet forum users.

We are aware that the content published in media and produced by netizens can’t be treated as a direct determinant of sources of Chinese soft power in Africa. We also understand that what attracts public opinion does not necessarily
have the same effect on the African political elites. However, we still believe that it could provide a good indicator of the Chinese soft power sources present in Africa, especially while taking into account the fact that among the analysed newspapers there are both government-owned and independent titles. Media content analysis would allow us to trace the effectiveness of the three channels of soft power listed by Li and Worm: “formal diplomacy targeting the political elites, economic and public diplomacy targeting interest groups and public diplomacy targeting the general public of another country” (2010, p. 74).

Fook (2010) mentions the Chinese authorities' awareness of the importance of media image and its relation to soft power, but focuses only on the framing of culture as “particularly relevant here since the discussion is focused on China’s media initiatives and how China is perceived by others” (p. 549). While such an attitude seems reasonable and follows Nye's definitions, in the case of Africa it is not well grounded, as will be shown in the latter part of this paper. We assume that soft power is also about the real outcome, not only intended results, of country promotion policies. Wang (2003) has shown that the efforts of the Chinese Publicity Department have not always succeeded in creating its intended image. It is therefore worth taking a closer look at media content to establish the level of coverage of particular social, political and economic areas, not only to examine the applicability of Nye's Western theories in a different cultural context, but also to trace the possible direction of future Chinese activities in Africa, because “once the Chinese government decides to build a certain type of image, that image can have a constraining effect on China’s policy choices” (Wang, 2003, pp. 70-71).

We decided to choose Zambia and Angola for both their similarities and differences. Both Zambia and Angola are located in sub-Saharan Africa, possess a significant amount of natural resources (Zambia has copper, while Angola has oil) and in both a significant level of Chinese activities have been observed.
(Taylor, 2006). On the other hand, these countries differ significantly. Zambia is one of a few African countries that haven’t suffered any domestic war after gaining independence in 1964. Although to a large extent its wealth was built on the basis of rich copper resources, it has also managed to develop a significant level of industry for an African country. The country's infrastructure might not be highly developed but at least it was not destroyed (see, for example, Taylor 2006). The case of Angola is different: it suffered a long civil war. The country's pre-independence infrastructure was almost completely destroyed and after the war its economy was in a very bad condition and needed foreign support (Oyebade 2007). We believe that such differences may significantly influence the perception of China and the Chinese in these countries.

**Methodology.**

We decided to apply content analysis techniques to determine the image of China and the Chinese as presented in the Zambian and Angolan media and by the netizens commenting on the media content. In order for our analysis to yield the best possible results, we followed Weber’s (1990) approach to content analysis, combining both quantitative and qualitative analysis, performed in sequential steps.

To obtain a wide range of material for analysis, we decided to base it on articles published in electronic versions of Zambian and Angolan newspapers and Internet information portals, instead of analysing the paper editions of particular newspapers. This choice was also dictated by the relatively ease of access to the entire content published between 2000 and 2010.

The following titles were chosen as sources:

I. Zambian newspapers and portals

1. The Zambia Times
II. Angolan newspapers and portals:
1. Jornal de Angola
2. Angonoticias

This choice resulted from a combination of various factors. Among the most important were the following: access to full archives, the potential for obtaining data, and the character of the newspaper. By this we mean its relationship with state: whether it is government-dependent or whether it maintains an independent or oppositional stance. In our case, Zambia Times, Daily Mail and Journal de Angola are official government newspapers and portals while Lusaka Times, The Post Online, Zambian Watchdog and Angonoticias are oppositional and/or independent or semi-independent. We assumed that such diversification would significantly increase the overall representativeness of the analysed data.

Using various search engines we managed to create a database of 1760 articles: 834 from Zambia (respectively, 16 articles from The Zambia Times, 171 from Daily Mail, 245 from Lusaka Times and 83 from Zambian Watchdog) and 926 from Angola (respectively, 472 from Journal de Angola and 454 from Angonoticias).

In the case of user comments we decided to use the same sources. However, the websites of the official government-owned Zambian newspapers, such as Times of Zambia and Zambia Daily, do not allow the posting of comments. Therefore, we decided to choose two Internet portals instead – Zambian Watchdog and
Lusaka Times. They both are run by independent editors and claim to be objective sources of information concerning Zambia and its internal politics.

Lusaka Times publishes articles from Zambia Daily, Times of Zambia, ZNBC (Zambia News and Information Services) and ZANIS (Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation). Therefore, we assumed (as a working hypothesis) that the netizens interested in discussing the news published on this portal might be influenced by government-directed content and therefore might tend to be pro-Chinese. The other source, Zambian Watchdog, is a website that openly declares its opposition to the government, and we assumed that its users are likely to be more anti-Chinese and that they perhaps discuss political issues more actively.

We collected 7218 statements, of which 3960 were posted on Lusaka Times and refer to 245 news articles concerning China and/or the Chinese, and 3258 were posted on Zambian Watchdog and refer to 83 such articles.

The use of online content as a source of material for analysis was dictated by the following factors: 1) most of the texts appeared also in paper editions of the particular newspapers, 2) Internet coverage in both Zambia and Angola is relatively high by African standards\(^3\), 3) we assumed that the Internet users occupy a higher economic level and probably have the highest level of education among Zambian citizens. They would therefore be the social group with the highest influence on state policies\(^4\).

General analytical procedure

The categorization procedure and analysis are, to some extent, similar to these used in grounded theory (see for example Strauss, 2003), and are supported by advanced quantitative analysis methods.

Categorization and dictionary:

The three-stage process of creating the categorization model and dictionary was
definitely the most important and time-consuming part of the research. The preliminary frame version of the categorization model consisted of basic notions related to specific areas - social, political, economical and so forth, connected with the context in which the image of China and the Chinese would be analysed. These included crime, economy, corruption and natural resources.

In the next step we assigned certain keywords to each category. These keywords were directly and interchangeably related to particular categories and were chosen on the basis of a preliminary analysis of Sino-African relationships. An important step was the creation of the category 'China', consisting of keywords related to China and the Chinese.

After generating the frame categorization model with its basic keywords, we used software to analyse the frequency with which the words appeared in the analysed data set. In this step every word with a frequency higher than 10 was either assigned to an existing or a newly created category. In cases where we decided that it wasn’t relevant to any area of interest, we placed it on the exclusion list – a pre-defined list of conjunctions, articles and so on that was provided by the software. This procedure was later repeated for phrases containing two to five words, and by reviewing synonyms of the already assigned keywords suggested by the software and assigning them to particular categories.

In the next step examined the already assigned keywords in the context of the analysed statements. After this step most of the categories were recoded; this process was repeated several times until we obtained a dictionary consisting of keywords grouped into 125 different categories. The inter-subjectivity of categorization, proposed by Holsti (1996) was secured through a discussion between the researchers on newly formed categories and a subsequent review of the dictionary.

The process of categorization was then started again, this time supplemented by
cluster analysis. The application of this tool allowed us to re-categorize some of the groups and merge them into wider sets. Finally, we obtained four general categories (sub-dictionaries) related to the following aspects: words related to emotional attitudes (positive or negative), geographical references, social references (such as categories with reference to family, tribe and nation), and sets of various activities (such as economy, sport, culture, and so on.) In this paper we are focusing mostly on the last of these categories. As we already mentioned, the main goal of this study is to verify to which extent the areas traditionally referred to as sources of soft power (such as culture, political values and foreign policy) are present in Zambian and Angolan media discourse. In this way we treat media content as an indicator pointing to potential sources of soft power. In this paper we focus on the connections between references to China and various types of keywords associated with particular types of activities, derived during the categorization process. We particularly looked at categories usually associated with soft power – such as references to culture, foreign policy, political values, democracy and so on. We also took into account categories occurring most frequently in the analysed material, such as economy, infrastructure, energy, investment and education/science.

However, we must emphasize that none of these categories was chosen before the analysis started. The conclusions of this paper are the result of categorization obtained through our analytical methodology – the categorization was not the result of any kind of hypothesis concerning soft power. All the conceptual and analytical categories were designed from the bottom up, through direct interaction with the newspaper articles and reader comments. We did however group certain keywords, trying to find common labels for them. For example, the category of culture covers (except for the term culture per se) all the areas connected with the arts. The category of economy mostly consists of purely economical, abstract terms, while industry/investment covers mostly keywords strictly related to this area, such as investment, manufacture, etc. It is easy to observe that
some of these categories relate to each other. The decision about whether we should create a unique category or assign certain keywords to an existing category was influenced by 3 factors:

- The frequency of a particular term
- A preliminary cluster analysis
- Our research interest.

Furthermore, we wanted to check if any differences related to the source of analysed content exist: whether it came from an article or a reader comment, as well as the country from which it came.

The analytical process was conducted in two steps. The first was based on a simple frequency analysis, in relation to various factors, while in the second we applied a more sophisticated method of content analysis, namely the co-occurrence of particular categories with the 'China references' category.

**Descriptive analysis of frequencies**

The first part of the research consisted of a quantitative analysis of the occurrence of keywords. We presumed that the frequency with which keywords occurred would serve as a basic indicator of the importance of particular factors in the totality of the texts we analysed.

In the latter part of this paper we will refer to two types of analysed texts: the original media content published in electronic versions of newspapers and on internet portals and the netizens' comments. To ease the reading process, the first group is referred to as *content*, while the second is labelled *comments*. 
<table>
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<th>% Cases</th>
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</tr>
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<td>556</td>
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<tr>
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Table 1. Frequencies of particular categories in content
Graph1. Articles content - choice of categories with regards to the country
Graph 2 Comments - choice of categories with regards to the country
In the table above we see that the predominant categories occurring in the analysed material related to infrastructure, energy, investment and money. All these categories are directly connected to the economy, business and development (52.50 per cent of coded keywords). These would not traditionally be treated as sources of soft power. Moreover, the frequency with which categories traditionally associated with soft power occur is very low. Actually only the categories related to culture, tourism and sport are sometimes mentioned (each of them makes up less than 2 per cent of all the coded keywords). Direct references to political values and foreign policy (such categories as diplomacy, democracy, ideology, human rights) were also rarely mentioned. The only frequently occurring category not directly related to business and the economy was a merged science and education category (4.1 per cent of coded keywords). This is not traditionally considered the most important source of soft power but in terms of China’s portrayal in Africa it occupies a high position.

The above description of the data visualized by Table 1, although referring only to the content of media articles, could be generally applied to both Angola and Zambia as well as to both types of content, regardless of whether they are articles or netizens' opinions.

Both graphs show that a large share of the coded keywords belongs to a limited number of categories. We chose the most frequent ones (connected with economy and business), as well as those traditionally associated with soft power sources, as well as the category of science and education we mentioned before. In all the cases (regardless of country and content type) we observed the extremely dominant position of the economy, business and development-related categories. Issues connected with culture, sports or tourism received quite minor attention. The Education/Science category was usually located in the middle.

However, we observed some minor differences according to the country and the type of text:
In the Angolan newspaper content, categories related to culture, science and education seem to be slightly more important than in Zambia, where the most important ones (after economy, which had the highest frequency in both countries), were energy and infrastructure. General references to culture are more frequent in Angolan content, while sport and tourism dominate in Zambia.

Graph 3. Changes of frequency of culture and economy categories in content

Graph 4. Changes of frequency of culture and economy categories in comments
Education and science occupy a higher position in the case of comments, and therefore seem to be deemed as more important by the commenters compared to the frequency of these categories in content. The Zambian comments mention sport much more frequently but culture appeared in a very limited number of references.

The next part of the frequency analysis was intended to answer the question concerning the dynamics of the occurrence of certain categories. Graph 3 and 4 show changes of share occupied by two particular categories (economy and cul-
ture) over time, respectively for articles and comments. In case of culture references there appears to be no dynamics at all – the irregularity between the 3rd quarter of 2001 and the 2nd quarter of 2006 is presumably the result of a generally lower number of China-related articles published during these periods. Actually, it also seems that the number of culture-related references in the articles decreased after 2007 and have only recently started to increase slowly. Yet the frequency of these keywords compared to those related to the economy remains very limited.

On this basis we assume that there is no evidence that the overwhelming attention paid to economic coverage is likely to change in the short term. For now, we cannot provide any well-grounded explanation for this trend. However possible explanations might be that Africans might be still too poor to be interested in foreign cultural issues.

**Co-occurrence analysis.**

As we already mentioned, the very frequency with which particular keywords occur cannot be treated as a perfect indicator of the prominence of China-related areas of reference. For example, in some texts China might be mentioned in a completely different context, not really associated with groups of keywords occurring in this text. Therefore we decided to employ a co-occurrence analysis of China-related references with categories linked to the areas we are interested in. There exist various algorithms used to detect and trace similarities in a given dataset. In our case we decided to apply Jaccard's coefficient, as it was proven that analysis based on this coefficient results in datasets of the highest level of coherence (Huang, 2008). It is based on the hierarchical modelling of correlations and starting from single clusters of data (in our case: particular categories of keywords) it creates a structured dataset.

*Graph 5 – Dendrogram content (19 clusters)*
Jaroslaw Jura and Kaja Kaluzynska

“Not Confucius, nor Kung Fu: Economy and Business as Chinese Soft Power in Africa”

Graph 6 Dendrogram - comments (19 clusters)

Graph 7 – Proximity Plot: Content
We analysed text strings consisting of the China reference keywords and the adjacent 13 words on each side.
Graph 8 Proximity Plot: Comments

This number was decided on in order to provide the potential for broad analyti-
cal content that still (on the basis of our pre-analysis of database content) related
more or less directly to China.
The frequency analysis depicted by the dendrograms above echoes our previous frequency analysis. In both cases references to China occur most frequently with economy-related keywords, as well as keywords linked to infrastructure, energy, investment and money, economic integration, business and development-related categories as the most often mentioned in connection with China.

In the next step we plotted proximity, based on keywords constituting particular categories of interest. Proximity plots – often used in data-mining techniques – allowed us to graphically represent similarities between and co-occurrences of particular nodes (in this case keywords) of the analysed text content.

The above proximity plots once again reinforce the observations from our earlier analysis. However, it is worth commenting on certain differences between the content and reader comments as they appear on proximity plots.

First of all, references to China and strictly economy-related keywords do not co-occur to the same extent in reader comments as they do in article content. However, the highest co-occurrence remains between references to China and those related to the economy, infrastructure, energy, investment and money. In our opinion, the fact that we don't observe such a big gap between the proximity of economy-related keywords and the other categories, indicates that the Zambian and Angolan Internet users refer to more concrete and less abstract issues when mentioning China (for example, they often tend to employ words related to particular investments, mines, or energy sources rather than use abstract economy-related vocabulary such as GDP, inflation, etc.).

Moreover, where readers employed keywords relating to democracy, policy, law, justice, and so on in their comments (usually associated with soft power), the proximity is higher than in the case of articles. However, it is still not the highest. Of course, we have to remember that the higher proximity of such categories with references to China should not be automatically interpreted as an
indicator of soft power. However, on the basis of the analysis we conducted for the purpose of another, paper (Jura and Kaluzynska, forthcoming), we can say that the perception of China and the Chinese as related to such issues tends to be, at the very least, not overwhelmingly positive, which means that it cannot necessarily be treated as an indicator of Chinese soft power. On the other hand, it could also be interpreted as a possible indicator that Zambian and Angolan internet users are more interested in (or more sensitive to) traditional soft power sources than the journalists working in the Zambian and Angolan media.

Summary

Although the above analysis is strictly quantitative and is limited to only two African countries, we believe that it provides some interesting findings. First of all, it shows that economy, business and development occupy a central position both in the media content concerning China and in the discussions among netizens. This is true both in Zambia and Angola. If we presume that both these data sources may be treated as channels of soft power, we can then try to look at soft power in these countries from a perspective quite different to traditional approaches.

All the areas Nye that described as fundamental sources of soft power seem to have almost zero significance in the analysed data. The overall number of references to culture, tourism or even sport is really low; what's more, there were almost no references to political culture, democracy, human rights and foreign policy. Thus the method used in our study clearly shows the limitations of Nye's approach, at least as soft power relates to the press. Both the frequency and cluster analyses showed that China and the Chinese are associated with business, the economy and development – not with traditional soft power areas. Moreover, these findings are based not only on media content analysis but also the opinions of readers. In such a way the methodology we applied can be treated as a tool which could test the quite theoretical and at least somewhat ethnocentric con-
cept of soft power in other contexts as well, and in such way could suggest a different, broader and more empirical approach\(^9\).

There appeared only one area of higher frequency among the categories related to culture, namely education and science. These areas are related to the traditional conceptions of soft power but are not treated as its core and might be more closely related to development. On the other hand, they definitely constitute a core value for China and Chinese culture. Education has traditionally been one of the most important aspects of Chinese Confucianism and a very basic mode of social advancement.

It is also worth mentioning that business, economy and development – areas not considered by Nye as constituents of soft power have always been connected with the Chinese imperial expansion policy for centuries\(^{10}\). The expansion of the Chinese empire was mostly based on economic forces, later supported by culture (in particular material culture in the form of commodities), than on a military basis\(^{11}\). However it is worth mentioning here that it is not our intention to claim that China is consciously trying to colonize or neo-colonize Africa. While we concede that it is almost impossible to prove such a thesis, it seems difficult to deny that Chinese influence is expanding in Africa and according to us this expansion is based (at least partly) on the traditional Middle Kingdom “economic soft power” pattern.

We believe that the above findings show quite clearly the limitations of Nye's soft power approach. Although both the acclaimed term ‘soft power’ and the approach stating that power might also be treated as “an ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion” (Nye 2004), retains its interest, the areas mentioned by Nye – namely culture, political values and foreign policy – seem to be, at least in this particular case, far from universal. His ideas were based on a particular (American or Western) cultural context and a particular time (following the collapse of the Soviet block). They appear to be less effective as
soft power tools in the case of other cultures possessing a completely different tradition of “attracting” other societies and states. Moreover, quite a long time has elapsed since the collapse of communism and democracy and human rights might not be considered very popular or important ideas. Or maybe these ideas are not crucial for Africa, where most countries are still poor and developing and remain focused mostly on economic progress and prosperity.\(^\text{12}\)

On the other hand, additional media content analysis, as well as a field study conducted in Zambia show that certain cases of labour abuse (such as the infamous shooting at the Sinazongwe mines in October 2010) strongly influences the perception of the Chinese in Zambia. Such phenomena could be an indicator that human rights might be perceived in Africa from a local (Zambian miners' abuse) rather than global (for example issues relating to Tibet or Chinese dissidents) perspective. It is also a warning that the “charm” of Chinese political and economic expansion in Africa might disappear soon in Africa.

Nevertheless, it does not change the general impression that taking into account all the data we analysed (as well as our wider research) show that Chinese power, image and status in Africa is based mostly on its economical position and not cultural nor ideological influence.

**End Notes**

1 This paper is based on research supported by the National Science Centre (Poland). The authors gratefully acknowledge this support.

2 This remark directly concerns former colonial countries such as the UK, France and Portugal. but to some extent, as a result of stereotyping, may extend to the “whites” in general
In 2010 it was estimated at 10 internet users per 100 citizens (http://www.indexmundi.com).

Due to the open nature of the internet, the users of internet forums also probably include diaspora members and some non-Zambians living inside and outside of Zambia. Being aware of such facts we still presume that internet forums are soft power channels and in the contemporary internet era there is no need to constrain one’s analysis only to Zambian residents.

The presence of particular categories can’t necessarily be treated as an indicator of soft power. For example, in the case of democracy or human rights, China is not necessarily described positively. Nevertheless, we assumed that the relatively small number of such references indicated that this area was probably not very relevant in the analysed material.

Probably due to a recent increase in the number of new Chinese investments in Zambian mines, power station development, and so on.

This might be connected with fact that Zambians are very enthusiastic football fans and Chinese firms recently finished a big stadium in Ndola.

Sports is an important dimension due to the fact that the analysed time frame covers Beijing’s 2008 Olympic games usually treated as strongly influencing Chinese soft power.

Of course as we have already mentioned in the introduction, this point has been raised by some of the authors. Nevertheless empirical proving it is an important asset of this article.

Here is its worth mentioning the famous concept of “five baits.” Chinese expansion in the South-western and Western territories since the Han dynasty or the whole Chinese tributary system construct – see for example “Trade and Expansion in Han China: A study in the Structure of Sino-Barbarian Economic
Relations” by Ying Shih Yu (1967) or “China's March toward the Tropics: A Discussion of the Southward Penetration of China's Culture, Peoples, and Political Control in Relation to the Non-Han-Chinese Peoples of South China and in the Perspective of Historical and Cultural Geography” by Harold Wiens (1954).

11 Of course this is somewhat of a simplification as there were periods when the Chinese empire expanded on a strictly military basis. On the other hand the proportion of non-violent economic expansion was quite significant.

12 There exists the probability that, after reaching a certain level of development and prosperity issues as human rights, freedom and democracy, are more frequently raised in the media and by netizens.

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The Political and Diplomatic Implications of Social Media: the Cases of China and South Africa

By Yu-Shan Wu*

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The development of social media, in the form of ‘web-based tools and services that allow users to [comment], create, share, rate and search content and information’ (Bohler-Muller and Van der Merwe; 2011:2), is changing how we engage with the world. The platform is connecting users in new ways and levelling the playing-field by stimulating conversation versus one-way communication and reaching across the toughest and most remote landscapes. During the last decade, developing countries began embracing social media as incomes rose; technology became more affordable and alternative social networks were crafted to suit regional differences².

China and South Africa are two such developing countries which are embracing communication technologies. They are both experiencing a rise in internet users (though at varying rates) and are increasingly penetrating foreign markets with their media ventures. In fact South Africa and China engage in the each other’s

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media markets. The South African media company, Naspers, owns the largest stake in China’s Tencent Holdings; while Chinese telecommunications companies, like Huawei, are supplying products to the South African market.

However there are implications to embracing the global technological shift while such countries are simultaneously seeking sound policies to meet development objectives. Social media has complicated the political space, because policymaking is met with real-time and intensified public participation. The experiences of China and South Africa reveal that the impact of social media varies between decision-making landscapes. Moreover, it is these unique domestic technological and political changes that could eventually motivate or undermine the diplomatic ties between the two sides. In this paper I will explore the political and diplomatic impact of social media.

**China’s opinion politics and social media**

According to scholars, there are three key influences on policymaking in China: the elite, sub-elite and popular opinions (Fewsmith and Rosen; 2001:152). The political elite have long-standing influence on China’s decision-making process, though in some ways, their perceived role has changed over time. When the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, policymaking tended to be characterised as highly centralised and led by a few powerful senior personalities who faced limited domestic pressure (Hao 2005:2). However as China became more globally involved, policymaking shifted from ideological and personal, to practical and sophisticated. Increasingly policies need to reflect the complex international system, requiring more knowledge of global affairs and specialised expertise. As noted, the new ‘Fifth Generation’ of leaders are already responding to these demands, being generally higher educated (particularly in social sciences) than their predecessors and seemingly more susceptible to technocratic than political views (Dotson; 2012:6). Moreover as in the sub-elite and popular opinion examples, it appears that unconventional
sources are increasingly informing decision-making.

Sub-elites and popular opinion

The latter two groups of influence (sub-elites and popular opinion) have recently experienced elevated participation in policymaking. Since 1998 the Chinese leadership sought academic input to broaden its sources of ideas and to understand the relationship between the domestic and international environment (Douglass; 2009:4). In this way sub-elites (also known as ‘public intellectuals’ and think tanks) have indirectly influenced government policy through their academic writing, briefings, internal reports and conferences. The group has also played a pivotal role in reconciling government and public positions, as sub-elites are commonly perceived as articulators of public opinion (Fewsmith and Rosen; 2001:154). On the other hand, public opinion has had limited influence on decision-making. Rather, leadership only appeals to national sentiment when it would strengthen official stances on tough policy positions abroad and as a tool in negotiation processes (Sun; 2011).

The role of both groups is changing in parallel with the development of communication technology. Three defining factors have influenced the unique advancement of China’s media infrastructure: economic development since 1978, the commercialisation of the mass media and the reshaping of power and interest groups³. Rapid modernisation led to the Chinese public being granted access to the Internet by the mid-1990s. The introduction of the Internet and the sudden explosion of users (from 20 million in 2001 to over 500 million in 2011) has made policy formation all the more complex (Freedom House; 2011:2). Social media is enabling wide participation and diffusing influence to the public realm, beyond the traditional echelons of government and previously limited political forums (Wu; 2012:10). Although popular social media sites like Twitter and Facebook are barred, the public in China are using their local versions,
like Sina Weibo, as a tool for engagement. Roles are also becoming blurred, as sub-elites infuse public opinion with active debate and the public have an opportunity to be elevated into the sub-elite group. An example is the race-car driver and author, Han Han, whose critical writing has made him the most popular blogger in China (Wasserstrom; 2012).

It is difficult to determine clear and coherent lines of policy influence on the public. Still there is compelling evidence of a process of negotiation between the state and the public over certain issues and under specific circumstances. The Chinese leadership have recognised the public’s ability to influence policy and thus the need to engage the public for support. In response, their own agencies are participating in social media and are engaging with the public. For example since 2009 China’s own premier, Wen Jiabao, has conducted live web chats with internet users and responded to screened questions addressing national concerns. There is also the ‘50-cent army’, whose mandate is to post favourable comments about the government, in order to change public opinion (Mou, Atkin and Fu; 2011: 344). Sometimes users are barred access to politically sensitive information, such as the 2011 anti-government protests in the Middle East and North Africa (Freedom House; 2011:10). Similarly a Harvard study has shown that Beijing does not necessarily remove online content that criticises leadership but rather content that could instigate collective action (King, Pan and Roberts; 2012). Therefore government involvement in this new medium has evolved to become both responsive and selective in nature.

**The future of public influence: technology, youth demographic and nationalism**

The ability to influence future policy in China will likely depend on three important variables, namely changing youth demographics, (mobile) technological innovation and nationalism. These factors could result in the rise or restraint of future public influence.
Mobile technology has spread more rapidly than Internet access, with about 986 million mobile phone users in China by the end of 2011 (Freedom House; 2011:3). Furthermore, technological developments mean more people will be able to access the Internet through their mobiles. Such technology could potentially enhance user engagement in the policy process. However this trend should be considered alongside other platforms, because even though Internet users are steadily increasing, television (followed by print media) is still the most favoured source of domestic and international news (Pew Global Attitudes Project; 2008:6). Unlike social media, broadcast media tends to engage viewers through one-way communication that could inevitably influence perceptions on certain issues.

The evolving youth population exercises significant influence on public opinion. According to the National Intelligence Council (2012:11), China’s population will reach a median age group of 35–45 years by 2030. This changing demographic (between 18–29 years of age) is also currently using the Internet and social media sites the most (Pew Global Attitudes Project; 2008:31). They also tend to be high school or college educated and wealthier than non-users. Besides their dominance in numbers, the sentiment amongst the youth is also significant. A study by the Unirule Institute of Economics found that the Chinese youth under 25 years of age were consistently more suspicious of authority than their elders (Ford; 2010). There seems to be growing sense of political apathy amongst the youth, who have historically played a pivotal role in pushing reforms. For instance, regarding the 2012 tension between China and Japan over islets in the East China Sea, Professor Zhou Weihong pointed out that young Chinese are not as anti-Japanese as those 20 years ago because they have a more rational understanding of foreign affairs (Hille; 2012). They are becoming more concerned about the effects of economic interdependence and social security (Douglass; 2009:4). This aging demographic could effectively influence the ability of the government to extend its power abroad and instead promote a fo-
focus on human capital in order to maximise the fading demographic advantage (National Intelligence Council; 2012: 10-11). At the same time, socio-economic concerns as a basis for future foreign engagement raises the question of how leadership will motivate for issues of limited public interest – especially those issues that could have large implications for China’s image and reception in the world.

Contrary to the popular image of apathetic youth there is clear evidence of rising nationalist sentiment. A study of Internet users in China (Lei; 2011: 309) found that Chinese Internet users are actually a politically salient group. When compared with non-Internet users, they are also more opinionated, critical and likely to have experienced collective action. Nationalism is not a new trend, but in recent years it has become an important supporter of government decisions as seen in the cases of US–China relations, China–Japan relations and the Taiwan question (Yong; 2012). However, it is incumbent upon the leadership to use or channel popular sentiment. For example, following the Chinese embassy bombing in Belgrade, the Chinese government understood that the frustrations of students needed to be vented and that they would inevitably participate in demonstrations (Fewsmith and Rosen; 2001:173). The leadership thus provided buses for demonstrators to go to the US embassy. Still, sentiment can influence the government’s agenda. For instance, following the global financial crisis in 2008, many people (online and offline) called for more leadership attention in China itself, to focus on citizens’ welfare and social tensions. This might be one reason why 90% of policymakers’ time is spent on domestic issues and only 10% on foreign policy. Generally, governments are likely to respond to critical views even when the challenge is beyond their control – because they do not want to be perceived as weak (Lagerkvist 2005:125). The areas in which leadership is likely to react are the areas in which the public are most critical: foreign policy, unemployment and inflation. Therefore, leadership is susceptible to nationalism that could potentially turn into online populism.
These recent developments and the unpredictable influence of emerging trends (mobile technology, youth and nationalism) will introduce greater complexity to Chinese policymaking. While the rationale behind policy decisions remain closed to leadership, the future determinants provide understanding to policy choices. What can be predicted is that dynamic and subtle negotiations are influencing China’s inward and outward looking policy.

South Africa’s opinion politics and social media

A continental shift

South Africa is part of a larger continental story. A major trend that is sweeping Africa is technological leapfrogging. It is predicted that by at least 2015, regions such as sub-Saharan Africa will have more people with mobile network access than electricity at home (National Intelligence Council; 2012: 46). This will lead to about 800 million mobile phone subscribers on the continent, a tool where internet access is increasingly available. With the lack of infrastructure in remote regions, wireless technology is single-handedly advancing communication on the continent. Africa is also taking to social media at a rapid pace, as seen in the case of the microblogging site Twitter. Thousands of people in less technologically advanced countries like Sudan and Cameroon are circulating information through this platform (Barnett; 2012). Moreover online interaction is taking place in less open democracies that have fewer spaces for political expression. In Zimbabwe, traditional communication channels have proved unreliable and expensive and, as a result, Zimbabweans have turned to Facebook as a medium of choice. The social media platform is providing the two important services of connecting locals to the three million Zimbabweans residing outside the country and enabling the public to access information and to make their views known, in an environment of severe press restrictions (Global Post; 2009). The widespread access to social media among the citizens of Egypt also proved a successful tool in mobilising masses of people in a short space of time.
as well as facilitating the distribution of uncensored public information (Bohler-Muller and Van der Merwe; 2011:2). Social media technology has been proven to possess the potential to connect the African public and to become a powerful political tool on the continent.

South Africa: a case of limited social media influence

South Africa’s communications technology has advanced rapidly. Since 2010 mobile technology access (virtually at 100% penetration), surpassed television access at 82% (Powell; 2012:8). The internet connection on mobile phones has changed the profile of online users in the last five years, to include low income Internet users (de Lanerolle; 2012:4&8). A report titled The South African Social Media Landscape 2012 Study found that the social networking gaps between age and the urban–rural divide have closed significantly (IT News; 2012) and that 73% of South African Internet users are also using social media sites (Ipsos Markinor South Africa; 2012). Between August 2011 and August 2012, Facebook and Twitter users grew by 100 000 each month (the former has about 5.3 million users, excluding mobile-only users, and Twitter has about 2.4 million users) (IT News; 2012). In fact South Africa is home to the largest number of posted tweets on the continent, with an average of five million posts in the span of three months (Barnett; 2012).

Despite being one of Africa’s most connected societies, the South African social media scene does not presently hold the political potential witnessed in North Africa during 2011 or comparative to China’s present experience. While circumstances may change rapidly, the reasons online spaces are not yet influencing policymaking are:

- the fairly recent uptake of social media by the South African public;
- the lack of recognition by the national and political leadership; and
- the larger context which affects the public’s recognition.

A primary impediment is the ‘new-ness’ of social media. Internet access only recently became available to the majority of the public, and they are still using the technology in superficial ways. For instance, Blackberry smartphones occupy 70% of the South African smart phone market (Powel III; 2012:11). The youth demographic, who dominates the ownership of this device, prefer to use the Blackberry Messenger application in order to send pictures and voice messages. More broadly, South African users connect to the internet (in descending order) to get information; to socialise; for study purposes; for work-related purposes and to seek jobs (de Lanerolle; 2012:4). Seibt (2012) found that besides the unique circumstances in Egypt during 2011, African Twitter users tend use the platform for communicating with friends, connecting with other Africans, and keeping abreast of the news (Seibt 2012).

While the uptake and participation in social media has occurred rapidly, users are still learning about the potential of the platform and thus prefer to connect to their immediate and personal environments rather than for political purposes. Nevertheless as users become used to new devices and platforms, they will inevitably discover new ways to incorporate social media into their daily lives.

There also remains little consensus amongst the national and political leadership regarding the political potential of social media platforms. Besides the posting of events and news, there remains little engagement with public users on government pages. For example, following President Zuma’s State of the Nation Address, the public raised their concerns over corruption and job creation on social media sites. Still the presidency’s own social media outlets provided limited feedback and interaction with the public (Media Tenor; 2012). Without some recognition of and response to public concern, social media is unlikely to be perceived as a space for negotiation. Rather individual public figures and political parties have taken it upon themselves to engage with the public. The
Minister of Public Enterprises, Malusi Gigaba⁷, is one of the few politicians on Twitter who utilise the platform to engage and receive dynamic feedback directly from the public. The main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), launched its social media strategy in 2009 (Global Voices; 2010). The strategy includes two interactive websites, online marketing, SMS communication, web access via mobiles and social media engagement (Global Voices; 2010).

Nevertheless government could possibly adopt social media strategies in the near future, as was recently suggested. Facebook and Twitter, dominated by young constituents, were common rallying arenas in the run-up to the 53rd National Conference of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) held in Mangaung (Gori 2012). Political campaign pages were created like ‘In support of President Zuma for a second term’ and ‘Anyone but Zuma.’ These groups reflect the two opposing camps that exist within the party (Seger 2012). According to the ANC’s communications manager, social media will become an important component of government communication during the 2014 elections (Gori 2012). While there is evidence of outreach to the public and the recognition is encouraging, it remains to be seen whether social platforms will be effectively used by leaders who still reach voting demographics through conventional media.

Finally even if ordinary South Africans and policymakers become more engaged online, the question remains whether action will be taken offline or vice versa. According to Gladwell (2010) network societies work simply because they are based on efficiency, weak ties and lack of consensus; rarely requiring users to give up anything substantive. The exception to this view is when physical barriers for engagement exist or when social media is used as an important means to a larger ends. For instance, social media aided the Arab Spring activists in breaking down ‘the psychological barrier of fear by helping many to connect and share information’ – and in some cases proved a necessary tool to or-
ganise physical protests (Kassim; 2012). But in democratic South Africa there exist other avenues to successfully influence policymaking. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) was more effective in pressuring the government to provide AIDS treatment through a multi-campaign strategy than through online engagement. It included working with a range of professionals, providing AIDS education to the public, shaming government and pharmaceuticals on broadcast media and ultimately, taking the government to court (and winning in 2002). Similarly, most South Africans are more likely to pressure policymakers offline, as witnessed in the string of illegal strikes in 2012. The reality is that despite the narrowing technology gap, other divisions exist, such as language (South Africa is home to 11 official languages) and geographic and socioeconomic barriers (UN Children’s Fund; 2012). The 2012 miners’ strikes at Marikana and the much-reported massacre thereafter also demonstrated the levels of general mistrust among business, government, trade unions and workers. Clear divisions within each interest group are also emerging, as rival unions and political leaders vie for popular support. Such deep-seated differences make it difficult to find common ground and since social media is user-generated, strategic and unified public pressure remains to be seen.

Looking forward, it is necessary (but challenging) to engage a changing society. Leaders will no longer be able to motivate their followers through memories of the liberation struggle, as the ‘born free’ generation moves away from personal recollection to reading about the past in history books (Herskovitz 2013). Without economic and social improvements and addressing social mistrust, South Africa will continue as an extremely divided society.

**China and South Africa’s diplomatic relations**

There are varying circumstances and impacts when it comes to social media and domestic politics. It is important to assess what impact new communication platforms will have on the formal diplomatic and informal ‘people-to-people’
relations between two countries. Contemporary South Africa and China share relatively close bilateral ties. Diplomatic ties officially started in 1998 and relations rapidly elevated to a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ in 2010. The progressive relationship has resulted in a wide range of agreements, including multilateral co-ordination, addressing trade imbalances, and possible cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear energy (Alden 2012). Judging from the expansive areas of co-operation and the string of visits among high-level officials, relations are strong on both political and economic levels. As the relationship reaches its 15 year anniversary in 2013, it is worth understanding the progress on the public front, specifically what communication technology could reveal about public sentiment.

Yet, public influence on the actual bilateral relationship remains weak. The specific and limited interest in this relationship as viewed outside of social media platforms provides some understanding of the types of opinions that exist online. When China became South Africa’s largest trading partner in 2009, critics raised concerns over China’s role in Africa and what were alleged to be its purely economic intentions. Still if the relationship is examined as a whole, South Africa’s attitude towards China is also defined by economic concerns. South African corporations have a variety of successful investments in China, including in mining, infrastructure and construction, finance and business (Gelb; 2010:17). For instance South Africa’s media company, Naspers, is the largest shareholder in China’s Tencent Holdings. This acquisition has helped Naspers’ internet operations to grow despite the 2009 recession (Bloomberg 2012).

Moreover general media coverage of the bilateral relationship is also reported through an economic prism. A study by Wasserman (2012: 143) demonstrates that China regards South Africa as one of the leading African countries with which to do business; and South Africa views China in a similar light, as its media predominantly covers China as an economically and politically newswor-
thy topic. A study by the Journalism and Media Studies Centre (JMSC)\textsuperscript{10} at Hong Kong University came to a similar conclusion. Global news articles on the China–Africa relationship (between June 2011 and June 2012) focused more on economic issues and high politics than human interest stories. Even though there are a range of influences in news making the current media system is audience-driven, which suggests such topics are responding to a demand or interest in certain \textit{kinds} of stories.

The same narrow bilateral interest is reflected by the South African online public. There is virtually no commentary on the relationship besides reaction to extraordinary cases or stories with local relevance. An example is the execution of the South African national, Janice Bronwyn Linden, in China during 2011. In 2008 Linden was arrested for possession of drugs on arrival in China and was given the death sentence three years later. Following the story was dynamic commentary\textsuperscript{11} amongst the South African online community that ranged from a discussion of power relations between South Africa and China, human rights concerns versus the logic of differing legal systems, criticism of both governments, to the basic socio-economic problems in South Africa that encourage people to turn to the drug business. Nevertheless, there was little action beyond these emotional online discussions. Moreover, following the 2012 public outrage over the poaching of 455 rhinos for their horns in South Africa, the journalist Julian Rademeyer (who is writing a book on the trade) commented: ‘there’s this stereotype being sold in South Africa of these evil, Fu Manchu Asians trying to kill our wildlife’ (Powell 2012).

This is not to say that perceptions are not changing – but understanding is developing slowly. As China and South Africa deepen their relationship and physical interaction between publics occur, knowledge will eventually increase on both sides. There are already a number of non-governmental efforts to bring together Chinese and African researchers, journalists and students, helping to raise the
communication and interaction levels on both sides. Still these communication channels are new, so discussion topics tend to focus on ‘getting to know each other’ and dispelling common perceptions that still inform general points of view. Sometimes selective interests are a product of practicality, as the examples of the economic focus of coverage reflected. Yoon Jung Park has noted that the acceptance of Chinese nationals in South Africa is difficult in cases where there is competition over resources, business and employment (Radio Australia; 2012). Likewise the ANC (2012:25) stated in their policy document, ‘the South African foreign policy is an expression of domestic public policy that projects national values and interests’; the core priority being addressing poverty and development. When such national priorities are the underlying basis for outward relations, there will understandably be constraints on the ability to address the larger gaps in perceptions among the countries’ respective publics.

On the Chinese side, public participation is reactive rather than proactively setting the agenda. Even though the following cases are not specific to South Africa, it shows that the Chinese leadership might increasingly have to be more responsive to domestic concerns over foreign policy choices. Along with the increasing number of Chinese businesses in Africa has been the increase of Chinese workers moving abroad. However in 2011, 35,000 workers had to be evacuated from Libya as the conflict began to escalate and in 2012, 25 Chinese workers were abducted in Sudan (Levin 2012). As a result, there is on-going domestic debate between the government (which emphasises that China is not yet powerful enough to protect all its citizens) and the online pressure for leadership and action (criticising China as weak compared with the US, and calling for a change in its non-interventionist policy). Online sentiment over Africans in China was also evident in June 2012\textsuperscript{12}. African migrants protested the death of a Nigerian national in a Guangzhou police station. In response, the comments posted on Chinese social media favoured the police and were critical of the protesters, calling them ‘troublemakers with no values’ (Lu 2012). Still there is yet
to be an instance of online views of the relationship spurring enough interest to be taken up in reality.

Social media can therefore mobilize strong opinions to motivate government action; or the lack thereof can provide the justification not to act. The challenge for China and South Africa then is to raise awareness of and interest\textsuperscript{13} in the bilateral relationship, beyond the traditional spaces, stereotypes and temporary interest of news headlines. Without engagement and interest among the citizens of both countries, it seems likely that the relationship will remain mostly – if not overwhelmingly – determined by leadership, business interests and a reactive public whose understanding of the other side will remain superficial. As witnessed in the recent Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC V), the China–Africa leadership has committed to enhance public engagement and to raise interest and understanding on both sides. The China-South Africa case demonstrates that in an era where leadership needs to be responsive and public attention can be quickly lost, real understanding will need to incorporate mutual interest and relevance to issues at home.

**Conclusion**

Communication technologies are changing the way users and countries relate to one another. Social media specifically reveals itself as both a progressive and neutral platform. China’s political experience shows how decision-making has become more complex. Although the political process remains opaque, internal changes, technological progress and the elevated role of public sentiment are producing an active negotiation process. Democratic South Africa is similarly advancing its communication capabilities. Yet unlike China, it demonstrates the possible limits of social media influence in politics because of factors existing outside of technology. The factors include the preference for using the internet to find information and socialise (as a fairly new tool utilised by the public), leadership is not yet engaging with online constituents as much as they could,
and due to socio-economic reasons, the public do not utilise social media as an avenue for negotiation. These two cases thus reveal that while dynamics could change at the drop of an instant message, social media as a political tool still depends on a range of domestic variables.

Besides the ability of social media to change domestic politics, online platforms reveal the effects of public sentiment on diplomacy. In the case of China-South Africa relations, online opinions reflect the larger relationship characterised by a narrow focus. The gauging of opinions (or lack thereof) reveals the challenging task at hand, in order to raise awareness and develop the relationship to one that is truly comprehensive. Without domestic relevance and mutual interest, it is unlikely that the relationship will widen from its current long-standing political and economic focus.

The discussion of the political and diplomatic implications for recently connected societies like China and South Africa reveal that social media is playing neither a positive nor negative role – rather, a complicated one. Understandably, as such countries grow and develop, they are torn between dealing with hard realities and rising sentiment, which makes the society both enthusiastic and apprehensive toward new advances. These dichotomies raise questions about how technological developments will be managed in the future, because like never before, social media is changing the way governments and people engage.

End Notes

Take for instance the new social platforms since 2008: Qzone in Asia, Sina Weibo in China, V Kontakte (VK) in Russia and Mxit in Africa. For more information see: http://memeburn.com/2013/02/defying-facebook-which-emerging-market-social-networks-will-stand-tall/.


Seminar by a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, August 2012.

In the words of a professor at the China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, August 2012.


Take for example the cable released by the Guardian that showed a US official describing China’s Africa engagement as aggressive and as an economic competitor with no morals (for the original cable see: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/250144, accessed 5 February 2013). Moreover during Hilary Clinton’s (the former US Secretary of State) 2012 Africa tour, she warned that Africa should beware of ‘new colonialism’; a comment that many believed were directed at China. See: http://edition.cnn.com/2011/BUSINESS/09/08/america.losing.influence.africa/index.html (accessed 5 February 2013).
In August 2012, the Journalism and Media Studies Centre at Hong Kong University published an article titled ‘Xinhua: Failing to present the Sino-African relationship?’, which reveals that articles written on the China–Africa relationship emphasise economy and politics across the board (including: AFP, Reuters, BBC, New York Times, The Guardian and Al Jazeera). The same stories came up in Xinhua News, except ‘livelihoods’ (including workers’ safety) was another top reported topic. See: http://datalab.jmsc.hku.hk/2012/08/10/271/ (Accessed in October 2012)


According to the People’s Daily Online, the Chinese youth’s most favoured tourist destinations include: France, US, Switzerland, Australia and Korea (respectively). South Africa or any other African country did not make the list of 20 favourite destinations to visit. For more information see: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/102774/7964826.html.

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Lonely Nights Online: How does Social Networking Channel Chinese Migration and Business to Africa?

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Introduction

It is not news that the last fifteen years’ expansion of economic ties between China and Africa has also led to a marked increase in Chinese migration to the continent. The growing body of scholarship dedicated to China-Africa migration (particularly as it relates to traders) has focused a lot on the role of social networks between Chinese citizens in finding suitable new migrants, managing their immigration experience and setting them up in new businesses. Scholars have pointed to the importance of Chinese kinship and regional networks as a factor undergirding the migration of Chinese people to an environment very foreign to them (see for example Pieke, 2004; Pieke et al, 2007; Park, 2009; Park, 2010; Turner, 2011; McNamee et al, 2012).

However, surprisingly little has been written on the role of internet communities in mediating the flow of migrants from China to Africa. This is particularly striking because, as we show in this paper, the internet plays a significant role in

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the everyday lives of Chinese migrants to Africa. This is true for tourists and traders, but even more so for the employees of Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Despite the sporadic use of the Internet by scholars and journalists to get opinions from Chinese migrants living in Africa, there hasn’t been a comprehensive study of the role of the Internet in China-Africa migration. One reason for this is the very size of the Chinese Internet. China now has more internet users than any other country and Chinese-language internet services like Baidu, Sina Weibo and Alibaba have shown explosive growth (Xu, 2012). For this reason, our paper can also not claim to be a comprehensive account of the role of online communication in migratory flows between China and Africa. Rather, we would like to offer those interested in this topic a few places to start, by showing how various sites are used by Chinese migrants in Africa and to point out a few of the most commonly occurring themes of this discourse. In the process we hope to open new avenues of enquiry to those interested in this underexplored side of China-Africa migration.

However, before delving into the specifics of this topic, one important question remains: why is the Internet so important in the lives of Chinese migrants to Africa? In looking at the lives of Chinese migrants to developing countries, several researchers have implicitly answered this question without necessarily drawing the logic through to the Internet itself. For example, Heidi Østbø Haugen and Jørgen Carling (2005) have pointed out that Chinese migrants to Cape Verde tend to isolate themselves in compounds due to perceptions that they will be targeted by criminals. This is even truer for Chinese migrants to mainland Africa. Dan Haglund (2009) has argued that Chinese SOEs’ employment practices in Zambia (including short-term contracts and discouraging the immigration of spouses and children) tend to produce low levels of engagement with the local community. These workers live in what Ching Kwan Lee (2009)
has called ‘enclaves’ or more evocatively, 飞地 (feidi – flying lands). Designed to keep Chinese workers safe, these walled compounds make interaction with the local community quite difficult. These worker compounds offer different levels of luxury (Lee describes a compound in Zambia with a Chinese cook, satellite TV, a karaoke room and even a Chinese-style stone bridge – this will definitely not be true for SMEs). Yet, despite varying levels of luxury in worker accommodation, a fast internet connection allowing them to download video and to stay in contact with their families at home has become a requisite part of the employer-employee compact. The internet doesn’t only act as a one-stop entertainment, communication and leisure hub, it also softens the impact of the stringent security measures designed to keep Chinese workers out of trouble. These measures include a strong discouragement or blanket ban of workers leaving the compound at night. This rule, together with armed guards, is inscribed into the employment contract offered by SOEs to prospective workers in China, and is considered a fundamental part of ensuring their safety. What happens in practice is that these workers are subjected to long, lonely nights where online communication becomes their only outlet outside of their work community. This is not only true for SOE workers in their worker compounds, but also for the workers and owners of SMEs, who fear (not without reason) that if they wander around at night they will become the targets of criminals or corrupt police (Global Agenda, 2009). In their case the Internet takes on a wider role than simply entertainment, maintaining family and cultural ties and managing boredom. It also becomes a crucial tool for employers to recruit new workers and to find reasonably priced supplies and for prospective workers to find out more about working conditions at certain factories before they commit themselves.

In this paper we will sketch in broad strokes the different online communities that play a particularly important role in mediating Chinese migration to Africa, with a particular focus on the role of web forums. The reason for this choice and
our approach and methodology is set out in the section below. In the subsequent section we identify three of the most prominent themes dominating online conversations: the discussion of working conditions and business practices, the discussion of relationships between Chinese and Africans and the description of African landscapes and environments to readers in China. We conclude by pointing out the potential for further research into this area. This paper is by no means intended to be comprehensive. Rather, we use it to open a wider discussion of the different ways online communication is shaping China-Africa relations.

**The Chinese Internet: Patterns and Methods**

One of the main factors complicating the use of the Internet as a research tool into the globalization of the Chinese experience is language. This is of course mainly a barrier to its use by scholars who do not speak Chinese. Yet even those who do might find themselves confused by the particular conventions and codes used by Chinese users of the internet or netizens. Another complicating factor is the sheer amount of information available. Akin to trying to drink from a fire hose, the researcher faces an overwhelming barrage of information, opinion and untethered comment. Research so far have tended to focus on certain particular topics (for example, recent work includes the rise of new web-based modes of discourse (Xu, 2012), the impact on young Chinese definition of self (Liu, 2011), the way this kind of media is used to mull over national disasters (Inwood, 2011) and using the Chinese netizen community as a barometer to gauge the wider Chinese public’s view of Chinese foreign policy and its perceptions of other countries (Hu & Lei, 2010; Shen, 2011). Other research has focused on certain communities, for example, the way how Chinese students at foreign universities use social networking sites and discussion forums to ease their adaptation to new environments (Lin et al, 2011; Ye, 2006) as well as how internet use reflect the kind of cultural differences that affect adaptation (Wei et
Research into the use of the Internet by Chinese communities living outside China has so far focused on Chinese communities in the developed world. However, we feel that it is exactly what Yu-Shan Wu in this volume has called the leapfrogging nature of the internet in Africa (the tendency of users to skip the gradual development of technology by acting as early adopters of the newest communication mechanisms available in the market) that makes Chinese internet use in Africa so useful to track its influence as a mediating force in migration.

Certain corners of the Chinese-language internet provide particularly useful glimpses into this mediating role. In our preparation for this paper we had to choose between three main types of web discourse. In the first place, we looked at the microblogging site Sina Weibo. While it is one of the biggest discussion forums on the web, it presents its own problems. In particular, Weibo’s interface, which resembles Twitter, tends to produce large amounts of sort posts that drift loose from each other. It soon becomes difficult to discern who responded to whom and it presents a barrier to following conversations.

In contrast, single-topic QQ groups proved more useful. QQ is a multifaceted web presence developed by the Chinese internet giant Tencent. One of its main services is an instant messaging service. Once the user downloads the QQ app, it provides access to more than 700 million QQ accounts. These accounts are mostly in Chinese, although QQ is expanding into foreign markets and currently offers services in English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese and Korean. Although most QQ users only use it to chat with friends or make new friends online, QQ is frequently used by Chinese small-scale businesses both within and outside of China to find raw materials and markets as well as to recruit workers. QQ does not only offer one-on-one instant messaging, but also allows the creation of topic-specific QQ groups. In this research we have identified more than 30 QQ groups formed by the Chinese community to exchange information about
living or doing business in African countries. While QQ lessens the random nature of Weibo messaging, and researchers can zone in on particular topics, they require researchers to track unfolding conversations in real time because they tend to be more ephemeral than web forums. In addition, they are not completely open. Entry into certain QQ groups requires approval by the group administrators who reserve the right to invite or expel group members. However, despite these limitations, QQ groups have proven themselves useful to our research, as we explain in more detail later in this paper.

The most useful for our purposes were single-topic web forums. These forums preserve whole conversations as they develop over time, which makes them an invaluable source for researchers interested in the breadth of opinions regarding a specific topic. The forums are also relatively stable, which means that one can follow a single thread back to its origin and return to these conversations over and over. The most useful web forums used by the Chinese community in Africa were:

Baidu PostBar¹

Baidu is the largest Chinese language search engine in the world. Baidu PostBar (or Baidu Tieba), allows its users to create a bar (forum) by typing a keyword. The largest bar related to Africa on Baidu is the “Africa Bar”, but country-related bars such as “Tanzania Bar” and “Ghana Bar”, also host a many threads and discussions.

Tianya Club²

Tianya Club is a popular Chinese web forum with one of the most vibrant online communities in China. By January 2013 there were more than 78,297,000 registered users on Tianya. Tianya has the reputation for hosting fierce debates on Chinese social issues and international relations. Its sub-forum “Africa” contained 3,040 threads with 53,758 posts by 6th February.
Chinese in Africa

"Chinese in Africa" is a web forum with more than 65,000 threads and more than 80,000 members by 2013. The forum was especially active in 2007-08, yet since 2010 the volume of the threads and responses has declined. However, it contains records of a large number of conversations documenting the lives, feelings, experiences and business interaction among the Chinese in Africa. The forum is divided into different sub-forums dedicated to topics such as "Life in Africa", "Business Opportunities", "Job-seeking", "Touring in Africa", as well as containing region-specific forums such as "West Africa", "East Africa” and “Southern Africa”.

Qufeizhou

Qufeizhou is targeted to Chinese who intend to go to Africa, or has been living or working in Africa. Launched in 2011, the forum is relatively new, but offers an integrated platform containing news, country-specific information about Africa, business, entertainment and opportunities to make friends. By January 2013, there were more than 25,000 members in the community.

Fob Business Forum – Africa Market

The Africa sub-forum of the Fob Business Forum has generated over 10,000 threads dedicated to information about trade and investment in many African countries. Topics frequently discussed include trade procedures, dealing with African merchants and companies and sharing personal stories.

Sohu

Sohu’s Africa Circle mainly contains stories and pictures of unique culture and scenery in Africa.

Country-specific forums

The relative size of the Chinese communities resident in particular African
countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and South Africa, has led to the development of country-specific web forums. These forums are not exclusive to those who live in these countries. For instance, the “Chinese in Nigeria” web forum has become an important online community for Chinese across the West Africa to exchange information and opinions.

This list is by no mean exhaustive. These web-forums are widely used by Chinese businesspeople interested in expanding into the African market, company employees considering moving to the continent or those already living in Africa trying to connect with netizens in China or other Chinese people in Africa. In addition, researchers interested in tracking the way Africa is discussed among Chinese people either already living there or considering to relocate will find these forums particularly useful.

In the following section, we identify three broad themes dominating the discussions we followed in these online forums. Readers should keep in mind that these represent an initial attempt to delineate broad fields of discussion. We lack the space to give a comprehensive account of each theme. There are also many other themes of discussion on these forums that demand analysis.

**Three major topics of discussion on web forums**

1. **Business Information Exchange**

One of the most popular ways Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa use social media is to produce, source or integrate business information relating to Africa. The huge business potential shown by many African economies has attracted hundreds of thousands of Chinese entrepreneurs seeking opportunities to fill gaps in the market. In an online survey posted on Fob Business Forum entitled "Are you willing to go and work in Africa?" 326 out of 551 (59.17%) respondents said yes. The thread also contains 232 posts which list some of the main factors motivating Chinese to go to Africa. Most of the respondents seemed young, and
expressed curiosity about Africa’s exotic natural scenery. They also appeared seduced by the many success stories of their peers and predecessors in Africa. They discussed the high wages and unexplored opportunities on the continent, while expressing concern about security issues in countries unknown to them. These comments echo research findings among Chinese communities in various African countries (see for example Dobler, 2009; Haugen & Carling, 2005; Turner, 2011).

Social media is playing a crucial role in creating links among Chinese traders in Africa. QQ and Alibaba are two of the most widely used web tools for manufacturers or wholesalers in China to look for, negotiate and partner with Chinese merchants overseas. Alibaba provides a dedicated service to business, while QQ has a wider range of users, including those using the service for leisure. However, users seeking business partners also frequently use QQ for this purpose. One finds many threads on web forums that are used by producers or wholesalers to list their wares and their QQ contact details in order to attract potential retailers. Below we lay out some of the main themes of business-related conversations we found on various Africa-focused Chinese web pages, although describing these business activities comprehensively would require more research:

**Seeking collaboration and partnership:** When one reads through the threads on these business forums one gets a distinct idea of the web-based personal networks facilitating the flow of Chinese-made goods to Africa. Much of the discussion on these forums is dedicated to looking for business partners. The categories of goods offered in these advertisements include everything from textile and electronics to furniture, machinery and building materials. Those who post these advertisements often circulate their business information wherever they can, disregarding the topics discussed in a particular thread.

In these types of threads, a discussion often starts with the topic initiator expressing his or her willingness or expertise to source goods from China to sell in
Africa. The topic followers subsequently post what they can offer, along with their QQ number or email address, asking for further communication privately. The researcher therefore frequently finds conversations disappearing from view the moment they become interesting. This echoes our point above that while QQ and Alibaba play a crucial role in facilitating China-Africa business exchange, their use limits our ability to judge the extent to which web forums facilitate China-Africa trade. For example, we found this thread on Tianya:

Subject: I have question to ask those who own shops in South Africa
Date: October 13, 2011
Viewed: 1317
Responses: 23

Original Post:
I will go to South Africa to open a shop, but I am not familiar with sources of goods and transport. I want to ask my predecessors [in South Africa] - how do you find these in the easiest and cheapest way? I am not really good at this. Please help me. Thank you!

Replies (selected):
- That's easy. Find a freight forwarding company
- People who got rich over there won't tell you
- General cargo transport clearance, etc. is not a problem. Just go to South Africa to see what you can sell.
- It’s easy to sell wedding dresses in Africa. Come to visit our site on Alibaba [address] and my QQ number is [deleted]
- (A spam message)
- Ask me if you don’t understand domestic custom clearance.

- You can find anything you want in Yiwu.

- First, you need to ensure you have enough supply domestically (in China). Second, look for a freight forwarding company. They usually have receiving points in several cities like Guangzhou, Yiwu, Shanghai and Qingdao. You just send your goods to them. Third, give them the shipping address and contact information in South Africa so they can contact you when the goods arrive. It’s easy because all the freight forwarding companies help with custom clearance. They charge by the cubic meter. In 2009 each cubic meter cost 1,500 [South African] Rand, but now it has increased to 2,500 Rand.

- Hello, please contact me if you have any cheap goods that needs stock processing. I am professionally selling many different kinds of overstock goods. Low prices and good quality. Contact me via [email address] Thank you!

- I export second-hand cloth from China. I’m looking for clients in Africa to collaborate. Please contact me via my number or QQ attached below. [Phone number] and [QQ number].

- Doing business in South Africa is quite tiring. Where are you going? Johannesburg?

- (A spam message)

Introducing business models: Chinese web forums provide a platform for businesspeople to learn from each other through discussing which business models have proved realistic in specific African countries. Some of the major questions raised and answered in Africa-oriented Chinese web forums relate to:

The procedures involved in exporting goods to specific African countries, including how to deal with customs;
How to transfer capital and profit between China and Africa;
Which kinds of financial transactions to conduct with African clients in order to avoid fraud;
How to deal with African government officials and police;
How to handle immigration-related issues, including bringing additional Chinese employees into Africa.

Not all of the business models being shared on Chinese social media are legal in the host nations. In fact, the internet has also become a source for sharing knowledge on how to accumulate wealth illegally or unethically, thanks to weak law-enforcement in many African countries. For instance, Chinese illegal gold mine operators and workers in Ghana – mostly from Shangin in Guangxi Province – have used web forums and personal blogs to share their experience, stories, and methods of operating small-scale illegal gold mines. However, it is difficult to quantify exactly how often such information has subsequently influenced additional Chinese to seek similar ventures in Ghana.

Hiring and job-seeking: Job seekers, especially young Chinese college graduates looking for global exposure, often post on these Africa related forums searching for opportunities. Chinese-run businesses in Africa also take advantage of web forums to recruit and bring additional Chinese workers to Africa. Chinese web forums therefore has served as a de facto job portal for recruiters and job seekers to find each other. But neither recruiters nor job seekers openly discuss job opportunities in a thread, as they prefer leaving their QQ numbers or email addresses for private communication.

Africa job opportunities posted on Chinese web forums cover a wide range of industries, from translators (English, French, Portuguese or Arabic) to engineers, designers, accountants and salespeople. A lot of these job ads have listed
requirements such as being hardworking, adaptable to harsh environments and possessing the enthusiasm to work overseas.

The benefits set out by job recruiters often include daily Chinese meals, living quarters arranged at the company’s cost and a return ticket to China one to three times per year. Because the Chinese working in Africa usually earn two to three times more than their counterparts in China, one can argue that job advertisements on web forums play a significant enticing role, motivating additional Chinese user to consider working in Africa.

Stories of success: A few Chinese businesspeople use web forums to tell their stories of success in Africa. They have usually been staying in Africa for longer than 5 years, often started their businesses from very small, working hard and living frugally. Such stories might create a positive image of Africa full of business opportunities, making some readers consider going to Africa. For instance, one thread talks about how a Chinese man earned a lot of money by just selling bean curd to the Chinese community in Uganda. In another case, Tianya’s Africa forum organized a special temporary forum during which a successful Chinese entrepreneur answered questions from the community on doing business in Ethiopia. The two hours of conversation covered topics such as starting up a business, dealing with Africa labor and living expenses.

Remittances: It is estimated that a majority of Chinese working in Africa eventually send their income back to China as remittances, often in the form of U.S. dollars. However, tight foreign exchange controls in some African nations present barriers to the export of income or profits. This has sparked numerous discussions on Chinese web forums about the best ways to send remittances from Africa to China, both legal (through banks or MoneyGram) and illegal (through Chinese-run underground banks or Chinese tourist agencies).

African news: Because many Chinese living in Africa are not fluent in English, a number of Chinese web forums are dedicated to updating and translating news about African macroeconomic environment, investment opportunities, govern-
mental policies and local sentiments towards the Chinese communities. For instance, Qufeizhou maintains a frequently updated news sub-forum\(^\text{18}\) with articles from both Chinese and Western newspapers.

2. Perception towards Africa and Africans

Due to cultural and language gaps and a lack of opportunities to socialize, life in Africa is typically not easy for recent Chinese migrants. Therefore sharing personal experiences and feelings online has become an important part of their social life. Some of the main topics shared on Web forums, QQ and Weibo are listed below.

**Perception of Africans:** One of the most fiercely debated topics on Chinese web forums comprise opinions and perceptions towards Africa and Africans. As many Chinese have never traveled internationally before arriving in Africa, their limited awareness of multiculturalism often leads to biased perceptions of the value systems and lifestyles of host nations. This is reinforced by limited interactions with Africans outside of the work context. On web forums, a number of Chinese have posted threads complaining about the living environment, security issues, difficulties they experience in managing African workers and other culture-related issues. These sentiments generally receive a lot of support from other Chinese, who chime in with similar experiences. These conversations also mediate and shape the opinions of those who have never visited Africa. Yet sometimes fierce debate may occur on issues such as whether racism towards Africans should be tolerated\(^\text{19}\). These debates usually reach no consensus.

**Interracial dating and marriage:** In recent years, an increasing number of threads have started to reveal an important new phenomenon relating to the lives of the Chinese community in Africa – dating and marriage with Africans. Interracial marriage is an important factor measuring immigrants’ assimilation into a host society. As the number of Chinese in Africa is rising, cases of interracial mar-
riage are becoming more common, albeit still rare. Again, the internet provides the space for Chinese to share stories of their romance with Africans, a topic still unfamiliar to Chinese netizens. Threads dedicated to such topics often attract a lot of discussion. Sometimes they develop into fierce arguments on whether a relationship with an African is reliable and long-lasting. Below is a sample thread containing one such discussion, translated into English:

Title: Getting Married to Tanzania

Date: August 20, 2009

Viewed: 17414

Responses: 161

Original Post:

I am marrying my Tanzanian boyfriend. He wants to take me to Tanzania and told me I will like it there. I know nothing about that place. Can anyone tell me where I can find a job there? If I start a business, how much will it cost? My English is not bad. I can also be a tour guide. Please tell me everything you know about it! Thank you.

Replies (selected)

- Tanzania is a good place.

- I know several Chinese women who married Tanzanians and moved to Tanzania. They all divorced.

- If you can handle him marrying 4 women and making you deliver 15 children, then you should go. I am not lying.

- Aren't there enough Chinese men for you?
- Don't think it's romantic to do so. You will regret it in the future.
- You have very unique tastes.
- I wish you happiness.
- I have been working here (Tanzania) for 5 years. I never thought about marrying a woman here.
- Be careful. Don't get cheated on.
- I stayed long in Dar es Salaam. Every time I think about blacks, I think whatever social class they belong to, they like to beg from you, even for a glass of Coke. Can you bear living in an environment where a few dozen brothers-in-law, nephews and cousins always come to extend their dark hands towards you?
- Agree. The world’s most shameless, most obscene, lowest quality and most ungrateful people are blacks. Take me as an example, I have studied markets for a year in more than 10 African countries and decided to operate my business in Congo for 5 years; I guarantee you that you don’t want to marry a black, except for the children of the President.
- I can’t stand their body odor . . . urg . . . urg. . . I am going to vomit
- Watch out for AIDS and malaria!
- You guys, don’t be like this. “Black ghosts” are very NICE. There must be some misunderstanding here :)
- Don't look through colored lens. That man must be a nice person... but Africa is not an easy place to live.
- I am sorry. I never discriminated against blacks when I was in China. But now I do.
Except for Cape Town, everywhere else in Africa is a garbage dump.

**Sharing experiences:** For those who overcame difficulties and finally succeeded on the continent, web forums provide the opportunity to gain fame through telling their personal stories and advising the public. The survival tips being shared range from handling a house robbery in South Africa, encountering corrupt police officers, lawsuits in Ethiopia's Federal High Court, protecting companies' property against thefts, or more commonly, ever-changing impressions of Africa. These individual stories are often motivating or inspiring to readers who may be considering working in Africa.

**Emotional and physical support:** The forums we analyzed do not only play an important role in recruiting workers to come to Africa, but has also developed into a community offering support. For example, an incident that drew a lot of attention on Baidu’s “South Africa Bar” related to a Chinese man who was solicited to work in South Africa by a Chinese businessman in South Africa without receiving a legal work permit. One day he became seriously ill but his employer refused to send him to a local hospital or back to China because he had not yet paid off the cost of his travel to Africa. His wife who was staying in China had no choice but to post threads online to ask other members in South Africa for help. Her posts received a number of responses, including someone who volunteered to communicate with his boss and subsequently helped the sick worker return to China. This example shows how Chinese web forums help to mediate the fraught migration experience, while also sidestepping issues of legality. While answering this question falls outside the purview of this paper, it is interesting to ask whether these forums should be seen as undermining the role of the local host government and the Chinese embassy, or whether it grew out of the relative lack of support offered to Chinese migrants by these two actors.

**3. Tourism related information share**

To the majority of Chinese readers Africa is a continent of desert, forest, tradi-
ational civilization, poverty, disease, warfare and corruption. Web forums allow Chinese travelers and residents in Africa to upload photos and to share their travel stories with a wider readership who wants to read about the realities of life in Africa. These stories, from the beautiful scenery of South Africa to local women in Ethiopia and traditional African festivals, have encouraged more Chinese travelers to explore the continent. Some Chinese travelers also launch threads to seek travel companions. A number of Chinese tourist companies have started to utilize web forums to promote their travel packages to Africa. The role these forums play in stimulating travel to Africa presents many opportunities for future research.

Conclusion and future research

One of the biggest problems bedeviling English-language reporting on China-Africa relations in both the popular and academic press is the tendency to flatten individual experience. The reduction of people into monolithic labels – “China” and “Africa” instead of individual Chinese and Africans – remains an ever-present danger. The Chinese-language internet offers an invaluable chance to get to grips with what it is really like for individuals to arrive, settle and survive in Africa. This experience has been notoriously difficult to gauge. The use of questionnaire-based surveys can be useful, but they tend to reduce spontaneity and can be logistically challenging to conduct. Web forums offer an invaluable chance to see conversations among Chinese migrants developing over time, to gauge the range of opinions within this community and to read how they see Africa and Africans.

In this paper we offered an initial attempt to map the parameters of this kind of analysis. We outlined the different kinds of web communities primarily engaged in mediating Chinese business development, labour recruitment and migration related to Africa. We also outlined in broad strokes some of the most common topics of conversation on these forums. This paper represents barely an intro-
duction into this research and we hope to contribute more in-depth accounts of the role of the internet in mediating migration to specific places in the future. This research also opens up other potentially fruitful fronts, for example the relationship between different communities of Chinese migrants in countries that have experienced successive waves of migration from different parts of the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the various business models of Chinese enterprises in Africa, the constantly changing opinions towards Africa and Africans held by different Chinese communities, the emerging impact of interracial marriages between Chinese and Africans, and the factors that contribute to the movement of Chinese people and capital to Africa. Future research should also take into consideration the important reality that despite the fact that it presents significant barriers to research, the majority of interactions among Chinese in Africa take place through QQ. Combining enquiries into web forums with a closer assessment of QQ would further reveal the impact of the internet on the lives and work of the Chinese in Africa.

End Notes

1 Chinese: 百度贴吧 http://tieba.baidu.com

2 Chinese: 天涯 http://bbs.tianya.cn/list-5033-1.shtml

3 Chinese: 非洲华人网

4 Chinese: 去非洲网 http://bbs.qufeizhou.com/

6 Chinese: 搜狐非洲圈论坛 http://africa.q.sohu.com/topics

7 http://ghana.5d6d.net/

8 http://www.nigeriabbs.com/bbs/forum.php

9 http://tan.africaapple.com/forum.php

10 http://www.nanfei8.com/

11 http://bbs.fobshanghai.com/thread-1749324-1-1.html

12 Alibaba, headquartered in China, is a leading e-commerce platform for small businesses around the world. Its Chinese platform had 54.8 million registered users and showcased 8.4 million supplier storefronts as of June 30, 2012. For more information see http://news.alibaba.com/specials/aboutalibaba/aligroup/index.html

13 http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-1881-1.shtml

14 http://bbs.shanglin.net/thread-88396-1-2.html

15 http://blog.china.alibaba.com/article/i29820305.html?domainid=tomzhangxf

16 http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-1232-1.shtml

17 http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-outseachina-66311-1.shtml


19 http://tieba.baidu.com/p/463051153?pn=1

20 http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-684-1.shtml

21 http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2115448270

22 http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2139174544
23 http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-1863-1.shtml
24 http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2136227049
25 http://q.sohu.com/forum/12/topic/4471550
26 http://q.sohu.com/forum/12/topic/53617956
27 http://q.sohu.com/forum/12/topic/52317377

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