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# The Rise of China's State-Led Media Dynasty in Africa

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## **ABSTRACT**

China is no exception to the global rise of developing media, who are challenging dominant traditional players. China's state-owned media are increasing their influence in the world as an instrument of its grander soft power engagement. The paper seeks to understand this new trend, particularly in the case of Africa. It traces China's media engagement on the continent, explains how strategies have changed in the 2000s and seeks to understand some of the challenges of transferring a global strategy to Africa.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCTV	China Central Television
CNC	China Xinhua News Network Corporation
CRI	China Radio International
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
ICT	Information and communication technology
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
LBS	Liberia Broadcasting System
MIH	Myriad International Holdings
RTNC	Radio-Télévision Nationale Congolaise
SACF	Sino-African Cooperation Forum
ZNBC	Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation

## INTRODUCTION

*To make the rest of the world aware of China's role in Africa, the Chinese mass media have to break the monopoly of their Western competitors in Africa and spread the facts, as well as the views, of the Chinese government and think tanks across the world.*

Deng Yanting, opinion piece in the China Daily<sup>1</sup>

*The first African news hub of China Central Television, CCTV Africa, has been launched in Kenya. The reports will cover news from the entire African continent.*

Chen Yi, reporter on CCTV Africa's Launch in January 2012<sup>2</sup>

China's engagement with the world is changing. Its leaders realise that in the post-Cold War era, soft power capabilities (the influence derived from non-coercive cultural appeal) are challenging the influence of military and economic might or multilateral diplomacy. In response to this reality, China is incorporating the pursuit of soft power as a foreign policy priority, complementing its emphasis on outward trade and diplomacy that began in the 1990s.

China is seeking to win over the hearts and minds of everyday people who have traditionally learned about the country through global political news circles. The state-led initiative is institutionalising soft power, most recently creating its own news providers to tell the China narrative. Chinese state broadcasters are taking steps to advance their views across the world, from Xinhua's lease of a massive LED billboard on Times Square in New York, to China Central Television's (CCTV) establishment of a new hub in Kenya.

Since the 2000s, such initiatives have focused progressively on the developing world, where China maintains a strong presence.<sup>3</sup> One particular media frontier is Africa, where perspectives on China continue to be clouded in mystery, despite volumes of Chinese aid and development assistance. As the relationship between China and Africa grows, Chinese media are becoming as influenced by global commercial strategies as by the leadership's emphasis on soft power diplomacy. So, while China builds on its traditional development assistance, Chinese broadcasting is finding a new voice in Africa (and in Swahili).

As no comprehensive study exists on how Beijing is institutionalising soft power – a new type of engagement through the media – this paper will seek to understand two main aspects of the issue. Firstly, to understand the origins of China's new engagement with the world: what soft power means to China, and what factors motivated Beijing to adjust its foreign policy engagement. Secondly, as it is too early to evaluate the Chinese media drive, to examine the scope and evolution of China's media engagement in Africa; studying the African case will clarify the factors Beijing will need to consider when expanding its global reach.

## THE CONTEXT OF CHINA'S MEDIA RISE

**Chinese media: part of a larger soft power focus**

China has explicitly shown interest in soft power – what Joseph Nye describes as intangible resources that help a nation achieve its goals by influencing others to adopt

the same.<sup>4</sup> Whereas hard power is the traditional use of coercion through military and economic influence, *soft* and *hard* power are two sides of the same coin, as both methods are able to change what others do to reach a set of objectives.<sup>5</sup> Yet soft power is an important instrument to help a state achieve its most desired goal with the least objection.

The soft power concept is not new to China: Confucianism (551–479 BC) opposed the enforcing of values on others; the founder of Mohism (470–390 BC), Mo Zi was against offensive force, and similarly, mind over force was the foundation of strategist Sun Tzu's *Art of War*.<sup>6</sup> In practice, propaganda was a key feature of the Maoist state (1949–1976) which used multiple techniques, such as control over the education system and media to influence the Chinese population,<sup>7</sup> The organisation of mass movements was necessary for the Communist Party to achieve its objectives, be it taking power through revolutionary means or mobilising popular support for development programmes.<sup>8</sup> Even before the soft power concept was formally used in government foreign policy, influence was considered a crucial tool in China becoming a leading world power.<sup>9</sup> In 2007 the first public pronouncement was made on the use of soft powers in Chinese foreign policy practice, when then General Secretary Hu Jintao gave a keynote address on the importance of culture as a foundation for creativity and national cohesion.<sup>10</sup> The government realised that competing for global influence required facilitating understanding of Chinese culture.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, a political report by Hu mentioned the term soft power or *ruanshili* for the first time.<sup>12</sup> In early 2010, the *People's Daily* published an article in which Premier Wen Jiabao announced that China would engage more actively in foreign cultural exchanges; the article also mentioned that soft power had become a key concept in government sessions.<sup>13</sup> As the *China Daily* noted, media which target overseas audiences, would receive more investments over the next 10 years to open and support new stations and to 'present a true picture of China to the World'.<sup>14</sup>

According to Joseph Nye, the easiest way a state can achieve its objectives is:<sup>15</sup>

- if it supports *institutions* that influence the behaviour of other states [or people] to the ways of the dominant state – thus saving the need for coercive tools such as economic and military power; and
- to create global norms that are not foreign to its own society, ensuring it is unlikely to need to change.

China's approach to soft power is slightly different to that of Nye. As Kurlantzick explains, like its East Asian neighbours, China's understanding of soft power is broader than Nye's original concept, which looked at harder forms of influence that excluded investment, development aid and diplomacy.<sup>16</sup> China also looks beyond the *international* appeal of multilateral participation, business influence, values and culture. Its soft power is about not only promoting international status but also making Chinese values and culture attractive to a public grown weary of traditional ideology.<sup>17</sup> Therefore China needs to inspire its own public before it can offer anything beyond economic growth to the world.<sup>18</sup> With regard to Nye's first point on 'supporting institutions', Beijing is not only increasing its multilateral participation but also institutionalising soft power in order to influence everyday people. For example, China has established Confucius Institutes worldwide to promote Chinese language and culture, participates in international events and exhibitions (such as the 2010 Shanghai Expo), and in academic and think-tank

exchanges. Of particular relevance to this study is the setting up of state-media bureaus worldwide. These institutions are part of China's informal diplomacy strategy to enhance its interactions along formal lines.<sup>19</sup> They also serve as a platform to explain China's values, culture and foreign policy in a non-evasive manner.<sup>20</sup>

The Chinese government is using the media for diplomacy, bringing a new, competitive element to influence states.<sup>21</sup> China is actively introducing its culture and values, and distributing favourable images through its media to achieve its goals of reducing fears of its military strength, developing closer relations with developing nations and expanding its international influence.

### Global trends

Traditional Western media giants have dominated the global information flow for a long time. In particular, media organisations like CNN and BBC have monopolised the news markets. Their financial resources enable them to send reporters overseas and, through their global exposure and interpretation of international events, they contribute to the dissemination of Western values in the world.<sup>22</sup> However, this longstanding Western monopoly on information appears to be changing, as the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signalled when she said the new battlefield is the progressively 'crowded field of state-financed satellite television news'.<sup>23</sup> Funded by governments, these television channels are directed at international viewers, give their views on events and produce stories and images of countries otherwise portrayed in a critical light by the Western media. The Western media's treatment of China and its expanding role in Africa is one of the most obvious examples. Common themes in Western media coverage are China's negative impact on Africa and its dealings with corrupt governments.<sup>24</sup> They regularly report on China as a monolithic entity, criticise China's colonial ambitions and emphasise present circumstances – with little socio-historic explanation of the China–Africa relationship.<sup>25</sup> For instance, *The Guardian* released a cable quoting a US official who described China in Africa as 'a very aggressive and pernicious economic competitor with no morals'.<sup>26</sup> An opinion piece in the *New York Times* described China as a 'rogue' donor, which like Iran and Venezuela has 'the cash and the will to reshape the world into a place very unlike the one where we want to live'.<sup>27</sup> The result is a primary obstacle to China's international integration: the unbalanced international communication order.<sup>28</sup>

The drive to change perceptions is not unique to China or to developing countries. The international news media's inaccurate reports on France's policy initiatives prompted the French government to start its own 24-hour news service.<sup>29</sup> In December 2006, France24 was launched to convey French values and perspectives in French, English and Arabic. Other governments have also made inroads in the global news market: Iran's international English news channel, Russia Today (RT), Euronews (a consortium of public service broadcasters) and government-funded media channels such as Televisora del Surin Venezuela. Last but not least is the Qatar-based Al Jazeera, a symbol of the Middle East's rise, and a leading challenger to major news services.<sup>30</sup> For Beijing, the 2008 financial crisis brought opportunities for expansion into the global media market. Domestic priorities and financial difficulties led most countries and news stations to curb their activities, whereas China and other emerging players (as noted above) were able to expand, devoting billions to global operations.<sup>31</sup>

These efforts recognise how interconnected the world has become. A virtual presence brings a global voice, taking public diplomacy and national image to international audiences.

### Understanding China's motivation

Traditionally, in Chinese culture losing face, or *mianzi*, is synonymous with loss of reputation.<sup>32</sup> The concept is closely associated with public appearances and image and a significant motivator in Chinese social psychology.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, open and public criticism – for the world to see – maximises the potential to lose face. In contrast, Western media tend to thrive on being critics of authority and watchdogs of those in power, and their commercial models are aimed at attracting audiences more interested in negative than positive news developments.<sup>34</sup> China's international image has been historically and commercially managed by easy narratives and assumptions by the Western media. In the late Qing Dynasty, missionaries with their religious prejudices wrote about China as 'uncultivated and weak'; between 1920 and 1949, China was a 'warring state', and under Mao Tse-Tung was portrayed as a poor and isolated country. During the 1989 Tiananmen student protests, the country was portrayed as unsympathetic and demonic. This image prevailed despite the fact that China was progressively diversifying as a society undergoing rapid reform.<sup>35</sup> When China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, global uncertainty about Beijing's intentions continued. During this period Chinese policymakers began to recognise both the country's economic strength (booming for over three decades) and weakness in the global media market.<sup>36</sup> Chinese cities were feeling the cultural influence of neighbours Korea and Japan (and Hong Kong and Taiwan),<sup>37</sup> as their films, television dramas and by-products (music and fashion) were penetrating the Chinese market, whereas China's creativity found far less fertile ground.

What brought significant change to China's national image management was the lead up to hosting the 2008 Olympics (having previously failed to win the bid in 2000). China sought to use the Olympics – and the accompanying worldwide media attention – to portray its rise in a more positive light, away from the defensive image during the days of Tiananmen Square.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the importance China placed on the 2008 event created problems. Activists exploited the increasing media attention to criticise China's disregard for human rights and, in particular, its links with Sudan. Since 2004, the world had become increasingly aware of the genocide in Darfur. Western activists highlighted China's passive role in the conflict and how its closeness (based on diplomatic, arms and oil support<sup>39</sup>) to the Sudanese government directly fuelled the conflict. Although multiple factors were involved, China's hosting of the upcoming Olympics had an unexpected influence on China's role in the Darfur crisis.

The lesson for China was simple: media portrayal matters — from American actress and humanitarian, Mia Farrow's 2007 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed 'Genocide Olympics'<sup>40</sup> criticising China's profiting from the Darfur crisis, to the resignation of world-renowned director Steven Spielberg as the Games' artistic director.<sup>41</sup> Favourable opinion towards China decreased steadily. With criticism of China's passive stance mounting and reluctance to comment on the Darfur situation, Beijing was eventually persuaded to support negotiations for UN peacekeeping forces to protect civilians in Sudan.<sup>42</sup> It also began to communicate with the global news media on the Darfur issue, providing frequent

official communication to major broadcasters and hosting press conferences with China's special envoy Liu Guijin.<sup>43</sup>

China faced more pressure when the ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang and the Tibet riots made international headlines.<sup>44</sup> In an effort to repair its public relations, China softened its stance on human rights issues that could provoke international attention, such as foreign press restrictions and unscrupulous construction companies involved in the building of the Olympic infrastructure. The latter were stripped of their Olympic licenses when found to have violated labour regulations.<sup>45</sup> Foreign and local media were also given relative autonomy in reporting on the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.<sup>46</sup>

In this way, the 2008 Olympic Games concurrently became a multiple platform for global criticism of China and ignited China's own re-branding efforts. Moreover, from *within* China aggressive media discourse emerged on what the 'real China' was. In April 2008, in response to the disruptions of the torch relay in London and Paris, the Chinese media quoted a student, Li Xuan, who encouraged overseas Chinese to 'oppose media injustice' and the overly negative and biased portrayals of China.<sup>47</sup> In a similar vein, journalist Tan Haojun commented that the world continues to understand China through the media, which have their own agenda and fail to portray a real picture of China.<sup>48</sup> An example of this is the 2004 media coverage of the story of China–Sudan relations told in light of the Darfur crisis but excluding the complex story from the countries in question.<sup>49</sup> Recognising the need for a 'positive China' image, local governments received a memo on China's strategy for the management of overseas media during the Olympic Games, which included the following:<sup>50</sup>

- Take firm control of the 'sequences of interviews' at the provincial level.
- Do more to improve the release of information, and reinforce the work of releasing information.
- Official information must be disseminated; positive propaganda must be reinforced at the provincial level; and the initiative must be taken in influencing and managing foreign public opinion.
- Ensure that key information is disseminated on websites – as a force for positive information online.
- Increase the capacity for emergency response to sudden events, and learn to take the initiative in opinion management.
- Increase the abilities of employees through training.

China recognised the international media as an important outlet for managing and communicating a non-threatening, responsible and peaceful image.<sup>51</sup> The lesson from the 2008 Olympic Games was that prestige comes with meeting international political pressure through responsible foreign policies, in which image is central.<sup>52</sup> China had embarked on a 'slippery slope'<sup>53</sup> and as the world's expectations rose in 2008, so did China's need to advance its image.

### **Chinese media's global reach**

China's 'going out' project has expanded from emphasising outward trade and industrial enterprises in the 1990s to promoting its culture abroad through various institutions.

Most recently, its multilingual media outlets are mandated to manage Beijing's 'foreign publicity with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>54</sup> This mandate includes sending strong marketing and distributing agencies abroad; improving knowledge of local audiences, culture, laws and regulations; and bringing in foreign media and opinion shapers to get to know the mainland. Figures spent on this rapid expansion differ, but estimates range between \$6.6 billion<sup>55</sup> and \$8.7 billion.<sup>56</sup>

The main state broadcasters mandated with China's global projects are as follows. Xinhua News Agency is the Chinese government's most traditional foreign news service. Founded by the Chinese Communist Party in 1931 as the Red China News Agency, the name *Xinhua* or 'New China' emerged during the Red Army's Long March.<sup>57</sup> Its first radio signal travelled 12 000 km to the US, broadcasting to Washington the development of China's war against Japan.<sup>58</sup> Xinhua continued to evolve with Chinese politics and by 1983, under Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, was encouraged to expand its content globally.<sup>59</sup> The pursuit of the objective of becoming an international news service continued under Jiang Zemin.<sup>60</sup> Since then, the steady globalisation of Chinese media has become more apparent. In 2011 Xinhua opened its North America regional headquarters in New York's Times Square and half of the 200 planned overseas bureaus have been opened (though no end date has been specified), with services offered in eight languages. The agency enhanced its status as a major international media player when it co-hosted the 2009 World Media Summit in Beijing, an event which brought most of the global media corporations together.<sup>61</sup> In July 2010 China Xinhua News Network Corporation (CNC), also known as CNC World, was launched. Modelled on global broadcasters CNN and BBC, the 24-hour English language channel aims to bring Chinese perspectives on international events to emerging markets.<sup>62</sup> This underlines Xinhua's intention to become a global broadcasting force.

China Central Television (CCTV) has also extended its mandate, from 1992 when the CCTV-4 channel was unveiled, allowing overseas Chinese to watch mainland programmes, to the launch of CCTV-9 in 2000, reporting news to an English audience. Subsequently, the network has opened Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian and Portuguese channels, an Internet television service, and increased its language operations to seven. CCTV is state owned, but market funded.<sup>63</sup> Guangdong television markets were also opened to foreign media, on condition that they broadcast CCTV International in their home countries. This arrangement has elevated the network's coverage to 98% of the world with a subscriber base outside China of over 45 million subscribers.<sup>64</sup> CCTV has also expanded into the US, with an office on New York Avenue and a centre in Washington that is expected to begin broadcasting by mid-2012.

Founded in 1941, China Radio International (CRI) is China's main external radio station that targets overseas audiences.<sup>65</sup> Its first overseas broadcast was in 1941 and first English broadcast in 1947.<sup>66</sup> By 2010, CRI had opened foreign channels in Australia, Mongolia and the US.

China's three main state broadcasters are also strengthening their online presence. Xinhua launched its own search engine, Panguso.com; and China Mobile and CCTV launched an online video platform, allowing access to its broadcasting content.

The global footprint of Chinese broadcasters recognises that cultural influence is a critical achievement for any emerging country, and in particular China who wishes to convince others of its peaceful rise.<sup>67</sup>

**Table 1: Summary of Chinese state broadcast media**

Media	Date established	Media type	Year of global reach
Xinhua	1931	News agency/broadcaster	1944 (first broadcast) 1948 (first overseas bureau)
CCTV	1958	Broadcast (China's national television network)	1992 (first broadcast abroad through CCTV-4)
CRI	1941	Radio broadcaster	1941 (first broadcast abroad) 1947 (first broadcast abroad in English)

Source: compiled by author from: Ken'ichi Y, 'China's focus on external publicity: the impact of changing media policy at home and abroad', *NHK Broadcasting Studies*, 9, 2011; CRI English, 'CRI's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary contest', <http://english.cri.cn/8706/2011/06/16/1461s643026.htm>, 16 June 2011, Xinhuanet, 'Xinhua's 80-year journey to global stage', 7 November 2011, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/indepth/2011-11/07/c\\_131233213.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/indepth/2011-11/07/c_131233213.htm)

## CHINESE MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Beijing is strengthening ties and actively building a positive image in developing regions where it is economically active, such as in Latin America, South-East Asia and Africa.<sup>68</sup> Xinhua has signed news content deals with state media in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Cuba, Mongolia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Turkey, making it a leading source of news in some regions.<sup>69</sup> Countries that need Chinese trade, aid and recognition, and those with tense relations with the US, are more likely to be influenced by China's soft power<sup>70</sup>. Such government-led initiatives are recent, and evaluating whether Chinese media are influencing behaviour or global norms against Nye's criteria is difficult. A starting point is to examine the factors that may affect China's media influence, particularly in Africa.

### Historical overview

Media co-operation has developed more slowly and unevenly than other aspects of the China–Africa bilateral relationship. Yet it stems back as far as the 1950s and follows the broader course of China-Africa relations. For instance, Xinhua's early presence in sub-Saharan Africa was to help the Chinese government form diplomatic relations with recently independent African states.<sup>71</sup> In the 1960s, as the Soviet Union and the US threatened China's own security, Beijing sought ideological support from other nations, which led to partnerships with Africa where China was involved in several large projects.<sup>72</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, Xinhua opened 12 bureaus across Africa.

Media exchanges also took place, with the first Chinese media delegation visiting Cairo in 1956 as part of a cultural exchange. In 1973 and 1976 delegations visited Ethiopia and Benin, Ghana and Togo respectively.<sup>73</sup> Even so, media assistance was administered in the context of the Cold War to support the communication projects of the African liberation movements and for ideological warfare, such as in the Congo and Radio Peking in East

Africa.<sup>74</sup> Instability in African host countries affected China's media engagement in Africa, as did other domestic priorities, such as:<sup>75</sup>

- the goal to establish a presence in Europe, North America and Asia, rather than in Africa; and
- the inward focus on economic development especially in the 1980s (the exception was the setting up of Xinhua's Africa Regional Bureau in Nairobi, Kenya in 1986).

Moreover, in the 1980s and early 1990s Chinese media coverage focused primarily on formal, political relations with Africa, as China:<sup>76</sup>

- sought to repair its international image;
- grew in diplomatic confidence in its regional diplomacy;
- increasingly sourced resources and commodities from the continent; and
- gradually identified African countries as important strategic partners.

This explains why, even with the growing number of economic-related stories in the late 1990s, very little substantive analysis appeared in media stories, as ideology gave way to trade.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, as Farah and Mosher conclude, prior to 2000 most media support was used to assist guerrilla movements rather than support national development in Africa.<sup>78</sup>

However, in the last decade Chinese media interactions have changed significantly. In Africa, China is moving from ideological to more practical economic and political engagements, with the aim of fostering a world order that supports its economic growth path and domestic stability.<sup>79</sup> To do so, a greater understanding of China's values and culture needs to be facilitated.<sup>80</sup> A common thread in Beijing's experiments to gain influence is its media initiatives, which are rapidly expanding. Chinese media engagements have expanded to include providing media infrastructure and supporting exchange efforts. A recent addition is China's global media strategy, which is providing customer-orientated news services in Africa.

### **Media relations since 2000: from the diplomatic context to operationalising media support**

According to Banda, the China–Africa media relationship is part of China's wider Africa agenda aimed at fostering political independence, creating friendly relations with African countries and supporting the development of African countries.<sup>81</sup> In this context media co-operation necessarily evolves along government-driven lines.

Since the launch in 2000 of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), official relations and overall co-operation between the two sides have become more co-ordinated. A significant year for Sino–Africa relations was 2006, when high-level exchanges included visits to Africa from the Chinese Foreign Minister, the Premier and the President; and the hosting of the FOCAC Beijing Summit in November, attended by President Hu Jintao and leaders from 48 African states.<sup>82</sup> Beijing also published the official *China's African Policy* document on China's role in Africa, in which the nature of media co-operation was outlined.<sup>83</sup>

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

Similarly, as a result of the Beijing Summit, the Beijing Action Plan was formulated, outlining the areas of China–Africa co-operation. The ‘co-operation in social development’ section of the Action Plan included the exchange of views and media personnel, and enhanced understanding, co-operation and coverage of both sides.<sup>84</sup> Following the 2009 summit in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, the new action plan expanded the scope of media initiatives to include the following:<sup>85</sup>

- *Reinforcing co-operation and exchange between officials and media workers* who deal with media on both sides; such as annual workshops, mutual visits, training and producing radio and television programs.
- *The involvement of Chinese communication and information enterprises* in building communications infrastructure in Africa and engaging in mutually beneficial co-operation.

Parallel to the FOCAC process, the China–Africa media engagements demonstrate the increasingly complex relationship. As Table 2 shows, since 2000 the media relationship has predominantly focused on infrastructure assistance for the development of African state broadcasters, such as the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC).

**Table 2: An overview of Chinese media engagement in Africa (2000–2011)**

Year	Country of operation	Type of engagement	Activity
2000	Africa	official exchange	FOCAC is launched
2000	Uganda	technical support	Xinhua donates satellite equipment to TV station (to receive its content)
2000	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	technical support	<sup>a</sup> Xinhua News and Radio-Television Nationale Congolaise (RTNC)
2001	Guinea	technical support	An agreement of about \$9.6 million to build a radio and TV network
2002	Zambia	technical support	China lent the government \$14.5 million part of it for FM radio transmitters
2003	Lesotho	technical support	2003–2005: provision of TV and radio equipment up to \$4.5 million to expand the national network
2003	Comoros	technical support	Beijing helps the Comorian government build a radio and television building

Year	Country of operation	Type of engagement	Activity
2003	DRC	technical support	DRC receives third generation transmitters to broadcast shortwave signals
2004	Gabon	technical support	Assistance in building the country's broadcasting station
2004	Kenya	technical support	Xinhua establishes its Africa bureau headquarters in Nairobi
2005	DRC, Mali, Djibouti & Equatorial Guinea	official exchange	State-run media sign agreements on co-operation/information exchange
2005	Equatorial Guinea	technical support	Audiovisual equipment and building for the National Radio, by Gwang Ding Construction Company
2005	Lesotho	technical support	Assistance with a \$15 million project to upgrade radio and television and donation of \$4.5 million worth of equipment and technical assistance
2005	Zambia	technical support	Zambia borrows \$14.5 million for FM radio transmitters and a new government complex
2006	Africa	official exchange	Beijing Summit
2006	Africa	Training	20 radio and TV journalists from Africa are welcomed by the Chinese Media University
2006	Africa	Training	The Third Workshop for African Journalists takes place
2006	Africa	Training	Xinhua hosts African journalists by invitation of Beijing
2006	Uganda	technical support	Ugandan government borrows \$120 million for ICT backbone infrastructure
2006	Zambia	technical support	A loan of \$560,000 for the purchase of transmitters to extend the national broadcaster's reach
2006	Mauritius	technical support	Construction of a building for the state broadcaster, Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation
2006	Zambia	technical support	A donation of media equipment worth \$8 million
2006	Nigeria	technical support/training	Nigeria purchased satellite technology from China that included training
2006	Malawi	technical support	Malawi receives \$250,000 to develop a radio channel
2006	Seychelles	technical support	A donation for about \$50,000 worth of ICT equipment
2006	Kenya	Chinese media presence	The launch of state-run CRI in Kenya
2006	Kenya	technical support	Kenya has reportedly received \$150,000 worth of equipment from CCTV

Year	Country of operation	Type of engagement	Activity
2006	Kenya	media presence	Xinhua's Regional Editorial office that provides content to French-speaking Africa, moves to Nairobi
2006	Africa	official exchange	In November the Sino-African Cooperation Forum (SACF) was held in Beijing
2006	Africa	training	Resulting from SACF, Xinhua began hosting African journalists invited by Beijing
2007	Africa	training	30 French speaking African journalists attend a training course at the Chinese Media University
2008	Liberia	technical support	\$4 million FM Radio Expansion in co-operation with the Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS)
2008	Africa	content	Xinhua launches its 'China Africa News Service' to expand coverage of African and Chinese news of mutual interest
2009	Africa	official exchange	Summit in Sharm el Sheikh
2009	Mozambique	content	Agreement for news broadcasts on China, to come from China
2009	Africa	official exchange	Seminar organised by the State Council on Information Office, China where 94 journalists from Africa, Asia, East Europe and Latin America brainstormed on the state of media
2010	Kenya	media presence	November: CCTV opens its Africa Bureau in Nairobi
2010	South Africa	content	December: Xinhua/CNC and Myriad International Holdings (MIH) joint venture to reach about 4 million Africans
2011	Kenya	official exchange	April: China-Africa Media Conference in Nairobi
2011	Namibia	official exchange	'The Role of the Media in Shaping Africa-China Relations' panel, at the Africa-China Young Leaders Forum
2011	Zambia	official exchange	January: MOU on capacity building and press protection
2011	Kenya	content	Chinese company wins a contract to distribute media content
2011	Kenya	media presence	Xinhua Mobile Newspaper is launched in Kenya
2012	Kenya	media presence	January, CCTV Africa launched (November 2011 the regional center was established)

<sup>a</sup>The parties signed a contract on the supply and exchange of information. RTNC also received a small satellite receiver.

Source: compiled by author from the following – Farah D & A Mosher, *Winds from the East: How the People's Republic of China Seeks to Influence the Media in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia*, Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), September 2010. The Somaliland Times, 'Chinese Influence on African Media', 12 July 2005, <http://www.somalilandtimes.net/sl/2005/203/30.shtml>; Journalism.co.za, 'China grows its role in Africa's media', <http://www.journalism.co.za/index.php/fellowships/fellowships/images/justice/news-and-insight/insight/89/>

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While the extension of hardware assistance continues to play an important role, China's media engagement in Africa started to diversify after the 2006 Beijing Summit. China has begun to express its opinion on media practices to African media practitioners. For instance the Chinese government invited African journalists to learn about its development experience, including the development of Xinhua as an international news agency.<sup>86</sup> The Third Workshop for African Journalists, under the supervision of FOCAC, covered topics that included discussions on Chinese journalism.<sup>87</sup> The result is clear in a country such as Equatorial Guinea, where qualified media professionals are divided into those journalists who were trained in Spain three decades ago, and the newer generation who are increasingly being trained in Cuba or China.<sup>88</sup> Such media training introduces the Chinese media system, in addition to the usual education on media equipment and other types of hardware supplied by China. China–Africa media ties have therefore developed on the back of official ties.

### **Are Chinese media adopting commercial tendencies?**

The global reach of Chinese media has brought heightened interest in providing media content and programmes, as well as the need for local bureaus. Africa is no exception. From China's notable strength in hardware industries (such as infrastructure and telecommunications), the recent shift towards soft power recognises the need to influence hearts and minds of the people in Africa, and to provide a better understanding of Africa in mainland China, as the government continues to invest and spend on the continent.<sup>89</sup> The support of such hardware is in itself a means of soft power.<sup>90</sup> By providing Chinese media infrastructure to African state broadcasters, China is providing an alternative to the Western media system where private media are the pinnacle of media development and the state is expected to hold back.<sup>91</sup> However, China's strategy has had a mixed reception.

The success of Chinese media in penetrating Africa has been uneven because of the varying developmental levels and needs of African countries. For instance, Cameroon and Senegal's lack of coverage on and interest in China has affected Chinese motivation to expand media into these markets, other than providing under-developed institutions with China and Africa-related content.<sup>92</sup> In contrast, in Libya the strategic placement of Chinese journalists close to the Libyan Transitional National Council in Benghazi provided ready access to the sources on key stories unfolding in Libya.<sup>93</sup>

The major changes came in 2006, when Xinhua moved its Regional Editorial Office from Paris to Nairobi – recognising the capital as a central hub in Africa for China's 'going abroad' media project.<sup>94</sup> Xinhua hired journalists to translate articles from French to English, brought in Portuguese language content from Beijing, and set up five bureaus in Arab-speaking African countries, and placed its Middle-East bureau in Cairo, Egypt.<sup>95</sup> With over 20 bureaus in Africa, Xinhua has become a primary source of information. The agency markets itself as a cheaper alternative to Western agencies (such as Reuters and Associated Press) by offering articles that are as insightful (and sometimes better thanks to its closer relations with African political elites).<sup>96</sup> Xinhua has moved from a free-of-charge, ideologically based news service to an institution where media outlets are now paying for the agency's news wires. However, as noted before, Xinhua continues to provide free news, equipment and technical support to those who cannot afford to pay.<sup>97</sup> In 2008 the news agency also strategically launched its China African News Service to increase reporting on issues of mutual interest.

Similarly CRI's newscasts over the Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) has allowed Liberians access to Chinese views, rather than receiving the news from a third media source. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) may be the country's most popular radio station, but with Chinese assistance the Liberian state broadcaster's boosted capacity in television and radio service, has allowed it to make inroads into UNMIL's monopoly.<sup>98</sup> CRI has also set up programme exchanges with the Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and, thanks to this co-operation, gained a larger listenership than in any other African country. As a result, CRI has established its own local radio station that broadcasts in English, Mandarin and Swahili.<sup>99</sup> CCTV has also donated equipment to KBC. Overall, these interactions have promoted cross-cultural understanding, as Africans receive more China-related stories.<sup>100</sup>

The boost in media engagements, particularly of a competitive nature, reveals the long-term intent of China's soft power mission on the continent. Since the latter half of 2000, content and media presence have been swiftly integrated. China is expanding its soft power strategies, and its media is gearing to compete internationally. Following in the footsteps of Xinhua, in November 2011 CCTV Africa established the network's regional centre for Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. The network now has the capability to compete with other international media channels (which are also based in the capital). As noted by CCTV president, Mr. Liang Xia Tao, CCTV's purpose in Nairobi is to expand 'English and Chinese broadcasts with footage from the continent to China, Africa and the rest of the world'.<sup>101</sup> The centre complements the networks in other central locations in London, Washington DC, and Moscow. During April 2011, Xinhua launched its first mobile newspaper in the sub-Saharan region in Kenya, as a joint venture with a Kenyan telecommunications company, Safaricom, which allows local mobile subscribers access to Xinhua news through their Multimedia Message Service. In the same year, Xinhua's

CNC reached four million African homes through the South African owned MIH's cable network,<sup>102</sup> in an agreement resembling the one with Eutelsat Communications that extended Xinhua's coverage to the Middle East, Europe and North Africa.

Better information and communication technologies (ICTs) mean that viewers are also receiving much more sophisticated services than a few years back. Although lacking in functionality and sophistication compared to their established media counterparts, the Chinese are willing to transfer such technology, making them welcome in poorer nations.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, for the first time, the Chinese media are hiring local journalists as news anchors, and providing them with language training. By engaging local cultures in such a manner, the Chinese media are expressing their views more subtly, adopting a hiring strategy common among global news media broadcasters.<sup>104</sup>

Beijing's media engagements with Africa are clearly expanding, and the benefits are widely felt. African countries are provided with the tools to strengthen their own media institutions and the ability to increase their own content output.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, China is beginning to disseminate its media philosophy in Africa, where many countries are still searching for a media model.<sup>106</sup> However, as cultural influence becomes a vital component of Beijing's foreign policy, how its outward media projects are received needs to be considered.

## THE CHALLENGES FOR CHINESE MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

The previously voiceless are without a doubt claiming their place in the global media space. Yet media as a soft power tool is a fairly new concept for Beijing. Although too soon to judge its success in Africa, the Chinese media's ability to influence audiences is likely to be affected by these factors:

- Timing and commercial viability.
- Understanding contrasting African media markets.
- Chinese domestic circumstances that affect African perceptions of China.
- Whether Africa is a priority for Chinese media.

### **Timing and commercial viability**

Chinese journalists, as newcomers to the African media scene, can expect difficulties when they catch up to their established counterparts. Africa is not a new frontier for Western media. Countries are largely influenced by former colonial powers (France in the case of Côte d'Ivoire), which makes penetrating the local media (where news flows are predominantly North to South) difficult.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, during the Cold War, superpowers were far more involved than China in the region.<sup>108</sup> In an age where the consumers are the editors, the test for China is to build its reputation and innovation as a credible media source. This means dealing with the criticism that China's policy is based on business interests versus political stability (even though some of the criticism comes from self-interested competitors).<sup>109</sup>

China is making efforts to re-brand its image through its media initiatives but still needs to develop as a credible and attractive source of information. Al Jazeera, has gained credibility in the news world because of its ground-breaking news. The funds may originate from the Qatari government, but the broadcaster has a large amount of editorial independence. Despite the name giving away the origin of a station, newsreaders' accents and nationalities vary across programmes and the nationality of successful news corporations is often unknown, or at least concealed. Although Chinese media are hiring more international staff at CCTV Africa and America, their competitive edge has yet to be seen.<sup>110</sup> The reality is that the majority of viewers get their information from tabloid news, yet China still lacks in attracting this type of programming and journalism.<sup>111</sup> Thus, Chinese media continues to be seen as involved in developing infrastructure and education, rather than being commercially driven. More critically, as explained by a senior editor of Associated Press, censorship can hurt business because, in international media, audiences have a lot of say about their expectations.<sup>112</sup>

At the same time, the Chinese media have state objectives to meet. When covering Africa, where competitors tend to comment on the controversial areas of China–Africa relations, the Chinese media emphasise the easier narrative of positive stories, friendship and sincerity,<sup>113</sup> avoiding any grey areas. In 2005, the Zimbabwean government jammed shortwave broadcasts, and (because of the secrecy of both the Chinese and Zimbabwean governments) Reporters Without Borders believed that China had provided the jamming equipment.<sup>114</sup> In such a case, China is prone to criticism for two reasons. Firstly, China exerts its hard power in a subtle manner, providing limited information about assistance to governments, and secrecy shrouds its military relationships (as seen in Pakistan and Burma),<sup>115</sup> which may affect its influence on audiences. Secondly, a central pillar of Beijing's diplomacy is mutual non-interference, and so the slightest suggestion that China is getting politically involved sparks criticism.<sup>116</sup> Overall Beijing's resource and economic priorities in countries with controversial regimes tend to contradict the government's other priority of soft power and legitimacy.

In order to succeed, Chinese state media needs to take its cue from commercial counterparts. Market or government objectives can both damage media independence, but the style in which a message is delivered is equally important in imbedding trustworthiness and a loyal and engaged audience.

### **Understanding contrasting African media markets**

China's media engagement in Africa should not be monolithic. As seen in South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria, many local media institutions do not require Chinese technical assistance.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, in liberal news markets such as South Africa, Chinese media may find it difficult to gain subscribers and to influence audiences.<sup>118</sup> Foreign media have succeeded in this competitive environment through commercial rather than official engagement. For instance, Al Jazeera's competitive edge is its multi-cultural, multi-language and multi-religious approach, which has convinced News24 (a South African digital news provider) to enter into a partnership and distribute its video news stories online.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, the recent MIH–Xinhua CNC deal was successful purely because of its commercial nature.

On the other hand, South Africa is an emerging power that also has media ambitions abroad. South African-based multinational media company, Naspers owns a stake in China's largest internet company, Tencent, and competes directly with the Chinese media through its multi-channel Digital Satellite Television service in Africa. Consequently, while countries like Eritrea may require technical assistance,<sup>120</sup> South Africa's competitive media environment requires a more complex understanding from Chinese media. This is made clear by the ongoing intense media freedom debate between the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and South African civil society about the implications of the Protection of Information Bill approved by Parliament.

In contrast, Kenyan media has its strengths, but government regulation persists. The Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) is state-controlled, and government owns about 45% of the electronic media – although print media remain largely in private hands.<sup>121</sup> Despite no restrictions on foreign and domestic media and media firms that use a selection of news agencies, players without government endorsement face significant barriers including a lack of resources, high government taxes and costs.<sup>122</sup>

**Table 2: Overall Average Scores on Media Sustainability in Africa\***

Score	Unsustainable anti-free press	Unsustainable mixed system	Near sustainability	Sustainable
(0.00–0.50)	Eritrea			
(0.51–1.00)	Equatorial Guinea			
(1.01–1.50)		Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somali, Zimbabwe		
(1.51–2.00)		Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Gabon, The Gambia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, Sudan, Togo, Zambia		
(2.01–2.50)			Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda	
(2.51–3.00)			South Africa	
(3.01–3.50)				
(3.51–4.00)				

\*0 is the lowest score and 4 is the highest.

Source: USAID and IREX, *Media Sustainability Index 2009*, third study on Africa, Washington, DC: Westland Enterprises, 2010, p.xvi

Chinese media strategy also needs to take into account the low cost of radio, which remains the primary information source in sub-Saharan Africa. The influence of institutions like Xinhua and CCTV (which focus on television and online presence) is therefore limited in Africa.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, Chinese print media could struggle with distribution, as most African print media originate from Western sources.<sup>124</sup>

It is not possible to generalise about the African media environment, however. Differences exist within each country – and even between various platforms – all of which determine the degree of support for Chinese media firms in a country.

### **Chinese domestic circumstances that affect African perceptions of China**

With government support, in 2006 China lifted its domestic bans on foreign journalists and in 2009 the Chinese media industry revenue grew by 16.3% year-on-year to \$72 billion.<sup>125</sup> Yet China is still finding its way between a sophisticated foreign policy and a relatively closed domestic political system. For example, in 2009 supervision over foreign reporting in China was tightened during the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.<sup>126</sup> This situation is expected to prevail, given the upcoming change in domestic leadership in 2012 and the scandal surrounding Bo Xilai's removal from power, which has damaged the perception of a peaceful transition. Moreover, national priority can override commercial viability. China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television recently implemented new regulations that reduced the number of commercial entertainment television programmes and increased the number of news programmes.<sup>127</sup>

The absence of a free press and vibrant civil society in China is shaping opinions in Africa on the benefits of China's media co-operation.<sup>128</sup> Despite China's efforts to spread goodwill in Africa, views are divided: some welcome non-Western interaction and others express concern over China's motives.<sup>129</sup> Kenyan media owners were not happy when a Chinese company received a contract to distribute media content digitally. They saw the deal as providing China with leeway to interfere in Kenya's press freedom, given the restricted civil liberties within China.<sup>130</sup> Further reinforcing this perception was the fact that the tender was not widely advertised.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, after the 2009 massacre of pro-democracy workers in Guinea, the local public began to view China's cultural engagements as supporting the government.<sup>132</sup>

Opposition parties are also commenting on China's apparent ulterior motives, as Beijing deepens its relations with African countries with ties increasingly linked to political ends.<sup>133</sup> In Zambia, China's infrastructure and technical support are politically linked, as shown by the timing: contracts were concluded in the months leading up to elections.<sup>134</sup> According to the media, Michael Sata's critical stance on China<sup>135</sup> is seen to be one of the reasons for his success in the Zambian presidential elections in September 2011. Public support for Sata was motivated by the manner in which China went about securing important raw materials and the previous government's pro-China stance (to the detriment of Zambia). Likewise, in Ghana opposition is growing following the government's decision to procure a \$3 billion loan from China, which critics in the media are branding overly conditional, as 60% of the loan must go to Chinese contractors.<sup>136</sup> The sudden change in African governments will prove challenging for China, whose competitive edge emanates from its long-standing ties with a handful of African leaders.

Beijing may be making important strides in expanding its media presence in Africa, however gaps still need to be filled because such gaps can affect the public opinion that Beijing is hoping to shape. Chinese technological assistance has been positive, although projects take a top-down approach, which means that Africa's state media determine how the media equipment is used, not China. In the last three decades, Chinese media have also transformed drastically, with increased diversification and specialisation of content, with the need to be responsive resulting in more investigative reporting (such as CCTV's programme *News Probe* and *Caijing* magazine).<sup>137</sup>

China has made efforts to counter biased foreign reports through its own reports rather than just rejecting them. However, China's own media environment raises questions about its ability to transcend the official voice. For example, domestic media are regulated by law. Yet sometimes the rules are vague due to the changing and divisive views within China, even among government ranks.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, such uncertainty leads journalists to self-regulate their work. Thus, the nature of reporting news domestically offsets the image and messages that China's state media are trying to convey in their international reports.

At the same time, Africa remains uninformed about Chinese society, as Africa has virtually no media presence in China.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, despite the increasing importance in China–Africa trade and political relations, the growing Chinese presence in Africa is not matched by Africans in China (information about Africans in China is mostly limited to personal experiences of visiting African students).<sup>140</sup> The limited coverage and knowledge of Chinese society means that African impressions are still largely based on other types of engagements. While African leaders and entrepreneurs view China more favourably, the impressions of small business owners and workers are mixed.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Africans who work for private media firms and do not participate in official media exchanges, remain far more critical about China's involvement.<sup>142</sup> In 2010, an *Afrobarometer* study revealed that Africans viewed China almost as positively as the US and former colonial powers and more positively than South Africa and Nigeria.<sup>143</sup> However, views varied widely within African societies. In particular, Africans most critical of China are those who prioritise political over economic factors, looking at China's effects on democracy and human rights rather than the increase in Chinese imports.<sup>144</sup>

Such perceptions and attitudes affect how the two sides interact in professional spheres. Views on China-Africa ties can be roughly categorised into:<sup>145</sup>

- friendship and mutual benefit emphasised by government officials;
- the welcoming of new economic opportunities (through Chinese investment and trade); and
- emphasis on the environmental and social impacts of Chinese influence by civil society including the general public and trade unions.

Perceptions remain varied and complex, as those who view China-Africa relations positively are also likely to experience tensions in their relationship with China, and vice versa.<sup>146</sup> Ultimately each and every African's view on China will depend on their background, place in society and the nature of the issue.

Nevertheless, in time the real relationship between China and Africa will become clearer, as the two sides find alternative avenues of engagement to that of government-driven media initiatives. One such example is the University of Witwatersrand (South

Africa) Journalism Department's China-Africa Reporting Project which selects a group of Chinese working journalists to attend their annual *Power Reporting African Investigative Journalism Conference* in Johannesburg, organised in collaboration with the Forum for African Investigative Reporters. After the conference, the Chinese journalists are provided with logistical and financial support to report on a China-Africa issue in an African country of their choice with the resulting story published in Chinese media.<sup>147</sup> The project ultimately aims to improve the quality of China–Africa reporting among journalists from both sides.<sup>148</sup>

China also cannot escape the global influence of the Internet and social media, where the true nature of what the Chinese think of Africa, and Africans of China, will become apparent.<sup>149</sup> The blogosphere is a convenient platform for opinions, as it requires only online access, is not geographically bound and is speedy. Humour, vague remarks, and multiple links to a single blog also make it difficult to censor.<sup>150</sup> Blogging is a popular avenue for informing the Chinese public, particularly the micro-blogging site, Sinaweibo, which can be accessed via mobile phones, the Internet and email. In 2011 the site was a platform for a real-time discussion on the government's handling of the Wenzhou train accident. The 500 million Chinese internet users may also challenge Beijing's desire for control in the lead up to leadership change.<sup>151</sup>

Cultural influence grows far quicker in spaces where people are able to interact and be creative – as in the case of the Internet or Chinese businesses and communities in Africa<sup>152</sup> unlike the one-way broadcast of state messages. The state requires the inherent attractiveness of its people and culture to accumulate soft power.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, influence depends on a fine balance between the state and society.

### **Is Africa a priority for Chinese media?**

China has only recently begun prioritising Africa in its 'going abroad' media strategy. In 2009 Africa did not feature much in Xinhua's global plans, as the agency opened 16 offices mainly in the former Soviet Union, central Asia and North America.<sup>154</sup> China's recent media diplomacy also goes beyond Africa and includes Latin America and Southeast Asia.<sup>155</sup> In fact, China has made significant progress in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with public discussion of streamlining media operations and news-gathering among all partners, and content sharing and partnerships with individual countries (most notably Singapore's digital media companies).<sup>156</sup>

Other global competitors are entering the African media market; for instance India's United Television recently launched its international movie channel in Africa. However, Chinese media are starting to engage Africa more effectively. In mid-2011, recognising the need to hire more locals so as to improve China–Africa co-operation, CCTV advertised positions for several East African journalists, technicians, editors, anchors and reporters.<sup>157</sup> Chinese journalists also require further education on Africa, as a cultural gap remains because journalists need permission to mix with locals.<sup>158</sup>

Overall China's media engagements in Africa are still framed along government exchanges and co-operation, with little attention given to local media projects. However, Xinhua and CCTV's decision (2011–2012) to launch satellite television services in Africa may be a positive shift to a more commercially orientated media. They are not only actively sourcing local and international personnel in direct competition with Al Jazeera,

but their credibility and influence may also grow simply from their focus on competing with each another.<sup>159</sup> Competition and innovation are probably the best way of changing the perception that China follows the Western creative industries model.

The Chinese media in Africa demonstrate the larger challenge that China faces in incorporating soft power into its strategy. The implications are that soft power can never be completely under control of governments who can themselves tarnish its very credibility; patience is needed, as results from impact are not immediately evident; desired outcomes are sometimes not enough to gain a favourable image; and identifying *who* is the subject of these efforts is often difficult.

The main challenge for China is to find an ideal mixture of soft power tools that will serve its foreign policy goals.

## CONCLUSION

China has sent its state media on a global mission to advance its influence in the world, signalling an addition to China's outward movement project, which previously focused on trade, investment and diplomatic activities. In particular, China's state media in Africa provide insight into China's larger soft power strategy. At this particular juncture, China is giving Africa something that other media infrastructure sources are not: the capacity to create its own content and an alternative platform to tell Africa's own story and to view China's story.

However, the question remains as to whether China has been successful in meeting its media strategy goals. Beijing has only just adopted its soft power policies and institutionalised them in the form of global media agencies. Thus China may still be in the process of rolling out its strategy.

If the official goal is to establish bureaus worldwide to broadcast China's values, then that goal has been achieved. However, gaps remain if success means influencing what audiences think of China. Based on the criteria proposed by Nye, China needs to support institutions that can influence others' behaviour and create global norms that parallel its own.

Nevertheless, as China's view of soft power includes all aspects outside of security, in some respects it is succeeding. While its media engagements in Africa may be mostly in the form of technical and infrastructural support, China is helping Africa to build media institutions and by default providing some credibility to its own institutions and values. Moreover, Chinese media have begun to adopt a commercial face by entering into joint ventures and adopting strategies similar to commercial competitors, making it harder to differentiate China's norms from those in the global media market.

Yet while it has laid foundations for its soft power currency, Beijing has only partly fulfilled this criterion. First the degree of influence on institutions is only applicable to the African state broadcasters that actually receive such media support. Secondly, China needs to address the challenges that have been identified as affecting its state media influence in Africa.

These factors explain that China may very well need to adapt to global and local norms, as audiences have not yet bought into its values. For instance its state media could adopt the global media norm of objectivity – at least the image of objectivity, as the concept does not

strictly exist. To play an impartial role, Beijing needs to demonstrate an honest relationship by addressing tensions in China–Africa relations rather than emphasising co-operation. It will also need to show innovation and creativity to pose a challenge to competitors.

China has irrefutably made an immense effort to send its message abroad, but ensuring that the actual message is acknowledged is another matter.

Without passing premature judgement, as Beijing continues to expand its soft power engagement, future and further areas of research need to be considered. First, comparisons with other institutions such as the Confucius Centres could provide insight into engagement beyond official efforts. Second, as Chinese print media such as *China Daily* make inroads into Africa,<sup>160</sup> applying the lessons of these broadcast pioneers could be useful, as would be comparing how Chinese print media engagement differs in scope and challenges. Overall, if China's objectives change as its media and soft power engagements grow, what will be the implications for Africa and the world?

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