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# A Comparative Analysis of Chinese, Western and African Media Discourse in the Representation of China's Expansion of Economic Engagements in Africa

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# A Comparative Analysis of Chinese, Western and African Media Discourse in the

the researcher's own ideological stereotypes and restricted number of selected media texts,





Mouffe (2001) elucidated, is the display of superior power exerted by a politically and economically strong entity over a weak entity. Therefore, China and Africa have endeavoured to jointly cast off the overarching and hegemonic western political discourse and “strategically leveraged structural characteristics of African political and economic systems” that promote the state interests of both parties (Rupp, 2008, p. 66).

Favoured by China’s African policy featuring cooperation on a free-enterprise basis (Kachiga, 2013), China-Africa bilateral trade exceeded 200 billion US dollars in 2013, over four times compared with the amount when FOCAC was held in 2006. So far, China has set up over 2,000 enterprises in Africa which operate agribusiness, infrastructure construction, industrial processing, natural resources exploitation and logistics (Xi, 2014). The expansion of Chinese business and investment projects has aroused scepticism and criticism from western nations, particularly the former colonizers of Africa. Some researchers have attributed China’s economic presence in Africa to the “growing need for energy and commodities” (Franks & Ribet, 2009, p. 130). China’s investment efforts in Africa, particularly in natural resources and infrastructure construction are labelled as ‘neo-colonialism’ (Frynas, 2007; Norberg, 2006). Raine (2009, p. 55)











is weakened in the process of media commercialization, Chinese media remain the mouthpiece of the CCP government and a “political propaganda machine



neo-colonialism. Therefore, how firm these ideological stereotypes still remain in western media discourse and to what degree the stereotypes exert influences on African media discourse will also be unveiled in this research. From a Chinese media perspective, I would explore how closely the Chinese media representation of Xi Jinping's visit and his promise to foster relations with Africa based on 'sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith' is linked with the propaganda model of ideological infiltration in mainstream media (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) under the authoritarian form of press (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956).

This research will mainly focus on how China's attempts to enlarge business and investment projects in Africa on occasion of Xi Jinping's African trip are being discussed and represented in Chinese, western and African mainstream newspapers. These will be compared in order to explore the ideological distinctions under different media discourses.

This study will contain one main research question and several sub-questions. The main question to be answered is *what power relations and ideological differences are reflected in the representation of China's growing economic presence in Africa in Chinese, western and African news*

### Limitations of the literature review and the necessity of this study

This research project will study media representation of China's economic presence growth in Africa by drawing upon Chinese president Xi Jinping's first official African tour in 2013 one week after he assumed presidency. The three nations which Xi visited, namely Tanzania,

discourse (Joffe, 2002). Accordingly, discourse analysis is the study of discourse by analyzing the written, oral and sign language, including media texts produced by media outlets (N. Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough (1995, p. 16) uses the term 'linguistic analysis' to highlight the decomposition of media texts from a language perspective. Since "texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power" (N. Fairclough, 1993, p. 135), the research on media texts will also concentrate on the influences upon media representation by "unequal power relations and relations of domination" (Norman Fairclough, 1995, p. 14) from different ideological contexts. In this research, textual and contextual dimensions of discourse analysis will be applied (Lupton, 1992). Meanings and key themes of media texts will be deconstructed first from a language analysis perspective. Then the meanings will be further analyzed by placing them into various media contexts shaped by different ideologies to explore what sorts of relations of power have been generated in representing China's expanding economic presence in Africa through Chinese, British and African news outlets. By means of discourse analysis, hidden meanings from different media discourses will be unveiled to interpret how "the world is being represented to us and to orient us towards others in this world" (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 25). With regard to this study, textual analysis will be initially conducted to explore the major themes and the reasons for the use of particular words and expressions in Chinese, British and African newspaper texts. Then contextual analysis will be applied to examine why these "texts are produced and interpreted" and why "the discourses are drawn upon and combined" in different ways in Chinese, British and African media contexts respectively (N. Fairclough, 1992, p. 213). Lastly, these discourses will be compared to identify the way in which postcolonialism, orientalism and ideological stereotypes are embedded in representations from different media texts (Dittmer, 2005; Myers, Klak, & Koehl, 1996).

In comparison to qualitative discourse analysis, content analysis, a quantitative method by means of "counting the occurrence of dimensions of texts" (Anders, 1998, p. 95) is inappropriate for this research since this method only calculates



### Selection of media texts

Newspapers are selected for this research, because this form of print mass media can provide a more in-depth analysis of news texts in comparison to other types of media outlets, such as TV and radio. Willey (1942, p. 19) highlights the “editorial function” of newspapers indicating that newspaper texts can “ma



media texts completely depends on the researcher's personal understanding of the texts and the social contexts in which he or she lives. Therefore, different articles would have been chosen by researchers from a variety of social status, gender, ethnic groups and age groups since they bear different life value and world vision (Lupton, 1992)

zero-

2014, p. 217). As media in authoritarian regimes, such as China “must further the interests of government and advance the political objectives of the central authority” (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 35), Chinese media have the power to disseminate CCP’s ideology to the public and to coerce the public to adhere to government policy (Yan, 2000). The representation in the *China Daily* articles tends to focus on the contribution that China’s growth of business and investment projects has brought to Africa while ignoring the potential risks and challenges for African development raised in western media texts. Chinese media discourse, a stronghold for instilling CCP ideology, “transmits and produces power” (Foucault, 1979, p. 101). This power produces a new discourse (Hall, 1997), for example, China’s development paradigm based on mutual benefit and win-win cooperation. A *China Daily* article cites a Chinese expert on Africa, Dr. He Wenping, as stressing ‘an alternative to the Western model



*long-term development'* (Wighton, 2013). It represents China as exploiting Africa and claims that this action makes no difference from what the British colonial power did before. A string of words in one paragraph, listed as '*hungry for natural resources*', '*grabbing African minerals*',







Both newspapers quote Chinese officials who have made comments on China's economic expansion in Africa. However, striking differences have been observed in the representation between the two. *Financial Times* cites Wang Zhiping, board secretary of Sinohydro, a Chinese state-owned enterprise who has rebutted the western claims that Chinese businesses and investments in Africa are neo-colonialist activities. President Xi Jinping is also quoted as hitting back '*a rising tide of criticism*' (Hook, 2013b) on China's economic engagements. Despite some criticism of Chinese enterprises' controversial business projects, this media text seems to have defended China's contribution to African economic development and the improvement of livelihoods. Here I would argue against Hall's argument that no representation is neutral (Hall, 1997). Actually, the discourse from the quotation is a kind of

business engagements in Africa. They also harshly criticize western representations in which China is labelled as neo-colonialist. As CCP's 'ideological front' and 'political propaganda machine' (Hu, 2007, p. 336; Reilly, 2011), *China Daily* has reinforced its emphasis on representing China's African policy based on mutual benefits and win-win cooperation. The propaganda discourse has transmitted and generated media power (Foucault, 1979) by which all critical representation is censored. On the basis of China-Tanzanian traditional friendship since the 1960s, similar socialist ideology is shared between the two nations (Pratt, 1999). The common ideology has rendered China's foreign policy of 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' and Xi Jinping's notion of the China-Africa 'community of shared destinies' (Wa, 2013) to be well endorsed by Tanzania. Accordingly, discourse from *Daily News* hails Xi Jinping's visit to Africa bringing mutual benefits and promoting common development between the two developing economies. Chinese propaganda discourse has produced power by which difference in representation is induced

media representation. On the contrary, the Chinese propaganda discourse would have more











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