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Finding China and the West in Africa

How British newspapers and the West perceive 'China in Africa' between 2013 and 2018

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Abstract

The first two decennia of the 21st century saw a deepening of the relations between China and African countries and, subsequently, saw increasing Western attention for this relationship. Together, these developments give rise to the research question how the West perceives the Chinese and China's activities in Africa. This question is answered with the help of empirical research on the British newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Economist* from 2013 till 2018. Previous research on Western (media) perceptions of China in Africa indicated that the West tends to see China as an emerging homogenous actor whose influence on Africa is regarded negatively. The empirical research of this thesis builds on an extrapolation of Ted Hopf's theory of social identity in combination with the concept of framing. The analytical heart of this study consists of two chapters that consider the Western perception of the Chinese and China's economic engagement, as well as China's soft power engagement with Africa. Both chapters ask how China in Africa is perceived, - who is China, what do they do and why – and how the newspapers see the West (i.e. itself) within the China-Africa nexus.

Regarding China's economic engagement, a (broad) distinction can be made between two different perceptions. First, a more traditional pessimistic perspective that sees the Chinese as a homogenous entity that is in Africa for its self-interest (predominantly for natural resources). Second, a perception of the Chinese as diverse business orientated actors, which functions as an alternative and challenge towards the first identity. This second identity has not been observed before by previous research. Regarding soft power, China is perceived as a blunt and amoral actor, with a unitary Chinese government as the primary agent. Moreover, the newspapers' portrayal changes over time from soft power as an economic mechanism towards soft power as a method to enhance China's global image.

Even though China's influence on Africa is still predominantly seen in a negative light, both the alternative perspective on economic engagement as well as the newspapers' attention for soft power are new. It is eventually concluded that, although media is moving away from a pessimistic view of China's engagement regarding economic aspects, they return to a familiar response when Chinese soft power is the topic.

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Introduction

Although the People's Republic of China's (PRC) engagement with Africa goes back to the early 1950s, their relations with African nations saw rapid development around 2000.¹ On the third Forum of China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit in Beijing in 2006, with forty-eight African delegations present, the Chinese government made a number of promises to the present African countries. Amongst others, they committed to doubling their development assistance, to set up a China-Africa development fund, and to provide more loans and debt relief than ever before.² Moreover, in line with a white paper called *China's African policy* published the same year, President Hu Jintao spoke about a "new type of strategic partnership" and "economic win-win cooperation".³ Simultaneously, China surpassed France as the second largest trading partner of Africa in 2006 and overtook the United States in 2009 to become the single largest one. Today, Sino-African trade exceeds a total volume of US\$ 200 billion.⁴ Moreover, Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) in Africa boomed at an annual rate of 114% in 2012; growing from under US\$ 100 million in 2003 to multi-billion dollar investments in fifty of the fifty-four African countries.⁵ Although the focus within this relationship evolves primarily around economic activities, there are also other forms of engagement of China in Africa. Among other things, China is involved in cultural cooperation, such as scholarships for African students, public health initiatives and media cooperation. In addition, China expresses that it wants to develop their relationship with African nations with "sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith".⁶ Altogether, the presence and engagement of China in Africa have been clearly rising.

In the footsteps of China's growing engagement with Africa, attention of Western academics, media, and politicians for the China-Africa relationship rose too.⁷ With both the

¹ Suisheng Zhao, 'A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner? China's engagement and rebalance in Africa', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23 (2014): 90, 1033–1052, 1035.

² Maurizio Carbone, 'The European Union and China's rise in Africa: Competing visions, external coherence and trilateral cooperation', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29 (2011): 2, 203–221, 207.; Deborah A. Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford 2011), 1.

³ Hu Jintao, 'Full text of President Hu's speech at China-Africa summit' [4 November 2006], http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-11/04/content_432652_2.htm, accessed on 7 June 2019.; The State Council of The People's Republic of China, 'China's African Policy', [12 January 2006], http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-01/12/content_156490.htm, accessed on 7 June 2019.

⁴ Michael M.O. Ehizuelen and Hodan O. Abdi, 'Sustaining China-Africa Relations: Slotting Africa into China's One Belt, One Road Initiative Makes Economic Sense', *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 3 (2018): 4, 285–310, 295.; Suisheng Zhao, *China in Africa: Strategic Motives and Economic Interests* (New York 2017), 42.

⁵ Xiaoyang Tang, 'Bulldozer or Locomotive? The Impact of Chinese Enterprises on the Local Employment in Angola and the DRC', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45 (2010): 3, 350–368, 350; Zhao, 'A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?', 1038.

⁶ China Pictorial, 'Win-win Cooperation: Sincerity, Real Results, Affinity and Good Faith', last modified 2 September 2018, <http://china-pictorial.com.cn/infographic-win-win-cooperation-sincerity-real-results-affinity-and-good-faith>, accessed on 24 January 2019.

⁷ Chris Alden, and Daniel Large, *New Directions in Africa-China Studies*, (New York 2019), 6.; Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift*, 1. Daniel Large, 'Beyond 'Dragon in the Bush': The Study of China-Africa Relations', *African Affairs*, 107 (2007): 426, 45-61, 61.

engagement and attention growing, the question arises how people in the West tend to see “China in Africa”. Therefore, the research question of this thesis is: how does the West perceive the Chinese and China’s activities in Africa? This question will be answered with the help of empirical research on British newspapers from 2013 till 2018. This specific timeframe is chosen, because it respects and builds on previous academic research on the topic, as well as on the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 by Chinese president Xi Jinping, of which (East-)Africa became one of the focus areas in the following years.⁸ Moreover, this empirical research builds on an extrapolation of Ted Hopf’s theory of social identity in combination with the concept of framing. With that, the objective of this thesis becomes twofold. First, it tries to build and use a new theoretical and methodological framework with which the Western perception of China in Africa can be assessed systematically. Second, it seeks to answer the research question in terms of identity. Together, this thesis aspires to contribute to the research on (Western perceptions of) China in Africa as well as to (historical) International Relations research on the influence of social identity.⁹

The first chapter is dedicated to the theoretical and methodological approach to the research question. The two chapters that follow are the analytical body of this thesis. The second chapter tries to find out how the newspapers perceive the economic interaction between China and Africa. This is done by looking at how the newspapers perceive *who* the Chinese are and what their motivations and practices are, as well as what the position of the West is within the China-Africa nexus. In the third chapter, the same questions are posed in relation to the Chinese soft power features in Africa. However, we first look at the relevant historiography that connects to the broader topic and the specific research question.

Historiography and relevance

The related academic literature to ‘China-Africa’ relations can be divided into two

⁸ Belt and Road Initiative was initially presented as the ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) initiative, but was later rebranded. The BRI involves underwriting billions of dollars of infrastructure investment in countries along the ancient Silk Road, linking China with countries in Asia, Europe and Africa. Mainly countries in East Africa, such as Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti are the focus of the initiative on that continent, but Nigeria in West Africa also receives large investments.; Ehizuelen and Abdi, ‘Sustaining China-Africa Relations’.

⁹ Ted Hopf, ‘Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split’, in *Measuring Identity*, ed. by Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair I. Johnston and Rose McDermott (Cambridge 2009). See also: Michael Barnett, ‘The Israeli Identity and the Peace Process: Re/creating the Un/thinkable’, in *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, ed. by Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (London 2002).; Joanna Tidy, ‘The Social Construction of Identity: Israeli Foreign Policy and the 2006 War in Lebanon.’ *School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies, University of Bristol Working Paper No. 05-08*, (2007).

distinguishing branches of historiography.¹⁰ First, the literature that covers the influence of Chinese engagement on the African continent is examined. This literature often speaks out about the historical roots of the China-Africa relationship and evaluates the consequences of China's engagement. Second, academic literature about the Western perception of China's engagement in Africa is considered. Since the academic literature is predominantly concerned with media portrayal, its relevance is almost self-evident since this thesis covers exactly the topic of media.

First, within the debate about the Chinese influence on Africa, three distinctive groups of literature are identified. The first group of authors entered the debate around 2005 and takes a dim and pessimistic view of the policies and consequences of China's involvement. Among others, they blame and criticize China for importing resources from Africa and dumping manufactured goods there, taking advantage of African countries' need for investments and financing in return for resource extraction rights, ignoring health, safety and environmental concerns, and promoting human rights violations.¹¹ In sum, as respected scholars Denis M. Tull and Ian Taylor both agree, "there is virtually no way around the conclusion that China's massive return to Africa presents a negative political development that 'almost certainly does not contribute to the promotion of peace, prosperity and democracy on the continent'".¹² In reaction to this pessimistic group of literature, a few years later a second group of authors emerged with the purpose to put China-Africa relations into context, 'myth-bust' assumptions of the pessimistic school, and explore the positive sides of China's engagement in Africa.¹³ Moreover, they point out that contemporary Western involvement is not always for the best for the African countries as well. Most noteworthy is Deborah Bräutigam's book *The Dragon's gift* in which she tries to dispel some myths regarding China's presence in Africa, while also offering a

¹⁰ Although I take the view that heuristically it is useful to separate the literature in two, in practice they sometimes overlap.

¹¹ Examples taken from: Zhao, 'A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner?'; See also: Qi Zhou, 'Conflicts over Human Rights between China and the U.S', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 27 (2005): 1, 105-124.; Eric Kiss and Kate Zhou, 'China's New Burden in Africa,' in *Dancing with the Dragon?: China's Emergence in the Developing World*, ed. by Denis Hickey and Baogang Guo (New York); Moses Kiggundu, 'A Profile of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment to Africa', *Proceedings of the American Society of Business and Behavioral Sciences*, 15 (2008): 1, 130-144.

¹² Denis M. Tull, 'China's Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences,' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44 (2006): 3, 459-479, 476. Also see: Ian Taylor, 'The 'All-Weather Friend'? Sino-African Interaction in the Twenty-First Century', in *Africa in International Politics: External Involvement on the Continent*, ed. by Ian Taylor and Paul Williams (London 2004), 99.

¹³ Such as: Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (London 2007); Taylor, Ian and Yuhua Xiao, 'A Case of Mistaken Identity: 'China Inc.' and Its 'Imperialism' in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Asian Politics & Policy*, 1 (2009): 4, 709-725.; Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift*; Giles Mohan, 'Beyond the Enclave: Towards a Critical Political Economy of China and Africa', *Development and Change*, 44 (2013): 6, 1255-1272; Miwa Hirono, and Shogo Suzuki, 'Why Do We Need 'Myth-Busting' in the Study of Sino-African Relations?', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23 (2014): 87, 443-461.; Gu, Jing and Chuangong Zhang, Alcides Vas and Langton Mukwereza, 'Chinese State Capitalism? Rethinking the Role of the State and Business in Chinese Development Cooperation in Africa', *World Development*, 81 (August 2016), 24-34.; Erica S. Downs, 'The fact and fiction of Sino-African energy relations', *China Security*, 3 (2017): 3, 42-68.

(more) nuanced view of China's tactical and strategic aims.¹⁴ Finally, in reaction to mostly the first group of negative authors, a third group of predominantly Chinese scholars echoes Beijing's view that China comes to Africa as equals without any neo-colonial intentions. Hence, the more bright-sided Chinese literature often formulates explicit reactions to Western criticism on China, pointing to the colonial history of the former in Africa and the absence of such history of the latter.¹⁵

The second distinguishable branch of literature relevant to this thesis considers how the media portray China in Africa. However, in contrast to the other branch, relatively few scholars have written on the subject. Among others, Daniel Large concludes in 2008 that Western media on China in Africa has become more critical about China over time. He points out the continuity of historical metaphors in British media that refer to a "new scramble for Africa" and China's colonial ambitions.¹⁶ According to Large, such colonial references are an indication of Western defensiveness about Africa. Moreover, political scientist Barry Sautman and anthropologist Yan Hairong typify popular Western discourse as focused on portraying PRC policies in Africa as colonialism, and resource extraction as China's only interest.¹⁷ Most noteworthy, in her groundbreaking and often cited paper *Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent*, Emma Mawdsley examines the ways British papers have represented the acceleration of relations between Africa and China from 2000 to mid-2007. Drawing on insights from critical geopolitics, she identifies a discourse that endorses images of African weakness, Chinese ruthlessness and Western trusteeship.¹⁸ Though thorough and systematic empirical research (besides Mawdsley's work) is scarce, there seems to be an Anglophone consensus that Western media portray China as a growing and homogenous actor whose influence is not good for Africa. However, both Mari-Anne Mørk and Tong Wei consider media coverage of China in Africa over more recent timeframes, and see prudent signs of a change in media portrayal. Both works state that Western media coverage seems to have become more diverse and less simplistic

¹⁴ Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift*.

¹⁵ Such as: Amsalu K. Addis and Zhu Zuping, 'Criticism of neo-colonialism: clarification of Sino-African cooperation and its implication to the west', *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 16 (2018): 4, 357–373; Luo Jianbo and Zhang Xiaomin, 'Multilateral cooperation in Africa between China and Western countries: from differences to consensus', *Review of International Studies*, 37 (2011): 4, 1793–1813; Articles written in Chinese as noted in: Hirono, and Suzuki, 'Why Do We Need 'Myth-Busting' in the Study of Sino-African Relations?', 450.; He Wenping, 'Zhongfei guanxi fazhan chudongle shei de shenjing?' ['Who's nerves have the development of Sino-African relations touched?'], *Shijie zhishi [World Knowledge]*, 19 (2006), 30–32.; Li Anshan, 'Wei zhongguo zhengming: zhongguo de feizhou zhanlu 'e yu guojia xingxiang' ['Establishing a name for China: China's Africa strategy and national image'], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi [World Economy and Politics]*, 4 (2008), 6–15.

¹⁶ Large, 'Beyond 'Dragon in the Bush'', 57.

¹⁷ Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, 'Trade, Investment, Power and the China-in-Africa Discourse', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 7 (2009): 52, 1-23, 1-3.; Critical note must be made that Sautman and Hairong base their statement on scarce and unstructured research into Western media sources.

¹⁸ Mawdsley, Emma, 'Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent? Representing China, Africa and the West in British Broadsheet Newspapers', *Political Geography*, 27 (2008): 5, 509–529.

in the second decade of the twenty-first century. However, they still recognized negative and sometimes neo-colonial references when talking about China in Africa,¹⁹ It is interesting to see if this change in media perception will also show within the timeframe of this thesis.

This predominantly negative perception of Western media can be put into perspective by looking at literature about African media portrayal of China's engagement in Africa. In summary, these (African) scholars state that African media have a more balanced view to China. For example, South African scholar Emeka Umeji argues that Nigerian newspapers frame China's engagement in Nigeria from two sides. On the one hand, China's engagement is portrayed as an opportunity for Nigeria and China as a possible partner in development. On the other hand, China is perceived as a new opportunist power that uses Nigeria's economy for their own gain.²⁰ Moreover, all literature states that African media have more attention to the diverse role that China plays in Africa than Western media.²¹

In the fast developing and changing situation that the China-Africa nexus is, however, no new literature on Western media views has been published after 2015.²² Therefore, this research can contribute – next to the objectives set out above – to the study of Chinese engagement in Africa in general and to the understanding of public and media perception of China's engagement in Africa in particular. Furthermore, this study distinguishes itself with the empirical research on public texts in a period (2013-2018) that has not received such scrutiny before.

Besides the academic relevance, a better understanding of the media coverage about China's presence in Africa might contribute to a better understanding of British (and possibly EU) positions and policy towards China. Media sources are a major information source for decision-makers and they partly rely on mass media to make a map of the world. This is especially the case for persons in Western nations since they generally do not have a first-hand experience of China in Africa and rely on the media for their information gathering.²³ In

¹⁹ Mari-Anne Mørk, "China in Africa: Changing Frames in Chinese and British Media Discourse" (Master's Thesis in Chinese Society and Politics, University of Oslo, 2012).; Tong Wei, "A Comparative Analysis of Chinese, Western and African Media Discourse in the Representation of China's Expansion of Economic Engagements in Africa", (Master's Dissertation for Media, Communication and Development, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2015).

²⁰ Emeka Umeji, 'China's Engagement with Nigeria: Opportunity or Opportunist?', *African East-Asian Affairs*, (2015): 3, 54-78.

²¹ Fei-Ling Wang and Elliot A. Esi, 'China in Africa: Presence, perceptions and prospects', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23 (2014): 90, 1012-1032; Anthony Olorunnisola and Lian Ma, 'Contemporary Sino-African relations: Interpenetration of history of relations with the West, ideology and comparative media frames', *African Journalism Studies*, 34 (2013): 3, 41-61; Bob Wekesa, 'The Media Framing of China's Image in East Africa: An Exploratory Study', *African East-Asian Affairs*, 2 (2013): 1, 16-41.; Umeji, 'China's Engagement with Nigeria'.

²² Wei, "A Comparative Analysis of Chinese, Western and African Media Discourse in the Representation of China's Expansion of Economic Engagements in Africa".; Wei's Master thesis is, to my knowledge, the latest published work on media perceptions or discourse on Chinese engagement in Africa.

²³ Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton 1963).

addition, scholars argue that media reports are among the factors that influence EU foreign policy-making towards China.²⁴ Further theoretical background and context of these claims laid down here is presented in the first chapter.

Many Chinas, Africas and Wests

In this paragraph, some crucial concepts are considered that are part of the wider framework within which the analysis of this essay takes place, thus contributing to finding an answer to the research question. After that, the choice for the newspapers that are part of this research is justified. Finally, the chapter division will be addressed and argued for.

First, since this thesis concerns itself with ‘Western’ perception of ‘China’ in ‘Africa’, the notions of these concepts as part of the conceptual framework need to be considered. In the first part of this introduction, no specification is made when referring to China. Although this might be in line with media reports that tend to homogenize Chinese actors, it needs to be made clear that China is not per se a single unified actor.²⁵ Although, there is an official African policy from the Chinese central government, “there are in fact many Chinas”.²⁶ In the same manner, the concept of what ‘Africa’ means needs to be disaggregated. To extend the previous quote: “there are in fact many Chinas (...) and equally, many Africas”.²⁷ Particularly, difficulties arise when considering Africa in the newspapers. Media might use a case study of, for example, Ethiopia to express a phenomenon they also see in Kenya. Hence, it will be a challenge to deal with the degree of specificity or generality in the newspaper articles. Finally, what do we consider as ‘the West’ in relation to China and Africa? Like Mawdsley also stated: “as with representations of Africa and China, there are ambiguities, contradictions and complexities, and very profound differences between different Western countries and actors.”²⁸ Nevertheless, postcolonial research gave insights about prevailing images of what the West means in Africa and how they see themselves. Earlier, the West saw itself as the deliverer of Christianity, commerce, and civilization, now of good governance and development.²⁹ However, I conclude, that it is not necessary and not desired for the sake of this thesis to pin down definitions on what is meant with ‘the West’, as well as with ‘China’ or ‘Africa’. This

²⁴ Carbone, ‘The European Union and China’s rise in Africa’; Zhang, Li, ‘The Rise of China: media perception and implications for international politics’ *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19 (2010): 64, 233–254.

²⁵ Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent’, 512;

Xu Yi-Chong, ‘Capitalist or Villain: Chinese SOEs in Africa’, in *China-Africa Relations in an Era of Great Transformations*, ed. by Li Xing and Abdulkadir Osman Farah, (London 2013), 102.

²⁶ Taylor and Xiao, ‘A Case of Mistaken Identity’, 714.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent’, 512.

²⁹ Ibidem.

thesis is receptive to the different definitions that are held by the different authors of the newspaper articles. However, the realization that there are many Chinas, Africas and Wests, can help to better understand the newspaper articles that are researched.

These articles will be drawn from the British broadsheet newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Economist*. The United Kingdom (UK) as a country of origin is selected for several reasons, of which one of them is language. In addition, the UK is a regional power and held a colonial empire in Africa. Moreover, UK newspapers are popular newspapers throughout Europe and have been used in earlier research on media views on China in Africa.³⁰ Newspapers are selected because they can provide in-depth and lengthily articles compared to other media outlets. Although *The Economist* is a weekly published paper, its special focus on economics makes it very suitable for analysis in this thesis. A detailed description of the selection process of relevant articles is shown in Appendix 1.

The research on these newspaper articles builds on a constructed theoretical and methodological framework extrapolated from Ted Hopf's theory of social identity in combination with the concept of Framing. The basis for this framework is made by a theoretical investigation in the first chapter, which lays the basis of how the China-Africa nexus is approached in the remaining two chapters. The second chapter focuses on the economic engagement of China in Africa. Newspapers' perceptions of topics such as trade, investments in infrastructure and loans are closely connected and will all be considered in this chapter. Is China perceived as a monolithic player in Africa that's after the continent's resources or as many Chinese actors with diverse interests? Moreover, how does the West perceive their own role within the China-Africa nexus? In the third chapter, the same practice will be undertaken in relation to the soft power features of China in Africa. Newspaper articles about, for example, Chinese media in Africa or Chinese scholarship programs for African students will be addressed. Is China's soft power seen as legitimate and beneficial for both sides, or is China seen as a cultural imperialist?

Finally, it is concluded that the Western perception of the Chinese identity regarding the economic engagement is becoming more diverse, but that the West's newly emerging perspective on Chinese soft power in Africa seems to refer back to a familiar response.

³⁰ For example: Mawdsley, 'Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent'.; Mørk, "China in Africa".

Chapter 1: Identity as a theory and method

As stated in the introduction, the goal of this research is to find out how the West sees China and the Chinese in Africa. It is, therefore, to say that this thesis tries to discover what the West perceives as China's *identity* within the China-Africa nexus. This chapter functions to clarify what such an identity exist of and how it can be discovered. Hence, this chapter is both a theoretical and methodological investigation that forms the backbone of this research. The theoretical part is based Ted Hopf's work on a societal constructivist theory of social identity, that he set out in his article *Identity Relations and the Sino-Soviet Split*.³¹ His theory will be extrapolated to fit the context of this thesis. Following Hopf's credo "theory should determine method" with which he starts his article, the argument is made that framing (as part of a discourse analysis of newspapers) is an appropriate method. At the end of this chapter, in combination with the findings that are displayed in the introduction, the consequences for the remainder of this thesis are set out.

1.1 Theory of identity

Hopf's theory of identity is based on the assumption that identity is an intersubjective reality that is experienced by its subjects, and is well-substantiated by (social) psychological and constructivist research.³² This assumption empowers us to see what the shared understandings are within a community, society or group, such as the West or smaller entities such as England, that together form the perceived reality. The intersubjective understanding of identity is both relational, cognitive and structural. Identity is both a product of social interaction and a cognitive necessity to understand one's world, as well as that it is embedded in the social structures of society.³³

These three aspects have their part as follows. First, identities are relational constructions.³⁴ A person is not able to understand oneself without a comparison to another.

³¹ Hopf, 'Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split', 279.; To prevent confusion, the distinction between general *social* constructivism theories and Hopf's version of *societal* constructivism deserves a short explanation. In general terms, social constructivists, such as Alexander Wendt, focus on interaction between states in the international system and disregards the role of domestic factors. Hopf's version focuses on the domestic formation of identity to understand how national interests are defined and what foreign policies they eventually lead to. In Hopf's words: 'If constructivists assume that a state's identity is constructed in interaction with other states, then surely they must assume that its identity is formed in relationship with its own population.'. See for Hopf's earlier work also his much cited work: Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', *International Security*, 23 (1998) 1, 171-200.

³² Hopf, 'Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split', 279.; Hans-Herbert Kögler, Agency and the Other: On the intersubjective roots of self-identity, *New Ideas in Psychology*, 30 (2012): 1, 47-64.; Hollway, Wendy, 'Relationality: the intersubjective foundations of identity', in *Sage Handbook of Identities*, ed. by Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Mohanty (London 2010).

³³ Hopf, 'Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split', 280.

³⁴ Hopf, 'Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split', 280.; Iver B. Neumann, 'Self and Other in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 2 (1996) 2, 139-174.

For example, a male cannot understand oneself as such without a female counterpart; one cannot define itself without the Other to define itself against.³⁵ Hence, one's identity is only relevant in relation to others and is (re)produced in interaction with them. In the context of this thesis, the West cannot understand itself within the China-Africa nexus without an understanding of the identity of China in Africa. Second, identities operate cognitively. The human desire to understand the social world and their cognitive need for order, predictability and certainty, leads to identities. A human, or a group of humans, have the need to understand the world and wants to be understood itself. However, because us humans are (unfortunately) paired with only limited cognitive resources, this results in shortcuts to knowledge, ideas and categorizations. Therefore, identities operate like cognitive devices or heuristics that consist of a collection of 'taken-for-granted knowledge' about the world.³⁶ Third, this taken-for-granted-knowledge is partly formed by social structures. Identities are part of the interaction with others and social structures. Identity is constructed through the mundane social practices that constitute everyday life. Within life, and this structure, a person is both an agent and an object. A person is an agent by inadvertently reproducing a particular discourse on 'the Chinese' in Africa. That same person is also an object since it is a product of the predominant discourse on China and 'the Chinese' in Africa. The identity has no value on its own but is only appreciated within the accumulation of prevailing social identities of a community.

Together, these identities form subsequent discourses. Within a community, one or several dominant identities and discourses can prevail. The premise following from this dominant discourse of identity is that it will "obtain as well among elites making foreign policy choices for their states, to the extent that these leaders have been socialized by the prevailing social structure with its collection of taken-for-granted knowledge about the world".³⁷ Hopf focuses on the domestic formation of identity to understand how national interests are defined and what foreign policies they eventually lead to.³⁸ Eventually, Hopf uses his premises to study state's foreign policy choices and changes, but this approach is neither the goal of this thesis nor possible within this thesis' context. However, it shows the potential relevance of finding and contextualizing discourses of identity in the China-Africa nexus. The fundamentals of the social theory of identity are the same and can still play a relevant role within this new context.

³⁵ The reference to the Other is an acknowledgment of the philosophical phenomenon of the Constitutive Other as has been, for instance, famously used by Edward W. Said in his book *Orientalism*. For example, 'us' as Europeans can only identify ourselves as superior against a non-superior Other. Edward. W. Said, *Orientalism* (London 1978), 13-14.

³⁶ Hopf, 'Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split', 280

³⁷ Ibidem, 284.

³⁸ Ibidem, 295.

1.2 The need for a method

The question rises how this identity can be found in texts. Hence, what does an appropriate method need to have? Several types of methods will be able to perform the task, as Hopf says that his method of large scale discourse analysis is not the only applicable and permissible approach. Although an ethnographic method would probably be the best technique, other approaches that focus on language, rhetoric or narrative are also appropriate.³⁹ It is most important that the methodological approach fits the theory about identity.

The task to perform is made particularly complex because identity is often hard to perceive, since it is based on things that are taken for granted and habits that need no further explanation. In texts, this implies that “the aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity”.⁴⁰ The most typifying aspects of identity are not clearly visible. However, the ‘normal’ can come to light by deviations from it. In alternative passages or texts, you can find challenges against what the predominant discourse takes for granted, treats as given or assumes by default. It can show things that were earlier unimaginable. The things that are normally hidden in familiarity now must be explained; the idiosyncratic aspects need to be argued extensively. When this social order is darned, the previously unthinkable is thought, and the taken-for-granted knowledge is questioned.

Therefore, an applicable method can find such taken-for-granted knowledge and deviations from it in texts. With that one can find how the West thinks about China and Africa and most probably also about itself. The relationships and the identities between nations are shown in texts, although possibly hidden in the taken-for-granted knowledge. Furthermore, the method preferable works without a priori theorization of categories of identity. If not, the researcher (me) will impose its own ‘pre-categorizations’ on China and the West.⁴¹ Obviously, in the case at hand, one cannot simply forget the insights gathered by previous researchers such as Large, Mawdsley and Mørk. However, the method must not look to ratify preexisting identities but must be open to new categories for the sake of not missing identities that might matter. With these requirements in mind, the systematic use of the concept of framing seems to be an applicable method for this study.

1.3 Framing as a method

In this research, the concept of framing is applied in a qualitative method of assessing the

³⁹ Ibidem, 313.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford 1958), 50.

⁴¹ Hopf, ‘Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split’, 289.

articles of the selected newspapers. Framing is an appreciated research concept in studying and explaining the role of the media in defining issues to the public. An often-used definition is derived from an article of Robert Entman in which he states that framing is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”.⁴² In relation to the media frames, this means that newspaper articles might contain frames, which are manifested by the absence or presence of certain information.⁴³ These frames exert power through selecting what is prominently displayed, what is repressed and how the observations are classified. This affects how the receivers (and senders) perceive the character, causes and consequences of a phenomenon.⁴⁴ In the use of framing as a method, it is exactly these aspects in a text that are being sought.

The attentive reader might already have seen that this understanding of frames is closely connected to the constructivist theory of social identity explored above. Based on the premises of framing that selecting, emphasizing and interpreting aspects of perceived reality are inescapable, it is a form of operationalizing constructivist thought.⁴⁵ Moreover, Bénédicte Van argues that culture is an essential part of frames. Culture, a concept with a broad array of meanings, is regarded as the primary base to constitute knowledge, meanings and comprehension.⁴⁶ Frames, as part of culture, communicate the news content within a familiar frame of reference to the audience. The journalist and the audience perceive the world in a similar way. Since frames reflect a certain understanding of culture or identity, systematically investigating them can result in finding the predominant discourse of identity.

Furthermore, similar to Hopf’s understanding that discourses of identity likely have an influence on nations’ leaders and their foreign policy decisions, the concept of framing also promises to have such multi-level influences. The discourse of identity has consequences for both the individual level as well as the societal level, and at the same time cannot exist or be relevant without interaction between the two. According to Cleas de Vreese, individual attitudes about an issue may be altered due to the exposure to certain frames. Frames could influence

⁴² Robert M. Entman, ‘Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm’, *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 4, 51-58, 52

⁴³ Entman, ‘Framing’, 52.

⁴⁴ Murray J. Edelman, ‘Contestable categories and public opinion’, *Political Communication*, 10 (1993): 3, 231-242, 232.

⁴⁵ Dietram A. Scheuffele, ‘Framing as a Theory of Media Effects’, *Journal of Communication*, 49 (1999): 1, 103-122, 105.

⁴⁶ Baldwin Van Gorp, ‘The Constructionist Approach to Framing: Bringing Culture Back In’, *Journal of Communication*, 57 (2007): 1, 60-78, 61.

social processes such as political decision-making.⁴⁷ Frames can especially be highly influential in relation to international issues and news about foreign countries, since international issues are often not experienced personally by the receiver and cannot be verified by personal experience or competing stories.⁴⁸ Hence, media contribute to people's understanding of other countries, and their understanding of the relationship between the countries.⁴⁹

This assessment shows that the use of a method of framing is able to bring to the surface the prevailing identity that the West holds of China in Africa and its self-identity within this nexus. The identity is shown in the frames, but the frames itself can also influence the decisions. Framing scholars say that frames can influence decisions of foreign policy. Along the same line, it is possible to argue that it is not the frame, but the underlying identity that influences decisions as proposed by Hopf. Either way, the identity or the frame can influence the decisions. So, either way, the influencing factor is present in texts and can be found with the frame technique.

In other words, the rationale of this thesis is that by finding out how China in Africa is portrayed in the media, a better understanding is reached on how China's identity is understood by West. The here presented theory and method means for the next two chapters that there will be a search for the identity of China in Africa. In addition, how the West perceives itself within the China-Africa relation needs to be understood, because the understanding of itself influences how the West perceives the Chinese. In a more practical manner, this framing exercise is assisted by a few questions that catch the essence of the identity. In the basis, these questions constitute of *who* the entities are and what their role is. As explained in the introduction, this will be done with the use of articles from *The Guardian* and *The Economist*.

⁴⁷ Claes H. de Vreese, 'News Framing: Theory and Typology', *Information Design Journal + Document Design*, 13 (2005): 1, 51-62, 52.

⁴⁸ Giovanna Dell'Orto, Dong Dong, Adina Schneeweis and Jensen Moore, 'The Impact of Framing on Perception of Foreign Countries', *African Journalism Studies* 25 (2004): 2, 294-312, 299.; James Mann, 'Covering China', *Media Studies Journal*, 13 (1999): 1, 102-107, 102.

⁴⁹ Noshina Saleem, 'U.S. Media Framing of Foreign Countries Image: An Analytical Perspective', *Canadian Journal of Media Studies*, 2 (2007): 1, 130-162, 130.

Chapter 2: Two Chinese identities, both looking for economic gains

“Africa is now more often seen by Chinese firms as a place to do business other than digging stuff out of the ground.”⁵⁰ China’s engagement has been famous in Europe for its resource extraction, but as this quote exemplifies the Chinese also look to Africa for other kinds of business. This chapter detects how English newspapers portray the economic side of the Chinese engagement and eventually argues what this means for how the West sees the identity of the Chinese in Africa. Therefore, the question central to this chapter is: how does the West perceive the economic engagement of the Chinese in Africa?

This question is answered with the use of three sections and related sub-questions that help to detect the different perceptions. First, an argument is formed about the dominant tendencies that describe *who* the Chinese actors are according to the newspapers. Are they regarded as one entity, exemplified by ‘the Chinese’, or are they seen as multiple actors with a Chinese background and various interests? Second, an argument is formed about what the specific motivations are of Chinese actors according to the media accounts and what kind of activities they engage in or mechanisms they use. Why is China in Africa and what do they do? Finally, the perception of identity that the West holds of China in Africa is partly embedded in the perception the West has about its own role within Africa and especially within the China-Africa nexus. Therefore, the question of how the West sees itself is answered as the last part of this chapter.

2.1 *The Chinese or Many Chinese*

The first part of this chapter dives into the question *who* the Chinese are in the perspective of the West. Are they *the* Chinese, as a homogenous large entity, or are there many different Chinese actors? Both trends are reflected in the English newspapers since 2013. The first trend is a complex tendency that simplifies Chinese actors and homogenizes their interests with those of the Chinese state. In contradiction, the second trend offers a more diverse image of Chinese actors involved in Africa.

2.1.1 *The Chinese*

The first trend simplifies Chinese actors and homogenizes their interests. Admittedly, articles do not exclusively and repeatedly refer to any actor as a simplification of ‘the Chinese’, as

⁵⁰ The Economist, ‘Little to fear but fear itself; China and Africa’, 21 September 2013.

earlier research argues to be happening.⁵¹ Nonetheless, it is argued here that the newspapers portray the engagement of these actors, and their interests and goals, as primarily directed and controlled by the central government in Beijing

As this tendency seems to be part of the taken-for-granted knowledge of the journalists and public, it is hard to exactly pin it down in the texts. However, it is implicitly present in a large body of accounts. For instance, “Chinese firms are carrying out a \$653m expansion of the main airport in the capital, Nairobi”, with the context of the article referring to China’s government led “exchanges and cooperation with Africa”.⁵² Repeatedly, it is displayed that the engagement is government initiated, “In 2014 alone, China signed more than £56bn in construction contracts across Africa.”⁵³ Another example frames the risen sesame seed export from Ethiopia to China as being part of a Chinese government-led plan to get their loans repaid.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Chinese government – clearly derived from context – is responsible for the undertakings of all their mining and construction companies, “China tends to strike one-sided agreements in Africa that include cheap loans in exchange for mining right or construction contracts.”⁵⁵

Although often not explicitly voiced, this evidence shows that a part of the articles hold the assumption that Chinese foreign policy towards Africa is a ‘grand strategy’, which is centered in Beijing and which has full control over Chinese nationals. Admittedly, there is an official ‘going out’ policy and Africa policy issued by Beijing, and there is also state control on companies, especially in the resource sector.⁵⁶ However, this tendency lacks to see the complexity of Chinese economic engagement in Africa due to the above-mentioned assumption.

In essence, the complexity results from the fact that the Chinese government is fragmented, in combination with different interests among State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) – let alone private-owned enterprises. Among others, Ian Taylor and Yuhua Xiao argue that the ability of the Chinese state to regulate and control practices by Chinese actors, especially SOEs,

⁵¹ Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent’, 518.; Heidi Haugen, “Chinese in Cape Verde: the lucky, the unlucky, the players and the dealers” (Paper presented at ‘A Chinese Scramble?’: The Politics of Contemporary China-Africa Relations, Sidney Sussex College, 2006).

⁵² David Smith, ‘China denies building empire in Africa’, *The Guardian*, 12 January 2015.; One of the contextual signposts that the engagement is seen as government-led is the highlight of the article: “Foreign minister Wang Yi says Beijing won’t copy ‘western colonialist’ amid claims it exploits African resources.”

⁵³ Poplak, Richard, ‘The new scramble for Africa: how China became the partner of choice’, *The Guardian*, 22 December 2016.

⁵⁴ Tom Levitt, ‘Ethiopia’s sesame seed trade with China – a partnership of equals?’, *The Guardian*, 10 July 2013.

⁵⁵ David Smith ‘China agrees to co-finance \$2bn fund with African Development Bank’, *The Guardian*, 27 May 2014.

⁵⁶ Taylor and Xiao, ‘A Case of Mistaken Identity’, 718.

abroad is highly constrained. Taylor and Xiao go as far as to say that “there are in fact many Chinas (in the sense of “China” as presented by the government)”.⁵⁷ On one side, this is both due to the fragmented and sometimes competing commercial or political interests and bickering among Chinese state agencies and provinces, and the limited ability of Chinese embassies to compel compliance of companies.⁵⁸ On the other side, there is fierce competition between SOEs, especially in infrastructure sectors, that are often not accountable to the government in Beijing but “to provincial or local governments or themselves”.⁵⁹ This argument even leaves aside the fact that Chinese immigrants, managers of Chinese companies or temporary Chinese laborers could have very different interests and opinions about desirable outcomes.

Acknowledging this complexity offers the possibility to see that activities of Chinese SOEs or private companies in Africa can be contradicting or undermining to the political and diplomatic objectives adopted by Beijing. Unfortunately, British newspapers are for a big part blind to this notion. In a sense, this might say more about the assumptions journalists and media hold about the nature of Chinese actors in Africa than about what they really entail. In conclusion – and in terms of identity –, it is clear by now that one of the dominant narratives about the Chinese identity in Africa is one of homogenous actors that are, in one way or another, reduced to the Chinese government. As noted above, this perception of Chinese identity was hard to pin down, because it is often only implicitly stated. Apart from close reading, the existence of an alternative and more explicit narrative helped to shed light on it. This alternative narrative is central to the next subsection.

2.1.2 Many Chinese

Partly in contrast with the trend discussed in detail above, a body of accounts emphasizes the diversity of the Chinese actors and their interests. In more than a third of the articles (mostly from *The Economist*) differences in types of actors and a difference in interests among these actors are reflected. Hence, it forms a discourse of diversity. Moreover, it is argued here that the newspapers are aware of the fact that the image they paint differs from what used to be the dominant perspective.

⁵⁷ Taylor and Xiao, ‘A Case of Mistaken Identity’, 714. Another excellent example is shown in: Bates Gill and James Reilly, ‘The Tenuous Hold of China Inc. in Africa’, *Washington Quarterly*, 30 (2007): 3, 37-52, 45.: ‘the ‘China Inc.’ model may be far less monolithic or efficient than outside observers often assume.’

⁵⁸ Gu, Zhang, Vas and Mukwereza, ‘Chinese State Capitalism?’.; Taylor and Xiao, ‘A Case of Mistaken Identity’, 714.

⁵⁹ Yi-Chong Xu, ‘Chinese State-owned Enterprises in Africa: ambassadors or freebooters?’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23 (2014): 89, 822-840, 840.

To start with, the diversity of Chinese actors engaged in Africa is highlighted. On a basic level, this is exhibited by explicitly referring to an organizations' name or other abstract but heterogeneous description, such as "Helen Hai, vice-president of Chinese footwear manufacturer Huajian Group", "He Lingguo, a sunburnt Chinese construction manager", "illegal Chinese goldminers", or simply "Chinese businessman".⁶⁰ Following from this notion of diversity, the competition between the different entities is highlighted: "State-owned companies compete with private firms--both tempted by margins often far higher than at home. Young Chinese private-equity funds are also coming to Africa".⁶¹ Although such explicit references to competition are very rare, it is also implicitly showcased in other articles that display the diversity of actors.

More profound, journalists play with the image of a government-led engagement and instead point at the variety of actors: "yet look beyond official loans or the work of big Chinese state-owned companies, and there are signs of a deeper Chinese involvement. McKinsey's work suggests that there are as many as 10,000 Chinese companies operating in Africa, 90% of them privately owned."⁶² Another example shows the same: "Without question, the Chinese are major players, engaged in hundreds of projects across a continent But not all of these projects are government-driven: some are worth only a few thousand pounds, and are negotiated between Africans and Chinese migrants."⁶³ Although these quotes still point at the enormity of the Chinese engagement, the emphasized image is one of both public and private actors. Adding to this are the explicit attempts to debunk earlier notions about the supposed homogeneity of Chinese actors. Assumptions that China only invests in commodities or in big infrastructure works carried out by Chinese state-owned companies are refuted, often by referring to scholars, academic papers or business reports.⁶⁴ "If anything, official figures understate the extent of Chinese non-commodity investment as they rarely include smaller firms in wholesale trading, retail, catering and textiles."⁶⁵

However, in this effort directed at swaying public understanding about the nature of Chinese business involvement in Africa, there is little self-critique on the media's position in

⁶⁰ Respectively: Elissa Jobson, 'Chinese firm steps up investment in Ethiopia with 'shoe city'', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2013.; *The Economist*, 'One among many; China in Africa', 17 January 2015.; Afua Hirsch, 'Ghana deports thousands in crackdown on illegal Chinese goldminers', *The Guardian*, 15 July 2013.; *The Economist*, 'Empire of the Sums; China in Africa', 23 August 2014.

⁶¹ *The Economist*, 'More than minerals; Africa and China', 23 March 2013;

⁶² *The Economist*, 'A thousand golden stars; China in Africa', 22 July 2017.

⁶³ Poplak, 'The new scramble for Africa'.

⁶⁴ *Economist*, 'More than minerals'; *Economist*, 'A thousand golden stars'.

⁶⁵ *Economist*, 'Little to fear but fear itself'.

the initial construction of this image. An excerpt of *The Guardian* about a real estate project near Johannesburg brings all these elements together, both the display of diversity and the debunking of earlier notions, as well as the lack of self-critique:

The South African press began reporting on a vast £4.8bn real estate development in Modderfontein, ... continually citing that fact that it would be financed and constructed by "the Chinese". The press was never clear on what was meant by "the Chinese". The details were surprising: the Modderfontein New City endeavour was headed by Zendai Group, a Hong Kong-listed company run by an eccentric, goateed entrepreneur named Dai Zhikang.⁶⁶

It is important to note that the journalist directs his commentary towards South-African media, while Western media, *The Guardian* included, also has the tendency to report homogeneously about the Chinese, according to previous research of Mawdsley and Mari-Anne Mørk.⁶⁷ Adding to this is the peculiarity that the quote originates from an article that, while highlighting the supposed diversity, repeatedly refers to a homogeneous China as shown in the previous section.⁶⁸ Noteworthy, these debunking attempts are said to be following up on a supposed change in the composition of Chinese actors and their behavior on the African continent, instead of a changed perception of the newspapers.⁶⁹

In sum, the second narrative of Chinese identity is one of diversity. Moreover, the authors of this narrative are aware that it represents an alternative voice to the other dominant view, that of Government-coordinated engagement in Africa. Taking both trends together, it can be concluded that they exist simultaneously. Answering *who* the Chinese are in Africa can lead to a story that either represents Chinese actors as under control of Beijing, or under control by the rules of the free market with its competing interests. However, it is clear that the second trend is newer to the stage. First, this is shown by the fact that it explicitly tries to debunk the taken-for-knowledge of the first trend. Second, the level of specification of diverse actors has not been reported in previous research on Western media sources, which suggests a new appearance.⁷⁰ Considering everything, both the existence of this alternative narrative and the relative sparsity of the clear homogenous identity in the newspapers leads to the prudent conclusion that the perspective of the West towards *who* China is in Africa is different

⁶⁶ Poplak, 'The new scramble for Africa'.

⁶⁷ Mawdsley, 'Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent'; Other instances of this tendency to homogenize are shown in the previous section.

⁶⁸ Poplak, 'The new scramble for Africa: how China became the partner of choice'.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Not reflected in any of the previously annotated academic research in both chapter 2 and the introduction.

compared to pre-2013.

2.2 Motivations & Mechanisms

In the previous section, the way the Chinese actors are perceived was discussed. In this section, an argument is formed about what the specific interests and motivations are of these actors according to the newspapers and what actions these actors engage in to achieve their goals. Throughout this section, comparisons with schools in academic literature are made to assist in making sense of the dominant discourses in the media accounts.

Unsurprisingly and maybe tautological within the context of economic engagement, one of the most noted motivations of Chinese actors in Africa are deemed to be of an economic kind. One body of articles emphasizes China's need for resources as one of their most prominent motivations for engagement with Africa. Another group focusses more on business opportunities in African markets that motivates Chinese investments, while at the same time often explicitly debunking the common knowledge that China is in Africa only for its resources.

2.2.1 From resource plundering to debt traps?

In many articles, the discourse about China's primary motivation for its engagement in Africa revolves around their need for natural resources: "What the Chinese want is resources, especially fossil fuels".⁷¹ Even when not explicitly stated by the author, the article refers to a familiar sentiment or critique. Saying that there is "growing *doubt* over whether China is persuading governments to part with natural resources" without providing any nuance, rebuttal or counterargument legitimizes these doubts.⁷²

Moreover, the Chinese are said to be using different methods to improve the extraction of commodities. Familiar aspects of the Sino-African relationship such as the infrastructure investments or free hospitals and stadiums are seen in the light of the resource extraction. "China has pumped hundreds of billions of dollars into African governments and infrastructure. In return, it has reaped hundreds of billions in commodities."⁷³ These exchanges are portrayed as shady 'package deals' that have no benefit for the average African.⁷⁴ The same pattern counts

⁷¹ John Pilger, 'Now China's role in Africa is Washington's obsession', *The Guardian*, 10 October 2013.

⁷² Smith, 'China agrees to co-finance \$2bn fund with African Development Bank' [*my italics*].; Another example in: Smith, 'China denies building empire in Africa': "Beijing has frequently been accused of an ethically deaf "resource colonialism" – extracting the continent's mineral wealth at knockdown prices to propel its economic growth."

⁷³ Poplak, 'The new scramble for Africa'.; Hirsch, Afua, 'China in Africa: Ghana given sporting chances – with bigger deals in background', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2013.; This method of resources for investments, which is named a 'package deals', is also present in Chapter 3 since it's linked to China's grow in soft power.

⁷⁴ Smith, 'China agrees to co-finance \$2bn fund with African Development Bank'.

for non-commodities: “Ethiopia uses sesame seeds to help repay loans on Chinese built-infrastructure.”⁷⁵ With a few exceptions, most accounts judge negatively about resource aspect in the China-Africa relationship.⁷⁶ Emphasis is placed on the fact that China is only after its own interests in Africa – which has a clear negative connotation –, that the deals are not “fair quid pro quo” or even that China might be a new (neo)colonial power.⁷⁷

This ‘resource extraction’ argument is familiar to the discourse about China in Africa. Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, stated in 2009 that the media focused overwhelmingly on resource extraction by China: “The China-in-Africa discourse ... presents the PRC as aspiring to be the chief taker of African resources and interested only on that account.”⁷⁸ However, China’s actions seem to be judged with less typical negative words than previous research found in media sources from the first decade of the 21st century. The discourse about Chinese and their need for resources was said to be rich of recurring words and phrases with a clear negative connotation, such as “guzzling”, “insatiably”, “thirsty” or “voracious”.⁷⁹ Such negative connotations seem to be mostly absent now.

In the more recent accounts, the supposed problem with resource extraction by the Chinese is either replaced or accompanied by stories of the ‘debt traps’ that China is causing in Africa with its cheap financing of infrastructure projects.⁸⁰ China’s investments and coupled loans are signs of “new colonialism”.⁸¹ The development and infrastructure projects China initiates in Africa are judged negatively by pointing at the ‘predatory’ loans that China uses to finance these projects: “the plan could saddle developing nations with too much debt”.⁸² This new discourse is becoming prominent since 2018 and it is therefore only hypothesizing if this will be the new version of the resource plundering narrative in the years to come.

Turning to academic literature on China-Africa relations leads to the observation that the media discourse is mirrored by a broad school of thought that focuses on the negative sides of the Sino-African relationship. Like the media discourse, this ‘pessimistic’ (or neo-colonial)

⁷⁵ Levitt, ‘Ethiopia’s sesame seed trade with China – a partnership of equals?’.

⁷⁶ References to positive sides of the resource extraction are rare and only found in articles that lay emphasis on other aspects. For example: ‘The Asian giant’s thirst for natural resources has helped spur Zambia’s economic growth’ in: David Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’, *The Guardian*, 29 April 2013.

⁷⁷ Poplak, ‘The new scramble for Africa’.

⁷⁸ Sautman and Hairong, ‘Trade, Investment, Power and the China-in-Africa Discourse’, 3.

⁷⁹ Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent’, 521.

⁸⁰ Benjamin Haas, ‘China defends plans to spend \$60bn in Africa over three years’, *The Guardian*, 4 September 2018.

⁸¹ Nick Van Mead, ‘China in Africa: win-win development, or a new colonialism?’, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2018.; Poplak, ‘The new scramble for Africa’.

⁸² Van Mead, ‘China in Africa: win-win development, or a new colonialism?’.; Afua Hirsch, ‘The scramble for Africa has moved on, but Britain hasn’t’, *The Guardian*, 4 September 2018.; Haas, ‘China defends plans to spend \$60bn in Africa over three years’.

school highlights that Chinese investments are resource driven and that the Sino-African relationship is not symmetric. In a general sense, the pessimists believe that China supports political illiberalism with their ‘Beijing Model’ without good governance conditions and therefore suggests that their relation with Africa is purely profit-making and not always in the best interest of the African host countries.⁸³ Besides a resource-driven China, other typical stories in the pessimistic school include critique that is also mirrored in the media accounts, such as unequal partnerships in agriculture or debt traps.⁸⁴

In sum, the newspapers see the Chinese in Africa, especially the homogenous China, as an entity that is in Africa for its own interests, regardless of the consequences for Africa. In turn, these consequences for Africa are undoubtedly judged negatively. This perception is largely in line with previous media studies that predominantly concluded that the portrayal of China in Africa revolves around the negative aspects and the resource extraction, such as Sautman and Mawdsley.⁸⁵ However, as will be exhibited in the upcoming sections and chapter, this discourse is not the only or most prevailing discourse in the press accounts since 2013. The debate about China’s engagement in Africa and subsequent motivations in the media seems to be much more diverse.

2.2.2 Business in Africa: “plentiful opportunities to make money”⁸⁶

Another strand of literature also sees that Chinese are in Africa for their self-interest, but places more emphasis on the business opportunities for individual Chinese actors, instead of the monolithic Chinese need for resources or the mechanism of debt traps. Moreover, these accounts occasionally go against the prevailing stories of the pessimistic school that are expressed above.

The main motivation stated for the engagement are both good business opportunities in Africa and decreasing investment opportunities in China. For instance, African markets are “a good place for business” and have “juicy returns”.⁸⁷ Both come together in a quote from *The Economist*:

⁸³ Simplice A. Asonga, ‘Sino-African Relations: A Review and Reconciliation of Dominant Schools of Thought’, *Politics and Policy*, 44 (2016): 2, 351-383.; David Shinn, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia 2012), 13.

⁸⁴ Asonga, ‘Sino-African Relations’, 355.

⁸⁵ Sautman and Hairong, ‘Trade, Investment, Power and the China-in-Africa Discourse’, 3.; Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent’.; Mørk, “China in Africa”.

⁸⁶ *Economist*, ‘A thousand golden stars’.

⁸⁷ *Economist*, ‘One among many’.; *Economist*, ‘A thousand golden stars’.

China's slowdown and structural change may also be an opportunity for Africa. State-backed Chinese firms are increasingly keen to make a better return, which may persuade more of them to look outside their home market for profitable investments. Africa is an obvious destination, given the relative lack of competition.⁸⁸

In adherence to this focus, emphasis is placed on investments to make money without bigger political motivations and mechanisms behind it: "individual Chinese are keen to enrich themselves without the slightest intention of kowtowing to the authorities back home" or more generally about all Chinese actors: "China has few political ambitions in Africa".⁸⁹ Either talking about individual Chinese or the Chinese government: China is in Africa for business.

These motivations and mechanisms are close to the so-called 'accommodation' school. This school emphasizes that the Sino-African relation is part of an inescapable changing process of globalization and economic relations. It has two main underpinnings that hold that China and Western countries might have the same (neocolonial) ambitions, but that African nations have no alternative, and that China is using the norms of free market competition to win projects in Africa.⁹⁰ A prominent narrative in this school holds that major factors driving investment are African market opportunities, competition within China and the strong entrepreneurial spirit of Chinese actors. For that matter, it has the same motivations as Western companies, and the Chinese engagement poses both a resemblance to colonial patterns as well as a new opportunity of development for African nations.⁹¹

These narratives are reflected in the newspaper articles. It is, for instance, emphasized that China's motivations and mechanisms are comparable to that of Western countries or emerging countries from the BRICS club.⁹² China is "just one more foreign investor jostling for advantage" and is "struggling with the same problems Africa has long given Western investors".⁹³ In this process, China is not systematically undermining democracy, but follows a "well-trodden path" and acts like other Western companies were doing for a long time.⁹⁴ At the

⁸⁸ Economist, 'Little to fear but fear itself'.

⁸⁹ Economist, 'One among many'; Economist, 'Empire of the Sums'.

⁹⁰ Asonga, 'Sino-African Relations', 366.

⁹¹ Ibidem, 367.; such a narrative is, for example, seen in: Peter Kragelund, 'Part of the Disease or Part of the Cure? Chinese Investments in the Zambian Mining and Construction Sectors.' *European Journal of Development Research*, 21 (2009): 4, 644-661.

⁹² BRICS club is regarded as consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa.

⁹³ Economist, 'One among many'; The Economist, 'Not as easy as it looks; Chinese investment in Africa', 21 November 2015.; More evidence in: Economist, 'Little to fear but fear itself'. Economist, 'More than minerals'; Economist, 'A thousand golden stars'.

⁹⁴ Economist, 'One among many'; Economist, 'Little to fear but fear itself'; Economist, 'Not as easy as it looks'.

same time, China's engagement offers opportunities for African governments and citizens: China's quest for resources "has helped spurred Zambia's economic growth" and other new economic engagements offer "an opportunity for Africa".⁹⁵ However, throughout the articles, it is implicitly made clear that African nations and citizens do not have a full array of choices to determine their engagement with China.⁹⁶

This perspective seems to be new to the newspapers, and the newspapers are aware of this. The dominant story is reflected upon: "The data, which challenges what has for years been the dominant story - Beijing's unrelenting quest for natural resources" or "Chinese trade with Africa keeps growing; fears of neocolonialism are overdone".⁹⁷ Another example shows that "much of the hype about Chinese firms buying up vast amounts of industry in Africa is overblown".⁹⁸ Also, the stories about loans are downplayed: "new data suggest that China lends less to Africa than is commonly assumed" and "only about a third of Chinese loans were tied to natural resources".⁹⁹ Although the newspapers point towards new data and old assumptions, the change is predominantly assigned to a change in circumstances or behavior of China and Chinese actors instead of to a change in perception from the newspapers.¹⁰⁰

In sum, the West perceives the Chinese in Africa as business oriented actors. The Chinese see Africa as a place where money is to be made, which has both positive and negative sides. Moreover, it is an alternative – maybe even counter-narrative – to the dominant discourse displayed in the previous section. A possible explanation for the contrast between the two is the difference in focus on actors. The first strand predominantly looks at unitary actors, such as described in the previous section, and the second strand focusses more on individual actors. A certain understanding of an actor likely determines the motivations you attach to those actors. Which perspective is the 'true' one is a question that is fascinating, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an answer. It does, however, offer insights in how the West perceives China's economic engagement in Africa. In conclusion of the two trends, despite all the differences presented in this section, both focus first and foremost on the economic self-interests of China. This might be an obvious conclusion, but that changes when considering that Chinese

⁹⁵ Smith, 'Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia'; Economist, 'Little to fear but fear itself'.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.; More examples, including the limited agency of Africans, is present in are among others seen in: Elissa, 'Chinese firm steps up investment in Ethiopia with 'shoe city''.

⁹⁷ Claire Provost and Rich Harris, 'China pulls the purse strings in Africa charm offensive', *The Guardian*, 30 April 2013.

⁹⁸ Economist, 'Not as easy as it looks'.

⁹⁹ The Economist, 'Credit limit; Chinese loans to Africa', 30 April 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Economist, 'Credit limit; Chinese loans to Africa'; Economist, 'Not as easy as it looks'; Change in circumstances also shown previously when referring to decreasing investments opportunities in China.

newspapers frame the economic engagement predominantly with an emphasis on the beneficial aspects for Africa which connects to their approach of win-win.¹⁰¹

2.3 The West: we are better, but we are losing

“As American and British populists prepare to close their doors to the outside world, and as Western influence dims across the continent, China may well be the catalyst Africa has required to leap forward into the future. But with the pros come some serious, unanticipated cons.”¹⁰²

As this quote illustrates, China’s economic engagement is compared to that of Western countries. In this section, two key elements of this comparison are used to argue that the West perceives their own identity within the China-Africa nexus as the morally superior competitor in a battle over influence in Africa. However, the West seems to be losing ground to China.

The first element in this comparison is the fact that the newspapers portray the Western standards and practices as both morally and economically superior. This is reflected in two ways. The first way focuses primarily on the moral element. Where China looks at Africa as a business opportunity without having an eye on the consequences for Africa, the West looks at Africa as an altruistic project and a moral cause. For example, in an article that reproduces the critic of a US official, the comparison comes to light: “China is a very aggressive and pernicious economic competitor with no morals. China is not in Africa for altruistic reasons. China is in Africa for China primarily.”¹⁰³ Without explicitly making the comparison, it is clear that in contrast to China, the US and other Western countries are in Africa for altruistic reasons and for Africa itself. Other examples are hard to pin down in the articles because of their implicit and taken-for-granted character. However, by pointing out the negative sides of China’s approach, the newspapers implicitly say that ‘we’ are not like that. For example, saying that China extracts natural resources for “knock-down prices with little benefit for the average citizen” or suggesting that it engages in neocolonialism or other forms of exploitation, puts the West at the good side of the moral spectrum.¹⁰⁴

Secondly, the economic standards and practices of China are compared to that of the West. Although China’s methods are not per se seen as negative or morally corrupt, it is pointed out that the Western methods work better. China either already follows the Western standards or will eventually adhere to them. With this, the newspapers take up a sort of paternalistic

¹⁰¹ Mørk, “China in Africa”.

¹⁰² Poplak, ‘The new scramble for Africa’.

¹⁰³ Smith, ‘China denies building empire in Africa’.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, ‘China agrees to co-finance \$2bn fund with African Development Bank’.

approach towards China. For instance, it is said that Chinese companies are “following a well-trodden path”, “They are now doing the sorts of things Western firms have long done: investing in corporate social responsibility programmes, hiring African managers and doing scrupulous due diligence.”¹⁰⁵ If the Chinese are not already following these better practices, they will soon find out that they will have to do so: “Essentially, the Chinese will realise, like others before them, that good governance norms are not luxuries but necessities in protecting investments and relationships from the vagaries of leadership and paucity of institutions, in Africa as elsewhere.”¹⁰⁶ If China won’t change, the Chinese will find out the hard way, just like the West has done before:

China seems to be repeating many of the mistakes made by Western donors and investors in the 1970s, when money flowed into big African infrastructure projects that never produced the expected economic gains. In a decade or so China may find itself in the position the West once did, of having to write off many of their loans to African governments.¹⁰⁷

A second element of the comparison between the West and China in Africa is the portrayal of competition, China and the West are fighting about influence in Africa. Explicit references to this competitive element are found in accounts that point towards “China’s rivalry with the West on the African stage” or “the competing interests ... and also different approaches.”¹⁰⁸ These different approaches refer to the differences in moral and economic standards. More implicit signposts are woven throughout the articles with comparisons of amounts of trading, investments or loans between China on one side and the UK, the US or the West on the other side. Sometimes this is done to show that China’s engagement is bigger than the West’s: “[China] currently exports eight times more goods to Africa than the UK and is the continent’s major investor in infrastructure”.¹⁰⁹ Other times to show that China’s engagement is not to be exaggerated: “China accounts for only 5% of all existing investment in Africa, and a similar share of new investments. America’s investment stock is twice as much”.¹¹⁰

Not surprisingly, in this competition over Africa, China has the momentum and the West is in the defense. According to Daniel Large, textual images and phrases that suggest or talk about China as a new colonial power in Africa are indications of Western defensiveness about

¹⁰⁵ Economist, ‘Not as easy as it looks’.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹⁰⁷ Economist, ‘A thousand golden stars’.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, ‘China denies building empire in Africa’.

¹⁰⁹ Hirsch, ‘The scramble for Africa has moved on, but Britain hasn’t’.

¹¹⁰ Economist, ‘A thousand golden stars’.

‘it’s backyard’ and part of a wider reaction to China’s emergence as a world power.¹¹¹ As also shown in the previous sections, such references are found throughout the articles. Sometimes, a seemingly neutral question gives away a part of the underlying judgment about China in Africa. Asking if the relationship is a partnership of equals, if it is “colonialism in another guise”, or if it is really “win-win development, or a new colonialism” has a strong rhetorical element to it.¹¹² Although the eventual answer is often that these fears of colonialism are overdone, the image of neocolonialism stays in place. These metaphors drawing on colonial history – and the supposed fact that the West has addressed and changed its former mistakes – contribute to the general critical approach towards China displayed in this thesis.

In conclusion, the West perceives itself in Africa as a competitor with China, who is an amoral – and maybe a neocolonial – opponent. Although the West seems to lose, they still consider themselves as being the better option (for Africa). However, this perception can be quite problematic. When considering factors like the procedures of the World Trade Organization, the power of Europe’s agricultural policies, or the mountains of debts inherited from Western loans, one sees the structural inequalities of the world system and the negative side of the West’s impact on Africa. Overall, newspapers and journalists can be very critical in their articles about such cases. However, when China is also present in the article this critique on the West seems to vanish.¹¹³ Although not explicitly highlighted here but evenly important, this section shows that newspapers often choose for West versus China angles, which in turn strengthens the image as if Africans are just an incidental part of the equation with little or no agency.

2.4 Conclusion

The image observed in this chapter, how shattered it may be, is different than what previous research found. First, the clear presence of two different perceptions of China’s identity has not been seen before. Especially the existence of the second alternative identity of diverse Chinese actors in Africa is new. Moreover, by challenging assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge, this alternative discourse of Chinese identity might eventually lead to the emergence of a new (and synthesized) dominant narrative about the Chinese and China in

¹¹¹ Large, ‘Beyond ‘Dragon in the Bush’, 61.

¹¹² Levitt, ‘Ethiopia’s sesame seed trade with China – a partnership of equals?’; Poplak, ‘The new scramble for Africa’; Van Mead, ‘China in Africa: win-win development, or a new colonialism?’.

¹¹³ Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, ‘The Forest for the Trees: Trade, Investment and the China-in-Africa Discourse’, *Pacific Affairs*, 81 (2008): 1, 9-29, 14.; Bräutigam, *The Dragon’s Gift*, 8.; Examples of newspaper articles that consider the negative sides of the Western impact: Mark Tran, ‘EU agriculture policy ‘still hurting farmers in developing countries’, *The Guardian*, 11 October 2011; Aurelie Walker, ‘The WTO has failed developing nations’, *The Guardian*, 14 November 2011.

Africa.¹¹⁴ Second, the language used to describe China in Africa has become less negative when compared to earlier research. Although neocolonial tropes and negative descriptions still prevail, a more complete and less simplistic approach is emerging.

However, the identity of China as a predominantly economic self-interested amoral actor is still clearly dominant. Be it through shady resource deals or be it for the investment opportunities of individual Chinese companies, the prime perceived motivation is achieving economic gains. Moreover, a juxtaposition of the view the West has of China in Africa and the view the West has of itself within the China-Africa nexus shows that the West still sees itself as superior to China. This prevents the West to identify China as a credible and long-term opportunity or development catalyst for African nations.

¹¹⁴ Such a change to a newly predominant discourse is seen in: Hopf, 'Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split', 287.

Chapter 3: China's soft use of power

In a 2017 blogpost, The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) calls upon researchers and media to focus more on China's use of 'soft power' in Africa. "Western media coverage of Chinese initiatives in Africa focuses on trade and investment, resource extraction and the presence of "Chinese boots on the ground." However, perhaps we should be paying more attention to China's growing use of "soft power".¹¹⁵ Although it is hard to define what soft power means in the China-Africa context, it indeed seems to be true that the Western media has for a long time and large part focused instead on the economic aspects of the engagement as is showed in the previous chapter. Moreover, there is no specific research on Western media perceptions of China's so-called soft power, apart from the 'myth-busting' attempts by Deborah Bräutigam in which she uses her research to debunk media accounts which imply that China's foreign aid to African countries is "all about Oil/Minerals/Resources".¹¹⁶ However, this chapter lends its existence to the very fact that it is undeniable that the Western media has actually been doing what the CFR ask people to do: paying attention to China's growing use of soft power.

Therefore, Chinese soft power in Africa is the second theme this thesis focuses on. Again, the question is asked how the West sees the Chinese identity in Africa. This time the question is asked within the context of Chinese soft power exertion in Africa. The first part of this chapter dives into the debate about what soft power is and how this might be different in the Chinese context. The second part of this chapter asks who the Chinese soft power actors are and analyzes their representation in the newspapers. After that, the specific motivations and mechanisms of these actors, according to the media accounts, are analyzed. Finally, this chapter is completed by assessing what the West's understanding of itself is in Africa, and in particular within the China-Africa nexus.

3.1 What is soft?

The concept of soft power was introduced in 1991 by Joseph Nye as the capacity of an actor to shape the preference of others through appeal, persuasion and attraction rather than through force, threats or exchanges, which is the method of hard power.¹¹⁷ In Nye's definition, the

¹¹⁵ John Campbell, 'Chinese Soft Power in Africa', last modified 20 July 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinese-soft-power-africa>, accessed on 15 May 2019.

¹¹⁶ Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift*, 277.

¹¹⁷ Joseph Nye, *Bound to lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York 1991); Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York 2004).

sources of soft power are the attractiveness of a country's culture (when pleasing to others), its political ideas and values (when attractive and consistently practiced), and (foreign) policies (when seen as inclusive and legitimate).¹¹⁸ However, there are a few problematic issues with soft power, as exemplified by IR scholar Kenneth King's argument that the concept had a specific use for US power in the Post-Cold War era but has since then become a catchall term that ignores such specific contexts, especially regarding China.^{119,120}

One of these issues is its definition and operationalization. The term *soft* implies that it is totally independent from its counterpart *hard* power. However, it is impossible to separate soft power from hard power, since countries or other actors need to use at least some hard power to communicate and promote their soft power. In the words of influential IR Scholar Ying Fan: "Behind or beneath it is hard power. Soft power is merely a manifestation or presentation of hard power."¹²¹ In addition, it is hard to make a distinction between the two, since they often come together; hard power is never absent. For example, Chinese military peacekeepers in South Sudan can be seen as soft power and enhance China's image as a peaceful, legitimate and responsible great power. However, the troops on the ground, funded with substantial amounts of money, are also clear elements of hard power exertion. Therefore, the distinction between hard and soft power lies not with the instruments (e.g. military peacekeepers), but with the motivations for this engagement and how these motivations are perceived.¹²²

Another important aspect is the vagueness surrounding the agent and the subject of attraction. Although the state is often regarded as the primary agent of a nation's soft power, it cannot always control other agents and, therefore, a state does not have full control over the creation of soft power. Hence, agents can be cultural and political values itself, government agencies, individual actors, civil society or companies that promote attractive messages.¹²³ On the subject's side, for instance, a government, the country's elites, or a country's public opinion can be the target audience. Moreover, subjects have a lot of control over the successful

¹¹⁸ Joseph Nye, Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power, *Foreign Affairs*, 88 (2009) 4, 160-163, 161.

¹¹⁹ Kenneth King, *China's Aid and Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education and Training* (Rochester 2013), 193.

¹²⁰ For a thorough discussion see also: Sigrid Sandve Eggereide, "Facing the Intangible, Unobservable and Immeasurable: A Conceptual Analysis of Joseph Nye's Soft Power" (Master's thesis in Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2012).; Although she concludes that soft power is a distinctive element of power, it remains problematic to operationalize.

¹²¹ Ying Fan, 'Soft Power: Power of Attraction or Confusion?', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 4 (2008): 2, 147-158, 156.

¹²² Similar argument made by: Gary D. Rawnsley, "Reflections of a Soft Power Agnostic" in *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa*, ed. by Xiaoling Zhang, Herman Wasserman and Winston Mano (London, 2016), 24.

¹²³ Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos, "From hegemony to soft power: implications of a conceptual change" in *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy Theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives*, ed. by Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (New York 2010), 19.; Łukasz Fijałkowski, 'China's 'soft power' in Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 29 (2011): 2, 223-232, 225.; Joseph Nye, 'What China and Russia Don't Get about Soft Power', *Foreign Policy*, last modified 29 April 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/>, accessed on 10 June 2019.

outcomes of soft power, since they decide whether to receive a message and to change their behavior and attitudes favorable to the sending agent. They are arguably the most powerful in the relationship.¹²⁴

Besides these two issues, defining and understanding soft power is made even more complex when the Chinese context is added to the equation. Most importantly, scholars who keep strict to Nye's original understanding argue that China is severely lacking any soft power. For example, Odd Arne Westad says "no young person of sound mind in Tokyo or Seoul, or even Taipei or Singapore, is looking to the PRC for music to download, films to watch, or ideas to latch on to".¹²⁵ However, both Chinese and Western academics say we should adopt a different scope since the Chinese government sees a broader set of instruments to fit into soft power toolbox. Joshua Kurlantzick argued first that China holds "the idea that soft power implies all elements outside of the security realm, including investment and aid".¹²⁶ In addition, Mingjiang Li argues that soft power should be analyzed as the "soft use of power to increase a state's attraction, persuasiveness and appeal".¹²⁷ Li's view allows us to recognize that the deployment of investments or aid in Africa, which may lead to enhanced legitimacy and admiration of China in the long run, is equivalent to Nye's classical understanding of the inherent attractiveness of culture, values or policies.

Although the strength of China's soft power is debated, there is no doubt that the Communist Party has soft power objectives that fit into their own broader definition. This was officially confirmed in 2007 when President Hu Jintao spoke about the importance of soft power regarding Chinese foreign affairs. He urges China to "enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests".¹²⁸ In addition, Premier Wen Jiabao announced in 2010 that soft power had become a key concept in government sessions and that China was to engage actively in foreign cultural exchanges. The Party realized that competing for global influence required to facilitate understanding of Chinese culture and the importance of an international image.¹²⁹

3.2 Agents

¹²⁴ Rawnsley, "Reflections of a Soft Power Agnostic", 21.; Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*, 11.

¹²⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (New York 2012), 459.

Other accounts that see China lacking soft power are among others: David Shambaugh, 'China's Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect', *Foreign Affairs*, 94 (2015): 4, 99-107.; Fijałkowski, 'China's 'soft power' in Africa'.

¹²⁶ Joshua Kurlantzick, 'China's Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power', *Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief*, June (2006), 6.

¹²⁷ Li Mingjiang, *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics* (Plymouth, 2009), 7.

¹²⁸ China Daily, 'Hu urges enhancing 'soft power' of Chinese culture', 15 October 2007.

¹²⁹ Yu-Shan Wu, 'The Rise of China's State-Led Media Dynasty in Africa', *The South African Institute of International Affairs Occasional Paper 117*, June (2012), 6.; David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford 2013), 207.

As spelled out in the previous section, an important aspect of soft power is the agent of attraction. This section argues that, although agents are often specified, the newspapers homogenize agents with the Chinese state, which in turn has total control over all agents. This point will be supported in this section with the analysis of three topics (foreign aid, soft power and business, Chinese media in Africa) in which this is shown. To further strengthen the main argument, this section ends with a fourth topic (natural cultural exchanges) that is the exception that proves the rule. These topics either fall into the broad Chinese categorization of soft power spelled out above or are referred to as ‘soft power’ in the newspaper articles.

The first topic is foreign aid, which is seen as a unified policy directed from Beijing. Subsequently, the soft power agents are reduced to the central government in Beijing.¹³⁰ For instance, this is seen regarding medical teams and is emphasized with a suggestive quotation, “why did the Chinese staff decide to come? ‘The government needed us’, Yui says.”¹³¹. For foreign aid, the association to a central government often is quite logic and arguably fair. Both in media and academic sources, it is customary to talk about foreign aid as being directed by the government, also in the case of other countries.¹³²

However, there are two peculiarities that stand out in portraying the Chinese foreign aid actors. Firstly, Chinese actors are not merely seen as part of a foreign aid program, but mostly as puppets in a bigger soft power game: “medical staff from both countries mingle at first general hospital in Lusaka, which helps focus attention on positive Chinese ties.”¹³³ In addition, also scholarship programs are foremost seen as part of China’s soft power strategy and not as genuine efforts to transfer skills or build capacity.¹³⁴ Secondly, and building on the first point, Chinese aid is portrayed as something shady and emphasis is placed on the fact that China’s aid is not transparent. It is compared to Western aid and the deviations from Western aid have a negative connotation: “Only a fraction of the database’s projects would count as official development assistance under the rules set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

¹³⁰ The note must be made that a many diverse practices can be regarded as foreign aid. For instance, scholarships and medical aid are also part of Chinese foreign aid, although the newspapers do not always explicitly state so.

¹³¹ Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹³² Provost and Harris, ‘China pulls the purse strings in Africa charm offensive’. Other examples in: Haas, ‘China defends plans to spend \$60bn in Africa over three years’.; *The Economist*, ‘A despot’s guide to foreign aid; China and Africa’, 16 April 2016.; *The Economist*, ‘No place like home; Chinese aid in Africa’, 7 October 2017.; David Smith, ‘Gambia severs diplomatic ties with Taiwan’, *The Guardian*, 15 November 2013.; Bräutigam, *The Dragon’s Gift*.; China Africa Research initiative, ‘Data: Chinese Foreign Aid’, last modified March 2019, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-chinese-foreign-aid-to-africa>, accessed on June 6, 2019.

¹³³ Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹³⁴ Jonathan Kaiman, ‘China in Africa: All mod cons and concerts for Africans with scholarship in Beijing’, *The Guardian*, 30 April 2013.; *Economist*, ‘A thousand golden stars’.; *The Economist*, ‘Soft power and censorship; Chinese media in Africa’, 20 October 2018.

Development (OECD)”.¹³⁵ However, except for the fact that China does not work with political conditions tied to its aid, the newspapers do not acknowledge that the Chinese foreign aid system has a vastly different structure of roles and responsibilities than the Western OECD system to which it is often compared.¹³⁶

Second, Chinese companies, either private or state-owned, are regarded as another agent in China’s soft power exertion who are completely directed by Beijing. For example, the soft power exertion described above is executed by a state-owned company: “Sarpong enthuses about China, which, through state-run company Poly Technologies Inc (PTI), donated the sports complex to the armed forces in 2011”.¹³⁷ Although the company is specified, it is implicitly portrayed as a stooge of the Chinese government, which in turn is seen as a unitary entity. In another example this connection is even clearer: “China continues to exert soft power in Zambia. This month, Hwatai Mining Investments Corporation signed an agreement with former president, Kenneth Kaunda, to construct a school for vulnerable children”.¹³⁸ Although Hwatai Mining Investments Corporation is a private-owned company – something which is not mentioned – it is framed in the article that this is a direct effort of the Chinese government to exert its soft power.¹³⁹

Admittedly, Chinese companies are stimulated to take part in activities that promote the Chinese image and, henceforth, their soft power. However, as also discussed extensively in the previous chapter, the Chinese state has limited control over both state-owned and private companies. Although specific examples regarding soft power are hard to find in academic literature, the same seems to be true for China’s central government’s ability for control over companies’ soft power practices, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects.¹⁴⁰

Third, Chinese media enterprises are seen as important players in China’s soft power strategy. The Chinese companies that are involved in the African media landscape are said to be a direct means of China’s government expanding soft power strategy, or more specifically, media expansion strategy.¹⁴¹ The newspapers specify the actor involved, but always paint the

¹³⁵ Provost and Harris, ‘China pulls the purse strings in Africa charm offensive’.; Moreover, a similar comparison between Western and Chinese aid is made in: Economist, ‘No place like home’.

¹³⁶ Denghua Zhang and Graeme Smith, ‘China’s foreign aid system: structure, agencies, and identities’, *Third World Quarterly*, 38 (2017): 10, 2330-2346.

¹³⁷ Hirsch, ‘China in Africa: Ghana given sporting chances – with bigger deals in background’.; For clarification, Sarpong is a Ghanaian local in the story.

¹³⁸ Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹³⁹ AidData, ‘Organization: Hwatai Mining Investments Corporation Ltd.’, last modified unknown <http://admin.china.aiddata.org/organizations/1743>, accessed on June 6, 2019

¹⁴⁰ Virginia Harper Ho, ‘China’s Soft Power in Africa or Real Corporate Accountability?’, *Peace Brief Piece* 232, September (2017), 3.; Chen Zhimin and Jian Junbo, ‘Chinese Provinces as Foreign Policy Actors in Africa’, *The South African Institute of International Affairs Occasional Paper* 22, January (2009), 17.

¹⁴¹ Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2018.

picture with the notion of its connection to Beijing, such as: “StarTimes, a private pay-TV company with close links to the Chinese government”.¹⁴²

This image is quite understandable, substantiated by a reflection of the image in the discourse of academic literature. In literature, the organizations are also predominantly seen as proponents of China’s soft power strategy in Africa and a result of the media ‘Going Out Campaign’. This campaign introduced, among other things, a corporate structure for major media organizations and, subsequently, invested heavily in these new Chinese media flagships.¹⁴³ Within this campaign, these organizations have the goal to promote the Chinese interpretation of world affairs in Africa.¹⁴⁴ However, as will be argued more elaborate in the next section, there are some differences in interpretation between academics and the newspapers.

Fourth, as the exception that proves the rule, there is only rare attention for natural exchanges and the attractiveness of Chinese culture to African people. In a very rare piece, Senegal’s growing interest in traditional Chinese medicine is highlighted, and it is mentioned that “growing soft power is sometimes felt at the tip of a needle”.¹⁴⁵ However, the political element is connected to it, which in turn proves the general rule: “As many as 50,000 young Africans are studying in China, many on scholarships provided by the host government. Although only a small share are at medical school, many students return with a taste for acupuncture and herbs”.¹⁴⁶ Senegalese interest in Chinese medicine is seen as a by-product of the scholarship programs that are directed and paid by the Chinese state.

In conclusion, apart from cultural exchanges, Chinese actors are mostly seen as if they are part of the Chinese state themselves. This Chinese state in its turn is a unitary, central and shady entity. The dominant identity that the West holds of China in Africa is that of a homogeneous entity. Admittedly, the actors involved are often specified by the newspapers and Chinese soft power is indeed highly strategized and regulated by the Chinese state, as is also shown in literature. Hence, the identity of the Chinese reflected in the newspapers is not purely based on stereotypes and misunderstandings; the media deserves more credit. Eventually, however, the homogeneous identity perceived by the newspapers seems to leave no room for individual cases and different motivations.

¹⁴² Economist, ‘Soft power and censorship’. Roy Greenslade, ‘Chinese media in Africa illustrate difference from western media’, *The Guardian*, 20 August 2015.

¹⁴³ Ran Jijun, “Evolving Media Interactions between China and Africa” in *China’s Media and Soft Power in Africa*, ed. by Xiaoling Zhang, Herman Wasserman and Winston Mano (London, 2016), 55.;

¹⁴⁴ Jijun, “Evolving Media Interactions between China and Africa”, 58. Shubo Li, *Mediatized China- Africa Relations: How Media Discourses Negotiate the Shifting of Global Order* (Singapore 2017), 34.

¹⁴⁵ The Economist, ‘La Clinique Chinoise; Needling Africans’, 10 November 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Economist, ‘La Clinique Chinoise’.

3.3 Motivations & Mechanisms

With this better understanding of soft power and the involved actors, this section now considers how the West perceives China's motivations and methods regarding their soft power engagement. How does China deploy its soft power and what are their motivations? As will be argued below, there is a change in Western perception about Chinese soft power in Africa within the timeframe of this thesis. The newspaper's portrayal changes from soft power as a method to acquire better business opportunities towards soft power exertion with more political motivations and, most prominently, to enhance China's global image.

3.3.1 That swimming pool is no gift, it is bait

“‘I believe it was a gift from China’, said Kachimba, sitting behind a laptop and desk. ‘I think it was just a sign of friendship. They built [the hospital], they built a stadium in the copper belt.’”¹⁴⁷ Maybe Kachimba truly believes the hospital and stadium are gifts from China, but *The Guardian* uses his quote to show their skepticism towards China's motivations; they do not see these acts as a ‘sign of friendship’. Instead, it is argued here that the West perceives the creation and protection of economic interests as the first and foremost goal of China's exertion of soft power. Obviously, this connects to the business actors described in the previous section, but this is also seen in relation to foreign aid.

First, there is a tendency in the newspapers to portray China as using its soft power to reduce fears of neo-colonialism and, subsequently, secure bigger and better deals. It is said that African people might fear foreign investments given their colonial history and that “soft power is an important tool in reducing sensitivities to a fear of outside domination”.¹⁴⁸ A Chinese-built hospital or school might reduce these sensitivities and serves as “good PR” for the Chinese.¹⁴⁹

Second, China is said to use its soft power as part of shady ‘package deals’. For instance, a swimming pool is built in exchange for a contract for resource extraction. “Many of the cultural and sporting projects across the continent are probably “upfront sweeteners” to win government favour, a “downpayment” for future commercial deals”.¹⁵⁰ As seen in the previous

¹⁴⁷ Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹⁴⁸ Kaiman, ‘China in Africa: All mod cons and concerts for Africans with scholarship in Beijing’.; Also in: Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, ‘Chinese hospital heals sore spot in Zambia’.

¹⁵⁰ Hirsch, ‘China in Africa: Ghana given sporting chances – with bigger deals in background’.; these packages are also seen in: Richard, ‘The new scramble for Africa’.

chapter, the package deals are recognized as part of Chinese economic engagement, but without the explicit connection to soft power. However, in some accounts that focus on China's soft power in Africa they are portrayed as such: "The grants are usually a modest component and fall in the category of public relations".¹⁵¹

Third, soft power activities that could be seen as having the primary goal to present China as a global player, such as scholarship and training programs or medical aid, are interpreted differently by the newspapers. Most emphasis is placed on the economic interests and China's goal of creating and protecting good business. This is best illustrated with a quote from an article about scholarships for African students to "win their hearts and minds". Skepticism towards the program is shown throughout the article and at the end of the article the real motivation of China is particularly emphasized with the use of a quote from a Cameroonian:

Their graduates may emerge with a more positive view of China. "I'm very, very sceptical about the impact. It must be understood by the African that they are not there to do philanthropy or help, they are there to do business. The Chinese are here to work for us, but they're here for their own interest first."¹⁵²

In sum, the narrative that the newspapers build is one of China that tries to enhance the image of themselves in Africa with the initial goal of cashing in on this improved image. This conclusion might seem straightforward but is complicated when compared to the categorization of soft power and academic literature, which will be done later in this chapter.

3.3.2 Enhancing China's image through media

This perception of Chinese soft power with an emphasis on the economic aspects changes over time towards the importance of China's global and African image. Instead of its economic interests, from 2015 onwards more importance is given towards China's international position. Moreover, the methods that China uses to improve its image are heavily condemned by the West.

This is most prominent and visible in accounts that refer to China's engagement in the African media landscape. In the most positive terms, this engagement is an effort of China to tell their side of the story. In the most negative terms, it is obvious propaganda with the goal to

¹⁵¹ Hirsch, 'China in Africa: Ghana given sporting chances – with bigger deals in background'.

¹⁵² Kaiman, 'China in Africa: All mod cons and concerts for Africans with scholarship in Beijing?'; Another example in: Provost and Harris, 'China pulls the purse strings in Africa charm offensive'.

redraw the global information order. The main motivation for this engagement is that the Chinese government wants to shape African and global perception of their position in Africa, because this would enhance their political influence in both Africa and other parts of the world (i.e. the West).¹⁵³ No attention is given to the before-mentioned economic interest, but emphasis is fully placed on shaping image and opinion.

Most prominent is the critique on the method of Chinese state-owned media agencies, such as CCTV Africa and China Daily Africa, who try to acquire a prominent position in the African media landscape. The newspapers place emphasis on the censorship of these agencies: as soon as the news touches Chinese state interest “censorship kicks in”.¹⁵⁴ For instance, the canceled column of South African journalist Azad Essa, after he wrote about the internment of the Uighurs, is used as an illustration of a broader problem.¹⁵⁵ Other methods of the Chinese plan to gain influence on opinions are also displayed, most prominently the deployment of Chinese satellite TV systems in Africa. Again, negative aspects are highlighted, such as the supposed Chinese total control over broadcast space, while aspects like the position of Western media or satellite TV companies are downplayed.¹⁵⁶

Admittedly, not all references are purely negative. In a clearly positive article, the contribution that the Chinese could have for Africa’s media is highlighted, such as the Chinese philosophy of constructive journalism in which it tries to offer solutions instead of reporting only about the negative aspects of a situation.¹⁵⁷ However, this is not done without also highlighting the censorship in Chinese media, the bad credibility and the differences to Western media.¹⁵⁸

As a final point, newspapers predominantly portray the African public and journalists either as victims of China’s influence or as naive collaborators. Admittedly, there is some attention for the skepticism of both public and journalists towards Chinese media incursion, which is also reflected in scholarly work.¹⁵⁹ However, most emphasis is placed on China’s

¹⁵³ Greenslade, ‘Chinese media in Africa illustrate difference from western media’.; Lim and Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’.; The Economist, ‘Soft power and censorship’.

¹⁵⁴ Economist, ‘Soft power and censorship’.

¹⁵⁵ Economist, ‘Soft power and censorship’.; Lim and Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁷ Greenslade, ‘Chinese media in Africa illustrate difference from western media’.; “constructive journalism can be both positive and negative, but the purpose is to find solutions.” Is set in comparison with the Western style of ‘Watchdog’ journalism.

¹⁵⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁹ Alan Finlay, ‘Tracking the effects of a ‘soft power’ strategy on journalism in China’, *African Journalism Studies*, 34 (2013): 3, 155-160.; Herman Wasserman, and Dani Madrid-Morales, ‘How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa’ *International Journal of Communication*, 12 (2018) 1, 2212-2231.

“blatant exhibitions of power” to which almost no resistance can be offered.¹⁶⁰ Simultaneously, the negative collaborative role of African journalists themselves is highlighted.¹⁶¹

In sum, Chinese engagement in the media landscape is mostly seen as a negative development and, therefore, China is seen as an “audacious” player that has bad intentions with African media.¹⁶² The newspapers mainly highlight China’s involvement as direct and rude, which draws a comparison to previously reported perceptions of China as a blunt and untrustworthy intruder in Africa.¹⁶³ It has to be said that indeed the newspapers review the “more subtle ways” of China’s influence, but this is downplayed with an emphasis on the above-mentioned blunt and direct aspects.¹⁶⁴

3.4 Academic literature as a mirror for identity

Although a comparison between the perspective of the newspapers and their academic counterpart have already been hinted at in the previous sections, a more thorough look at academic literature offers insights about the perception of the West, that would otherwise have been missed.

Firstly, the media’s perception of China’s soft power as a method to secure economic interests and to acquire more business is not confirmed by academic literature.¹⁶⁵ It is argued here that this is due to the unfair extension of the concept of soft power that the newspapers make when they talk about soft power. Although the definitional boundaries of soft power are flexible as has been shown previously, it is clear that the concept is focused on attraction. It’s about making China more persuasive and attractive, but without elements of force or straightforward exchange. However, the package deals, for instance, are direct exchanges and it is a stretch of the newspapers to qualify them as soft power. This further supported by the fact the author who initiated the term package deal, David Shinn, does not qualify these packages as being soft power. Indeed, the Chinese use aid to facilitate economic objectives, but this is not regarded as a part of China’s soft power.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Lim and Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’.

¹⁶¹ An excellent example that brings these elements together is seen in: Lim and Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’: “The thing I like is we are telling the story from our perspective,” Kenyan journalist Beatrice Marshall said, after being *poached* from KTN, one of Kenya’s leading television stations. Her presence strengthened the station’s credibility, and she has continued to stress the editorial independence of the journalists themselves.”

¹⁶² Lim and Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’.

¹⁶³ Both in this thesis as well as in line: Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent’.

¹⁶⁴ Economist, ‘Soft power and censorship’.

¹⁶⁵ Drew Thompson, ‘China’s Soft Power in Africa: From the “Beijing Consensus” to Health Diplomacy’, *China Brief*, 5 (2005) 21, 1-4.; Fijałkowski, ‘China’s ‘soft power’ in Africa’; Jianbo and Zhang, ‘Multilateral cooperation in Africa between China and Western countries’.

¹⁶⁶ Shinn, *China and Africa*, 128-161.

More importantly, however, is what the newspapers' extension says about how the West perceives the Chinese soft power identity. It shows that the West holds the image of the Chinese as tricky actors who have the goal to exploit Africans. Indeed, they offer Africans hospitals, aid and scholarships, but do this with the final goal of protecting and increasing its economic interests. This understanding might be influenced by the difficulties of the Chinese system and its differences to the Western system as pointed out before. The Chinese aid system regards these educational programs, infrastructure loans and other aid integral element of the same development policy, instead of separate policy areas like Western OECD countries.¹⁶⁷ This combination seems hard to grasp for the West.

Secondly, parallel to the media's attention, there is a growing academic interest towards Chinese soft power in the media landscape of Africa. However, the predominant discourse in academic research differs from the dominant image portrayed in the media accounts. Two examples show that most scholars are above all more nuanced, which simultaneously lays bare the biases that the newspapers hold. The first is Azad Essa's cancelled column mentioned in the previous subsection. The newspapers give no attention to the intolerance to critical journalism that exists within a lot of African media organizations, including Essa's organization, apart from China's involvement. The generalization of such a single instances shows both the prejudice of the West as well as it hurts the ability to see the subtler, less crude and indirect ways of influence of China's engagement in African media.¹⁶⁸ Second, there is no eye for the specific business interests of individual (media) companies. The newspapers' perspective of seeing the media companies as direct means of Beijing shuts down the opportunity to see the specific (commercial) objectives of these companies that are not entirely compatible with those of the Chinese state.¹⁶⁹ The idea of conflicting interests between (and within) the state and the media organizations seems to be impossible to grasp within the cognitive scheme that the West holds of China in Africa

In conclusion of the three previous sections, the dominant identity of the Chinese in Africa regarding soft power is a homogenous state-directed actor whose deeds are *wrong* and have a negative impact on Africa. The Chinese are first seen as economic focused agents, but eventually this shifts to an agent who is more concerned about the image others have of them.

¹⁶⁷ Zhang and Smith, 'China's foreign aid system'.

¹⁶⁸ Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales, 'The limits of Chinese interference in Africa's media landscape', *The Asia Dialogue*, last modified 16 October 2018, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2018/10/16/the-limits-of-chinese-interference-in-africas-media-landscape/>, accessed on 1 May 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Li, *Mediatized China- Africa Relations*, 9.; Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 'The limits of Chinese interference in Africa's media landscape'.

Moreover, the problem with media is not per se the inaccuracy of their reports, the facts and figures are often right, but it reflects an ideological bias which it lacks to acknowledge. This contributes to the creation of the paradoxical situation where the Chinese are concerned about the image others have about their identity in Africa, but the activities they undertake to challenge this identity only strengthens the negative perception because it fits into the image they West already held of China in Africa.

3.5 The West doesn't use soft power, they just have it

This section is dedicated to finding out how the newspapers portray the West regarding soft power in the China-Africa nexus. What is the West's understanding of itself? The attentive reader already has seen signs of this in the previous sections. It has become clear that the newspapers have quite a negative judgment of China's soft power in Africa, either about the protection of economic interests or its activities in Africa's media landscape. With condemning China's motivations and actions, the newspapers implicitly say that the West would never do such things. Examples about Chinese soft power in foreign aid and in media are used to argue that the newspapers lack to acknowledge the West's soft power grip on Africa.

For example, Chinese foreign aid is compared to Western foreign aid, and it is made clear that the Western version is both practically and morally better. Moreover, Chinese aid is hurting the good efforts of Western aid. Besides the package deals that are condemned, as seen in the previous sections, there are plenty other examples of a view of superiority of the West. One of the most heard criticisms is that Chinese aid is not transparent and does not adhere to the OECD rules of official development aid (ODA).¹⁷⁰ It is implicitly stated that not complying to these norms makes China inherently worse, though it has no official obligation to do so.¹⁷¹ Other criticism is seen in the notion that China's approach "effectively shores up the rule of ... Africa's most tenaciously authoritarian rulers"¹⁷² The West's approach would never lead to that. Another example highlights that China heavily rewards countries that vote in line with them at the United Nations, and simultaneously downplays the notion that the United States does the same.¹⁷³ Summing up these examples, China's aid is portrayed as bad. However, this perspective is problematic because academic literature shows that China's aid is not so much

¹⁷⁰ Provost and Harris, 'China pulls the purse strings in Africa charm offensive'; Economist, 'No place like home'.

¹⁷¹ Among others: Edwin Muchapondwa Daniel Nielson, Bradley Parks, Austin M. Strange and Michael J. Tierney, 'Ground-Truthing' Chinese Development Finance in Africa: Field Evidence from South Africa and Uganda', *The Journal of Development Studies*, 52 (2016):6, 780-796.; Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift*, 14.

¹⁷² Smith, 'China denies building empire in Africa'.

¹⁷³ Economist, 'A despot's guide to foreign aid'.

different than Western aid. Even sources that the newspapers use, such as AidData, show this.¹⁷⁴ This perspective, however, does not seem to fit into the image the West has of itself in comparison with China in Africa.

The way the West perceives itself is also seen in the criticism of China's efforts to enhance their global image, most prominently in media. China's insertion into African media is predominantly seen as a battle between the West and China. The West recognizes that China wants to increase its discourse and wants to challenge the dominant (and unchallenged) Western media narrative, however, they hardly show an understanding of why China would want this. The existence of Western dominance in Africa in forms such as *BBC*, *TV5* or *CNN* on prime-time TV, the availability of *The Guardian*, *Jeune Afrique* or *Financial Times* in newsstands all over the continent, or the fact that African journalist heavily copy their European counterparts, seems not to be understood as a form of Western soft power.¹⁷⁵ This situation seems to be perceived as normal, natural and taken for granted. The West is unbiased, so why would you want to tell another story? It is, therefore, portrayed as a battle between real and fake, between good and bad.¹⁷⁶

Admittedly, some alternative and contrary points are made in the articles to show that the West is not holier than thou with its soft power features. For example, “There are a lot of reasons countries give aid and China is no different These [education and training programmes] are all about diplomacy, about soft power ... like the Alliance Francaise and the British Council. All the big countries do this’.”¹⁷⁷ Or about Western and Chinese media: “Of course, influence campaigns are nothing new; the US and the UK, among others, have aggressively courted journalists, offering enticements such as freebie trips and privileged access to senior officials”.¹⁷⁸ Besides the scarcity of such self-reflective statements, it is emphasized that China is different, goes further than the West and crosses moral lines. For instance, as a

¹⁷⁴ Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, Bradley Parks, Austin M. Strange, Michael J. Tierney, ‘Apples and Dragon Fruits: The Determinants of Aid and Other Forms of State Financing from China to Africa’, *AidData Working Paper 15*, October (2015).; Axel Dreher, Andreas Fuchs, ‘Rogue aid? An empirical analysis of China's aid allocation’, *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 48 (2015): 3, 988-1023.

¹⁷⁵ Examples drawn from: Anshan, Li, “Soft Power and the Role of Media A Case Study of PKU African Tele-Info”, (Draft, Peking University, 2014), 1.; Lauren, Gorfinkel Sandy Joffe, Cobus Van Staden, and Yu-Shan Wu, ‘CCTV’s Global Outreach: Examining the Audiences of China’s ‘New Voice’ on Africa’, *Media International Australia*, 151 (2014): 1, 81–88, 84.

¹⁷⁶ Economist, ‘Soft power and censorship’.

¹⁷⁷ Provost and Harris, ‘China pulls the purse strings in Africa charm offensive’.; Interestingly, this rebuttal is voiced by Deborah Bräutigam. This shows again that newspapers lack the capacity to recognize Western dominance themselves and need input from outside to bring nuance, in this instance from Bräutigam. However, Bräutigam’s point is downplayed right after, by pointing at the business interests behind China’s soft power program, as is also argued in section 3.3.1: “Other programmes can be linked to China’s trade agenda.”

¹⁷⁸ Lim and Bergin, ‘Inside China’s audacious global propaganda campaign’

continuation of the previous quote: “But unlike those countries, China’s communist party does not accept a plurality of views.”¹⁷⁹

In conclusion, the West does not see that it exerts soft power in Africa. Perhaps this has to do with the normality of Western presence all over the African continent. To go back to IR Scholar Ying Fan’s quote that “soft power is merely a manifestation or presentation of hard power”, it is obvious that the West has manifested its hard power a long time ago. The prevailing idea that the West has addressed and changed their former mistakes and behavior does not include the acknowledgment that remnants of its presence still exist in the form of its dominant soft power.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter shows that Chinese soft power is predominantly perceived as something that is actively exerted by Beijing. That the Chinese government is identified as the primary agent of China’s soft power is not particularly strange, since the state is commonly seen as such.¹⁸⁰ However, the newspapers rarely seem to acknowledge the possibility that other Chinese agents have or exert soft power. Moreover, the newspapers’ portrayal changes from soft power as an economic mechanism towards soft power exertion with more political motivations and, most prominently, to enhance China’s global image. An obvious explanation for this change seems to be the fact that China’s media engagement in Africa is relatively new and, therefore, receives increasing attention and scrutiny.¹⁸¹

Most importantly, however, in contradiction to the west, China is perceived as a blunt and amoral actor. The way China exerts their soft power neither fits the conceptual understanding the West has of soft power – as something you just have and not as something you can create with the use of hard power elements – nor does it adhere to the Western values and standards that are often the substance of soft power exertion. From a Western view, China’s soft power is not actually ‘soft’, its rather an accumulation of awkward government programs that are consequently discounted as artificial or propaganda. This negative image fits the overall predominant negative perception of identity that West already holds of China in Africa. The

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁰ Zahran and Ramos, “From hegemony to soft power: implications of a conceptual change”, 19.; Fijałkowski, ‘China’s ‘soft power’ in Africa’, 225.

¹⁸¹ For example, CCTV started in Africa in 2012. Moreover, besides growing newspaper attention towards China’s engagement in African media, academic interest for the phenomenon is also quite new. A Social Science Research Council mapping study published in 2017 identified ‘media studies’ as one of two new emerging thematic concentrations within the China-Africa research.; Tatiana Carayannis and Lucas Niewenhuis, ‘China-Africa: State of the Literature 2012–2017’, Social Science Research Council, December (2017).; Alden and Large, *New Directions in Africa-China Studies*, xv.

negative perception of identity of the Chinese and China's soft power can become problematic, however, because it leaves no room to understand potential natural, unique or individual cases of Chinese soft power exertion or the various motivations and interests of Chinese soft power agents.

Conclusion: New phenomenon, same old response

The first two decennia of the 21st century saw a deepening of the relations between China and African countries and, subsequently, increasing Western attention for this relationship. Together, these developments gave rise to the research question of how the West perceives the Chinese and China's activities in Africa. Besides answering this question, the objective of this thesis was twofold. First, this thesis designed and used a new framework with which the Western perception of China in Africa could be assessed systematically. Furthermore, and building on the first objective, it tried to answer the research question in terms of identity. In doing so, it aspired to contribute to the research on (Western perceptions of) China in Africa as well as to (historical) International Relations research on the influence of social identity. To do so, China's engagement with Africa was divided into two topic areas. The second chapter gave notice of the economic aspects of China's engagement. The third chapter considered the soft power aspects of the China-Africa nexus. Both chapters researched how the Chinese were perceived, - who is China, what do they do and why – and how the newspapers saw the West (i.e. itself) within the nexus.

The answers to these questions are different for each chapter. Looking at the economic aspects, two different identities of the Chinese are perceived by the West. There is a homogeneous government-directed Chinese with a macro-economic view on one side and a more diverse Chinese with interests in different business opportunities on the other side. Moreover, the latter identity functions as an alternative and challenge towards the former. Despite the distinction (which is not always crystal clear), both share the image of a predominantly self-interested economic (and amoral) actor. Regarding soft power, China is perceived as a blunt and amoral actor, with a unitary Chinese government as the primary agent. Although this tendency remains stable throughout the timeframe of this study, the newspapers' portrayal changes over time from soft power as an economic mechanism towards soft power exertion via media organizations to enhance China's image.

Bringing both answers together offers interesting insights. Reviewing the economic part, the tendency of negatively projecting China's engagement in Africa as a homogenous project with neocolonial intentions seems to be fading due to the challenge of an alternative discourse. However, putting this in juxtaposition to the Western perception of China's soft power shows that such an alternative or challenging identity is absent in the latter. Moreover, the discourse about Chinese soft power seems to be an extension of the traditional pessimistic (neo-colonial) narrative on economic engagement. China's soft power exertion is regarded as

the next round in China's invasion of Africa. While the media seems to move away from a solely pessimistic view of China's economic engagement, they return to such a narrative when Chinese soft power is the topic. Even more so, this narrative can flourish because dissident voices, which are present in the discourse about China's economic engagement, are not (yet) heard. Chinese soft power in Africa might be a new phenomenon for the West, but it receives a familiar response.

This observation forms a valuable addition to the historiography on Western perceptions of China's engagement in Africa. Even though China's influence on Africa is still predominantly seen in a negative light, both the alternative perspective on economic engagement as well as the attention for soft power are new to the stage. On the one hand, this is further substantiation of the prudent change of discourse towards a more diverse and less simplistic approach, such as seen by Mørk and Wei. On the other, the new (and negative) perception of Chinese soft power contradicts this change. Concerns in one area have been dismissed, but have reappeared in another domain.

Nevertheless, blunt neo-colonial accusations in media discourse are fading away. However, the Western defensiveness that these colonial references embodied has not disappeared.¹⁸² Especially regarding soft power, making colonial references about, for instance, Africa's media landscape or medical aid, would appear rather obscure. However, Western dominance in these areas as a remnant of its colonial past is clear. Chinese soft power in Africa is seen as a challenge to the current (and 'normal') situation in Africa.

Although these insights are valuable, the limited character of this study can hardly provide a definitive answer to the question of how the West perceives the Chinese and China's engagement in Africa. A few critical points of this study could be improved by a new research project. First, although *The Guardian* and *The Economist* are newspapers with international allure, including more newspapers from different countries would have increased the generalizability of the results. Second, including the Western perception on the position of African nations and citizens within the China-Africa nexus could have been worthwhile. Although this perspective got modest attention within some sections of this thesis, time constraints and the word limit restricted the inclusion of a more elaborate analysis. Ironically and despitefully, this contributes to the claim that 'African agency' is often overseen in media and academic research on China-Africa relations.¹⁸³ Finally, the framework of social identity

¹⁸² More about this defensiveness in section 2.3 as well as in the introduction.

¹⁸³ Both my own claim in section 2.3. as well as by authors who researched 'African agency' in the China-Africa relation, see for example: Giles Mohan and Ben Lampert, 'Negotiating China: Reinserting African agency into China-Africa relations',

and its methodological compartment of framing worked sufficiently. However, both its artificialness as well as the unfamiliarity of the author with the framework restricted its use. Perhaps the concept of framing would have worked better when it was used in a more explicit and traditional way to find the semantics, structures, and selections deployed in the texts.¹⁸⁴

Although this study has been very critical on media discourse about China in Africa, it *must* remain debatable if and to what extent China intends to control Africa's economic, cultural and ideological sphere. However, neo-colonial accusations and poorly-informed assumption will not help the credibility of this debate.

African Affairs, 112 (2013): 446, 92-110.; Peter Kragelund and Carmody, Padraig, 'Who Is in Charge - State Power and Agency in Sino-African Relations', *Cornell International Law Journal*, 49 (2016) 1, 1-23.

¹⁸⁴ Such approaches were taken by Mawdsley and Mørk.; Mawdsley, 'Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent'; Mørk, "China in Africa".

Appendix 1 – Selection of newspaper articles

As explained in Chapter 1, UK based newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Economist* were chosen as providers of the articles that functioned as primary sources in this thesis. This appendix shows how the articles that are eventually present in this thesis were selected. First, LexisNexis functioned as the database for *The Guardian* articles and Gale for *The Economist* articles. These databases claim to contain every article published within the selected timeframe (2013-2018). Utrecht University licenses provided full access to these databases. Second, within these databases, the search terms ‘China OR Chinese’ AND ‘Africa OR African’ were used to identify possible useful articles. The initial selection was based on the title of the article, the highlight (if this was shown) and the number of hits of the search terms. If an article reflected anything connected to ‘China in Africa’, the article was scanned through quickly and downloaded if deemed to have at least some relevance. This resulted in the selection of 66 *Guardian* articles and 14 *Economist* articles. Third, by quick reading and scanning through the articles it was decided if an article would be fit for analysis. The fitness was mostly decided on if the article was actually about the China-Africa relation and if the article was more than a simple news piece reflecting press statements. Eventually, 19 *Guardian* and 11 *Economist* were selected for further analysis.

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