**The impact of perceptions of China's human rights and sustainable development on its soft power initiatives in South Africa**

**By**

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# DECLARATION

I, *Willemien Calitz*, hereby declare that the work on which this dissertation/thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study examines how China's human rights and sustainable development record is covered in mainstream South African media. It further explores how this coverage has been shaped by influences on South African journalists as set out by Reese's (2001) explanation of the hierarchy of influences. Furthermore, it also examines Chinese outgoing media's counter-coverage of China's human rights and sustainable development, as well as how this coverage is shaped through the hierarchy of influences in Chinese newsrooms.

The study contributes to our understanding of how Chinese soft power operates in different contexts. The frames found in this study reveals how China is portrayed in South Africa media, in comparison to how China portrays itself in its outgoing media, and therefore how it aims to be perceived. The interviews with South African and Chinese journalists on the other hand, provides insight to the influences that produce these two types of coverage of China. This contributes to our understanding of China's soft power successes and failures thus far, and the role that the media plays in wielding that power.

## 1. China in Africa: the controversy of sustainable development and human rights

The relationship between China and Africa can be traced back to at least the fifteenth century, and China has maintained relations with the African continent in a variety of forms (Wasserman, 2012; Webster, 2013). China and African countries share similarities as developing nations, having socialist legacies, and colonial or semi-colonial histories. China's entry onto the African economic scene was delayed by the Western-led "Washington Consensus, privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and austerity policies" (Sautman & Hairong, 2007:77). The China-Africa relationship has been cemented in recent years with China's "Going Out" policy encouraging China to increase trade and diplomacy with African nations.

Many claims have circulated in the global media discourse that China is a "neocolonial" force on the African continent (Sautman & Hairong, 2007; Hairong & Sautman, 2013; Norberg, 2006). In 2011 the then U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary

Clinton, warned African nations that China's conduct did not meet international standards of good governance and transparency (Hairong & Sautman, 2013). Also in 2011, the US-African affairs official Johnnie Carson claimed that China was stealing jobs from Africans and failing to comply with local labour laws, pay decent wages, train staff, and share technology (Hairong & Sautman, 2013). The U.S. labelled China a "rogue creditor" for providing low-interest loans to African nations without political conditions (Phillips, 2006). Additionally, Western nations have criticised China's foreign policy. "In its drive to secure reliable supplies of raw materials, it is said, China is coddling dictators, despoiling poor countries and undermining Western efforts to spread democracy and prosperity" (Lucas, 2008).

China's involvement in Africa has been perceived as controversial for several reasons, including China having a lack of concern for good governance, transparency, freedom of the press, worker's rights, human rights, and environmental protection in Africa (Sautman & Hairong, 2009; French, 2014). At the core of this criticism lies the perception that China exports its environmental damage and human rights abuses to the African continent: "The lax environmental and labor standards by which Chinese companies operate in Africa unfortunately replicate the lax environmental and labor standards practiced at home" (Webster, 2013:650).

## 2. China and sustainable development

China has rapidly expanded its environmental footprint in Africa (Bosshard, 2008 & Taylor, 2015). The Chinese government and state-supported enterprises have made significant investments in African resources, and by extension, mines, oil exploration and secondary infrastructure, such as pipelines, roads, railways, power plants and transmission lines. According to Webster (2013), China's objectives in Africa are perceived as essentially exploitative, extracting the continent's natural resources to feed China's growth.

China's integrated investment strategy is visible across the African continent. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) entered Sudan in 1995 and expanded its exploration after Western competitors withdrew because of public outrage over their complicity in the country's civil war. In 2005, Sudan provided 5% of China's oil imports, and China is the largest importer of Sudanese oil. China invested in a

pipeline, an oil refinery, a railroad, and several thermal and hydroelectric power plants, such as the Merowe Dam. China is implementing similar investment packages in Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, and Zambia (Bosshard, 2008).

In Gabon, the activities of the Chinese state-run oil company Sinopec have stimulated public outrage. In 2002, Gabon selected a quarter of the country as a nature reserve, protecting 67,000 square kilometres of mostly virgin rainforest. Sinopec has since been found to prospect for oil in one of Gabon's national parks, without approval of their environmental impact study. The company has been charged with mass pollution, illegally dynamiting areas of the park and carving roads through the forest. A Gabonese government delegation visited the park and corroborated that Sinopec was guilty of a variety of environmentally damaging practices (Taylor, 2015).

These kinds of activities and enterprises occur especially in countries with weak governance structures (Taylor, 2015; Bosshard, 2008). However, alongside cases of what John Lonsdale (2000) refers to as "African agency in tight corners," contexts have also emerged showcasing multiple forms of African agency working to its own benefits. Researchers have found African governments both colluding with and resisting the Chinese government (Haglund, 2008; Ampiah & Naidu, 2008; Ferreira, 2008).

According to Mohan and Lampert (2012:108), "weak local political capacity is a toxic cocktail in which Chinese firms are relatively free to abuse labour and environmental laws". African trade unions have achieved mixed results in improving local working conditions in Chinese enterprises, particularly where government support has been influential in its organised labour. They opine: "Africa cannot be seen as simply a passive space increasingly subject to intervention by China" (Mohan & Lampert, 2012:109)and further emphasise the responsibility of academics not to overlook African agency and create "political nihilism" in China-Africa studies. African actors have also shaped the China-Africa political relationship to benefit African development at the levels of the individual, organised civil society, and within parts of the state.

However, it appears that most often the African political and business elites benefit from the Africa-China relationship, such as the elite "nodes" (Mohan & Lampert, 2012) of central government that provide protection for Chinese firms, which might

weaken the accountability of political and economic governance (Mohan & Lampert, 2012). Furthermore, concerns have arisen that Chinese competitors are using lower environmental standards as a strategy to win a larger business share in the international infrastructure and extractive sectors. In this light, investment and expansion into Africa can be viewed negatively and is increasingly becoming a serious topic of debate, particularly in Western academia and media (Taylor, 2007; Tull, 2006).

*China and Wildlife Trafficking*

Particularly significant to the South African context is the perception of Chinese involvement in wildlife trafficking. According to Thompson (2015), the East Africa coordinator of Traffic, South Africa has seen an increase in both elephant tusk and rhino horn trade. Whereas about 13 rhino were poached in 2007, about 1 200 were poached in 2014. Large numbers of pangolins, abalone, lion bone and even timber are increasingly exported to places such as China – both legally and illegally. Shaw (2015) maintains that poaching and its accompanying violence is becoming more sophisticated. "This leads to an increase of militarisation by government: is this the most useful or holistic solution to the problem? Government is simply providing more guns" (Shaw, 2015).

Julian Rademeyer (2015) from the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime calls for an international approach to tackle the chain of wildlife trade that he labels as African countries to Laos, Vietnam and China. "The poachers on the ground are easily recruited by international crime organisations. They are expendable and easily replaced. Thus shooting and arresting on-the-ground poachers is not the key solution" (Rademeyer, 2015). According to Rademeyer, the so-called "kingpins" are the least at risk. "Therefore the linkages need to be drawn between various countries that are involved. This is a big organised crime network that requires collaboration at a global level." He explains that poaching syndicates' reach goes beyond wildlife trade to weapons exchange and the drug trade – all of these at an increasing human cost. "People are dying – for example three rangers and a soldier have recently been gunned down, and roughly seven soldiers have died in SA" (Rademeyer, 2015). About 300 poachers have been killed in the last five years, which impacts poor communities since these are often their breadwinners.

Eradicating the ivory and rhino horn market, which is often perceived to be located in China, is central to the illegal wildlife trafficking debate. Western media has referred to China as a "threat" to the wildlife in Africa (Leithead, 2016). According to the BBC, illegal wildlife trade is driven by economic development in China. "China is just a bigger scale. We not only have to address the demand in China, but we also have to address Chinese criminal networks that have penetrated the supply chains here in Africa" (Leithead, 2016:1).

According to Zhou (2015), the Chinese government prioritises environmental conservation. China's 13th Five-Year Plan includes the aim to eliminate illegal wildlife trade. Among others, China issued the "Guidance on Accelerating Building of Ecological Civilisation" policy in 2015 and launched a national Inter-Agency CITES[1] Enforcement Coordination Group in 2011. "This has helped to increase the effectiveness of combating illegal wildlife trade in China" (Zhou, 2015). In 2014 the Chinese government committed $10 million in aid to wildlife protection in Africa, and in 2015, implemented policies banning ivory import and export, ivory carving and trophy hunting (Zhou, 2015).

Poaching is subject to severe punishment in China. China has launched outreach and education programmes on wildlife trafficking in countries such as Ethiopia and Mozambique (Zhou, 2015). Several high-profile campaigns using Asian celebrities and Chinese social networks have been launched to educate new generations on the impact of consuming ivory, abalone, and rhino horn.

According to Thompson (2015), the word "poaching" tends to elicit images of rhino horn or ivory from elephants being exported to China. "We see Chinese involved in this trade. But they are not doing this alone, they are doing this in collaboration with their African counterparts" (Thompson, 2015). Addressing the corruption and collusion involved in this issue has also been deemed crucial (Rademeyer, 2015). Because of the complex financial flows, the issue of wildlife trade goes beyond government and requires the involvement of the corporate sector as well (Thompson, 2015).

[1] Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

A major challenge in addressing wildlife trade is communication and translation skills. Rademeyer (2015) notes, for example, that cases have been thrown out of courts because there were no Vietnamese interpreters available. There is also a lack of understanding of how poaching syndicates operate; research seems to be dated and law enforcement is also lacking expertise in this area.

## 3. China and human rights

China has reviewed and appraised its human rights policy since the late 80s. In 2004, the Chinese Constitution was amended to include in Article 33 the phrase: "The State respects and preserves human rights" (Krumbein, 2015:159). Rhodes (2013) defines China's human rights as "where human rights are defined and conferred on the individual by the state, and can thus be taken away by the state."

The People's Republic of China (PRC) promotes collective rights, such as the right to development, over individual rights. Ideological differences often put China at odds with Western-oriented commentators who perceive collective rights as unessential, and a natural outcome of the implementation of individual rights. According to the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP, 2017:8), criticism of China's human rights record is "often simplistically portrayed as the West finding fault with a repressive East". Defenders of China's human rights record claim that the state's approach to human rights is sufficient to safeguard citizens against exploitation by the controversial hukou system, one-child policy, and capital punishment, among others (ISDP, 2017).

China's tumultuous history might have led to its emphasis on collective rights, and shaped its view on the way citizens interact with the state (ISDP, 2017). Historically, China has been subjected to famine, war and internal strife, as well as the challenging first steps towards modernisation. These incidences left large portions of the mainland vulnerable to malnutrition, violence, disease, infant mortality, and trauma. Therefore, the Chinese state emphasises the right to development and economic opportunities, both of which are codified in the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development. China's National Human Rights Action Plan for 2016-2020 enshrines its belief "in the rights to work, education, employment, social security and basic

subsistence" (Webster, 2013:649), as part of the UN platform on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights – of which China is a signatory (ISDP, 2017).

China's National Human Rights Action Plan specifically targets migrant workers, a key driver of the transformation of China into a global economic powerhouse, aiming to increase opportunities for them to start small businesses and encourage skill-specific training (ISDP, 2017). Labour rights have increasingly received public attention via the media and NGOs, which has put government and employers under pressure to improve working conditions. However, according to Chen (2007), labour laws are still largely ignored and poorly implemented in China. One constraint of this implementation is the Chinese state prioritising "efficiency over equity" (Chen, 2007:60), which is perceived to be exported to the African continent (Webster, 2013).

One particular case which has put the priority of human rights in the China-Africa relationship in the spotlight, has been copper mining in Zambia. Contributing factors to this discourse have been Zambia's Patriotic Front's (PF) anti-China sentiments and a Human Rights Watch (HRW) 120-page report published in 2011 (Hairong & Sautman, 2013). When the PF came into power in Zambia in 2011, it essentially changed its position on China and Chinese firms, but "the consequences of its anti-Chinese incitement remain very much present" (Hairong & Sautman; 2013:132).

The China Non-Ferrous Metal Mining (CNMC) Group's African subsidiary, Non-Ferrous Metals Mining Company Africa (NFCA) owns the four companies Chambishi Mine, Luanshya, Sino Metals and Chambishi Copper Smelter, that came under fire in the 2011 HRW report. The HRW criticises Chinese-run copper mining companies in Zambia for routinely flouting labour laws and regulations designed to protect workers' safety and the right to organise (Hairong & Sautman, 2013).

The report is based on research conducted during 2010 and 2011 and draws on more than 170 interviews, including with 95 mine workers from the Chinese mines mentioned above, and 48 from other multinational mining operations. "Sometimes when you find yourself in a dangerous position, they tell you to go ahead with the work", an underground miner at Non-Ferrous China Africa (NFCA) told HRW. "They just consider production, not safety. If someone dies, he can be replaced

tomorrow. And if you report the problem, you'll lose your job" (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Hairong and Sautman (2013) later researched the various accusations against the PRC in the HRW report and both debunked some as myths or placed them in a broader context. They maintain that "the HRW report singles out China and Chinese for scrutiny and in a way that is methodologically problematic and inconsistent with sound social science" (Hairong & Sautman, 2013:132). Essentially HRW accused Chinese companies of being the "biggest violator of workers' rights among Zambian copper industry employers", as the worst offenders regarding safety, wages, hours, unionisation and job security (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

However, Hairong and Sautman (2013) argued that the interviews conducted by the HRW were not representative of permanent workers, and that they interviewed a sample of PF supporters – who are known to have a strong anti-Chinese sentiment. The researchers furthermore mentioned that close observers of Zambian mining disagreed about China being the worst regarding safety, and that the focus on the Chinese-owned mine has actually shielded the other foreign-owned mines from criticism. Zambia's Assistant Labour Commissioner listed only Chinese companies when asked about which mining companies complied with Zambian labour laws, and they were commended for their advanced technology that affects health and safety (Hairong & Sautman, 2013).

Hairong & Sautman (2013) essentially found that Chinese mines were on par with, or at times an improvement on, western-owned mines operating in Zambia. However, thousands of media reports about HRW's study fueled the fire of anti-China sentiment on the African continent (Dow Jones Network, 2011; Voice of America, 2011; Radio Free Asia, 2011). China's ambassador to Zambia at the time commented that "in the 'Western media' … if you have not written something bad about China in a given day, then you have not done your job" (Hairong & Sautman, 2013:152).

*Chinese prison labour in Africa*

Since the late 2000s, rumours have circulated globally that China sends convicts to developing countries. According to Hairong and Sautman (2012:399) in 2010,

"newspapers on five continents promoted these rumours to 'facts' by publishing sensational, but unsubstantiated, charges about the export of Chinese prisoners". Hairong and Sautman argued that Roberta Cohen, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, sparked these rumours by claiming in a *New York Times* article that 75 per cent of workers that China's Jiangsu Construction Co. employed to build a road in Benin were Chinese convicts. In 2008, a British tabloid published an article entitled *How China is taking over Africa and why we in the West should be VERY worried* (Malone, 2008) accusing China of shipping prisoners as a form of cheap labour to Africa. The article was then reproduced globally by other newspapers and websites (Hairong and Sautman, 2013).

> They are said to have been made to fight rebels, build a pipeline, guard oil installations in Sudan, put up parliament buildings in Malawi and Gabon, work in mines and build power stations in Zambia, labour on roads and plantations in Zimbabwe, work as textile and garment workers in [privately-owned Taiwanese] factories in Lesotho, slave in a cement factory in Rwanda, engage in construction and even serve as "foreign experts" in Nigeria (Hairong & Sautman, 2013:400).

Though they have since been debunked, initial rumours portrayed Chinese prisoners coming to Africa as opting to do their time overseas, that ex-convicts are paroled into developing countries, or, in the majority of portrayals, that prisoners were forcibly sent out to work as cheap labour. Often quoted in western media, Michael Sata, leader of Zambia's then opposition Patriotic Front (PF) claimed: "Zambia has become a labour camp. Most of the Chinese are prisoners of conscience" (Hairong & Sautman, 2013:406). The Chinese managers in Africa interviewed by Hairong and Sautman (2013) "found the idea of importing convicts laughable because of African governments' close scrutiny of and long delays in processing applications for visas and work permits" (Hairong & Sautman, 2013:413).

Hairong and Sautman (2013) conclude that the portrayal of China's poor human rights in light of prison labour, evokes themes of authoritarianism (China's abundance of prison labour as "slaves"), another Chinese export (along with cheap goods, labour) and colonialism (cruel exploitation). Despite China's contribution to Africa in the form of infrastructure projects, agricultural experiments, educational facilities, and

pilot projects, criticism remains for their "human rights footprint" on the continent (Webster, 2013).

## 4. Sustainable development, human rights and the media

*Sustainable development and the media*

Sustainable development is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today. Defined in the 1987 Brundtland report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987), sustainable development reflects an important acknowledgement of the interconnected social and ecological issues humanity wrestles with globally (Yacoumis, 2018). Barbier (1987), cited in Adelekan (2009), states that "the primary objective of sustainable economic development focuses on creating lasting and secure livelihoods based on minimisation of resource depletion and environmental degradation". Following Holt & Barkemeyer (2012), this study combined the terms sustainability and sustainable development and used it interchangeably, since though they differ, they both refer to the same basic conceptual framework of the consideration of ecological impact of development (Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012; Yacoumis, 2018). The link between environment and development is particularly strong in sub-Saharan Africa where nations heavily depend on agriculture and natural resources for their economic growth.

While the concept of sustainable development has been contested for its "utopianism" (Yacoumis, 2018), other critics have challenged the concepts of green growth or ecological modernisation embedded in the current sustainable development paradigm for the belief that economic growth and ecological protection are mutually compatible. Ecological modernisation emerged as an environmental discourse in the 1980s, and more recently as a political discourse as a more moderate alternative to the radical consideration of demodernisation as a response to ecological destruction. (Kangas, 2019). As continued economic growth inevitably means an increase in resource consumption, it could lead to a global collapse of ecosystems. This further raises issues of equity and poverty, as some scholars argue sustainable development currently reproduces the embedded structures of power in a capitalist society that perpetuates the global environmental crisis, and which prioritises its offset through

technological innovation and incremental political reform (Kangas, 2019; Kemp & Van Lente, 2011; Yacoumis, 2018).

Alongside the Brundtland Commission Report, the 1992 UNCED report not only highlights a crucial economic development and environment link, but the importance of environmental information in achieving public engagement with sustainable development issues (Adelekan, 2009). Sustainable development and climate change has seen an increase in sustainability awareness (Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012; Yacoumis, 2018), often facilitated by media coverage on television, in newspapers, online, and through films and documentaries, as well as school curricula and environmental education programmes (Adelekan, 2009; Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012). The press is influential through its gatekeeping and agenda-setting role: the media informs and educates the public on important issues, creates perspectives on these issues and influences behavioural change and action from the public, including policy making. (Adelekan, 2009; Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012; Yacoumis, 2018). However, Holt & Barkemeyer argue that sustainable development issues have not sufficiently moved into the mainstream of public consciousness.

Throughout the history of environmentalism, some issues have risen to prominence around a specific event, and then faded from public view, and this is still reflected by the findings of SustainAbility's tracking of sustainability in the media (Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012). Since mainstream media responds to breaking news and events, journalists find it challenging to sustain the public's interest in sustainable development, and often coverage is centered around policy or legislative trigger events such as the 2012 Rio +20 Sustainable Development Summit, and more recently the Paris climate conference (Adelekan, 2009; Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012). Similarly, an increase in coverage of climate change was found when Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* reached its peak in 2007 (Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012). Yacoumis argues that the media treats these trigger events with skepticism – particularly on the topics of diplomacy and politics. Furthermore, sustainability issues often compete with other urgent topics such as politics and the economy, and coverage decreased during late 2008 as the global focus turned to the recession at the time (Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012). Adelekan (2009) argues that the "creeping nature" of the sustainable development issue reduces its salience. He encourages coverage to interpret global events as they affect local contexts, as he found the environmental

link to everyday life lacking in his case study on the Nigerian press' coverage of climate change.

In their study on community radio in Zambia, Young & McComas (2016) found that although sustainable development campaigns are dominated by new media, there is still a great need for traditional media in developing countries with little access to electricity or the Internet. Young's study examines the use of media to increase the adoption of sustainability agriculture among farmers in Zambia who listen to an educational radio programme called Farm Talk, produced by Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO). Farm Talk could be considered an innovative form of entertainment education, which combines entertainment and education to help create positive social change. Most of the success of this radio programme is attributed to the fact that the producers, Comaco, is trusted by the rural Zambian community.

Though most media positions itself as truthful and objective, Yacoumis (2018) adds that regarding sustainable development, coverage may reproduce hegemony, by reflecting dominant discourses, ideologies, and power relations. Such discourses include the portrayal of the global South as idle in terms of sustainability and development, and therefore needing assistance – essentially financial or technology-based, from rich countries. These discourses also blame developing countries for climate negotiation failures. Yacoumis' study of Australian media coverage of sustainable development, found that coverage centered around discontent with environmental policy, the promise of technology as solution to sustainability, the business case for sustainability, and the image of progress in the sustainability field. The latter theme overwhelmingly dominated – symbolising an expectation of growing commitment to sustainability. In particular the journey metaphor was used, which avoids defining where society is and where it is heading, but suggests to the reader that achieving the "silver sustainability bullet" is within reach. Such frames shield readers from contradictions between economic growth and environmental protection, and consequently impedes further public and political engagement.

In his examination of the visualisation of sustainability in the media, Kangas found a *technological dualism* inherent in the conventional media imagery of climate change. This dualism builds on the media's use of two particular visual themes recurring in media climate imagery: fossil fuel factories ("smokestacks") and wind or solar

(renewable) energy. These images represent alternatives to each other, embody the conceptual categories of "cause" and "response", and suggest a technology-oriented view on climate change (Kangas, 2019). These binaries are both anthropocentric – smokestacks represent the human impact on nature, whereas renewable energy represents the human-driven solution through technology. According to Kangas, journalism presents two modernities – the current destructive vs a future ecological one, and as such simplifies sustainable development issues rather than encouraging more complex discussions of what true ecological modernity might be.

Yacoumis (2018) also accuses the media of distorting, over-determining and simplifying reality, often reproducing news from foreign press without a detailed analysis of environmental events and issues. This is exacerbated by the resource, time, and space constraints increasingly facing newsprint journalists. Yacoumis' study found that authors were from a wide range of fields as the topic has a broad scope, but also highlights an absence of journalistic expertise in the sustainable development beat. Meaningful analysis beyond mere reporting is necessary, and in particular, a focus on the involvement and accountability of relevant stakeholders. Adelekan (2009) refers to sustainable development coverage as an example of Schoenfeld's (1980) "journalism of uncertainty". This is evident in environmental reporting's challenge to comprehend and communicate the deeply interconnected system of people, resource and technology, and consequently also not providing the needed complexity of the energy, economy and environment link.

*Human rights and the media*

The media's involvement in human rights protection became prominent in the 1990s, when several governments started incorporating human rights principles in their legal frameworks (Sadaf, 2017). The modern human rights movement relies on the media as an essential partner to hold governments accountable for human rights violations. Amnesty International was born from the union of human rights activists and the press, while Human Rights Watch from its inception relied on the media for public naming and shaming of human rights violators (Winston & Pollock, 2016).

According to Hamelink (2001), the media relates to human rights on various levels, including creating awareness. Exposure gives recognition to victims, identifies the perpetrators, shames perpetrators so as to deter future violations, relieves some of the

burden on the victims, shapes public opinion on human rights matters and educates a general public (Hamelink, 2001:4; Pulfer, 2012). Though the media is considered instrumental in human rights coverage, limited media attention is paid to the topic, and few media still have a human rights beat covering the topic with expertise and context. News reporting often depends on immediacy or sensationalism of short-lived events, while human rights reporting requires background, context and in-depth analysis of long-term processes. (Hamelink, 2001). Pulfer (2012) explains that training at the Journalism for Human Rights (JHR) organisation focuses on foregrounding human rights issues faced by the poor and marginalised, and holding authorities to account to protect those rights, ideally by linking coverage to policy and legislation. The JHR's criteria for a good human rights story includes that it should be participatory, and balanced; should allow relevant authorities or individuals to account for their actions; its language should be neutral, clear and accessible; it should be empowering for marginalised communities through accurately reflecting their views and mentoring them on demanding rights; and should include a legal component (Pulfer, 2012).

The human rights movement relies on a strong emotional appeal in the media, which has increasingly taken the shape of compelling biographies and memoirs, such as *I am Malala*, (Sadaf, 2017). In the case of Malala Yousafzai, Sadaf argues that she has been exoticised by media in the north. Sadaf accuses these news organisations decontextualising human rights coverage by dehumanising victims, promoting an us vs them narrative, and creating simplified direct links rather than highlighting complexities. Allen (2009) echoes the sentiment that decontextualisation of human rights coverage is promoted by images of suffering, referring to his case study on visual imagery of victims in Palestine. Allen explores the politics of immediation – which aspires to give the viewer access to an authentic experience and truth, by discussing the representation of damaged bodies as locus of proof and sentiment of human rights violations. Debates around appropriateness and usefulness of circulating images of suffering either sees it as an excessive display of violence that might be harmful, or a need from the media to illustrate the situation in Palestine to leverage international political support (Allen, 2009). Pruce and Budabin on the otherhand, encourage scholars and activists to pursue ambitious projects, with somewhat corporate strategies to market their messages. They cite the 2012 "Invisible Children"

campaign (KONY2012) designed to make the Lord's Resistance Army commander Joseph Kony a negative household name by employing films, merchandise, action kits, and donations to target celebrities, politicians, and cultural figures (Winston & Pollock, 2016).

Human rights news is no longer simply produced by media organisations, but also NGOs, civic groups, or individuals (Winston & Pollock, 2016). Access to the Internet allows the framing and circulation of visual evidence or personal testimony within global media systems. Before the Internet, human rights activists were subjected to the gatekeeping of mainstream media to get exposure for their cause, which often led to tension between making the story timely and newsworthy and making sure it was accurate and contextualised (Winston & Pollock, 2016). According to Winston & Pollock, this led to human rights news being highly simplified and misleading, as well as to a preference for coverage of individual and security rights at the expense of the less sensational but more widespread abuses of economic, social, and cultural rights. Now, individuals can record and distribute human rights news instantly. However, this might also lead to decontextualised coverage, and Winston & Pollock urges audiences to be weary of misinformation and fake news. Human rights NGOs have also become savvier about using new media and social media (Winston & Pollock, 2016). Financial challenges of news organisations, and their consequently smaller newsrooms, has created an opportunity for the major human rights NGOs to contribute to reporting international human rights news by often providing credible and authoritative sources such as human rights lawyers. However, he adds that the essential role that professional journalism should continue to play in safeguarding human rights should not be dismissed (Winston & Pollock, 2016).

The media has also been responsible for human rights violations, for example creating and fueling tensions between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, or censorship during apartheid in South Africa. Media can be used as the social institutions for distribution of hateful propaganda or disinformation. Furthermore, the media can also fall victim to human rights violations. Press freedom in itself is an indicator of the state of human rights (Hamelink, 2001; Brooten, 2013; Reshi, 2015). To some extent the Internet has helped escape state censorship, but it is not fully impossible for a national government to establish control over a global network. Similarly, media independence can also be threatened by a concentration of media ownership, especially multimedia

conglomerates. Additionally, a fear of defamation cases, accusations of hate speech or other types of covert pressure leads to self-censorship in media houses, as few countries have robust regulatory environments. (Brooten, 2013).

Furthermore, organisations such as Freedom House's indices of media freedom has been critiqued for emphasising individual freedoms to the detriment of economic and social rights. Prioritising individual rights undermines the needs of those in multicultural societies with allegiances to both local cultures and their country (Brooten, 2013; Nyamnjoh, 2005, 2009). Nyamnjoh (2009) highlights the tensions in Africa between allegiance to cultural or ethnic communities and dominant theories of journalism that demand of journalists professional independence and a socially and culturally disembedded professional ethic. Critics consider western officials arrogant and lacking introspection regarding their own implementation of a narrow definition of human rights. Hence, while the Freedom House Index is said to measure the degree of freedom, UNESCO's index measures media development.

## 5. China in the media

Before China's historic opening, it had retreated from the world and did not attempt to exert power across the globe. Once China had realised its potential to be a great power (a *daguo*), it started "reinventing globalisation in its own image – challenging Western dominance and norms of globalisation" (French, 2014:3). Specifically, China's "going abroad" campaign has been implemented to counteract the Western media portrayal of China as "a mystic player and rogue donor in the global community" (Shi, 2013:30). The Western media's portrayal of China in Africa has been linked with Orientalism (the image of "Yellow Peril" or the threatening Other), or as a mysterious, exotic and unknowable force (Wasserman, 2012). Zeleza (2008) categorises the portrayals of the Africa-China relationship in terms of imperialism, globalisation, or solidarity. He adds that some of the most significant criticism against Chinese involvement in Africa has come from South Africa. For example, former president, Thabo Mbeki, has asked for China not to colonise Africa (Zeleza, 2008).

The China-South Africa relationship is a key component in China's media "Going Out" policy, which is detailed in Chapter 3 of this study. China currently distributes

its state-owned media, Xinhua, CRI, China Daily and CCTV, in South Africa, and has become a key player in hosting those media (French, 2014; Kurlantzick, 2008). However, as Wasserman (2016) notes, it is important to keep in mind that there have been flows and contraflows in China's relationship with South African private media. The media relationship that has developed between South Africa and China, has brought into question the media's role in China's efforts to wield its soft power in the African nation. China's soft power efforts have partly focused on improving its reputation on the African continent – which has been influenced by critical news coverage of China's perceived lack of human rights and environmental impact.

China's human rights and sustainable development reputation as outlined above, raises questions about the success of China's soft power on the African continent. Negative coverage of China's human rights and sustainability record could impact its reputation and credibility as a powerful yet peaceful nation. It is therefore crucial to understand how China reacts to being perceived as having a lack of respect for the environment and human rights.

The objectives of the study are to establish a) how China's human rights and sustainability record is portrayed in South African media; b) how China's human rights and sustainability record is portrayed in Chinese media in return; c) what South African journalists' attitudes towards Chinese soft power efforts are; and d) what Chinese journalists' attitudes towards Chinese soft power efforts are. These objectives will be attained through the use of a framing analysis and individual interviews.

# Chapter Two: Background

## 1. A short history of the China-South Africa relationship

International relations between China and Africa go back at least to the fifteenth century and, according to Wasserman (2012) and Webster (2013), China has maintained these in various ways. The distinctive links between China and Africa

> stem from China's status as a developing country, its socialist legacies, and its own semicolonial history, as well as from its late entry into Africa in the midst of a decades-long decline in African fortunes associated with Washington Consensus privatisation, liberalisation, deregulation, and austerity policies (Sautman & Hairong, 2007:77).

During the 1990s, through its "Going Out" policy, China transitioned to a more globalised nation, encouraging trade with foreign countries, and particularly the African continent. Prior to that, the People's Republic of China (PRC) played a supportive role in a number of African countries' fight for independence, including South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle (Taylor, 2000; Sautman & Hairong, 2007). China's anticolonial and postcolonial solidarity was repaid through African states' recognition of the PRC.

*From ROC to PRC*

In 1931, South Africa established ties with the Republic of China (ROC), which strengthened in the 70s with its base in Taiwan. Besides the two countries' commonalities in feeling at risk of communist influences (Taylor, 2000), the relationship also had important economic implications for both nations. South Africa needed new sources of foreign investment after trade boycotts from the west due to its oppressive segregation policies at the same time that Taiwan searched for new trading partners to meet their import needs.

Increasing diplomatic isolation – South Africa had been expelled from the Commonwealth in 1961, and Taiwan had been removed from the China seat at the United Nations in 1971 (Pickles & Woods, 1989; Jiang & Shu, 2019) – encouraged

Taiwanese-South African cooperation. Between 1960 and 1970 Taiwan needed to boost its image in the newly independent nations of Africa; mostly to foster support for Taiwan's position as the representative of China at the United Nations. Since each newly independent country had a vote on resolutions, it meant Africa had become the largest group of voters. The 1971 vote resulting in Taiwan's removal of the United Nations occurred despite the pro-Taiwan votes from predominantly from African countries. (Pickles & Woods, 1989). Though many countries terminated relations with Taiwan after this vote, South Africa continued its relationship with the ROC, and increased its anti-Peking stance. Taiwanese and South African consulates were upgraded to embassies in these countries and the Taiwanese ambassador at the time, H.K. Yang, publicly stated that they were "joined in the fight against communism" (Pickles & Woods, 1989:511). Ironically, ambassador Yang also said Taiwan and South Africa "are in favour of free enterprise, democracy and freedom" (Pickles & Woods, 1989:511).

Virtually all Asian investments were in the South African homelands, particularly Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei. The apartheid government directed Asian investment towards the homelands through a selective visa strategy: certain homelands awarded Asian investors residential status for an indefinite stay, while South Africa itself was reluctant to do the same. Asian investments provided jobs in high unemployment regions, and, to an extent, recognised the legitimacy of the homeland governments that had been rejected globally. The autonomous homelands were one of the South African government's anti-urban apartheid policies, alongside influx control, the migrant labour system and the policing of migrants and squatters. By the 1970s, these policies had increased tensions in the homelands essentially due to decreased income and increased unemployment (Pickles & Woods, 1989). The homelands became unattractive as a point of investment because of "poor communications, an unskilled labour force, inadequate social infrastructure, remoteness from complementary services and ancillary industries, and few social amenities for managers" (Pickles & Woods, 1989:516).

Consequently, the apartheid government implemented policies to nudge investors towards the homelands, such as the 1960 "Border Industries" scheme, which constructed companies close to the Bantustan boundaries, for easier commute of black workers who were forced to live within the homelands' boundaries. Taiwan had set

up around 20 textile factories in the homelands, and after criticism from its major market, the United States, sold to Canadian, European and South African markets. Sanctions had limited South Africa's access to certain forms of technology and foreign capital and created difficulties in exports. While Taiwanese investments were small compared to overall South African investments, they were important for the homelands.

The significance of the South Africa-Taiwan relationship reached beyond economic ties. Taiwan employed public diplomacy efforts, such as an academic exchange programme between the two countries, and a series of cultural exchanges, including the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra's performance at the Taipei Arts Festival. In the early 80s, military cooperation also increased as South Africa developed growing nuclear ties with Taiwan, signing a six-year contract to deliver 4 000 tons of uranium to the ROC. At the time, South Africa, Taiwan and Israel had shared nuclear technology and were even thought to have worked together in the production of a nuclear bomb. By 1987, bilateral trade between the ROC and South Africa had reached US$911 million. Amidst comprehensive sanctions, Taiwan even became a possible conduit for South African exports (Pickles & Woods, 1989).

## 2. The PRC and South Africa's freedom struggle

In contrast to Taiwan's relationship with apartheid South Africa, the communist PRC officially broke economic links with South Africa in July 1960. "Until the demise of the minority regime, Beijing's *official* ties were largely with the South African liberation organisations" (Taylor, 2000:92). However, Taylor (2000) notes trade with South Africa continued on a covert basis, despite China's public anti-apartheid stance.

Initially, China's conflict with Russia affected their support for South Africa's liberation movements. In response to Russia's support for the African National Congress (ANC), China put its weight behind the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). PAC units were trained in Tanzania, Zambia, and some in Ghana, by Chinese instructors (Gibson, 1972). The South African Communist Party's (SACP) close ties with the ANC and Beijing's hostile foreign policy towards Russia essentially shut out the PRC from close involvement with the ANC. Much of the hostility was

ideological, with the SACP being critical of Maoism and Chinese-style communism and its spread in Africa.

In 1973. China was one of four UN Security Council members to vote against Pretoria's credentials, and walked out when this failed to stop South Africa from addressing the General Assembly.

> Beijing was conscious of the need to reflect general Third World anger at the West's perceived reluctant reaction to the situation in South Africa for this would enable China to maintain its position within the Third World, bolster Beijing's credentials as a friend of the oppressed, and prevent Moscow from manoeuvring itself into the role of the chief anti-apartheid power (Taylor, 2000:98).

As Moscow and Beijing warmed to each other in the 1980s, the ANC asserted that it was willing to resume normal links with Beijing if it rejoined the anti-apartheid struggle (Kempton, 1989).

In 1989. Beijing began hosting delegations from diverse organisations including the PAC and the liberal Democratic Party, and explored a renewal of economic links with South Africa. According to Sautman and Hairong (2007), China's anticolonial and postcolonial solidarity efforts with African nations were "repaid through African states' recognition of the PRC" (Sautman & Hairong, 2007:78). China concentrated on promoting a positive image of itself in South Africa, particularly as a helpful supporter of the democratisation process. Taylor notes, however, that "the irony of China playing out this role in South Africa in the post-Tiananmen era should not be ignored" (Taylor, 2000:101).

In 1992, Nelson Mandela visited China and met with Premier Li Peng and President Jiang Zemin. He expressed gratitude for Chinese support for the anti-apartheid struggle, and voiced South Africa's admiration for China's economic construction. China was one of the first nations to resume official trade with Pretoria after Mandela's call for the removal of sanctions in 1993. East Asia, with its rapid economic development, promised to offer insights which would generate broad-based economic development (Grimm et al., 2014). South Africa had thus transitioned from

recognition of the ROC, to dual recognition of both the PRC and ROC. Eventually, South Africa officially renounced ties with the self-determined Taiwan, in exchange for the recognition of the "One-China" policy in which Taiwanese sovereignty is viewed as illegitimate (Alden, 2006; Grimm et al., 2014; Jiang & Shu, 2019).

The recognition of the PRC did not happen immediately after the end of apartheid. The first democratic government under former President Nelson Mandela initially maintained ties with Taiwan, mainly because Taiwan had become a democracy in the 1980s. China, on the other hand, had resisted the fall of communism, and received global criticism for its violent crackdown in Tiananmen Square in 1989. This made it a difficult cooperation partner at the time (Grimm et al., 2014). However, China became an uncontested regional and global partner as it reported an unprecedented growth in its economy and great progress in reducing absolute poverty, making the country indispensable. South Africa thus made what Grimm et al. (2014:10) call the "realist" move towards recognising Beijing that had already been undertaken by most of the African continent much earlier.

Economic diplomacy strongly influenced South Africa's shift from its recognition of Taipei to Beijing. Economic diplomacy concerns "state formulation of economic policy by a given state or group of states, *vis-à-vis* other states. Crucial to the practice is a balancing-act in which states attempt to promote their own domestic interests via economic leveraging" (Grimm et al., 2014:6). With the increasing importance of global, multilateral institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), scholars have argued that understanding economic diplomacy as simply a practice of diplomats from Country A engaging with diplomats from Countries B and C has become more complicated (Grimm et al., 2014). Prior to the 2000s. global economic diplomacy was dominated by permanent officials from a few powerful countries, but, since then, the process has increasingly been shaped not only by diplomats, but also by business, civil society, non-government organisations and international organisations (Grimm et al., 2014).

Business plays a crucial role in a multi-actor approach to international relations. South Africa's engagement with the PRC has been influenced by a number of players, including China's development banks, State-owned enterprises (SOEs) and the

private sphere, although linked to government. Grimm et al. (2014) argue that economic diplomacy is perhaps even pushing public diplomacy into the background, as companies can dominate political instruments for their own ends, which would potentially shift the centre of influence to corporations. Scholte (2008), on the other hand, argues that the state remains an important actor since it is the main actor practising diplomacy and interaction between state and non-state actors at various levels. Diplomatic relations are used to open doors for strategic domestic industries in foreign countries through efforts such as high-level politicians' state visits, or diplomatic missions actively showcasing important economic sectors via institutions such as organised trade fairs.

China has used various economic diplomacy tools in order to promote economic ties with developing countries. Under the "going global" slogan, it has created various "business-promotion instruments" (Bräutigam & Tang, 2012). These include the China Development Bank, as well as the China Export-Import Bank (China Eximbank), which is owned by the Chinese government and responsible for export and import credit and loans for offshore contracts and overseas investment (Bräutigam & Tang, 2012). Chinese companies presently involved in South Africa include Zijin Mining, Minmetals, Jiquan Iron and Steel (Jisco), East Asia Metals, and Sinosteel (Taung Gold, n.d.). There is also a significant amount of investment in the telecommunication sector, including Chinese major companies such as Zhongxing Communications (ZTE) and Huawei Technologies.

## 3. PRC trade and investment in South Africa

The relationship between South Africa and China has grown rapidly since the late 90s – at its core, China's aspiration is to strengthen political and diplomatic ties to increase economic engagement. South Africa is strategically important to China as a resource nation, while China sees its investment in energy and raw materials in South Africa as integral to developing local infrastructure and speeding up economic development (Beeson, et al., 2011). In 2009, China became South Africa's single largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totalling US$16.3 billion. South Africa has, in turn, become China's biggest trading partner in Africa, representing about 25 per cent of overall China-Africa trade (Beeson et al., 2011).

In 2010, Presidents Jacob Zuma and Hu Jintao signed the Beijing Declaration, which committed both countries to "establishing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership based on equality, mutual benefit and common development" (Beeson et al., 2011:1377). Regarding development, the debate around the most appropriate development strategy increased over recent decades (Kennedy, 2010; McKinnon, 2010). While some credit the western concept of broad liberalisation with successful development, others suggest that China's success challenges conventional theories about the role of the state in development. Joshua Cooper Ramo labelled what he views as China's unique approach as the "Beijing Consensus" (BC, *Beijing gongshi*), thereby distinguishing it from the "Washington Consensus" (WC, *Huashengdun gongshi*), invented by American economist, John Williamson, which connotes a more conventional development approach.

The Washington Consensus comprises ten policies that Williamson "thought more or less everyone in Washington would agree were needed more or less everywhere in Latin America" (Kennedy, 2010). The International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the World Trade Organization are renowned for advocating development in alignment with the Washington Consensus. The WC has often been conflated with the economic ideology of neoliberalism and a democratic political system. The WC's failure to lead to sustained growth in different developing regions has led to severe criticism of the WC "brand". It has been accused of raising the bar to unrealistic levels for any country seeking to develop.

The BC has been viewed as challenging the normative authority and imperialism of the WC (Dirlik, 2006). According to Ramo (2004),

> China is marking a path for other nations around the world who are trying to figure out not simply how to develop their countries, but also how to fit into the international order in a way that allows them to be truly independent, to protect their way of life and political choices in a world with a single massively powerful centre of gravity.

Kennedy (2010) argues that China's economic development strategy is not unique – while having some distinctive elements, it does not hail a new consensus. In fact, China researched other countries and followed in the footsteps of other developmental

states. Dirlik describes the "Beijing Consensus" as a notion, rather than a concept or idea. "The 'Beijing Consensus' appears, more than anything, to be a sales gimmick — selling China to the world, while selling certain ideas of development to the Chinese leadership" (Dirlik, 2006:2).

A popular alternative to the Beijing Consensus has been the "China Model" (*zhongguo moshi*). This has been used to describe China's gradualist reform strategy, while simultaneously maintaining China's original political institutions, such as the Chinese Communist Party's one-party rule. Under the China Model the concepts "capitalism with Chinese characteristics" and "authoritarian capitalism" have strengthened. Dirlik suggests the China Model could be more useful to China than the BC, because the BC is more likely to arouse fears overseas of the Chinese threat to the international system.

China has designated South Africa as the preferred country on the preferred continent for Chinese investment. Chinese companies have invested in a range of sectors in South Africa, including mining, textiles, electronics, agriculture, communications, transportation and banking. Beeson et al. (2011), however, note a skewed trade relationship between the two countries, since, in 2011, Chinese investment in South Africa remained smaller than South African investment in China. At the time, it served as a point of contention for China's involvement in South Africa, as labour unions complained about the effect of cheap Chinese imports on the local textile sector. The PRC government has since ordered a quota on exports of Chinese cheap goods to South Africa (Beeson et al., 2011). Sautman and Hairong (2007) claim, however, that these inexpensive PRC-made household goods are much more affordable than both Western imports and many local products, and may therefore benefit lower-income consumers.

Additionally, after a strong push from China to extend an invitation to South Africa, the country formally joined the elite BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) group in 2011. The BRICS Group forms part of a growing effort by emerging economic powers to build alternative institutions and forums to Western-dominated ones (Polgreen, 2013). The acronym BRIC, coined by Goldman Sachs in 2001, took on a life of its own and became somewhat synonymous with an economic power shift away from the developed world to the developing world (Schoeman, 2011). South

Africa's invitation followed intensive efforts by the country to gain admission, including high profile visits to the BRIC countries by former President Jacob Zuma in 2010 (Bond, 2013). Zuma announced during his visit to China that the country had formally applied for membership of the BRIC Group (Schoeman, 2011). Officials from one of the BRIC countries characterised South Africa's quest to prove its "BRIC-ability" as "embarrassing" (Alden & Schoeman, 2013:115). After securing an invitation to join, an internal review was launched in South Africa to assess the actual benefits of a BRICS membership, which still remains under suspicion (Alden & Schoeman, 2013).

Analysts have questioned South Africa's inclusion in BRICS because of its comparatively small economy, slow growth rate, territory and population size. Jim O'Neill, the Goldman Sachs executive who coined BRIC, believes South Africa does not belong in the group. "South Africa has too small an economy. There are not many similarities with the other four countries in terms of the numbers. In fact, South Africa's inclusion has somewhat weakened the group's power" (Polgreen, 2013:1). However, politically, South Africa shares the broad aspirations and objectives of the BRICS countries, and justifies its inclusion into BRICS on its "natural" or "obvious" leadership of the African continent (Alden & Schoeman, 2013:115). Perceptions have surfaced that South Africa's continental leadership is under threat, with Standard Chartered reporting that Nigeria's rising middle class and oil revenues are likely to enable them to overtake South Africa in total GDP terms by 2023. South Africa also seems to be torn between aligning itself with BRICS or pursuing an African agenda (Alden & Schoeman, 2013).

The BRICS alliance has been challenged on whether the countries have enough in common and enough shared goals to effectively counter the West. They are divided on basic issues, have "widely divergent economies", invest little in each other and have "disparate foreign policy aims" (Polgreen, 2013:1). Most importantly, India, Brazil and South Africa have strong democratic traditions, while Russia and China are autocratic. However, according to Bond (2013), BRICS countries share a common experience, and rejection, of the western-dominated neoliberal development model of the past several decades. Yet, despite the discourse of mutual benefit and sovereignty within BRICS, the relations much resemble a kind of "second scramble for Africa"

(Schoeman, 2013) and Bond (2013) has even accused the BRICS group of sub-imperialism.

The relationship between China and South Africa has become even more significant since the BRICS invitation, with Beijing declaring 2015 as the year of South Africa in China.

## 4. Othering of Chinese in South Africa

South African media coverage of the Chinese presence in Africa could potentially be influenced by the history of "othering" of Chinese in South Africa. Until 1980, the Chinese population in South Africa was made up almost entirely of South African-born Chinese (SABCs). During that time an immigrant community – about 90% Taiwanese – began to form, and, by 1993, there were 36 000 Chinese in South Africa (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). A decade later more than 80 000 Chinese residents were reportedly living in South Africa, and, in 2004, between 100 000 and 400 000 legal and illegal Chinese immigrants were estimated to live in South Africa (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). These were mostly from mainland China, however, as the Taiwanese population shrank drastically as the political relationship between South Africa and the ROC changed.

Karen Harris explores the "othering" of Chinese in South Africa, aimed at understanding the origins of Chinese xenophobia. According to Harris (2016:2) "othering" is a process that marks difference, and "secures one's own identity by distancing and stigmatising an other". Following Said's (1978) work on Orientalism, Harris builds on the ideas that the Orient is constructed as the "other" in a "reductionist, distancing and pathologising way", and therefore all things Chinese are "exoticised" (Jensen, 2011:64). The Orient is posited as the alien, inferior or negative counterpoint of the Occident (Mackerras, 1989:44-5). It is against this backdrop that the Chinese are still viewed as the "Yellow Peril" by South Africans, which might influence them to distrust China, and perceive their investment in Africa as neocolonial (Harris, 2016; Bright, 2013). "The othering of the Chinese was rooted in the Dutch and British Cape; it was transposed from other colonies to the mining metropole and beyond; it was entrenched in the jaws of apartheid and was perpetuated into a multi-cultural yet xenophobic new South African dispensation" (Harris, 2016).

Additionally, South Africans generally perceive of "the Chinese" as a homogeneous entity, and have failed to distinguish between SABCs and Chinese and Taiwanese migrants.

During apartheid the Chinese had been classified as a subgroup under the "coloureds" – an apartheid racial nomenclature to define a group consisting primarily of people from multiracial or multicultural origins. In 2008 it was ruled that Chinese people who lived in South Africa prior to 1994 would benefit from black economic empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa, providing recognition that the group had been previously disadvantaged by racial oppression (Harris, 2016). Prior to apartheid, the mineral revolution had led to an expansion of Western imperialism in South Africa, which saw a peak in the negative "Orientalist" approach to China. Mackerras (1989:44-45) claims that it was a time "when Europe colonised not only parts of China, but also knowledge about it".

Even earlier in South Africa's history, the early 1900s, the fear existed that the Chinese would take possession of South Africa, since they provided competition to the West through their stereotypical "hard-work ethic." They were referred to as *parasieten* (parasites) by the Boer Republics, fearing that they would be unfair competition to European traders. During this period, the physical appearance, cultural traditions, political structures and social lifestyle of the Chinese were belittled, with rhetoric that included "yellow peril", "yellow scourge", "almond-eyed", "slit-eyed", "pig-tailed", and "Mongolian filth" – terms that have resurfaced in recent years (Harris, 2016; Bright, 2013). The first piece of blatant legal discrimination against an ethnically identifiable group in South Africa was, in fact, directed at Chinese immigrants through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1904. Therefore, this colonial history of China being perceived as an "alien threat" to South Africa, and the link with current perceptions of China as neocolonial, could influence South African media coverage of China's impact in Africa.

# Chapter Three: Literature Review

The relationship between Africa and China has grown in the past decade on several platforms important to soft power, including economically (trade, aid and loans), politically (the BRICS relationship with South Africa and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC]) and culturally (China's public diplomacy efforts and media engagement on the African continent) (Wekesa, 2016). In short, soft power refers to getting others to want the outcomes you want, by attracting them rather than using coercion (Nye, 2004). It differs from hard power and militarisation; Kurlantzick (2008) refers to soft power as a country's "charm offensive" – the persuasion of a foreign country without threats or inducements. Since China's growing significance in the global world order, the country has been increasing its efforts to wield soft power, particularly on the African continent.

South Africa plays a crucial role in China's Going Out policy, as well as its media Going Out policy. China currently distributes its state-owned media Xinhua, CRI, China Daily and CCTV in South Africa, and alongside Kenya, South Africa has become a key player in hosting those media (French, 2014; Kurlantzick, 2008). However, as Wasserman (2016) notes, it is important to keep in mind that there have been flows and contraflows in China's relationship with South African private media. Whereas China now has financial investments in Independent Media (owner of large newspapers such as *Cape Times, The Star* and *Cape Argus*) and StarSat (formerly known as TopTV – a competitor to Naspers' DSTV), South African media conglomerate Naspers also has a large share in TenCent, a Chinese social media platform company that owns services such as QQ, Weibo and Youku (Wasserman, 2016). Overall, a substantial media relationship has developed between South Africa and China, and it is important to analyse the media's role in China's efforts to wield its soft power in Africa. In part, China's soft power efforts have been aimed at improving its reputation on the African continent – which has strongly been influenced by critical news coverage of China's perceived lack of human rights and unsustainable practices.

This study looks particularly at how China's human rights and sustainable development record is covered in mainstream South African media. The study also looks at how this coverage has been shaped, by the possible influences on South African journalists as set out by Reese (2001) in his explanation of the hierarchy of influences. Furthermore, it also delves into Chinese media activities – possible counter-coverage of China's human rights and sustainable development reputation in Chinese mainstream media, as well as how this media coverage is shaped, in other words the hierarchy of influences as played out in Chinese newsrooms. The hierarchy of influences as model for impacting Chinese and South African coverage of China is further discussed in chapter four. These elements all come together as a contribution to the theoretical framework of soft power, which is explained below.

## 1. China's current reputation regarding its presence in Africa

While China shied away from the global limelight for years, this approach has become impossible with its expanding global presence (Hartig, 2012). China has not only become increasingly visible, but it is also "vocal more than ever in the global arena to advance its agenda and interests" (Hartig, 2012:8). In many ways, China has become a more assertive (and some maintain, arrogant) actor in the international playing field, as it pushes to have a more significant voice on international affairs, in a global system that has thus far been dominated by advanced industrial economies, particularly the United States (Zhang, 2013).

Since the early 2000s, China has aimed to increase its influential power in politics (Wang, 2011). According to Zhang (2013), China now seems more enthusiastic to challenge the US and other powers over discrepancies within the international arena than at any time since it introduced reform and opening-up policies. In 2012, Hu Jintao, in fact, stated that China "will never copy a western political system" (Zhang, 2013:87). Instead, China supports other developing nations in implementing political systems that suit their local circumstances.

Through its key membership in the BRICS group, China aims to challenge western-dominated institutions. One strategy of BRICS has been to set up a BRICS bank in 2014, countering the dominating influence of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Thussu, 2016). Furthermore, China has increased trade, and

ultimately aligned itself, with African countries by expressing camaraderie with "the victimised", and continues to identify itself as a non-western developing country to increase resonance with these nations (Zhang, 2013; Zhang, 2016).

The increased involvement of China in Africa has been one of the most controversial geopolitical developments on the continent in recent years (Zhang, 2016). China's engagement with the African continent has led to debates globally, which centre around the question whether China is a friend or foe, a neo-colonialist or ally, and what this engagement might mean for the west's relationship with Africa (Alden, 2007; Sautman & Hairong, 2007; Wasserman, 2016; Jijun, 2016). This engagement has often been met with suspicion and a lack of trust from non-Chinese points of view (Madrid-Morales, 2016). Zeleza (2008:172), for example, claims that "the commentaries swing unsteadily from the excited to the anxious, the celebratory to the condemnatory, and the sanguine to the suspicious". Zeleza blatantly asked: "Are we witnessing a new scramble for Africa, this time not among European powers but between the West and China?" He notes that the responses to this question vary from glee to gloom,

> some reminiscent of the old rhetoric of Third World solidarity, others full of trepidation, recalling Africa's tragic history of external pillage, warning Africa to be wary of the strangers from the east bearing flashy but flimsy gifts of dependency and underdevelopment" (Zeleza, 2008:174).

Overall, a variety of concerns contribute to China's undesirable image among Africans, including human rights and democracy issues – such as tight control of the Internet and the treatment of activists, corruption, China's rivalry with the United States, its particular relationship with Taiwan and Hong Kong, and disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam over the South China Sea (Zeleza, 2008). On top of these, regarding China's impact in Africa, concerns have emerged about China's environmental impact, China's influence on media freedom in Africa, and an apprehension regarding China's cheap goods sold in Africa (the term "Fong Kong" goods has been popularly used) (Alden & Wu, 2014; Wasserman, 2016; Rønning, 2016). Additionally China has been accused of "neocolonialism" (Reporters Without Borders, 2019) – media discourses debate whether China is the "World's New Colonial Power" (New York Times, 2017). According to Zhang (2016), official views

of African countries tend to be cosy and positive, but non-official perspectives are critical of Beijing's actions and policies, resulting in fear and suspicion among non-elite Africans. Zeleza (2008) explains that the various positive and negative portrayals of China in African media could fit into one of three frames: imperialism, globalisation and solidarity.

Western policy makers, scholars, and media commentators are more likely to take the imperialist view on China in Africa (Zeleza, 2008). Zeleza argues that the west, accustomed to western imperialism on the African continent, clearly states that China cannot be good for Africa, as the west has been. "It is a discourse in which western benevolence and Chinese malevolence are assumed and compared, often unashamedly" (Zeleza, 2008:175). Furthermore, Zeleza states that the paternalism in western discourses places Africa as a continent in need of salvation, while the west sees itself as delivering that salvation while it defames its competitors and adversaries, in this case China, with exploitative intentions. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, for example, cautioned citizens in Nigeria that new forms of "authoritarian capitalism" may be taking root on the continent, in reference to China's vigorous entrance into African markets (Wasserman, Mano & Zhang, 2016). Similar issues have been raised about the potential role China's authoritarianism may play in Africa's media sector, with critics highlighting a possible undermining of Western efforts to promote openness and freedom of expression (Farah & Mosher, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2008).

However, some Africans have expressed their uneasiness with this form of western hypocrisy. Former Mozambican president, Joaquim Chissano, the winner of the first $5 million Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership awarded in October 2007, said:

> Well, if the West is concerned about China's human rights record [as a reason to deter increasing trade with Africa], then perhaps African countries should reconsider trading with America because of their war in Iraq and their torture of prisoners in Guantanamo… China is a country like any other, they will offer something that will give them benefit… but at the end of the day they have been open to a win-win situation. They know they are working with economically

> weaker partners, so they know how to facilitate things. But it is up to African countries to be careful to protect the interest of Africans (Zeleza, 2008:177).

Defenders of the China-Africa relationship, including many Chinese and African leaders and opinion leaders, perceive the relationship as rooted in solidarity, specifically in South-South cooperation. China is viewed as a partner to Africa when the west thought it was hopeless (Rønning, 2016). “Many Africans see China as an attractive alternative to the West that has exploited their societies ruthlessly over the centuries and continues to do so” (Zeleza, 2008:180). To supporters of the China-Africa engagement, China is a developing country with no imperialist history and incapable of being a colonial power like the nations of the west. It is also admired for unlocking the secrets of rapid development that other developing countries in Africa can follow (Zeleza, 2008).

*Changing the perception of China*

According to Zeleza (2008), media reports decry China's growing involvement with Africa. However, Wasserman (2012; 2015) found that coverage of the South Africa-China relationship in South African media has been cautiously optimistic for several years, although particularly when framed as a business story. Such media coverage has generally framed China’s involvement in Africa in economic and political terms as a source of development opportunities, whereas the social concerns of the engagement, such as human rights or media freedom, has largely been neglected as a news topic (Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2018).

In a survey (Louw-Vaudran, 2014) of 1 056 Africans from 15 countries conducted by the Ethics Institute of South Africa, the majority responded negatively to Chinese business people in Africa, the quality of Chinese products and services, and the economic and social responsibility of Chinese business and their employment practices in Africa. Labour practices were seen in a particularly poor light. The negative perceptions from the survey, especially from Nigeria and South Africa, could be attributed to business investment rivalry and negativity in western media reports. Additionally, the Pew Research Centre found that China is generally seen in a positive light in most developing countries – even though it receives negative coverage in western media (Mano, 2016).

The Chinese government has consistently presented itself as a peace-loving nation, a victim of foreign aggression, and an opponent of hegemony. A large part of its narrative has also evolved from the socialist and revolutionary nation under Mao, to an emphasis on its role as an international co-operator and major power (Hartig, 2012:40). Hartig maintains that, while American opinion leaders can accept China's self-portrayal as a socialist, developing country and major power, it doesn't see China as a peace-loving nation, a force for international cooperation or a victim of foreign aggression.

China frames its engagement in Africa as mutually beneficial, rather than asymmetric, and often promotes the term a "win-win situation" (Madrid-Morales, 2016) alongside concepts such as partners, south-south cooperation, mutual respect and non-interference (Tan-Mullins, 2016). China wants to increase its influence and build a positive image for itself in Africa and the rest of the world, and has aligned with African countries to gain their support for its domestic and foreign agendas. Through its public diplomacy, which includes media engagement, China seeks to be perceived as a stable, reliable, trustworthy and responsible economic partner and member of the international community.

Rønning (2016) argues that the most important source of China's increasingly positive image in Africa is linked to China's recent economic success. *The Economist* reported in 2013 that an increasing number of Africans believe that the Chinese create jobs, transfer skills, and spend money in local economies (Rønning, 2016:65). China's development assistance to Africa, which takes many forms – loans and direct economic support, health, agriculture, education, training, academic cooperation, infrastructure construction, culture and media – is an important element of the Chinese soft engagement with Africa.

To increase its possibilities of wielding soft power, China's media "going abroad" campaign has been implemented to counteract the western media portrayal of China as "a mystic player and rogue donor in the global community" (Shi, 2013:30). The western media's portrayal of China in Africa has been linked with Orientalism (the image of "Yellow Peril" or the threatening Other), or as a mysterious, exotic and unknowable force (Wasserman, 2012). Some Chinese scholars argue that Chinese media have been muted in comparison to the overpowering western media, which

have exaggerated individual Chinese companies' misconduct in Africa. This unbalanced coverage thus called for an intensified media engagement on the African continent, to make the Chinese voice heard (Jijun, 2016).

Now that we've explored the different perceptions that have emerged on China's engagement in Africa, it is important to understand how these views can either strengthen or impede Chinese soft power efforts. But first, it is important to understand what exactly soft power is, and how it operates.

## 2. Soft power

Since there is little consensus on the definition of soft power; most scholars revert to using Nye's account that soft power is the ability to produce outcomes through persuasion rather than coercion or payment (hard power). It rests on a country's culture, its political values and its foreign policies (Nye, 2004). Whereas hard power generally refers to using military resources to obtain the outcomes a country wants, "soft power" refers to the influence on a foreign country without threats or inducements (Nye, 2004). Kurlantzick (2008) refers to this as a country's "charm offensive".

The key word for Kurlantzick is "offensive," particularly in reference to China's "systematic, coherent soft power strategy" and the accompanying tools that China has developed, which include public diplomacy through media investment, the expansion of Confucius Institutes, educational exchanges and official conferences (Kurlantzick, 2008:xi). Aside from public diplomacy, attractiveness can be conveyed in many ways, including a country's popular and elite culture, its businesses' actions abroad, international perception of its government's policies and the gravitational pull of a nation's economic strength. This study specifically looks at the role that media engagements play in China's soft power strategy.

Nye distinguishes between soft power and hard power by referring to a spectrum. "The types of behavior between command and co-option range along a spectrum from coercion to economic inducement to agenda setting to pure attraction" (Nye, 2004:7). Soft power is at the co-option end of spectrum, whereas hard power is associated with command. Many debates around the distinction between hard power and soft power

have emerged in international scholarship, and these will be looked at more closely later in this chapter. However, this study follows Kurlantzick's view on soft power, which holds that it includes everything outside of the military and security realm, including coercive economic and diplomatic levers, such as aid and investment (Zhang, Wasserman & Mano, 2016).

While scholars continue to grapple with the concept of soft power through theories, such as smart power, or the soft use of power, the concept has been legitimised through global leaders launching soft power campaigns and charm offensives to exert wooing efforts. Though emerging literature calls for a critical look at the motives of soft power, scholars seem to agree that, to construct a favourable image of the state to attract allies and win support for its policies, soft means are much better than crude forces (Zhang, Wasserman & Mano, 2016).

*China's soft power*

Soft power is playing an increasingly important role in China's foreign relations (Bräutigam, 2009). According to Li and Rønning, discussions on the concept of soft power in China can be traced back to 1992, when Joseph Nye's *Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power* was translated into Mandarin under the title *Can the United States lead the world?* (Nye, 1992). China had been using pure propaganda, which was unsuccessful, and then turned to tools of culture and diplomacy toward a more nuanced public relations strategy. Eventually the name of the Party's Propaganda Department changed to the Publicity Department.

China started the media Going Out Campaign in the 2000s, primarily because of its belief that its image had been tarnished by demonising western media coverage. It envisioned enhancing China's prominence in international politics and communication in order to counterbalance this unfavourable image. China's major media players, such as state-owned CCTV, CRI, Xinhua and China Daily, were called to collectively promote the Communist Party of China's grand external propaganda (*Dawaixuan*) plan, disseminating key messages abroad (Jijun, 2016). Through this strategy, China expanded these state-owned media outlets on the African continent.

Chinese officials have viewed soft power as a means to prepare the ground for China's foreign policy. Interestingly, China has generally directed its efforts towards foreign government officials and elites, who are driven by national interests, and

control many of the resources that China desires a share in. In this way, China has succeeded in securing cooperation on policies from many countries, although it has neglected engaging with civil societies. This could be a problem in the long-term, as soft power depends more than hard power on the reception of the audience.

Some scholars note that China's lack of engagement with civil society is not surprising, since the nation is new at wielding global soft power. Thus China is learning by doing, as promoting soft power (rather than propaganda) is outside of their comfort zone, and Africa, in particular, is an important testing ground for its soft power strategies (Zhang, Wasserman & Mano, 2016). Zhang found that some media professionals are more confident about China's soft power success in Africa because "the level of expertise and technology are lower there", while "in the West it is harder for China to compete" (Zhang, 2013).

To understand how and why the Chinese exercise soft power, it is important to understand the consequences of the claims that have been made about China, particularly as a rival power to the west. As mentioned above, media coverage could both create a favourable or unfavourable image of China, which has an impact on the power it yields as an international player (Rawnsley, 2016). In this sense, Shi (2013) refers to China's soft power strategy as a "charm defensive" – essentially the nation is trying to defend a reputation that has been crafted by western powers. China's reputation has been a product of the USA's "threat discourse" of the 1990s (Rawnsley, 2016:26). He therefore argues that it is understandable why the west's claims of universalism (of pluralism, liberalism and autonomy) could have provoked Beijing into adopting a reactive, defensive and nationalist soft power strategy.

The primary objective of Chinese soft power thus seems to be to change the global conversation about China and provide an alternative to the alleged distorted picture of the nation presented in the western media. China uses soft power both to promote its political and economic agenda, and also to react to its perceived misrepresentation in the current hegemony of international news (Rawnsley, 2016). President Hu Jintao suggested the existence of a deliberate threat from western soft power in 2012, hence China's view that soft power is another international rivalry at which it is at an asymmetric disadvantage (Rawnsley, 2016).

Nye (2012:4) has argued that "China is weak in its soft power". However, critics have pointed out the limitations to Nye's western definition of soft power (Wekesa, 2016). Kurlantzick (2008) argues that Nye's definition excluded investment, aid and formal diplomacy and thus proposes a broader idea of soft power that implies all elements outside of the military realm. Chinese intellectuals have undertaken to redefine and expand the normative and western definition of soft power. "Chinese soft power is compatible with Confucianism and related to Chinese cultural values, such as the place of morality in leadership, standards of benevolence and mind over force" (Wekesa, 2016:136). Chinese academia goes as far as distinguishing American soft power, referred to it as "hegemonic assimilation and cultural imperialism," from Chinese soft power, which they view as "non-aggressive but generically reflexive and benign" (Li & Rønning, 2013:103).

Before we consider the role of the media in generating soft power, it is important to further explore what the literature reveals about this concept, particularly the criticism of soft power and its limitations.

*Critiques or limitations of soft power*

A range of criticism against the "charm offensive" concept has emerged. As mentioned above, Shi (2013) believes the "charm offensive" launched by Chinese media has inevitably evoked doubts, challenges and criticism across the world. He therefore argues for a "charm defensive" which allows China to "maintain her position as a respectful and respectable role model for developing countries" (Shi, 2013:33) by countering criticism portrayed by the western and African media through providing its own positive representations of China. Shi views China's activities in Africa's media terrain as less of an active strategy to extend its power, and more of a response to existing stereotypes to win hearts and minds.

The concept of soft power has also been criticised for its limitations. According to Nye (2004), some fail to see attraction as power. He argues, however, that exerting attraction on others often does allow you to get what you want. Other sceptics object to using the term "soft power" in international politics because governments are not in full control of the attraction. Nye refers to the USA. for example: "[M]uch of American soft power has been produced by Hollywood, Harvard, Microsoft, and Michael Jordan. But the fact that civil society is the origin of much soft power does

not disprove its existence" (Nye, 2004:17). He adds that soft power is difficult to wield precisely because some of its resources are outside of government control.

Accordingly, another limit of soft power is its primary focus on government and official structures and lack of impact on civil society; this, while civil society groups have proven their own agency by standing up to Chinese businesses and interests in Africa on an independent basis (Rønning, forthcoming). In South Africa, a focus on "soft power" as underpinning high-level, elite interests may distract from the informal, everyday interactions between South Africans and Chinese migrants, which might be more influential than formal policy in shaping public views of China's involvement on the continent. Perceptions of Chinese goods as inferior (Fong Kong goods), of Chinese migrants stealing African jobs, and outrage at the illegal trade in rhino horns in which China is a key market, could more substantially influence China's image in South Africa (Alden & Wu, 2014:25, 27).

The audience, and the socio-political context in which it operates, is crucial to the success of soft power. It firmly relies on "receivers recognising and accepting that another political actor possesses power that may be used over or against them" (Wasserman, 2016:21). Nye's concept of American soft power differs from that of China's, which is less concerned with its attraction among the broader public than with impacting the opinions of government and business elites (Zhang, 2016). China's focus on elites is important for audience research, as its media engagement seems to follow more of a two-step flow model, from elites to the masses via policy-making, than the bottom-up consumption of media in everyday life (Wasserman, 2016). Most of the current approaches to soft power focus on the actor exercising soft power and the instruments used. Rawnsley (2016) believes that there is a need for soft power research to focus more closely on China's targets. Regarding the significance of audiences, the social media space could also make or break China's soft power ambitions on the African continent. (Zhang, Wasserman & Mano, 2016).

*Is economic power soft?*

Soft power is relational and communicative. Chinese soft power includes an economic dimension that western models neglect, as they include economic resources in the realm of hard power. Yet China has played an increasingly influential role in the world due to its economic growth since 1978, its population of over 1.3 billion,

having lifted 500 million people out of poverty, and having reached its MDGs. In showcasing its economic strength, China is telling the world that the China model for development (Beijing Consensus), works (Zhang, 2016). Notably, Nye placed economics in the hard power plane, and culture on the soft power plane (Wekesa, 2016). This leads back to the debate on the distinction between hard and soft power. Distinguishing between the two is often not clear-cut; for example, when it comes to a country's military involvement in humanitarian assistance. According to Rawnsley (2016:24), "the distinction between hard and soft power lies not with the instruments deployed but in the motivation for engagement in the label attached to such activities by the audience/target/recipient".

Zhang (2016) views Chinese engagement in Africa as soft power with Chinese characteristics, in which economic power plays an especially important persuasive role. Jijun (2016) echoes this sentiment, pointing to the crucial role concessional loans for major construction projects play in China's image-building strategy toward African countries. China has also aimed to be perceived as a responsible country – in which case its aid to African countries could be a significant strategy. Through aid, China is showing international solidarity through development, and generally offering assistance without strings attached, which has made its aid popular in some African countries. However, China's involvement in international aid requires mass media and public engagement, if it wants its soft power to gain traction, both domestically and internationally (Tan-Mullins, 2016). China thus offers economic power in the form of development assistance, grants, and loans to Africa to win hearts and minds, and has already made great progress among African elites.

Beyond the dual-thinking of hard and soft power, Li (2009) has argued for the benefit of analysing the soft use of power. He calls for "seeing soft power within the lens of how a state uses its capability instead of focusing on the resources of power, as in the instrumentalist approach" (Li, 2009:7). Thus, Li calls for a focus on how culture, values and institutions are instruments of soft power, which are used against the backdrop of a target's local context, as well as the motivations and interests of China. Additionally, Rawnsley (2016) encourages more focused studies on local and global discourses about soft power, rather than a pure instrumentalist approach. He notes that "the simple descriptor soft power fails to capture the nuances of each type of international engagement and their possible consequences" (Rawnsley, 2016;19).

The motivations behind China's soft power efforts then raise the question whether soft power is benign. Its aims are often unstated, unknown, and therefore, uncommunicated. Zeleza (2008), after all, noted that China, despite its trade and humanitarian assistance, was in the "business of business" on the African continent. Soft power has had ties to cultural imperialism, as well as propaganda (for which it has been viewed as a euphemism), which means, to some receivers, it could seem anything but benevolent. "In fact, soft power can be more insidious than hard power precisely because it can be embedded and hiding within cultural products and aims to influence both thought and behaviour" (Rawnsley, 2016:25). It is important to recognise that soft power was never intended as a liberal alternative to hard power, but rather a valuable addition to the statecraft toolbox that can be deployed in specific circumstances and with specific goals in mind (Rawnsley, 2016).

Kurlantzick points to China's soft power tools – particularly its public diplomacy and its growing aid and trade – that have helped China develop significant influence, especially in developing countries. A form of this soft power is the establishment of relations abroad through what French (2014:4) refers to as a "modern-day barter system" in which nations pay for infrastructure, such as railroads, highways and airports, by supplying minerals to China in long-term contracts. Support for this type of global trade can also be established through the use of a variety of soft power efforts including cultural exchange, media use and education.

## 3. Soft power and public diplomacy

When discussing China's soft power, it is also important to look at its public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is generally a state-controlled strategy to reach the public of its target countries, and is used as a tool to wield soft power. China has been paying more attention to its public diplomacy and how it can cultivate favourability among foreign publics (Wang, 2008). According to Nye (2008), public diplomacy is thus an instrument used by the Chinese government to attract an audience beyond only the governments of other countries. This kind of diplomacy focuses on bringing about understanding for China's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies. Public diplomacy is used by states, associations of states, and non-state actors to influence opinions and actions to

advance interests and values (Wang, 2006; Chang & Lin, 2014; Gregory, 2008; Gilboa, 2000). According to Eytan Gilboa (2000), public diplomacy has also been used as a euphemism for "propaganda" or "international public relations" (Gilboa, 2000:290). Yet, public diplomacy transcends traditional diplomacy of engagement with diplomats and foreign correspondents by influencing public attitudes through strategies such as intercultural communications.

Public diplomacy has recently been developed into a tool to influence issues relating to governance, economic growth, democracy, the distribution of goods and services, and other pressures or opportunities. It aims to attract publics through a variety of strategies including broadcasting, films, books, magazines, artists, festivals, exhibitions, overseas advertising, international public relations campaigns, and cultural and educational exchanges (Nye, 2008; Chang & Lin, 2014; Wang, 2006; Gilboa, 2000).

On a broader diplomatic spectrum, China has been rebuilding its humanitarian cause, expanding economic diplomacy, and promoting Africa in China, to cultivate cultural and citizen diplomacy. Following the French model, China has learned how to exert an influence over Africa through cultural penetration (Li, 2009). Additionally, China has been using educational exchanges, encouraging African students to study in China on Chinese scholarships. Besides degree courses, frequent short-term training programmes and seminars remain an essential part of the so-called experience exchange (Li, 2006).

The media has also increasingly played a role in promoting public diplomacy. Therefore, as will be discussed in more detail below, China's media presence in Africa has increased in recent years. Xinhua News Agency, for example, now has more than 20 branches accompanying its African headquarters in Nairobi, and employs 60 journalists and 400 local staff. Every month Xinhua's headquarters dispatch a large quantity of news releases, including around 1 800 pieces of news in English, 2 000 in French, 2 200 pictures and 150 video clips. Media are primary sources of information for most people obtaining news about global affairs (Semetko, 2011). In forming opinions about foreign countries and international affairs, people often rely on news or media information, because of a lack of real-world experience in that arena.

Leaders of state and non-state actors use the media as a standard instrument for communication and negotiation (Gilboa, 2000:303). International relations and foreign policy are influenced by public opinion, which, in turn, may be influenced by information in the media. Mass media are a useful diplomatic tool to bypass the powerful elites and target the mass public directly. There is a consensus that "the media have transformed diplomacy", but, according to Gilboa, the question whether the media have functioned primarily as an autonomous actor of influence or as a sophisticated tool in the hands of officials remains (Gilboa, 2000:303).

What sets public diplomacy apart from the general propaganda that has formerly been used, is credibility. National credibility allows the instruments of public diplomacy to translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction. Credibility is the "crucial resource" and "an important source of soft power" (Nye, 2008:100). Political struggles occur over the preservation of, and damage to, credibility, indicating the power of a nation-state's reputation in the current world order. Governments compete for credibility with a broad range of entities including other governments, news media, corporations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), intergovernmental organisations, and networks of scientific communities.

Similarly, Zhang (2016) argues that, regardless of the sophistication of a country's public diplomacy strategy, it requires support from its policies. China uses a state-centred approach of public diplomacy, and the state-owned media outlets struggle to spread China's soft power through public diplomacy, precisely because of its close ties to the government. "It will be difficult for China to win the hearts and minds of foreign viewers unless it deals effectively with issues of credibility and government control" (Zhang, 2016:68). People still tend to perceive communication by a foreign government as political propaganda. This could, in turn, undermine a country's reputation for credibility, and is thus counterproductive as public diplomacy. "Public diplomacy that degenerates into propaganda not only fails to convince, but can undercut soft power" (Nye, 2008:108).

Unlike the concept of public diplomacy, propaganda in modern usage generally carries a negative connotation that implies governmental interventions to indoctrinate foreign audiences. Chang & Lin (2014) found that, since the 1980s, researchers have been using the term public diplomacy much more than the term propaganda,

indicating “a conceptual and epistemological shift from the idea of international propaganda to public diplomacy” (Chang & Lin, 2014:456). China’s efforts to redress the so-called China threat without blatant propaganda might have increased, but one of the obstacles Chinese public diplomacy might face is that “as long as political dissidents are arrested and detained for their political ideas … no public diplomacy will be able to change China’s image as a country where human rights are violated” (d’Hooghe, 2005:102).

When talking about people as targets, it is important to differentiate between public diplomacy, conventional or new, and soft power. Conventional public diplomacy is government-sponsored programmes, such as cultural exchanges, television and radio programmes and movies, intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries. New public diplomacy extends beyond the operations of government to the activities of the private sector and of the larger society and culture, in order to better influence the attitudes and behaviours of others. The public remains the target. While soft power and public diplomacy share similarities in terms of actors, soft power is more comprehensive in that it aims to enhance its charm at both the elite and public levels (Zhang, Wasserman & Mano, 2016).

It is therefore crucial to research China’s soft power impact on both elite and public audiences. This will require China’s public diplomacy and soft power efforts to be higher up on the academic agenda (Hartig, 2012). Existing research in public diplomacy suffers from several weaknesses, including limited research on public diplomacy programmes and activities of countries other than the United States (Gilboa, 2008).

## 4. Soft power and the media

Soft power represents the ability to affect others through “the co-optive means of framing the agenda,” illustrating the role that the media can play in wielding soft power (Rawnsley, 2016:22). One of China’s official soft power instruments, FOCAC, has identified the media as a priority in building bilateral ties. In particular, FOCAC aims to facilitate knowledge of respective cultures, and counter the western bias in the news coverage of China and Africa (Gagliardone et al., 2012).

The intention of China's media strategy is summarised by Li Changchun, the CPP's Propaganda Chief: "Enhancing our communication capacity domestically and internationally has a direct bearing on our nation's international influence and position, has a direct bearing on the raising of our nation's cultural soft power, and a direct bearing on the function and role of our nation's media within the international public opinion structure" (Zhang, 2016:7). The Chinese media serve as two major functions: to endorse and defend the Chinese presence in Africa, and to launch the charm offensive in promoting a China model (Jijun, 2016).

Chinese state-owned media in Africa aim to further strengthen the understanding between China and the African continent, and to provide an alternative yet authentic view of China in Africa. These media produce their own content for African consumption, which ultimately hopes to invalidate western media's overly critical and biased reporting on China (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016). To fulfil this goal, several state-owned Chinese media houses have established offices on the continent, especially in Kenya and South Africa.

These media include the Xinhua News Agency, Central China Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI) and China Daily – aka the 'Big Four' official media outlets. These media practice self-censorship informed by domestic censorship guidelines, which include weekly directives from government on what to publish or not (Council on Foreign Relations, 2015). Xinhua, the world's largest news agency, has developed the most outlets of any Chinese or western news agency on the continent. It strategically placed its Africa Regional Bureau in Nairobi, and, in 2008, launched its China African News Service, and, in 2011, its mobile news services (Zhang, 2016).

In 2006, CRI launched its first overseas station, and in 2012, the English-language paper *China Daily* launched its *Africa Weekly* edition. Chinese telecommunication companies Sagem, Huawei and ZTE also became more active in Africa around this time, providing both equipment and network construction. These telecoms provide low-priced products, and ultimately, low-interest loans.

In 2012, the CCTV Africa hub in Nairobi was established, and launched its flagship show, *Africa Live*. Shortly thereafter, its mobile TV application, *I Love Africa*, was also launched. CCTV Africa's launch came as a surprise not only to African and

global audiences, but, to some extent, also to CCTV's management in Beijing. It was a component of a bold, multi-billion dollar strategy to improve China's image abroad, which Li Changchun legitimised through his visit to Nairobi in 2011. Within a few months, CCTV employed more than 100 staff, of whom around 70 were African and 40 Chinese, including journalists, producers, editors, correspondents, technicians, as well as journalists working for the CCTV service in Chinese (Gagliardone, 2013).

In 2017, CCTV News rebranded to the China Global Television Network (CGTN), a new international media organisation to integrate resources and to adapt to the trend of media convergence. CGTN is a multi-language and multi-platform media grouping consisting of six TV channels, a video content provider and a digital media division. CGTN aims to strengthen China's global reporting ability and communication skills to provide viewers with better services, including an expansion of its mobile platforms and exploration of media convergence (Wang, 2016).

CCTV has showcased that it has vast resources allocated by the Chinese government, to spend on running CCTV, including employing correspondents, while other traditional media outlets are struggling for survival in the digital media age. This suggests the operation is not necessarily aimed at profit, but rather influence. The abundance of resources also means that editorially, CCTV can include a greater variety of stories, as well as deploy journalists to conduct interviews in the field. This gives journalists a sense of opportunity, a realisation they are offered resources they could not find elsewhere (Wasserman, Mano & Zhang, 2016).

However, as these resources go hand-in-hand with Chinese government ownership, CCTV is challenged with the suspicions about its independence and its intentions. Wasserman, Mano and Zhang (2016) found that CCTV Africa journalists and editors appear to be aware of this challenge and have accordingly tried to reduce references to China in their broadcasting. The researchers argue that China's ultimate success in persuasion will be influenced by whether its coverage remains merely an instrument to improve the Chinese image abroad, or whether it also gives way to African and global audiences' African news interests. "The media is a resource that helps produce soft power, but when it becomes a credible source of information, when it is a profession that others respect and trust, then it is soft power in itself" (Zhang, 2016:8).

Despite China's media industry undergoing an extensive process of marketisation, the state remains a crucial actor in Chinese media and communications, especially in its media for overseas audiences. This is evident from the fact that the industry falls under the Propaganda Department of the CCP. Government funding also ensures readership and audience, these media organisations purchase space in African newspapers to increase the amount of news-sharing. CCTV, for example, exchanges news programmes with local media organisations, such as ZBC in Zimbabwe, and *Africa Live* is broadcast in prime-time slots on Kenyan stations.

But who is ultimately watching Chinese programmes and with what effect remains an open question (Thussu, 2016). A study by Tan-Mullins (2016) found that Kenyan journalists are not aware of or watching the main Chinese media operating in Kenya, and do not view CCTV as a credible source of international news. Additionally, Xinhua, despite being one of the largest news agencies in the world in terms of personnel, news bureaus, and daily output, has been disregarded by communication scholars as a mere source of propaganda (Madrid-Morales, 2016). Tan-Mullins argues that CCTV still has a long way to go before it shrugs off the negative connotation associated with Chinese government-owned operations in Kenya's public sphere. She believes that China has managed to convince African elites, which were its initial intended audience, with their "Dump the West, look East" mantra (Tan-Mullins, 2016:133), but still faces challenges to unseat the seemingly entrenched preference for western media products. These media tend to have a lack of knowledge of Chinese or Chinese society (Kupe, 2013).

Compared to Reuters and Agence France Presse (AFP), Chinese media are not seen as similarly credible or legitimate, and therefore struggle to compete. Western media's influence on African media public and media organisations is still strong – partly due to historical reasons, language dominance and also because the 'quality' of Chinese news is considered lacking. China, however, has implemented a range of strategies not to simply have its voice heard, but to have the power of discourse, that differs from the west, particularly regarding the focus on the concept of human rights (Zhao, 2011). China is aware of its lack of experience as a global power, and of its lack of discourse that is strong enough to counter the hegemony of a US-led western discourse. With its own platform in Nairobi, China is not only able to deflect western criticism, but also challenge the US's intentions in Africa.

*Returning the gaze of the west*

*Africa Live* on CCTV aims to present an image of Africa that differs from what is projected by the west. This strategy enables Chinese media to brand the west as the "other" for harming Africa's image. *Africa Live* provides Africans with a platform to tell their stories, instead of using traditional propaganda. Local participants have in this way publically stated that "the democracy practised in their own countries is far superior to that of the West" (Zhang, 2013:98).

China is thus promoting its positive image by being highly critical of the west. As such, it highlights western intervention and interference in African affairs, condemning international structures for targeting and harming the image of Africa, leading to disinvestment in Africa: it accuses the international system of not respecting the African Union in dealing with African affairs; it challenges the World Bank for awarding the presidency to an American rather than an African, which raises questions of merit and transparency in the selection process; and it questions US intentions in sending troops to a relatively stable Uganda, where oil has been found. These programmes aim to educate the African public that the west is to blame for many of Africa's failures.

While Chinese media have largely been defending the China-Africa friendship, it has expressed opposition to hostility and criticism, especially from the USA. A variety of Chinese media, such as the *Global Times* newspaper, have been fighting accusations of exploitation, neo-colonialism and fighting western hegemony, as seen in the story headlined "African media bashing Western countries for cautioning Africans against China" (*Global Times,* 10 November 2009). The stories briefly recap the accusation, and then refute it, either directly from China or via an authoritative African source. Also fighting western demonisation, the market-driven press interviews similar official sources, with headlines such as "Countering Western demonization with communications that African people understand" (*South Metropolitan Daily*, 21 November 2011). Chinese state media have followed through on their condemnation of the west and the west-led international system, but have failed to be clear on the alternative discourse China can offer to the world. Thus far its challenge to the west has culminated in the concept of an international system that allows the co-existence of different systems (Zhang, 2013).

Chinese media's expansion on the African continent is part of a broader international media presence in Africa. Both internationally and in African media, there have been critical reports on China in Africa, and China has had a clear need to establish alternative images of its African presence (Rønning, 2016). However, a limitation to fully mobilising soft power strategies using the media is that perceptions do not entirely rely on the media, as people base their views on more than media reports. Additionally, Zeleza cautions that China's "hardnosed superpower ambitions" should not be concealed under the veil of "soft power" (Zeleza, 2008:181). He claims that "the Chinese are not coming to Africa for philanthropy but to make money. They are in the business of business" (Zeleza, 2008:181).

When scholars discuss whether or not China's role in media and telecommunications in Africa has replaced the west, they often ignore African agency. Africa's own self-interest is also at stake (Zeleza, 2008). Regarding media approaches, CCTV Africa could offer an opportunity for African journalists to learn alternative traditions to gain new perspectives on the debate on freedom vs control. It is still unclear, however, whose partner CCTV is going to be in the long run. Furthermore, African journalism could also impact Chinese journalists, which could eventually shape their reporting at home.

Whatever the future holds regarding China's engagement on the African continent, Africa needs to know more about China, coordinate its policies on China, and define its interests and relations with China realistically. Knowing more about China includes studying its languages, history, and culture. Both African and Chinese governments and businesses in Africa and China need to be transparent and held accountable in this relationship (Zeleza, 2008).

Wekesa (2016) argues that Africa is, however. more the receiver than the giver of aid, indicating a power dynamic, where China is on a mission to achieve her goals through soft power, rather than vice versa. Yet, although Beijing is powerful, its power over its image is limited by other points of power. In some cases, China is unable to reap benefits from its soft power efforts because of local challenges to its image.

## 5. China's involvement in South African media

China's recent direct investment in South African media is considered a new phase in the expansion of its media across Africa. Besides expansion of Chinese state-owned media in South Africa, China has also invested in local media. For example, StarTimes has invested in the subscription satellite television network, StarSat (formerly TopTV), a more affordable rival to Naspers-owned DSTV. StarTimes is held in high esteem by the CCP, which is why it conducts inspections of its subsidiaries in Africa by high-level party officials, including Li Changchun.

More controversially, CCTV, backed by the China-Africa Development Fund, is believed to be behind the Chinese consortium that provided 20 per cent of the financing for the Sekunjalo Group to purchase Independent News and Media, one of SA's most powerful media groups (previously owned by the Irish magnate Tony O'Reilly) (Harber, 2013; Wasserman, 2016). Sekunjalo is headed by Iqbal Survé, who has close ties with the African National Congress (ANC) government (which could limit editors and journalists in the group's criticism of government). Surve fired Alide Dasnois, editor of the *Cape Times,* for allegedly running a front-page story about corruption involving a Sekunjalo subsidiary (Evans, 2014). From the South African side, as mentioned above, Naspers owns 34% of TenCent, the owner of Chinese social media platforms, such as QQ and Weibo.

China's heightened interest in African and South African media has raised questions about its intentions (Wasserman, 2016). Compared to Chinese investments in other African nations' media, South Africa has not been a major recipient of China's media assistance, partly because its media industry is relatively robust (Wu, 2012). Some scholars argue that increased Chinese involvement in South African media could threaten the freedom of the press (Harber, 2013). The Chinese government does not support free and critical media, but rather has a firm hand on its media to serve its national interests. South Africa illustrates great concern for its freedom of expression human right through the vigorous opposition to the Protection of State Information Bill by the civil society organisation Right 2 Know. In South Africa, serious doubts are cast on any media content that is perceived as propagandistic, which again points to the credibility Chinese media need to be successful as instruments of soft power. Zhu (2012:7) remarked that "perceived openness and transparency are keys to successful soft power".

China's attempts to use media to exert soft power in South Africa will continue to be met with considerable challenges. The local media's reception and portrayal of China's relationship with South Africa could be influenced by their stance towards the South African government. Currently, the default stance towards the ANC-led government falls between scepticism and antagonism (Wasserman, 2016). The Chinese government's comfortable relationship with the ANC could instil distrust and criticism towards China among the South African media. Generally, Chinese media may compete with local media outlets that may provide contesting frames of China's involvement in Africa. China hopes that its media platforms, Xinhua in particular, could serve as a source of news for local news organisations, which raises the chances that the Chinese perspective might be considered.

To some extent, South African journalists have started referring to Chinese media sources, and some reports showed that exposure to these media helped journalists form a nuanced understanding of China's involvement on the continent and of South Africa's place in the BRICS group (Wasserman, 2016). In his study, Wasserman (2016) found that South African journalists did not use Chinese media as a source and only very rarely consumed it. The lack of trust in the credibility of Chinese media is caused partly by their government ownership and control. The South African media operate within the constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press, transparent routines, and editorial independence, whereas the Chinese media culture is controlled by the state. South African media believe in their ability to withstand political pressures, either from their own government or influences from Chinese-owned media. Resistance will be strong if there is pressure from Chinese investors to try and shape the media sphere (Wasserman, 2016:18).

There is a lot to be understood about how South African media have responded to China's media push on the continent. As Wasserman (2016) asks:

> [D]o South African journalists use Chinese media as a source, and if so, where do Chinese media rank on the 'hierarchy of influences' (Reese, 2001) on South African news agendas? To what extent do the South African media amplify Chinese soft power initiatives that are exercised through its media? (Wasserman, 2016).

Wasserman's study found that journalists recognised the importance of providing coverage regarding this geopolitical alignment. In general, the journalists characterised the South Africa-China relationship as "important," "strong," and largely based on economic concerns. The journalists also remarked on the unevenness of the relationship and China's dominance of it. The study found that South African journalists are critical of the media's ability to portray the complexities and nuances of the growing China-Africa relationship, and generally offer "shallow" representations based on second-hand sources (Wasserman, 2016:14). Most South African media do not have correspondents in China, which can increase xenophobic attitudes. South African journalists also believe it is not their responsibility to create a better image of China. These journalists tend to focus on political and economic stories or big news events (the "upstairs" dimensions) instead of ongoing coverage on China (the "downstairs" dimensions).

Though China's media expansion is comparable with channels such as Russia Today, Al-Jazeera, the BBC, and CNN, it is seen as less transparent and open than these media channels. South African journalists are unclear about Chinese intentions on the continent, and have therefore practised cautious reporting. Wasserman (2016) summarises the major challenges to Chinese soft power exercised through the media as follows: Journalists do not access Chinese media or see no reason to prefer Chinese media to western sources.

> Chinese media are not used as a source because they are not seen as credible, particularly because of state control. Relying on Chinese media sources could compromise journalistic integrity. The "China story" does not satisfy news values, and Chinese media do not yet seem able to present their content such that it is either credible or appealing to local journalists (Wasserman, 2016:15).

There are huge limitations to South African media improving its coverage on China. Few South African journalists have been to China, and use sources from international media organisations. Resources thus limit journalists' coverage, and with the current financial crunch of local media, newspapers tend to focus more on local stories than on providing nuanced coverage of China. Wasserman's study also found that Chinese media do not seem to have relevance to the South African audience: "[W]hat does a

Chinese TV channel and news agency mean to the man in a shack in Gugulethu? Probably not much," (Wasserman, 2016:13).

Chinese media face the challenge of acting both as a mouthpiece for the CCP, and trying to be trusted news sources. The Chinese government has prioritised the need to reach out to civil society; however, the absence of alternative and independent media inside China means the nation has a lack of experience in engaging with civil society.

China tries to influence its image abroad not only by directly offering an alternative image of itself, but also by encouraging new ways of looking at Africa, especially via its CCTV Africa programmes (Maweu, 2016). This kind of "positive" or "constructive" reporting is a key characteristic of Chinese state-owned media's coverage. "Positive reporting encourages an emphasis on collective achievements while overlooking divisive issues" (Wasserman, Mano & Zhang, 2016:26).

Moeller (1999) has noted that western media tend to represent issues as either positive or negative, leaving few grey areas to fulfil its "watchdog role". Traditional media approaches have been proven to have a negative emotional impact on both audiences and media practitioners. The Chinese media have thus adopted a different role that is more in line with what Wasserman and Berger call "development communication", which is associated with "positive psychology" (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016:96). Such "constructive journalism" differs from watchdog journalism as it focuses the public attention on a problem only long enough to stimulate discourse, which would lead to a solution. It does not avoid controversial issues but is solutions-based, which means reporters aim to understand and engage with both problems and possible solutions.

Constructive journalism conducts reporting in a way that empowers people, and information can be used constructively to tackle the problems that plague society while remaining accurate and critical. Central to this journalistic approach is to follow up on solutions – how a problem was solved, by whom, and what lessons can be learned from that. That also means evoking a positive emotion by celebrating the achievement in order to inspire others in a similar situation. This approach has a strong economic and social development focus, working side-by-side with nation building.

Some of the criticism that constructive journalism has received, is its lack of objectivity. In watchdog journalism, communication workers are expected to provide only facts, without a deliberate focus on solutions. Constructive journalism's nation-building approach could lend itself to slanted and biased reporting. In other words, this type of reporting can result in an institutional and uncritical style, which marginalises alternative narratives (Lull, 1991; Zhang, 2006). While CCTV's positive reporting may be interpreted as a new way of telling African stories and a way of promoting a Chinese form of journalism, it might not appeal to African audiences, which, in large part, consist of politically and critically interested publics. African media, in general, align more with the western style of watchdog journalism.

Most literature assumes that negative news or watchdog journalism is good, while positive news is viewed as propaganda. However, Christians et. al. (2009) explains that western media itself makes use of several styles of journalism, that sometimes contain elements of positive journalism. Chinese journalism should thus be distinguished from propaganda or just positive reporting. Western media, in particular, voice scepticism of Chinese media because of its government-ownership. Accordingly, concerns about whether China will be critical of the operations of Chinese companies in Africa have been expressed.

Finally, *Africa Live* might have declared its goal to put forward a new narrative, yet seems to fall back on more traditional frames. Zhang's (2013) sample of CCTV's Africa coverage between January and April 2012 found the majority of African news items to be either neutral or negative. Instead only news stories involving Chinese actors were given a positive spin.

The abovementioned positive reporting approach has been promoted by China in Africa in many forms, which includes training. China sends the message that Africans have also fallen victim to the western-dominated international media's negative publicity. Such portrayal has focused on stereotypes of Africa as the hopeless continent, plagued by ongoing conflicts, HIV and poverty. China therefore encourages Africa to correct these perceptions, using African voices.

To assist with African nations' efforts to improve their image, training sessions and workshops for African journalists and editors have emerged under the FOCAC framework. Between 2004 and 2011, China held eight training workshops for African

media in China, attended by about 300 African media officials from 48 African countries (Shinn & Eisenman 2012:209). These workshops were also held in the hope that African information officers and journalists would cover China stories at home from a better understanding of China's perspective because few African journalists have first-hand information regarding China's policies (Jijun, 2016).

China has come to better understand that its image in the foreign media partly stems from the bias of reporters covering China. Thus, training of journalists could help reduce the prejudice of media professionals. However, CCTV Africa's editors and journalists are aware that portraying China in a positive light will not necessarily improve African audiences' attitudes towards the country. Instead, quality reporting on African issues could more likely begin to erode some negative perceptions on China.

Ultimately, for China to influence communication workers in Africa, it has to address current perceptions on its lack of freedom of expression. Zhang (2013) found that Chinese state-owned news media are perceived to have little to no criticism of government. It has also blocked Facebook and Twitter in China, which is challenging to CCTV Africa's social media strategy – which has become crucial in recent years. CCTV Africa currently benefits from the online presence of individual staff members who have been informing the social media sphere, and, in this way, they have developed a more interactive relationship with its audience.

Against this theoretical backdrop, this study looks at the media's role in China's pursuit of wielding soft power, specifically in the midst of China being perceived as having a lack of respect for human rights or environmental protection.

# Chapter Four: Methodology

This study investigates Chinese and South African media coverage of a central source of China's perceived notoriety on the African continent: its human rights and sustainable development impact. The study also explores the potential influences of both Chinese and South African journalists' coverage of China. The methodology of this study consists of two parts. Firstly, to answer RQ1 and RQ3 about the representation of China's sustainable development and human rights record in South African and English-language Chinese media, a framing analysis will be conducted. Secondly, to answer RQ2 and RQ4 on journalists' and media practitioners' attitudes towards China's sustainable development and human rights reputation, semi-structured interviews will be conducted.

## 1. Framing analysis

To answer the questions about South African and English-language Chinese media representations of China's human rights and sustainable development records, a qualitative framing analysis will be conducted of the coverage of China in both South African and English-language Chinese print media.

Frames can craft audience perceptions through the way a news story is presented. Media framing research is interested in, among other things, how media represent a specific topic, how they selectively pay attention to specific issues at the expense of others, the various factors and actors that may influence this selection process, as well as the potential impact news framing may have on audience perceptions and actions. Robert Entman's simple definition of framing refers to "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2004:5). He claims that news cannot escape framing, particularly regarding foreign affairs: "Few people have direct data, and most information originates in media reports even if it is passed along selectively (or framed) in conversation with informants who themselves saw the news" (Entman, 2004).

A large and growing body of literature in framing studies has emerged in recent years from a range of disciplines and academic domains (Entman 1993; D'Angelo, 2002; Giles & Shaw, 2009; Sieff, 2003). However, most researchers express a concern about the lack of clear conceptualisations and operationalisations of framing (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; Borah, 2011). Entman (1993) has been one of the most influential scholars researching framing, and his explanation of the framing process has been widely quoted:

> Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame 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 (Entman, 1993:52).

He argues that most framing research is based on inconsistent meanings of its core terms: "frame", "framework", and "framing". These inconsistencies in the use of terminology in the research have inhibited "a general statement of framing theory" and have led to a "fractured paradigm" of framing research (Entman 1993:51). According to Entman, the standardised use of a framing theory could help media scholars "accomplish their mission to bring together insights and theories that would otherwise remain scattered in other disciplines" (Entman, 1993:51). On the contrary, Paul D'Angelo has responded by claiming "that there is not, nor should there be, a single paradigm of framing" (D'Angelo, 2002:870). He believes instead that "theoretical and paradigmatic diversity has led to a comprehensive view of the framing process, not fragmented finding in isolated research agendas." (D'Angelo, 2002:870).

Because framing analysis is currently one of the most widely used methodologies in communication studies, many authors have called for some form of continuity – conceptually and methodologically (D'Angelo, 2002; Entman, 1991, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Scheufele, 1999, 2004). The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or

considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualisation of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue. From a socio-cognitive perspective, framing is viewed as placing information in a unique context so that certain elements of the issue get a greater allocation of an individual's cognitive resources (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Framing research has often been grouped with agenda setting and priming (Borah, 2011). According to Entman (2004), priming refers to "activating an association between an item highlighted in the framed text and an audience's thinking about a related concept." Thus framing "is to prime values differentially, establishing the salience of the one or the other" (Entman, 2004:27). In the past, some researchers had considered framing to be the second dimension to agenda-setting. However, "agenda setting occurs due to the frequency with which an issue is discussed in the mass media. It does not involve how the issue is treated in the media and is not relevant to framing" (Borah, 2011:250).

Severin and Tankard (2001) have explored the concept of framing's usefulness for studying certain aspects of the media coverage of news. To some extent, the concept of media framing at the time of its emergence presented a new paradigm to replace the older paradigm of studying the "objectivity and bias" of the media. Where bias studies have focused on whether a news article is positive, negative or neutral towards someone or something, framing considers the subtler ways in which the presentation of news contributes to the social construction of reality.

Media framing often manifests itself by the choice of some keywords, key phrases and images that reinforce a particular representation of the reality and a specific emotion towards it, and the omission of other elements that could suggest a different perspective or trigger a different sentiment. It can also be observed in the journalist's selection of whom to quote, what to quote and where this quotation is located in the story.

Framing is both a macrolevel and a microlevel construct (Scheufele, 1999). This does not mean, of course, that most journalists try to spin a story or deceive their audiences. As mentioned earlier, the production of a news article is influenced by individual, routine, organisational, extra-media and ideological factors. Such

influences shape the way journalists make decisions when framing news articles. Shoemaker and Reese's "hierarchy of influences" model locates the individual journalist within a web of organisational and ideological constraints. Reese (2001) argues that this media sociology approach addresses the structural context of journalism, and more broadly focuses on how media power functions rather than narrowly focusing on text production. The importance of the sociology of media concept will be discussed further below, in the section on this study's in-depth interviews method.

The media sociology approach is ultimately concerned with the forces that set the media's agenda (Reese, 1991). Framing, therefore, can be a necessary tool to reduce the complexity of an issue, given the constraints of their respective media related to news holes and airtime (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Entman states that "frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture" (Entman, 2004:52). This study will look closely at the location of, firstly, the text, and then the communicator.

*What are frames?*

In its most basic form a frame can be defined as "a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (Severin & Tankard, 2001). According to Entman (2004), scholars have used the term "frame" interchangeably with such closely related concepts as schemas, heuristics, scripts or even news topics. Entman's study applies the term "schemas" (as defined by Goffman below) to interpretive processes that occur in the human mind, and applies frames to texts. "What differentiates a frame from a script most clearly is this: framing directly promotes interpretations that lead to evaluations" (Entman, 2004:26). Furthermore, frames are often reduced to story topics; however, a frame does much more "organizing" and "structuring" work (Reese, 2007). De Vreese (2004) also makes an important distinction between frames and what he refers to as the core news facts – the answers to the questions of where, when and who.

Within sociology, Erving Goffman coined the term "frame analysis" to describe the process of deconstructing the individual's "organisation of experience" (Goffman,

1974:11). Goffman's aim was to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense of events and to analyse the context of frames. Goffman presents framing as a day-to-day sense-making technique; individuals create and rely on frames to make sense of daily interactions, conventional rituals, discourse, advertising, and other elements of social experience. He calls frames the "schemata of interpretation", a framework that helps in making an otherwise meaningless succession of events into something meaningful (Goffman, 1974:21). Thus, the dual nature of framing research—frames in the news versus frames in the individuals' minds—is evident (Borah, 2011).

Gitlin (1980) defines frames as devices that facilitate how journalists organise enormous amounts of information and package them effectively for their audiences. He sees frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion", organising the information for both the journalists and their audiences (Gitlin, (1980:7).

Gamson has developed the concept even further. To Gamson, a frame is a "central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987:143). Gamson and his fellow researchers describe frames as underlying structures or organising principles that hold together and give coherence to a diverse array of symbols and idea elements. He explains that frames, similar to the idea of a "picture frame" or "window frame," define boundaries and direct our attention to what events and texts are relevant for our understanding of an issue or situation (Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002:36).

For Gamson, a frame is a necessary property of a text—where text is broadly conceived to include discourses, patterned behavior, and systems of meaning, policy logics, constitutional principles, and deep cultural narratives. All texts, regardless of how clear or abstruse they may be, are comprised of packages of integrated idea elements held together by some unifying central concept, called a frame (Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002:37).

Through selection and salience, framing therefore promotes a particular definition, interpretation, and evaluation of a topic. Frames are more than topics, they include more organising and structuring, as well as placing information in a unique context so

certain elements of the issue get more of the individual's attention. Framing considers the subtler ways in which the presentation of news contributes to the social construction of reality, through considering discourses, patterned behavior, and systems of meaning, policy logics, constitutional principles, and deep cultural narratives. This study therefore examines the frames that have been created through the use of language by South African and Chinese media to represent China's sustainable development and human rights.

*Framing devices*

The motivation to study the framing of China's sustainable development and human rights is strong. "Choices of words and their organization into news stories are not trivial matters. They hold great power in setting the context for debate, defining issues under consideration, summoning a variety of mental representations, and providing the basic tools to discuss the issues at hand" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993:70). Because of its underlying attention to context, standing, and power, Creed, Langstraat & Scully (2002) argue that frame analysis provides us with a linked theory and methodology to guide communication research. Using frame analysis as a methodology generally refers to the identification of "framing devices" that carry the themes of news stories (D'Angelo, 2002; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). "The content of the frame amalgamates textual items (words and images) with the contextual treatment that they receive from framing devices" (D'Angelo, 2002:881). He adds that beyond pinpointing words and images, researchers must identify news values, discursive structures, and content formats that integrate the words and images of a news story into a frame.

The literature reveals a wide spectrum of framing devices that go beyond identifying headlines, introductions, pull-quotes and lead-outs (Severin & Tankard, 2001). According to Pan and Kosicki, the signifying elements of a theme (which they use as a synonym for a frame) are that they are structurally located lexical choices of codes constructed by following certain shared rules and conventions. "They function as framing devices because they are recognizable and thus can be experienced, can be conceptualized into concrete elements of a discourse, can be arranged or manipulated by newsmakers, and can be communicated in the 'transportation' sense of communications." (Pan & Kosicki, 1993:59) They make a frame communicable

through the news media. Pan and Kosicki classify frames in the media discourse into four categories, representing four structural dimensions of news discourse: syntactical structure, script structure, thematic structure, and rhetorical structure.

In a syntactical structure, which is quite a common structure for news framing, framing is achieved by drawing attention to the article via a strong headline, and through use of the "inverted pyramid style" to focus on pertinent issues. News stories have traditionally used the inverted pyramid convention to emphasize the most important facts in a newspaper story first (Bolsen, 2011). Thematic structures, which are used less frequently, suggest hypotheses or causal sequences. "These structures pull together events, sources and propositions that flow together with logical reasoning to form a hypothesis or state a causal relationship. Rather than following the inverted pyramid style, thematic structures attempt to capture human interest or resonate with a particular theme through the use of vivid imagery" (Bolsen, 2011:264).

Gamson and Modigliani have popularised framing devices such as metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images (Borah, 2011). The five elements – metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images – "accentuate a given frame, making it noteworthy, vivid, memorable, and easily communicated." The three reasoning devices – roots, consequences, and appeals to principle – "serve as argumentative devices to justify or support the preferred perspective of the speaker or frame sponsor" (Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002:40). Entman (2004) suggests that "defining effects or conditions as problematic, identifying causes, conveying a moral judgment and endorsing remedies or improvements" as the functions of framing devices (Entman, 2004:5). Furthermore, Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) recommend identifying metaphors, stories (myths and legends), traditions (rituals and ceremonies), slogans and jargon, artifacts (symbolic value), contrast and spin as framing devices.

Other framing elements include the attribution of statements to particular individuals; calling on experts or officials to increase the validity of a claim or trivialisation through the use of comments made by less desirable individuals (Bolsen, 2011). Finally, researchers Giles and Shaw (2009) from the field of psychology have suggested the following framing devices: identifying story, identifying character,

reader identification, narrative form, analysis of language categories, and generalization. Scheufele (1999) refers to the dynamics of how speakers, such as media outlets, choose among frames to communicate issues to the public as frame building.

Framing analysis can be quantitative (Tankard, 2001) and qualitative (Maher, 2001). This study employs a qualitative framing analysis. In qualitative analyses, categories are not predefined, which allows categories to emerge as the researcher becomes immersed in the data. According to D'Angelo (2002), framing researchers are encouraged to use all available unitising techniques found in content analysis and discourse analysis in order to defend the existence of different framing devices and provide the means to detect frames in news. Gamson and Lasch (1983) provide a basic and accessible way of approaching frame analysis by laying out a "signature matrix" for sorting the specific idea elements of a set of texts into categories (Gamson & Lasch, 1983:399).

Carragee and Roefs expressed some criticism towards content analysis framing studies "that do not differentiate between story topics, themes, or frames", and "the reduction of frames to story topics, attributes, or issue positions" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004:218). This ignores how frames construct particular meanings. Successive authors have attempted to refine the analytic procedures necessary for the identification and interpretation of frames (Giles & Shaw, 2009). These authors have aimed to develop framing methodology further, but have also been critiqued for the number of important aspects of the process that are in danger of being lost through further reduction of media material to basic, usually countable, elements. While some researchers may be concerned with increased precision in measurement, other authors have urged against further reductionism, arguing that simple attempts to quantify media material are in danger of missing the subtleties of framing (Van Gorp, 2007).

Even though the majority of studies have used a quantitative framing analysis, Hope (2010) views frame analysis as a type of discourse analysis. He states that frame analysis as a discourse analysis is "principally concerned with dissecting how an issue is defined and problematised, and the effect that this has on the broader discussion of the issue. He argues that frame analysis shares many of the building blocks of critical discourse analysis (supporting the idea that discourse is socially constitutive as well

as socially shaped) but returns to its linguistic and textual roots to some extent. It shares the same principles of the construction of meaning, and the potential for discourse to affect action beyond the text (Entman, 1993; Gonos, 1977), while retaining its methodological roots in detailed linguistic analysis.

This study takes a qualitative approach to framing analysis. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; and observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments in individuals' lives. "The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:10). Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning.

Qualitative research often brings up the question of objectivity in the research. According to Hope (2010), "the problem of subjectivity is dealt with through the theoretical grounding – that is, it is perfectly acceptable for the study to be seen as subjective as there is no such thing as 'objective'." Creed, Langstraat and Scully (2002), add that, "although respected scholars in this genre have at times employed such quantitative measures of reliability, these are often the wrong questions for this endeavor, because they assume that the project is one of converging on an objectively right answer" (Creed, Langstraat & Scully, 2002:48). They argue, however, that there are better or worse frame analyses in terms of how richly researchers capture a frame; how deeply they peel away the layers; whether they initially move to present frames in ways that are recognisable and ring true to sponsors of the frame; whether the researchers' interrogation of their own perspective informs the analysis and gives readers further understanding and assurance that the analysis is not packing an ideology covertly; and, sometimes, whether the frame analysis is a gateway to dialogue, action, policy, or change. Another problem that has been identified with

some framing analyses is that the coding and interpretation processes themselves are subject to the same selective bias as the media material they are examining. Taking a social constructionist position, it is argued that all research involves some element of framing (Giles & Shaw, 2009).

As mentioned above, this study will firstly focus on media content – specifically, how South African and English-language Chinese media cover China's sustainable development and human rights. It aims to take a descriptive approach using a qualitative framing analysis. The study aims to identify frames that emerge from a close reading of South African and English-language Chinese media reports. These frames will be analysed through the identification of framing devices, with the guidance of the several suggested devices mentioned above, including the identification of the speaker, the structure of the news article and other linguistic techniques, such as word choice. Similar to the critical discourse analysis approach, this study will focus on the meaning, organisation and social construction of frames.

## 2. In-depth interviews as triangulation

Whilst the framing analysis can provide an understanding of South African and Chinese media's coverage of China's human rights and sustainable development role on the African continent, it is limited to studying media content. To explore journalists' and media workers' perceptions, triangulation is achieved by including qualitative, in-depth interviews with both South African and Chinese journalists, about what and how their media coverage is potentially influenced within their newsrooms. As mentioned in chapter three, using Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchy of influences (2001) as a guide, these interviews address influences on media workers' news coverage from an individual, routine, organisational, extra-media and ideological perspective.

*Hierarchy of influences*

The influences on journalists' coverage of China could shape how China's sustainable development and human rights record is framed in the media. Reese (2001) views journalists and journalism as important research topics because of the "crucial role it plays in the quality of the world's press" (Reese, 2001:173). To help identify

journalism's implicit normative and theoretical assumptions, Shoemaker and Reese's hierarchy of influences model locates the individual journalist within a web of organisational and ideological constraints. Reese (2001) argues that this media sociology approach addresses the structural context of journalism, and thus more broadly focuses on how media power functions. The media sociology approach is thus concerned with the forces that set the media's agenda (Reese, 1991).

The hierarchy of influences' levels range from the most micro to the most macro: individual, routines, organisational, extra-media, and ideological, with each successive level viewed as subsuming the one before. These forces are thus anticipated to operate simultaneously at different levels of strength in any shaping of media content. Higher-level factors are assumed to exert more influence than lower-level ones. The job of the researcher, then, has been to discover under which conditions different levels become more influential and how the different levels interact with each other (Fahmy & Johnson, 2012).

At the individual level, the attitudes, training and background of the communication worker are viewed as influential. "Whether political or academic, power to shape news is held by the individual journalist, and journalist studies attribute great importance to individual characteristics in shaping the news product" (Reese, 2001:180). The interview sample, in this study, purposeful sampling of South African beat journalists and Chinese English-language journalists, is therefore significant at this level, as it describes the characteristics of the group. Reese (2001) expresses criticism, however, to the implicit normative assumption that journalists should be socially representative, reflecting the beliefs of the public.

Next, the routines level of analysis considers the constraining influences of journalistic work practices. This level looks at the "ongoing, structured, deeply naturalized rules, norms, procedures that are embedded in media work" (Reese, 2001:180). Individuals have to operate within a multitude of limits prescribed by technology, time, space and norms. The routine structuring of the newsgathering task, which is more visible to researchers, provides important clues about how the media have chosen to deploy their resources, which also tells us something about the rest of the media structure.

The organisational level considers the larger social structure and how power is exercised within it. It focuses on the requirements that give rise to the abovementioned routines and how individuals are obliged to relate to others within that larger normative structure. Keeping in mind the economic goals of the media, the organisational level reveals a great deal about editorial policy, and particularly what is considered news, the importance allocated to different stories, and how they are framed. This level encompasses several layers that needs exploring, including the news organisation itself, the larger company to which it belongs, and the still more complex ownership network of firms (media and otherwise) that may subsume both. At this level, power is often not overtly expressed. For example, a journalist anticipates organisational boundaries, the power of which is manifested in self-censorship by its members.

At the extra-media level, influences originating primarily from outside the media organisation are analysed. The power to shape media content is thus shared with a variety of institutions in society, including the government, advertisers, public relations, influential news sources, interest groups, and even other media organisations. In many ways the media are subordinated to elite interests in the larger system. At this level, then, we assume that the media operate in structured relationships with other institutions that function to shape media content.

According to Reese (2001), each of the preceding levels subsumes the one before, suggesting that the ultimate level should be an ideological perspective. This level considers how media symbolic content is connected to larger social interests, how meaning is constructed in the service of power. The ideological analysis considers how a system of meanings and common-sense understandings is made to appear natural through the structured relationship of the media to society.

The hierarchy of influences model is useful in considering effects of various factors on the press agenda as well as on how issues are “framed” (Reese, 2001:186). Unfortunately media sociology has tended to focus more on British and US national media systems, hence Reese’s encouragement to do comparative research across geographical or historically defined systems. Benefits to comparative research include making researchers cautious to assume that the meaning of basic concepts is self-evident and comparable across cultures.

Not all studies have supported this hierarchy-of-influences model, however. For instance, when Weaver et al. (2007) explored the factors influencing support for controversial reporting practices, they found that personal perceptions of the journalistic role had the strongest impact. Those who viewed the media's role as getting the news out quickly and accurately did not support controversial reporting practices, but those who believed journalists have to interpret or to analyse problems and to investigate government claims, as well as those who perceived reporters as adversaries of the government and businesses, supported the use of controversial practices.

Furthermore, in Fahmy and Johnson's (2012) study on embedded journalists' performance in Iraq, it was found that the difference between the higher-level factors and lower-level factors of influences were not that significant. Journalism routines were perceived as most influential before and during the occupation of Iraq, while the cultural (ideological and extra-media influences) level was the second most important factor after the ground war (Fahmy & Johnson, 2012:35). Among the individual-level factors influencing perceptions of embedded reporting were professional roles or norms and journalistic routine roles (embeds did not go anywhere without the military and the relationships with the unit they embedded with). Fahmy and Johnson concluded that their study could not measure what effect each level of influence had on embedded journalists' performance because results were limited to just what embeds perceived as factors that had the greatest effect on their work. Therefore, journalists might have underestimated the influence of extra-media and cultural forces on attitudes toward censorship and press freedom. "The hierarchy-of-influences model, thus, may be better suited to explain journalists' values and how they cover news events rather than their assessment of performance" (Fahmy & Johnson, 2012:37).

*Interviews: A qualitative approach*

According to Bonnie Brennen (2013), qualitative research is "interdisciplinary, interpretive and theoretical in nature" (Brennen, 2013:4). Qualitative researchers study alternative notions of knowledge, and their understanding is that reality is socially constructed. Additionally, qualitative researchers consider the diversity of

meanings and values created in media. These researchers attempt to understand the many relationships that exist within media and society.

One qualitative method that is practical and valuable to media research is conducting interviews. Interviewing has been used as a research method for centuries. Jensen (2012) states that "common sense suggests that the best way to find out what the people think about something is to ask them" (Jensen, 2012:270). Because people speak from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives, interviewing is a valuable method that may be used to gather a large amount of important information. According to Brennen, "simply stated, an interview is a focused, purposeful conversation between two or more people" (Brennen, 2013:27). On a more complex level, Lindlof (1995) states that "interview talk is the rhetoric of socially situated speakers, *not* an objective report of thoughts, feelings, or things out in the world" (Lindlof, 1995:165).

Qualitative interviewing strives to understand the meanings of information, opinions and interests in each respondent's life. Through face-to-face, in-depth guided conversations using semi-structured interview questions, qualitative interviewing explores respondents' feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their deeply nuanced lives. Qualitative interviewing is influenced by a constructivist theoretical orientation, which considers reality to be socially constructed; from this perspective, respondents are seen as important meaning-makers rather than passive conduits for retrieving information. Interviews are valuable because they "provide opportunities for interviewees to respond in their own terms, through their own linguistic structures. Verbal answers can be longer and more complex, and so more rich and interesting than written answers" (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005:74). Being able to ask a person follow-up questions helps to clarify what has been observed.

According to Bertrand and Hughes (2005), the interviewing process is never completely objective, as the interviewer is always implicated in the interview situation. Interviewing involves the exercise of a power differential, usually with the interviewee less powerful than the interviewer. "At the very least, the interviewer assumes the right to ask questions and to expect answers from the interviewee" (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005:165). Jensen (2012) echoes this idea, saying that "all interview statements are actions in a context, arising from the interaction between

interviewer and interviewee" (Jensen, 2012:270). With this, Jensen suggests that statements from individual interviews are not simply representations of what people think. "Interview discourses are, in a strong sense of the word, 'data'. They become sources of information through analysis, and of meaning through interpretation" (Jensen, 2012:270).

Interviews for this study were conducted in English by a fluent English speaker. Though the Chinese journalists interviewed are employed by English-language Chinese media, their command of the English language varied. Language might have created a power differential, that the author tried to counter through the use of technology such as iPhone language applications to ensure that both the questions and answers were both understood and interpreted accurately. The author often read the Chinese journalists' responses back to them until they agreed to the correct understanding of their responses. Furthermore, because most Chinese journalists requested anonymity, this also created a power differential, which the author tried to counter by removing all identifiable information in the results and analysis of this study.

***Data collection***

*Data collection for framing analysis*

For RQ1, the news articles will be sampled using the purposive sampling technique, which in this case refers to selecting articles covering China's human rights and sustainable development over a six month period from South African mainstream media news sources, the *Mail & Guardian, Cape Times* and *News 24.* All of the above-mentioned publications are privately owned, and therefore not state news outlets. *News 24* offers timely, instant news updates to one of the largest online media audiences in South Africa, while *Cape Times* is a South African daily that offers day-to-day news. *News 24* is owned by Naspers, which acquired a 47 percent interest in May 2001 in Tencent Holding Limited, the operator of what has become the leading instant messaging platform in China (called QQ). The *Cape Times* is currently owned by Sekunjalo, of which 20% is owned by the Chinese company Interacom, and uses copy from the Chinese newswire Xinhua. The weekly *Mail & Guardian* provides more in-depth, investigative and critical coverage on political and economic issues. Therefore, my sample encompasses instant, daily and weekly news and includes

articles written with both informative as well as investigative objectives. These publications are chosen because their combination reflects the South African media discourse.

The keywords to define my sample will include environment, sustainability, climate change, rhino poaching, logging, labour, labour rights, human rights, and others. These key words represent the human rights and sustainable development aspects that I will focus on in this study. After entering the above-mentioned key words, all articles related to how China is framed or perceived in terms of sustainable development and human rights will be selected and entered into a data collection document. A close reading of every selected article will then be conducted to get an idea of the overall themes that emerge – more specifically, to determine the frames that have been constructed for China. Once the frames have been identified, the close reading will be continued to determine how China has been framed in a specific way, particularly looking at the connotations of language use, article structure and who has been interviewed or quoted. The analysis will then include a setting out of all these elements, as well as their relevance to the political and social South African context. The relevant articles will be selected within a six month period, starting August 2015, up to February 2016. This is a sufficient period to generate an adequate sample of articles, and to account for potential events or occurrences that would lead to heavy coverage of one news element. *News24* will be accessed online, while *Cape Times* and *Mail & Guardian* will be accessed via hard copy.

To answer RQ2 on Chinese media coverage, another qualitative framing analysis of English-language Chinese media will be conducted, using a similar process to the one mentioned above. This time Chinese news sources will be sampled through the purposive sampling technique. News bulletins from China Central Television Africa (CCTV Africa) and Xinhua News will be sampled and analysed because of these two media companies' increased presence and expansion on the African continent (Kurlantzick, 2008). For CCTV, its *Africa Live* platform will be accessed to watch its daily bulletins and then the relevant news bulletins transcribed and kept in a data document. The transcriptions will then be analysed according to their related human rights and sustainable development features to determine which frames emerge. The news articles on Xinhua will be selected through a key word search on its general home page that will include the keywords: environment, sustainability, climate

change, rhino poaching, logging, labour, labour rights, human rights, and others. Both of these samples will also be sourced for a six-month period, from August 2015 to February 2016, during which these sites will be consulted on a regular basis. Both Xinhua and *Africa Live* will be accessed online, as the latter is available on CCTV's website, which provides all the daily news broadcasts of *Africa Live* in its archives.

Xinhua and CCTV were selected because they form part of China's media Going Out strategy, and are English-language Chinese media, that can provide data on how China is portrayed to its African audiences in particular. This comparability of the two media is complicated by the fact that Xinhua is a global online news platform, while *Africa Live* provides television news broadcasts aimed specifically at African audiences. This sampling method thus excludes daily and weekly mainstream print media that are included in the South African sample, and instead includes television broadcasts, which are generally use a different format than print media.

*Data collection for interviews*

This study will be making use of semi-structured interviews to answer RQ 3 and 4. Semi-structured interviews are usually based on a pre-established set of questions that are asked to all respondents, but they allow for greater flexibility than structured interviews (Brennen, 2013). "Interviewers may vary the order of the questions and may also ask follow-up questions to delve more deeply into some of the topics or issues addressed, or to clarify answers given by the respondent" (Brennen, 2013:28). Thus, acting as moderator, the interviewer guides the interview, but permits the various aspects of the subject to arise naturally, in any order, and can allow digressions if they seem likely to be productive.

The semi-structured interviews of this study will focus on a set of key questions that relate to Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) hierarchy of influences. Essentially, this hierarchy builds on the concept of news as socially constructed, and thus influenced by a journalist's beliefs, deadlines, media ownership, editors' involvement and the ideology of society, among other things. According to Jensen (2012), news is a social artifact; it is the result of particular work practices, and is socially patterned. "The production of news takes place in institutional and organizational settings in which the type of ownership, managerial hierarchies, allocation of resources, available

technology, and market considerations influence how news reporters work and, therefore, the kinds of stories they produce" (Jensen, 2012:87).

These questions will therefore revolve around the individual, routine, organisational, extra-media and ideological influences on news content. The first set of interview questions is designed to be broad, to get to know the interviewee and making them comfortable with the interview setting. These questions aim to provide background on the interviewee, and therefore will focus on their work experience, educational background and current position at their media institution. This is followed by a set of questions regarding the interviewee's knowledge of, or interest in, the China-Africa relationship. These questions are meant not only to determine the interviewee's personal relationship with the topic, but also how or why it is placed on the news agenda. Furthermore, these questions, particularly relating to their knowledge of soft power, will indicate how aware the journalists are of the significance of promoting China's favourable image on the African continent.

The next set of questions will focus more closely on the actual topics of news coverage, and particularly on the interviewee's attitudes towards China and sustainable development, and China and human rights. The journalists' personal attitudes towards China and issues such as climate change or poaching can contribute to the knowledge of what influences their news coverage. The final set of questions will relate more specifically to Reese's hierarchy of influences. These questions focus on daily routines in the media environment, media ownership, relationship with the editor, relationship with sources such as government and NGOs and also issues such as target audiences. Such questions aim to shed light on the influences on the journalists' coverage by taking into account that news is a product of particular work practices, and explores how these practices operate.

This study uses interviews with the aim of getting personal insights into South African and Chinese journalists' lives to determine what possible influences could guide them in their media coverage. The South African journalists were selected because they had either been environmental or human rights beat journalists at either the Mail and Guardian, or any Media24 or Independent-owned publications. The Chinese journalists were selected because of their employment at the English-language sectors of either Xinhua or CCTV. As mentioned above, interviews provide

a portal into the personal thoughts and lives of journalists, and therefore could contribute to the knowledge of what shapes their coverage. This study aims to do so through semi-structured interviews, to allow for more flexibility in the interviewee's responses, but also to provide clear guidance through a list of structured, open-ended questions. Through these interviews this study hopes to find insights into the workings of the journalistic process and how this process possibly influences media coverage of China's human rights and sustainable development reputation. Ultimately these interviews hope to inform the question of whether China's soft power efforts are acting as an influence on the communicators of news content.

# CHAPTER FIVE: SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHINA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This chapter presents a qualitative framing analysis of South African media coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights impact on the African continent. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the study explores six months of coverage from *Mail & Guardian*, the *Cape Times* and News24. A framing analysis was conducted via manual and online searches to find any articles featuring China alongside other keywords, such as poaching, climate change, environment, and sustainable development.

Regarding sustainable development, five dominant frames emerged: China as key perpetrator in poaching; superpowers China and USA; China's role in climate change mitigation: COP coverage; China as source of green technologies, renewable energy and green investments; China as polluted country itself; and India and China compete for Africa. Regarding human rights, four themes were present: disasters in China; Chinese neocolonialism; the pragmatism of human rights neglect; improvement of China's human rights. This chapter presents a deeper insight into each of these frames.

## 1. Sustainable Development

### 1.1. China as key perpetrator in poaching

A framing analysis of six months of South African mainstream media coverage found poaching to be a dominant frame in the media sampled. China features prominently in the poaching issue, often portrayed as "the world's largest ivory market" (News24, 2015/08/04). The homogenising concept of "China" as an entity is generally used, implying the entire nation's involvement in creating a demand for ivory. The

motivation for “China” to acquire these poached goods is reported to be because of its medicinal properties, art and jewellery (News24, 2015/08/06).

Poaching is a highly emotional issue in South Africa, and an increase particularly in rhino poaching has increased the topic’s salience on the news agenda. A large number of articles highlight an urgency to address poaching. News24 (2015/08/06) reports, “poaching of rhino and elephants in African countries has reached critical levels in recent years, leading to the possibility of extinction.” The words “critical” and “extinction” illustrate a desperate situation.

Poaching is also a controversial topic in South Africa – it implicates complex issues of race and class against a historical background of race and class segregation. On-the-ground poachers have often been portrayed as black, poor and of rural backgrounds. The World Wildlife Fund has referred to poachers as “often poor locals”, and *The Guardian* described poachers as “usually poor and black” (WWF, 2018; Smith, 2015). On the other hand, concerned anti-poaching activists have been depicted as middle class and white. This leaves a gap in the representation of the syndicates responsible for leading and managing poaching efforts. The media often place the Chinese in that gap.

China is not only portrayed as leading poaching syndicates, but has also often been blamed for creating a demand for illegal trafficked goods. One news article states: “The bad news is that, like drugs, if there is someone willing to buy, there is always someone willing to sell. That’s why policymakers and conservation groups are now targeting the demand side of the problem. A crucial component of that strategy is gaining a deeper understanding of who buys ivory and why” (News24, 2015/09/03). However, surprisingly few articles thoroughly detailed the who and why of the illegal wildlife market. South African media coverage has not been supportive of creating a nuanced understanding of China’s involvement in illegal wildlife trade. In this sample, there were no in-depth articles or individual profiles of Chinese individuals involved in poaching. Accordingly, few articles distinguish Chinese involvement as consumers, middlemen or poachers. Instead, coverage presents the concept of “China” in its entirety as poaching perpetrator, regardless of specific identities, backgrounds or industries.

However, some articles complicate the essentialist concept of China as poaching perpetrator. The article, *Kenya: Race against time to save the last white rhino* (News24, 2015/09/22), explains how poaching forms part of organised crime. Instead of "China" the article specifies involvement of "criminal syndicates, primarily in Vietnam and China". By firstly mentioning "syndicates", and only then focusing on their potential nationality, the article distinguishes between Chinese nationals who are involved in organised crime, and those who are not. This distinction gives visibility to Chinese citizens not involved in poaching or actively opposed to it. Nuanced representation of Chinese individuals is crucial to China's reputation. The word "criminal" links poaching with crime in China, therefore challenging the notion that the Chinese government accepts, or is indifferent to, poaching. The Chinese government's efforts to curb poaching are important to their representation as a leader in sustainable development. Researcher Yu-Shan Wu stated in the *Mail & Guardian* that, in the "contentious issue" of illegal wildlife trade, "perceptions are important" (*M&G,* 2015/12/04).

Yang Fen Clang, a 66-year old Chinese businesswoman, was reportedly caught with 19 tons of ivory in Tanzania (News24, 2015/10/9). According to US non-profit organisation, Elephant Action League, her arrest is "the news that we all have been waiting for, for years". "We" and "all" suggest that the NGO represents a broader view than its own, implying a large group of supporters of poaching justice have been awaiting Yang's arrest. The article withholds the name or any other identifiers of the accused, referring to her only as "a Chinese woman" – emphasising her citizenship. Furthermore, Yang's gender is highlighted, perhaps because men are stereotypically involved in poaching, making this contradiction newsworthy. She was dubbed the "Chinese Ivory Queen" (News24, 2015/10/13). The four articles in the sample covering Yang had an antagonistic tone, but one provided China with the opportunity to defend their commitment to conservation: "In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying…said she did not know about it but asserted that China is committed to protecting endangered wildlife" (News24, 2015/10/13).

*China's anti-poaching efforts*

A sub-dominant frame of China's anti-poaching efforts emerged in one article. The punishment for poaching under already-existing Chinese policy is severe. In

Switzerland, where Chinese poachers were reportedly detained, “they face Swiss fines of up to $41 000 each”, but according to News24, they “would likely face more severe punishments in China” (News24, 2015/08/04). This quote highlights strict punishments in Chinese legislation aimed at preventing poaching, which challenges stereotypical criticism of the government’s indifference to poaching. Highlighting the Chinese government’s strict anti-poaching policies contributes to the sub-dominant frame that “China” in its entirety is not a poaching perpetrator; in fact its government strongly opposes poaching.

While South African media reports that China’s financial contributions attempt to curb poaching, the USA received negative coverage for allowing poaching in South Africa. This difference in frames illustrates the significance of poaching coverage in wielding soft power. China’s anti-poaching support in Zimbabwe was reported during a flood of articles covering Cecil the lion, killed by an American dentist. One article (News24, 2015/08/06) suggests a correlation between the negative publicity of the USA following Cecil’s death, and an increase in Chinese conservation efforts. “The funding came after Zimbabwe's wildlife became the focus of global attention with the killing of Cecil the lion, a well-known animal among tourists, by an American trophy hunter.” This correlation implies a strategy by China to appear heroic, contributing to conservation, at a time when the US is framed as villainous for its involvement in Cecil’s death – a symbolic destruction of Zimbabwe’s wildlife.

The symbolism around Cecil suggests the destruction of conservation in Africa, specifically by the USA. This frame is strengthened by the article’s explicit reference to the poacher’s nationality, “an American trophy hunter” without using his name or other identifiers. He is described only as a “trophy hunter,” which is negatively associated with greed, destruction and a disregard for wildlife. South African media portrays this incident in the familiar good-bad duality frame. While the USA is posited as bad, China is automatically associated with good, for responding to the incident. Contradictory to the stereotypical depiction of China as environmentally destructive, the country is portrayed in this article as a conservationist, offering support and allegiance to Africa.

The article emphasises Chinese-Zimbabwean cooperation. According to Chinese ambassador Lin Lin, “by providing equipment for wildlife protection, China is willing

to co-operate with our Zimbabwe friends to ensure that all of Africa's wildlife can survive." China is one of the few influential countries that have remained "friends" with Zimbabwe, despite criticism of bad governance and authoritarianism by current president Robert Mugabe (News24, 2015/08/06). In this article, Zimbabwe is portrayed as a victim of poaching, while the USA is not only depicted as one of the countries that has abandoned ties with Zimbabwe, but has also exploited its wildlife through the poaching of Cecil. Alternatively, China is portrayed as the loyal ally showing solidarity with the victim, Zimbabwe. China recently awarded Robert Mugabe the Confucius Peace Prize (China's version of the Nobel Peace Prize) because of his "strong support of Pan-Africanism and African independence" (News24, 2015/10/22).

Despite the article from News24 highlighting the anti-poaching stance, South African media tend to portray China as key poaching perpetrator, even in articles about its curbing efforts. One article leads with "China, which is accused of fuelling the trade in elephant ivory and rhino horn, on Thursday pledged equipment worth $2m to curb poaching in Zimbabwe." Though the article's focus is on China's anti-poaching assistance, the introductory sentence redirects the focus to China's position as key poaching perpetrator. Thus media coverage of China's anti-poaching efforts indirectly puts China's poaching reputation in the spotlight.

China is even portrayed as key poaching perpetrator in articles on other countries' poaching activities. The article *700kg rhino horns, elephant tusks seized in Vietnam* (News24, 2015/08/14) focuses on the seizure of tusks in Vietnam, yet emphasises China: "but the trade has flourished in recent years, particularly thanks to demand from Vietnam and China with devastating results for Africa's rhino populations". Though the article provides no contextual link between Vietnam and China in this particular case, it does highlight China as a key market for illegal wildlife goods. China is implicated here in illegal activity that is "devastating" for the rhino population. Along with the phrase "thanks to", the article implies that Vietnam and China are directly responsible for the rhino population's decline. This emotionally valued language could portray China as antagonistic. Even in articles that focus on the anti-poaching efforts, China fails to escape its reputation as key poaching perpetrator.

Coverage on the Chinese government's policy development on illegal wildlife trade is struck through with skepticism. "In fact, both China and the U.S. recently announced new laws that, if enacted, could limit significantly the amount of ivory in circulation" (News24, 2015/09/03). While China's anti-poaching policies could "significantly" impact the industry, the parenthesis "if enacted" depicts a lack of faith in the implementation or priority of Chinese policies. The implied skepticism of the Chinese government's policy implementation, portrays it as untrustworthy.

Articles on China's anti-poaching efforts often use information sourced from Chinese state news organisations. The article titled, *China seizes 620 turtles, tortoises smuggled from Vietnam*, refers to Chinese "state media" saying "the official Xinhua News Agency said…" Chinese media has increasingly become available to South Africans through its African expansion. This could have increased the availability of information to South African media on China's anti-poaching efforts. If that information is published by South African media, it could improve China's environmental reputation. However, according to Madrid-Morales and Wasserman (2018), South African journalists rarely use official Chinese news sources, or treat it as propaganda.

*Colonial stereotypes*

The South African media in the sample studied focus strongly on China's multinational relationships. While the USA features alongside China in articles on sustainable development, the involvement of the United Kingdom is central to wildlife trade coverage. During Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2015 visit to the UK, Chinese state media framed the event as beneficial to a healthy China-UK relationship. This is illustrated by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) Chairman Munshi Faiz Ahmad's statement in Xinhua that "any indication that bilateral relations between China and Britain are getting better and better every day will send a positive signal to the rest of the world" (Karim, 2015).

Simultaneously, South African media focused on the wildlife conservation speech by the UK's Prince William, delivered on a popular Chinese show called "Let's Talk." The speech featured prominently on South Africa's news agenda, including titles such

as *Prince William appeals to Chinese to save elephants* (News24, 2015/10/20), seemingly because the South African public is concerned about poaching, but also potentially because of South Africa's historical relationship with Britain. Thus, exploring how China's involvement in wildlife trade is framed in South African media, requires an examination of how the UK's position on wildlife trafficking is portrayed.

Princes Harry and William are devoted to wildlife conservation in Africa. Harry has joined "the war against rhino poachers" by assisting with three months of night patrols in South Africa's Kruger National Park. "The fight has already proven to be a deadly one," as the force had reportedly killed 300 poachers before 2015's end (D'Souza, 2015). Additionally, according to a satirical piece in *The Guardian*, it occurred to Prince William "that a romantic affinity with a distant landscape could be elevated into a job," and that "William appears immediately to have found a replacement for conventional work: protecting African wildlife." Prince William is accused of "adopting a whole continent," illustrating a neocolonial attitude by a patronising prince who "loves Africa. It's where he proposed to Catherine, it's where he spent his gap year and it's where he found himself" (Bennett, 2013).

It is therefore unsurprising that Prince William assumed responsibility to plead for Africa's wildlife, especially to a Chinese audience, since "China is a major consumer of ivory, with demand for the tusks threatening dwindling elephant populations with extinction" (News24, 2015/10/20). Through emotive words such as "threatening", "dwindling" and "extinction," China is presented as responsible for apocalyptic consequences of Africa's wildlife. While China is depicted as dangerous to the future of African wildlife, the UK, through its royal representatives, is portrayed as the saviour of Africa.

The article does not discuss the implications of the British royalty's sense of responsibility in approaching conservation in Africa. Firstly, it augments the idea of Africa's dependency on developed countries for assistance, which might affect the perception of both African competency and agency. Secondly, it creates the idea of ownership of Africa, which creates a sense of colonial entitlement to Africa's wildlife. If British royalty are perceived to be the "true owners" of Africa, then Africans are merely the custodians of its wildlife. British royalty can thus be

perceived to essentially protect its own wildlife in Africa. China is then portrayed not simply as a threat to African wildlife, but to the property of British royalty. The royal responsibility to chastise China, then also stems from a fear that Africa is not fulfilling its role as wildlife custodians – again questioning African competency.

Additionally, the frame emerges of a paternalistic figure (Britain) encouraging an infantilised China to do better. "I am absolutely convinced that China can become a global leader in the protection of wildlife" (News24, 2015/10/20). William's confidence, being "absolutely convinced," reassures the audience, affirming that he is in control of a dangerous situation. William's encouragement of China, through highlighting its potential to lead in conservation, further supports the concept of paternalism – he tries to push for China's cooperation through affirmation and validation. This portrays China as lacking leadership to reach its conservation potential, and through William's speech, western leadership is presented as a necessity for China to do so. This portrayal neglects mention of wildlife trafficking policies and campaigns China has created and participated in without input from western countries.

The paternalistic frame is further cultivated through William's perceived self-reflexivity on his colonial legacy. "William, who is second in line to the throne, noted that his own ancestors had collected animal trophies, but said that the prospect of total extinction meant traditions had to change" (News24, 2015/10/20). William acknowledges western cultures' history of trophy hunting, but aligns this history with past, unacceptable behaviour from an embarrassing heritage. His insight into the wildlife extinction crisis positions this as a "developed" attitude, while those perpetuating this crisis, including China, are comparatively "undeveloped". Because China is perceived as lacking the understanding William has gained, he is obliged as protector of Africa to teach China. Now seemingly culturally superior, William is in a position to pressure China, illustrated by the implied necessity of the word "had" in "traditions had to change." This contributes to the image of William as a paternalistic figure – the protector or saviour of Africa.

Where the frame of Britain is condescending to China, this strengthens China's alliance with Africa as members of "the rest" (Zakaria, 2008) – developing countries who unwillingly receive western leadership. This patronising frame could affect

China's image in two ways. Firstly, China is framed as inferior and untrustworthy, in contrast to a reliable Western country. Secondly, the patronising role of the UK aligns China with the African continent. The continuing infantilisation of China, alongside the patronisation of Britain, could stimulate an increasing solidarity with China by the "rest", and importantly, potentially distract from China's negative image as poaching perpetrator.

The section has found that one of the dominant frames emerging in coverage of Chinese sustainable development in South African media is China as a key perpetrator in poaching. Sub-dominant frames have also emerged, acknowledging Chinese policy and anti-poaching efforts, but these are met with skepticism. It also found that China as perpetrator is juxtaposed by the UK, British royalty in particular, as protectors of Africa.

### 1.2. Superpowers China and USA: Who leads?

South African media coverage of Chinese sustainable development often mentions China and the USA together – either pitted against each other, or highlighting their similarities – especially as two of the biggest contributors to global carbon emissions. The USA is essentially portrayed as the global climate leader, pushing for cooperation on sustainable development from China in particular. A paternalistic attitude towards China, similar to the one of the UK mentioned above, emerges. However, rather than the infantilisation of China, the USA-China relationship tends to be framed in a more competitive light.

China and the USA are often described as "top emitters" of carbon. "Top emitters Beijing and Washington both say their [carbon reduction] plans are ambitious. China plans to peak greenhouse gas emissions around 2030 while the United States aims to cut greenhouse emissions by 26-28% by 2025, from 2005 levels" (News24, 2015/10/19). The publication explains to readers that China's plan is "ambitious", which, in contrast to China as top emitter, presents China's carbon-reducing commitments as remarkable, and even newsworthy. The article sets a tone of progress, an improvement to previous approaches of the USA and China to climate change – essentially defensive or indifferent. This is illustrated by Yvo de Boer, head

of the Global Green Growth Institute in Seoul, commenting that "both the United States and China were more engaged this time" (News24, 2015/10/19).

Most articles featuring China and the USA adopt an official US government perspective. Coverage of a speech by then US Secretary of State, John Kerry, affirms a portrayal of USA's climate leadership. Kerry claims that "scientists are 'overwhelmingly unified' in concluding that humans are contributing to global climate change" (News24, 2015/08/31). Countries who are not proactively responding to climate change are described as "irresponsible". He adds: "Skeptics who stand in the way of action to respond to climate change will not be remembered kindly." The words "will not be remembered kindly" comes across as threatening. This implies that countries not following the USA's preferred route of "action" could have their legacies destroyed by the USA. China would then be pressured into following the USA's lead, or risk reputation damage and soft power failure. Kerry's comments are ironic, as the USA had failed to ratify any international commitments on carbon emissions at the time (Milman, Smith & Carrington, 2017). This coverage highlights the USA's global power and influence, in particular their ability to wield their soft power efficiently to be able to divert attention from their own inaction on climate change, and still be portrayed as a climate leader.

It is therefore crucial to the USA's image to appear as a climate leader, to enable their lack of accountability to remain unquestioned. This portrayal creates space for the representation of a scapegoat, which has often been China. This, in turn, illustrates China's unsuccessful wielding of its soft power, particularly in comparison to the US. Coverage of the US further distracts from its inaction, by focusing on its redemption of China. "China is taking the issue seriously... We've been urging other countries all around the world to do so" (News24, 2015/08/31). The USA's leadership position is affirmed through its reassurance to the public that China is cooperating, and further "urging" global cooperation. The USA's leadership is portrayed as being patronising towards China, confirming its cooperation on its behalf, which suggests a need for western leadership and supervision. The article offers no response from China to defend itself, or to challenge US leadership. This suggests an approval by South African media of the USA's authority to act as a watchdog towards China.

The USA's leadership is established so firmly that a challenge by China seems unlikely or impossible. American leadership exudes confidence, which offers China only one place – as follower. Obama is quoted as saying "If we [USA] don't do it, nobody will. The only reason that China [is on board is] they saw we were gonna do it, too... When the world faces its toughest challenges, America leads the way forward." (News24 2015/08/04*)*. Not only is USA leadership reaffirmed, this suggests that China lacks agency in allowing the USA to determine its decision-making. It also suggests that the USA is the only country with the power to lead in sustainability.

The article lauds the US with "visionary leadership" as a subheading, further reifying the leadership frame. Obama's plan was "applauded by environmental groups including the World Wildlife Fund for Nature and the Centre for Climate and Energy Solutions". These endorsements by renowned non-profit organisations award the US leadership with credibility. The endorsements also associate the USA with goodness and representative of civil society, which connotates righteousness. This could justify both its watchdog attitude towards China, and its self-appointed climate leadership.

Subdominant frames have also emerged. The *Cape Times* (2015/08/06) reports that "Beijing recently announced that it was closing its four coal-fired power plants because its leaders recognise that dirty air is harmful to the business environment and public health." This highlights China's agency in portraying its responses to climate change without western leadership.

This section found that China and the USA are often portrayed alongside each other in climate change coverage. The USA's climate leadership is firmly established in the South African media sample studied, despite its lack of carbon-reduction commitments. Its ability to remain portrayed as a climate leader illustrates its soft power success, in contradiction to China, who becomes the climate change scapegoat, depicted without agency or sufficient competition to the US for leadership.

### 1.3. China's response to climate change: COP21 coverage

Climate change coverage during the sample period mostly centred on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris. Many of these articles referred to China as the "world's largest carbon polluter" (News24, 2015/09/29). China's developing country status

awards it more leniency to mitigate carbon emissions, compared to already developed nations. However, South African media challenge the clemency towards developing nations because of their severe environmental impact. The BRICS nations are accused of leaving "the world on a path toward 3.5°C of warming compared with pre-industrial times" (News24, 2015/09/28). Among them, China's carbon emissions are often singled out as critical.

One article reports that "fundamental divisions remain over how to share out carbon-emissions cuts between rich nations, which have polluted for longer, and emerging giants such as China and India powering fast-growing economies and populations" (News24, 2015/09/04). China is portrayed as an "emerging giant," with "giant" either implying China's large size and population, or connotating intimidation and power. This is evocative of danger and uncontrollability. Alongside "emerging," which suggests growth and expansion, China seems increasingly dangerous and unstoppable. This coverage reflects a potential fear of China's growth, which might be associated with accusations of China as a neocolonial force in Africa.

Additionally, "powering" not only implies driving force, but also strength and success, potentially evoking admiration, especially from fellow BRICS countries and allies. Since reports of China's slowing economic growth caused panic among South African economists in 2015 (McCurry, 2016), the words "powering" and "fast-growing" are reassuring. Sustained economic growth presents China as both a powerful and also reliable South African ally. However, "fast-growing economies" and "population growth" somewhat associates China with carbon emissions and potential environmental destruction given that China's carbon emissions are reportedly "still rising fast" (News24, 2015/09/28). This illustrates the tension within the portrayal of China's growth as signifying either economic benefits or danger to sustainability.

Some articles focus on the environmental impact of cheap, imitation products created in China. The *Cape Times* (2015/10/02) reported on a study claiming these products "are not good for the environment as they have significantly higher carbon emissions than the same products made in other countries." Its heading, *Chinese products accelerating climate change*, directly blames China for a changing climate. The present continuous tense use in "accelerating" suggests this is an ongoing and

increasing problem. The article acknowledges the benefits of these cheaper goods to developing countries and boosting the world economy, but explains "all this has come at a substantial cost to the environment." Cheap, fake goods from China have become common across the globe and are generally perceived to be below quality and wasteful. The word "cost" (*CT*, 2015/10/02) creates a sense of loss - China's impact on the environment seems unable to be redeemed.

The article attributes China's high production emissions to the fact that "their manufacturing technologies are less advanced and they rely primarily on coal for energy." "Less advanced" portrays China as lacking the innovative technology to reduce their carbon footprint. This suggests that they lack the capability, rather than the motivation, to reduce emissions. Ironically, South African media also frame China as a leader in green technology, which will be further discussed below. Scientists suggest that "developed countries could help reduce China's carbon pollution by improving manufacturing processes in these areas" (*CT*, 2015/10/02). China is depicted as needing "help" from "developed countries," that again contributes to the concept of China as less developed and therefore dependent on developed countries. For the most part, China's science and innovation advancement lacks recognition in South African media.

The *Mail & Guardian* paid more attention to the African perspective at COP21, focusing on African agency in the Africa-China relationship. An article titled, *Africa seeks better deals with China* (*M&G,* 2015/12/04), focuses on the African position at COP21, which is suggested to be strong, implied by the proactivity of "seeks." The subtitle, "but the continent does not speak with one voice when meeting and dealing with the Asian giant" (*M&G,* 2015/12/04) emphasises African agency's failure in reaching a COP21 agreement. China is again portrayed as a "giant", but this time in direct relation to Africa. While China is presented as a strong and powerful force, Africa is portrayed as weak, predominantly because of its divisiveness. However, despite the portrayal of China as powerful, the article's focus on the African perspective is empowering to African representation. Highlighting African agency implies that China's influence on the continent is limited. The focus on African agency at COP21 potentially sketches a more equal power dynamic in the Africa-China relationship.

Another *M&G* article titled, *Africa will burn after timid talks* (*M&G,* 2015/11/11), critiques the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) negotiating bloc. BASIC countries are accused of stifling COP negotiations and resisting the termination of coal plants. They are described as wanting "to avoid responsibility for their growing emissions, while still getting funding from developed countries to adapt to climate change". China is positioned as the leader of BASIC, who "sank COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 – the last time an agreement to lower emissions was on the table" (*M&G,* 2015/11/11). The word "sank" portrays China as uncooperative, detrimental to the goals, and even rebellious. China is also held partly responsible for the failure of agreements at COP21, because of its "just politicking". Additionally, China is placed in direct opposition to Europe, who is "loath" to fund BASIC countries' carbon reductions, "because China and India will have access to it" (*M&G,* 2015/11/11). This illustrates developed nations' reluctance to accept China's developing nation status.

*China's climate change mitigation efforts*

During COP21, China reportedly pledged "that its emissions would peak by 2030" (News24, 2015/09/29). Some articles indicate enthusiasm about China's climate change mitigation drive, which is evident in the subheading "China brightens projections". China's commitments seem hopeful through the word, "brightens." The article describes China's emissions peak as "a huge factor", and carbon reduction in China is portrayed as crucial. While South African media displayed a lack of faith in China's anti-poaching efforts, China is framed as more trustworthy and committed to climate mitigation and adaptation.

Enthusiasm for China's climate change commitment emerges in coverage that "China was doing more than its fair share, for instance, counting its emissions since 1950" (News24, 2015/10/19). The term "fair share" is used to allocate different responsibilities to developing and developed countries to curb their emissions. China, as a developing nation, is reported to be "outperforming" what is expected from them. China's policies and funding are portrayed as generous, beyond what has been agreed upon as "fair" for developing countries. This enthusiasm diverts attention from China's position as one of the world's biggest polluters. The article's optimism about China is awarded credibility via the article's primary sources: "18 civil society

groups". The inclusion of these organisations associates China with goodness and representing "civil society".

The abovementioned USA-China relationship emerges again, but in this article China is lauded for its climate change efforts, in contrast to criticism of the USA for its inaction. The article leads with: "The United States and other rich nations are doing less than their fair share to fight climate change under a UN accord due in December while China is outperforming." The USA is placed in direct comparison with China, and found to be underperforming. While the USA is portrayed as part of the "rich nations," symbolising an underperformance of developed countries as a whole, China's position as a developing country is reaffirmed, even though developed countries are loath to accept this position.

This sample also shows that media acknowledge China's policies that have "increased their renewable energy targets" (*CT*, 2015/09/22). The *Cape Times* (2015/10/05) calls China one of the "renewable investment 'champions' awarding China the number one position in renewable energy investment in 2014". "Champions" and "first place" illustrate triumph, but also suggest something to compete for. While the USA's climate leadership has been established, the competitive tension between China and the USA continues. However, the USA and China are perhaps unfairly compared – expectations of the USA in this particular case are high, due its developed country status, while expectations of China are low as a developing country – yet they compete for global leadership regardless of their development status. The portrayal of admiration for China as victor in this article indicates its potential to lead in sustainability.

Some articles challenge the homogenisation of China as an environmentally destructive country by featuring voices of Chinese environmentalists. "'Our concern is that we will end up with a lowest common denominator, where everybody just agrees on the least ambitious options,' said Li Shuo of Greenpeace China." (News24, 2015/09/05). Greenpeace is a renowned global environmental organisation, and Greenpeace China's inclusion is crucial to the representation of Chinese environmentalism. China's reputation as environmentally unethical tends to overshadow Chinese environmental activism. Little is known about environmental organisations in China, and their very existence might be surprising to South African

audiences. Greenpeace China's visibility symbolises a potentially lesser known broad network of Chinese environmentalism and conservation. Ultimately, this coverage contributes to a more nuanced image of China, highlighting the presence of environmentalism in a country that is often stereotyped for its lack of environmental concern; however, these nuanced articles are few and far between.

Another nuanced article includes China's chief delegate, Su Wei's, quote on the progress of negotiations before COP21: "We need to work faster" (News24, 2015/08/31). This affirms China's commitments to the climate agreements, despite News24's report that "enforcement of environmental rules has long been a problem in China" (2015/08/30). Su's statement counters the stereotype that China lacks commitment to climate change mitigation, and instead creates the perception that the Chinese government – essentially represented by the broader "we" – is aware of the urgency of mitigation commitments, emphasised by the word "faster."

Much of the coverage around China's climate change role centred on the UNFCCC's Conference of Parties (COP21). Articles strongly focused on China as top carbon emitter, but frames of China's proactive policies, climate leadership, and its solidarity with developing nations in the climate negotiations also emerged.

### 1.4. China as polluted country

South African media portray China as a polluted nation itself, through its coverage of the Tianjin blast and smog warnings in Beijing.

*Tianjin blast coverage*

In August 2015 in Tianjin, "giant explosions killed dozens and left residents in fear of being cloaked in a toxic cloud" (News24, 2015/08/14). About 140 people were killed by the blast and "thousands of tonnes of hazardous chemicals were stored at the site, officials have said", including "highly poisonous sodium cyanide, a white powder or crystal which can give off lethal hydrogen cyanide gas" (News24, 2015/08/23). The Tianjin blast coverage is characterised by the use of emotive language and a reliance on Chinese government sources, including state media.

The blast was frequently labelled a “disaster” and dubbed “among the deadliest industrial accidents in China in recent years” (News24, 2015/08/17). Dramatic descriptors such as “giant explosions,” “toxic cloud,” “walls singed,” “windows shattered,” “devastated” and “suffering” (News24, 2015/08/17; 2015/08/19; 2015/08/14) were used throughout the coverage to illustrate the severity of the blast. Citizens reportedly demanded clarity on their families’ “fates” but were hampered by state security (News24, 2015/08/15). Additionally, Greenpeace declared the situation “critical”, and “scores” of people died.

An article reported that “there was a rare moment to cheer on Friday morning when rescue workers pulled a 19-year-old firefighter from the rubble”. While the article focuses on a hopeful “moment,” the word “rare” in fact highlights the overall dire picture of the blast’s aftermath. Emotive language also created the image of fear. Articles reported “heightening fears about toxic contamination” (News24, 2015/08/18), as well as “fear of the unknown”. One article led with a description of the victims as “furious, frustrated and fearful” (2015/08/15). The “f”-alliteration strengthens the fear imagery, and suggests an antagonistic attitude towards Chinese authorities.

A focus on personal experiences further evokes emotion in the coverage of the blast. Liu, a father who had not heard from his firefighter son was described as speaking in “flat tones,” his voice “trembling with emotion” – indicating the emotional impact of the blast on Chinese citizens (News24, 2015/08/15). Liu is implied to be from a lower economic background, signified by the emphasis that he was “wearing a blue worker's cap typical of the Maoist era”. The article thus creates an image of the traumatic impact of the blast on the poor, hard-working Chinese citizens, essentially associated with vulnerability. These accounts might evoke emotion from the reader – creating empathy with the victims, and consequently, sympathy for their antagonism towards the Chinese government.

Local officials were reportedly “unperturbed” as security increased to prevent anti-government protests (News24, 2015/08/15). This image juxtaposes the powerful with the powerless – the powerless represented by the working class, vulnerable locals, while the local government commanding security is presented as the powerful. Local government is portrayed as unsympathetic and merciless towards the vulnerable. The

Chinese government's treatment of its own vulnerable communities reflects how it could potentially treat vulnerable African communities. This type of coverage could fuel skepticism of the Chinese government's human rights impact in Africa, which will be further discussed below.

Another element adding to the image of the community's vulnerability is the young age of the firefighter, a 24-year-old. Youths often symbolise the most vulnerable members of society. Highlighting the firefighter's age could strengthen the demonisation of the powerful. A vulnerable individual becomes collateral damage to poor governance that could have prevented the blast. The article concluded: "But he still clung to a sliver of hope" (2015/08/15). Within the image of powerlessness, the word "hope" also portrays the resilience of vulnerable communities, which could challenge the extent of the Chinese regime's power.

The Chinese state is central to the Tianjin blast coverage. Official Chinese news sources such as *Xinhua* were consulted for updates on the blast: "…fifty people are still missing and 624 are still in hospital a little more than a week after the blasts, the official Xinhua news agency reported, citing local officials" (News24, 2015/08/23); and "Niu Yueguang, deputy director of the fire department of the Public Security Ministry told China Central Television" (News24, 2015/08/18). According to Madrid-Morales and Wasserman (2018), the use of official Chinese media is unusual for South African media. Chinese officials were referred to either using the collective "officials" or quoting an individual: "…said Tianjin Deputy Mayor He Sushan" (News24, 2015/08/18); or sourcing official organisations, such as the Tianjin Environmental Protection Bureau (*CT*, 2015/08/21). Coverage of the Tianjin blast saw an overlap in official sources quoted in News24 and the *Cape Times* – suggesting they consulted similar Chinese or international news sources, or relied on similar press releases, though these were not acknowledged.

In addition to official Chinese sources, South African media also relied on western official sources for factual reporting on the blast. News24 (2015/08/18) reported on the prolonged impact of chemical exposure, "according to the US Environmental Protection Agency". The USA's EPA is consulted, even though the event occurred in China. Additionally, the US embassy in China was mentioned as a credible source throughout the coverage of the blast. Corroborating Chinese-sourced information with

western sources could imply a mistrust in the credibility of Chinese sources compared to a deeper trust of US-based sources. However, US sources could simply be easier and more comfortably accessed by South African journalists.

The Chinese government was reportedly proactive in its response to the blast. While South African media acknowledged the impact of the blast, it focused on the government responses. Chinese authorities "confirmed" the presence of toxic chemicals, but News24 reported that to prevent leaks, the Chinese government had "sealed all waterways leading into the sea from the blast site" (2015/08/17). Furthermore, "Tianjin officials have ordered a citywide check on any potential safety risks and violation of fire rules." Focusing on how the problem is addressed by the state, is an example of how Chinese media practices constructive journalism.

Coverage of the Chinese government's proactive response to the blast is characterised by accountability. The local Tianjin government was reportedly "under pressure from China's leaders in Beijing to improve industrial safety" (*CT*, 2015/08/27). Keeping local governments accountable awards the national government with credibility. Furthermore, Yang Dongliang, director of the State Administration of Work Safety, and other detained officials were frequently in the spotlight, highlighting the consequences of their negligence. The *Cape Times* reported that "China has sacked the head of its work safety regulator for suspected corruption, state news agency *Xinhua* said yesterday" (2015/08/27). Additionally, The *Cape Times* (2015/08/27) mentioned "the ruling Communist Party's graft watchdog" launched an investigation. This creates the image of an active regulatory body, illustrating the Chinese government's zero tolerance of corruption and misconduct.

Some terminology was harsher, such as a "crackdown" by the Chinese government (News24, 2015/08/18). President Xi Jinping even reportedly vowed that "authorities would learn the lessons paid for with blood" (*CT*, 2015/08/28). This implies a threat of violence – which portrays the Chinese president as powerful, but also potentially dangerous. While it highlights Xi Jinping's personal intolerance of bad governance, it might harm the charming public persona he has tried to create.

Chinese state media openly critiqued local government involved in the blast. The *People's Daily*, official mouthpiece of China's Communist Party, stated that the

facility's construction “clearly violated” safety rules (News24, 2015/08/14). News24 reported that Chinese state media “lambasted officials” for a “lack of transparency” (2015/08/17). Some news agencies found access to information challenging. The *Global Times* tabloid, “which has close ties to the ruling Communist Party” (News24, 2015/08/17) was quoted saying there had been “scant information offered by Tianjin authorities”. It accused the government of frequent inadequate disaster-response work. This type of reporting contradicts the expectation of Chinese state media to be uncritical of government.

Unofficial sources critical of the Chinese government also featured in South African media, including online sources such as Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* and *Beijing News*. Several quotes were sourced from online forums, and specifically the online microblog service Weibo. News24 (2015/08/18) referenced “numerous social media reports” and the large amount of criticism from online users and protesters led to censorship. A *Beijing News* post reportedly became a “quickly deleted article”. According to *Beijing News,* “the report was no longer available on the newspaper's website on Friday, giving rise to suspicions that the Chinese government was clamping down on sensitive information relating to the tragedy” (News24, 2015/08/14). Furthermore, “many posts were quickly deleted from China's highly censored Twitter-like microblog service Weibo”. News24 reported that Chinese authorities suspended dozens of websites and hundreds of social media accounts (2015/08/17). The Chinese government’s lack of transparency and censorship could lead to a deeper mistrust by South African journalists.

Censorship further fueled public outrage. News24 (2015/08/14) reported that “online commentators expressed fury at authorities, who are regularly accused after disasters of cover-ups”. Online commentators urged transparency, and one claimed that “every time when disaster happens, state media always spread heroic acts…nobody asks the cause of the accident to explore the truth”. Another commentator reportedly accused Chinese authorities of muzzling victims’ families, and “ensur[ing] that domestic media focus on positive aspects: rescuers' heroism or miracle rescue” (News24, 2015/08/15). This illustrates the local perception of the Chinese government’s control of the narrative, as it forces state-owned media to focus on proactive government responses, rather than accountability.

Offline protests of the blast were also covered. "'We victims demand: Government, buy back our houses,' said a banner carried by the residents at a protest" (News 24, 2015/08/17). Sourcing *Al Jazeera*, one News24 article (2015/08/17) reported that soldiers did not intervene in the protest, nor obstruct coverage by local journalists. Though the dominant frame reflects Chinese censorship, this coverage indicated a contradiction to that frame: "China's government is normally uneasy about even small, spontaneous protests. It's very rare for authorities to allow this to happen." Ultimately the overall frame of the Tianjin blast, as part of environmental damage in China, focused on the Chinese government's proactive response to the blast.

*Smog coverage*

Coverage of China's smog was often linked to the UNFCCC's COP21. Greenpeace called for "a cap on coal use" in China to bring back "healthy, breathable air" to Chinese cities. News24 (2015/10/15) published Greenpeace's report that Chinese cities' pollution levels are four times the maximum exposure to harmful particles recommended by the World Health Organisation. Sourcing the Associated Press newswire, the article referred to smog as one of "China's severe environmental challenges" (News24, 2015/10/15).

Similar to the Tianjin blast, the smog coverage also contains emotive language. China's smog was described as a "heavy haze," "choking grey haze" (News24, 11/30), "monotonous gray" skylines and "extremely severe air pollution" (2015/12/01). China's cities were referred to as "the world's dirtiest" with "notoriously foul air" (2015/10/15), which is linked to "hundreds of thousands of premature deaths each year" (2015/10/15). The dramatic impact of Chinese smog was highlighted via specific headings and subheadings: "Unhealthy and unsafe" (2015/10/15); "Beijing air pollution reaches hazardous levels" (2015/12/01); "Choking smog" (2015/12/02) and "China smog climbs to perilous levels on eve of climate talks" (2015/11/30). These portray China as dirty, reckless, and dangerous to the environment.

A dramatic heading exclaims "Toxic smog brings nightmare 'white Christmas' to Beijing" (News24, 2015/12/25), painting a gloomy picture of their Christmas. It even quotes a Weibo user asking "Can Santa find Beijing?" Western symbols of unity,

family, and joy during Christmas are placed in opposition to the Chinese context – unhappy, depressing and unsafe. Another Christmas-themed article referred to the "white Christmas" in Beijing "obscured by thick toxic smog rather than snow" (News24, 2015/12/25). This contributes to the image of an unsafe and depressing environment created by smog. The strong focus on smog almost anthropomorphises it, shaping it to be a villain – a grinch – that disrupts Chinese society.

The coverage also included the portrayal of smog as a threat to vulnerable people. An article reporting on Beijingers wearing masks outside, focused on the impact on children, stating that "schools in the Chinese capital kept students indoors and parents brought their kids to hospitals with breathing ailments on Tuesday" (News24, 2015/12/01). The children's hospital was reportedly "packed." Parents and grandparents complained about "the smog's impact on small children" (2015/12/01). Liu Feifie, a "36-year-old mother and Internet company employee" (2015/12/01) reported her own health problems but explained she was "more concerned about the health of my 7-year-old kid". The smog's impact is emphasised by descriptions of sick children, but also through the image of the sacrificial mother, further demonising the pollutant.

While villianising the smog, journalists humanised interviewees by describing their occupations, living circumstances, and providing a personal account of how they are affected by the smog. One article described office worker, Yinan Zhang Li, becoming "very depressed" and suffering "serious eyelid swelling" from the smog (News24, 2015/11/30). As with the Tianjin blast, Chinese citizens used Weibo to complain about the smog. Again it is unclear whether these testimonies were obtained through interviews, or South African journalists consulting Weibo themselves, or whether the information had been packaged by a newswire.

The smog's impact is widespread, as seen through the coverage of international sport events in Beijing. According to News24 (2015/08/04) Beijing "often enacts pollution controls ahead of major events such as the 2008 Olympic Games". Articles reported fans wearing masks, and that the Tennis Centre was "swathing" in a "hazardous" and "musty haze" (News24, 2015/10/07). Additionally, one player reportedly said the "pollution had made him vomit" (2015/10/15).

Rafael Nadal was interviewed during the China Open tennis tournament. However, Nadal "insisted he'd seen worse pollution in Beijing" and he thought "the pollution this year better than other years" (2015/10/07), especially after having had a "blue sky" day two days prior. Nadal attributed the smog to Beijing being a "big city" and that's "what you can expect". Nadal's comments contradict the perception of Beijing's unique heavy pollution, suggesting that pollution is a characteristic of large and developing cities worldwide. Similarly, other articles reflected the perspective that smog results from "explosive economic growth" that led to construction of "hundreds of coal-fired power plants". This portrays China's pollution as a product of development and not unique, rather than from a lack of environmental concern.

Similar to the Tianjin blast coverage, South African media's smog coverage incorporated Chinese government sources. Chinese officials and media often confirmed Beijing's "highest smog alert of the year" and advised citizens to "stay indoors" (News24, 2015/11/30). One article quoted an announcement from the Chinese government's Weibo account, about temporary efforts to stop construction and coal (News24, 2015/08/04). State sources again focused on the Chinese government's response to the smog. South African media covered the Chinese government's "emergency response plan", quoting "an official from the Beijing Municipal Commission of Economy and Information Technology, who declined to be named," but who had "told AFP" (News24, 2015/12/21). This illustrates South African journalists' trust of western newswires: despite their use of an unnamed source, South African media still found AFP credible enough to quote. In contrast, they are more reluctant to quote *Xinhua*.

Similar to the Tianjin blast coverage, articles contained references to western sources of information. A recurring example is the reference to the US embassy's "independent readings" of air quality. "Jason West, a University of North Carolina environmental sciences professor" was quoted on the large percentage of global deaths caused by exposure to air pollution. The same article sourced Jos Lelieveld at the Max Planck Institute for Chemistry in Germany echoing this, and providing statistics of China's air pollution fatalities (News24, 2015/09/16). This further illustrates the credibility South African media awards to western information sources, while skeptical of the data provided by Chinese news sources.

According to Greenpeace China's Li Shuo, China's carbon reduction commitments had already been embedded in Chinese policy, but reportedly "had not been widely publicised". This suggests that Chinese carbon-reduction efforts, including its standards for coal plants, which "are in some respects stricter than the corresponding standards in the EU". are not well known. This can be due to a lack of coverage, or adequate messaging from government, as Li explains: "[I]t's probably not been framed that way before. They chose to frame it a little more explicitly" (2015/12/02).

This section showed that South African media coverage focused closely on China as a polluted country, drawing specifically on two events: The Tianjin blast and Beijing smog alerts. For coverage on China as a polluted country, South African media consulted official Chinese sources and state media, and used emotive language to illustrate the severity of the impact of China's pollution.

### 1.5. China as source of green technology and renewable energy

While the South African media coverage of China's sustainable development contains pessimistic frames about China's environmental impact – such as its role in wildlife trafficking or pollution – optimistic frames also exist, such as China's growing climate leadership. Another optimistic frame emerging in South African media is China as a source of green technology and renewable energy investment.

Central to the coverage of China and green technology is the controversial topic of nuclear energy. China is entering what News24 (2015/08/02) calls a "nuclear energy boom" that could lead to China building about 100 reactors in the coming decade. "Boom" contributes to the portrayal of China as a growing, unstoppable, developing nation. China is also portrayed as a friend to Africa through coverage of nuclear energy: through its cooperation with China, Kenya will be able to "obtain expertise from China by way of training and skills development, technical support in areas such as site selection for Kenya's nuclear power plants and feasibility studies" (News24, 2015/10/09).

Additionally, according to News24, South Africa sent 50 people to China for training in nuclear power-plant operations to prepare for a South African nuclear-build programme. "This training opportunity marks the first phase of a scope that aims to

cover capability and technology in areas of nuclear power plant engineering, procurement, manufacturing, construction, commissioning, operation and maintenance, and project management" claimed the South African Department of Energy. Coverage of cooperation on nuclear power between China and South Africa portrays a close relationship between the two governments. The South African government revived its nuclear expansion plan as it "seeks to address energy shortages that are already causing blackouts and to reduce its reliance on coal". South Africa's situation appears desperate: it needs development, but particularly sustainable development, which its friendship with China could provide.

China's involvement in nuclear is mostly celebrated by officials – both Chinese and African. None of the articles sampled sourced Chinese or African citizens' opinion on nuclear power. Thus, China and South Africa's nuclear relationship is portrayed as political – and excludes civil society.

A contentious issue around nuclear energy is a lack of employment opportunities for unskilled labourers, which is the largest unemployed group in South Africa. News24 reports that "50 people" were sent to China, and they were selected from the "major role players" in the industry. "Major role players" is vague, and does not reveal much about the demographics of this group. "Major" likely implies engineers or skilled workers that are already employable. If the nuclear expansion does not employ unskilled workers, China's engagement with Africa could be perceived as benefiting richer, educated and skilled populations.

*Fun with climate change* (News24, 2015/08/12) is an optimistic article that counters the negativity around climate change by focusing on solutions in a light tone. Covering its contribution to renewable energy growth in Africa, China is included in that hopeful frame: "China has begun construction on the planet's biggest solar power plant (200 megawatts) in the Gobi Desert." Despite being the biggest polluter in the world, China is portrayed as a key actor in climate change mitigation. China's role in renewable energy is further highlighted through its reported building of the "biggest solar power plant."

South African media portrays China as a frontrunner in the field of renewable energy technology. China's renewable energy sector is described as a "vast expansion" and a

"hotbed" for "environmentally friendly investments" (*M&G,* 2015/11/06). Despite pessimistic frames about China's sustainable development, a strong optimistic frame in South African media coverage emerged of China as source of green technology and renewable energy investment. China's green innovation and investment contribute to the larger frame of China shaping itself to be a leader in the field of climate change. China's capacity and resources to promote green technology illustrate the country's ability to challenge the current environmental leadership of western countries, as mentioned in sections above.

1.6. India and China compete for Africa

As mentioned above, China is often covered alongside western countries such as the USA in South African media, and this section shows that China is also often mentioned with India. The two are predominantly portrayed together as the biggest developing country polluters, but frames of India challenging China's leadership in Africa also emerged.

During COP21, China and India were often covered together because China's Xi Jinping and India's Narendra Modi were two of the world leaders opening the UN Summit. They were mentioned together as "emerging giants" who are "powering fast-growing economies and populations" and part of the "Like Minded Developing Nations bloc" (News24, 2015/09/04). China and India are part of the G77 group of developing nations, who insist that "rich nations must bear bigger responsibility for cutting emissions, since they have been polluting for longer". These mentions of their negotiating blocs highlight their developing country status. However, developed nations refer to them in these articles as "giants like China and India", emphasising that they are ultimately heavy polluters (News24, 2015/11/03; News24, 2015/09/28).

While articles credit China for its carbon emission cuts, India is reported to not have committed to cuts in its "rapidly rising" emissions (News24, 2015/10/02). An article referencing the journal *Nature Climate Change*, states "thanks mainly to changes in China, the worldwide growth in emissions… is set to drop slightly." However, "the study showed" that "a key contributor to projected future emissions is India" (News24, 2015/12/07). China thus seems to progress towards sustainable development more readily than India.

In these articles, China potentially offers leadership to India's sustainable development. "As the giant of the G77 group of emerging economies, Beijing is well placed to put pressure on its partners at the conference, particularly India, the world's fourth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases" (News24, 2015/11/01). Additionally, China is lauded for its progress, while India seems uncooperative. "Obama met Monday with President Xi Jinping of China, which has started taking aggressive action to curb emissions, and with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has argued repeatedly that climate change isn't India's fault" (News24, 2015/11/30). India also seems to strongly support shifting the blame of climate change from developing to developed countries: "Delhi has pointed the finger at wealthy developed countries as mostly to blame for global warming" (News24, 2015/11/01).

Ironically, those developed countries assume the role of leading India's sustainable development. "As he sat down with Modi, Obama said he agreed that India has the right to pursue economic development and fight poverty, but said those priorities must also reflect 'serious and ambitious action by all nations' to curb its carbon pollution" (News24, 2015/11/30). Similar to portrayals of China, India is infantilised, and a frame of the paternalistic USA develops. The USA essentially provides India with an ultimatum for its development: Obama's perceived authority to tell Modi what India "has the right" to do, highlights this paternalistic attitude. The article implies China and the USA's cooperative leadership of India, as Obama "credits U.S. and Chinese leadership with leading 180 nations to make their own pledges". Xi responded that it was "important for the U.S. and China to work together" (News24, 2015/11/30).

Contrary to this paternalistic frame, India is also portrayed as having potential as a climate leader, through its role in the renewable energy industry. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is banking on increasing solar capacity fivefold to help cut crippling blackouts and bring power to 300 million Indians currently living without" (News 24, 2015/09/29). Here, India is portrayed as competitive in the renewables industry, attracting even Chinese investment: "With the cost of manufacturing panels falling and consumer demand rising, foreign firms are also turning to India. Japan's SoftBank, US-based SunEdison and China giant Trina Solar have all pledged investments in recent months." An Indian official was quoted saying "the 'whole world' was impressed by India's ambitions". The article refers to Modi as

“a green energy enthusiast who helped create solar parks in his home state of Gujarat”. This awards Modi with credibility as the leader of a sustainably developing country. Modi also responded to Obama that “development and protection of the environment go hand in hand”, indicating that he advocates for sustainable development (News24, 2015/11/30).

Significantly, India is sometimes depicted as a rising leader in Africa, capable of competing with China. According to News24, Prime Minister Narendra Modi “seeks to challenge China's dominance” (2015/10/26). India is reportedly honing “its soft power and historical ties to Africa” in contrast to “China's focus on resource extraction and capital investment”. According to the article, Modi wants to capitalise on China’s economic slowdown to highlight India as an alternative partner for trade and investment in Africa. India is financially unable to challenge Beijing, but according to an Indian foreign policy commentator, “we can't match the Chinese in terms of resources – but any engagement we do with the Africans at least gives them a choice”. In contrast, the Chinese economy “sucks in oil, coal and metals to feed its industrial machine”. An Indian official explained: “[O]ur partnership is not focused on an exploitative or extraction point of view, but is one that focuses on Africa’s needs and India’s strengths.” India is portrayed here as offering a partnership with Africa, while China is presented as exploitative.

In some articles, India seems able to provide a closer solidarity with Africa than China. News24 reports that “India and Africa are on the same page” in what is termed a “development partnership” (2015/10/16). Modi singles out Africa and India as “two bright spots of hope and opportunities in the global economy”. He also urges African nations to support reform of the United Nations, who risk “becoming irrelevant”, since “neither India nor any African country has a permanent seat on the UN Security Council”. Modi also draws on India’s colonial history to strengthen solidarity with Africa: “Our global institutions reflect the circumstances of the century that we left behind, not the one we are in today” (News24, 2015/10/29).

Modi reportedly called for a “‘comprehensive and concrete’ agreement on climate change” as he addressed leaders from all 54 African countries at a summit in New Delhi, where he invited them to “join an alliance of solar-rich countries” (News24, 2015/10/29). According to Modi, “no one had contributed less to global warming than

India and Africa" (News24, 2015/10/29). India is placed firmly in solidarity with Africa. Modi gathered "the highest number of foreign dignitaries to descend on India since 1983" because India wants to improve ties with Africa for "a greater share of the continent's natural resources". Thus, despite the solidarity frame, India and China are seemingly working towards the same goal – to access Africa's natural resources. However, India's bilateral trade with Africa seems currently insignificant because its "economic presence in Africa is dwarfed by China". The article furthermore reports: "China has faced criticism for using foreign labour to build infrastructure and extracting Africa's natural resources." This illustrates how China's environmental and human rights reputation might negatively impact its influence in Africa, and allow for an economically weaker India to become more significant in its presence on the continent.

However, this study finds that India is not exempt from scrutiny in South African media. Coverage includes human rights groups' criticism of India's invitation to Omar al-Bashir, the former president of Sudan, who was at the time wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes. For India, "business comes first" (News24, 2015/10/26). The article claims that its state-run oil company, which has fields in Sudan and South Sudan, is "on the hunt" for foreign assets, which are not necessarily sustainable development investments. Coverage of India's business priorities challenges the idea that its relationship with Africa is necessarily based on solidarity.

This section has found that the sampled South African media portray India and China as the biggest developing nation polluters, but include frames that suggest that India is challenging Chinese influence in Africa. This is based on the portrayal of India as offering more genuine solidarity to Africa than China, which was also found to potentially be a fallacy.

*Sustainable development summary*

The following frames have emerged from this framing analysis of South African media coverage of China's sustainable development: China as key poacher; the climate leadership struggle between the USA and China – including the significance of China's position as a developing country; China's pollution as characterised

through the Tianjin blast and smog coverage; China and India's competing influences on the African continent, and finally, an optimistic frame of China as source of green technology and renewable energy investment. A substantive conclusion follows at the end of the human rights section below.

## 2. Human Rights

Compared to sustainable development, Chinese human rights issues received limited coverage in South African media during the same period. This could be because COP21, the Tianjin blast and Beijing smog alerts mentioned above were important sustainability events that increased its coverage. There are overlaps in the human rights and sustainable development frames of the two topics, illustrating their interconnectedness. For example, during the Tianjin blast, essentially an environmental disaster, articles also reported on the emerging protests – a human rights issue. The following frames emerged in South African coverage of China's human rights: disasters in China, Chinese neocolonialism, pragmatism of human rights negligence, and improvements in China's human rights.

### 2.1. Disasters in China

Human rights coverage of China in South African media often focuses on disasters, both natural and man-made. South African media relied on Chinese state media sources to cover the events. An article on a mine collapse in Shandong stated that "the official Xinhua News Agency said" (News24, 2015/12/26), and another article stated that "Yulin city's propaganda department says…" This was done "in a statement", illustrating the use of government press releases (News24, 2016/01/07).

These articles followed coverage of a landslide in Shenzhen that "killed one person and left another 75 missing and presumed dead" (News24, 2015/12/26). China is portrayed as creating unsafe work environments, as News24 suggests: "Authorities on Friday ruled that the landslide was not a geological disaster but a work safety incident, adding to China's list of major man-made disasters in recent years." Mentioning China's "list" of man-made disasters implies a regular occurrence, suggesting that unsafe work environments are common practice in China. "Man-made" implies China's neglect has an impact comparable to that of natural disasters,

emphasising the extent of the danger posed by China's environmental mismanagement. It also suggests that this disaster could have been prevented, had China invested in workers' safety. The article acknowledges safety improvements, which have "drastically" reduced the number of people killed, but also emphasises that "China's mines have long been the world's deadliest." China is portrayed as one of the worst offenders of labour rights protection, through a lack of prioritisation of safety. Chinese prioritisation of profit over labour protection was a predominant frame in the natural disaster coverage on South African media. Implying that man-made disasters are a regular occurrence creates the idea that mining in China is a hazardous occupation.

### 2.2. Chinese Neocolonialism

This section suggests that South African media portray China as a neocolonial force in Africa, which is characterised by its lack of respect for human rights. The Chinese neocolonialism frame is strengthened by the use of human rights groups and grassroots interviews as sources. Amnesty International features in a News24 article, saying "cobalt mined dangerously by children in the Democratic Republic of Congo could end up in the lithium batteries of smartphones and electric cars made by Apple, Samsung or Sony" (2016/01/19). The article describes "children" working in "tunnels" with "rudimentary tools" in a "clandestine" environment. Not only is this an emotive description of a horrific work environment, but the fact that "children" – symbolic of vulnerability and innocence – are employed in such an environment, portrays the employers as particularly villainous. The report's title, "This is what we die for: Human Rights Abuses in the Democratic Republic of Congo power the global trade in cobalt", underlines this deadly working environment.

The employers are not specified, but "the firms contacted by the report were identified as clients of Asian battery manufacturers" that acquire cobalt from the Chinese-owned Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt, who owns a subsidiary in the DRC. Furthermore, "once processed, the cobalt is sold to battery component manufacturers in China and South Korea, which supply the multinationals". While the article specifically emphasises the Asian and Chinese involvement, it does not name any other nations that featured in the report, or are involved in electronics production. Those nations are indirectly identified through the names of their products such as

"Lenovo" or "Microsoft", who were "unable to declare the origin of the cobalt used in their lithium-ion batteries". China features from the beginning of the article, while the USA's involvement in "blood minerals" appears only as a sidenote in the final paragraph. While the article mentions existing USA policies, China seems to have no human rights policy framework at all.

Along with this human rights framework, another article portrays Chinese influence in Angola as directly neocolonial. The *Mail & Guardian* article emotively describes the working conditions in Angola: "Then came the talk of rice paddies, followed by Chinese overseers, the threats to shoot trespassers, the hiring of teenagers for wages paid in part in cigarettes, plus word that all the rice to be grown would be for export and not for local consumption." In fact, China is accused of neocolonialism in the discourse: "It pointed to the project as a clear example of neocolonialism in action, and made noises about Chinese investment being worse for the people of Angola than Portuguese settlement had ever been, to the considerable embarrassment of the government" (*M&G*, 2015/08/28). Here, it seems as if China's neocolonialism in Africa is worse than western colonialism.

This frame is carried by the interviewee, essentially a soundboard for his community – a local Angolan called Capalandanda. "They had neither been consulted nor compensated, the people of the area told Capalandanda", the article claims, suggesting a powerlessness against the Chinese influence. Angolans express concern about employment of "Chinese workers they strongly suspected to be sentenced criminals sent to work the land in lieu of prison time" (*M&G,* 2015/08/28). These quotes might fuel suspicion around the stereotype of Chinese prisoner employment in Africa. Similar perceptions are emphasised through inclusion of the interviewee's opinions, with few counterarguments from other sources. For example, "according to Capalandanda, on June 20 human rights activists and journalists were imprisoned in Angola, accused of planning a coup". However, in response, "Angola and China both describe such suspicions as ludicrous". The Angolan government argues that "what those citizens actually see, however, is what by some estimates may top 300 000 Chinese migrant workers in Angola already…in a country with a population of 24.3 million" (*M&G,* 2015/08/28). However, the Angolan government's counterargument is weak in comparison to the interviewee's, though his quotes have no factual basis.

This illustrates the ineffectiveness of government responses in comparison to an individual voice, which suggests accusations of neocolonialism might not be effectively challenged by the Chinese government.

The article ends with a rhetorical question: "Does it court the displeasure of Luanda and, more importantly, Beijing by giving Capalandanda a fresh start in this country, with the tacit acknowledgement that there is trouble in Angola because of China?" (*M&G,* 2015/08/28). The technique is emotive, and the open ending also places China in a position in which it is unable to respond. The reader answers for themselves, based on their existing beliefs of China. China is directly blamed for Angola's problems. Finally, the title suggests that South Africa and China are remarkably close: "Angolan asylum seeker set to test SA's love affair with China" (*M&G* 2015/08/28).

As seen above, articles focusing on a human-interest angle can evoke powerful emotions. For example, Mokoena is "one of hundreds of thousands" of Vaal residents preparing for "the worst" after ArcelorMittal SA announced a closure of some of its steel plants (News24, 2015/08/01). China seems to put Mokoena's livelihood at risk, due to "cheap Chinese imports" affecting the profitability of the company. The situation is depicted as unfair and unjust, through emphasising its impact on ArcelorMittal employee Tsietsi Phiri as a "father of four" who "has been with the company for 14 years". Management reportedly told Phiri that "the dumping of steel from China made it difficult for them to compete". China is blamed for this negative impact on Phiri, a loyal employee, and his vulnerable dependents. Along with dramatic captions such as, "we will slowly die of starvation", China is further demonised for negatively affecting livelihoods in Africa (News24, 2015/08/01).

China is accused of neocolonialism in Africa, a frame the South African media create through the use of grassroots interviews. Coverage also excludes specific mention of other neocolonial, especially western, players, which suggests that China's neocolonialism is extraordinary.

### 2.3 Pragmatism of human rights negligence

This section shows a frame of China's lack of human rights legislation and implementation. Coverage even implies that China's legal system enables human rights violations. One article's caption, "UN: Torture entrenched in Chinese justice

system" (News24, 2015/12/10) suggests that human rights violations are not only normalised but a fundamental part of Chinese governance. The UN Committee against Torture is reportedly "seriously concerned" about torture in China, which is compounded by a failure in "transparency and accountability". Additionally, "international rights groups welcomed the UN report on Thursday, also Human Rights Day", suggesting that there is a broad, influential network of concerned groups criticising human rights violations in China. The plural "groups" suggests this criticism is substantial and widespread.

The article further portrays China trying to hide these accusations: "The observations 'send a clear message that the international community sees through China's denial of documented facts', said Sharon Hom, head of the group Human Rights in China." While China denies the claims, human rights groups are depicted as airing a more credible truth. The article reports on China's "ongoing" human rights violations existing "in China's courts and prisons", again suggesting the legality of human rights violations in China. Kai Müller, Executive Director of The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), Germany, expresses "alarm at China's attempts to subvert criticism of its record on human rights and to distort ... reality". ICT is committed to the accountability of "Chinese authorities" for the "suffering" they have caused. China seems to avoid accountability for its human rights violations in this portrayal.

Despite the focus on the UN report, the article also awards the Chinese government's defense significant space: "China on Thursday dismissed a United Nations report" that was written "despite legislation outlawing torture in the country". According to the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, "in recent years China has been promoting the rule of law and has made great efforts in every aspect, including fighting torture" (News24, 2015/12/10). This response implies the Chinese government's zero tolerance of torture, which it is actively "fighting" against. The article highlights the fact that Chinese anti-torture legislation is overshadowed by NGOs' publicisation of its monitoring of China's human rights violations.

Coverage suggests that human rights violations are legal or government-approved in China. One article focuses on the Communist Party's police crackdown on civilians that led to "hundreds detained and dozens sent to prison" (News24, 2015/12/14). USA representative, Dan Biers, reportedly said: "[W]e urge Chinese authorities to release

Mr Pu and call upon China to uphold fundamental civil rights." China seems to violate civil rights while the USA promotes and even enforces it, illustrating a moral authority. Here, the USA is the innocent promoter of good, while China is further demonised through the coverage of Chinese impoliteness: Chinese "officers and unidentified plain-clothes policemen shouted at senior US diplomat Dan Biers and pushed him as he tried to read a statement condemning the trial". Biers accuses China of "continuing repression" of human rights lawyers which hinders building a "stable China". China's perceived human rights violations thus contribute to a frame of an unstable, and potentially dangerous, country. The image of China lacking respect of the law also implies that it is a risky trade partner for Africa.

Western authority to scrutinise China's human rights practices is emphasised through coverage whereby "a diplomat speaking on behalf of the European Union was also shouted down as she delivered a statement outside the court criticising the process" (News24, 2015/12/14). The coverage of western criticism again infantilises China, implying either its unwillingness to promote western-approved human rights, or its incompetence to create and implement adequate policies. Furthermore, "analysts" reportedly predict Pu's conviction, yet the article does not clarify who they are, who they work for, or their expertise. "Analysts" implies a knowledgeable, authoritative opinion, and strengthens the idea that a logical outcome will be China violating Pu's human rights. A lack of respect for human dignity is thus an expected response from China.

The article features international journalists and newswires, such as *Al Jazeera's* Adrian Brown and AFP. Brown reported that "one elderly woman told me that some of her friends were taken away by police. 'There are no human rights in China,' she said" (News24, 2015/12/14). "Elderly" again creates the image of the vulnerable. It also implies that the interviewee has enough life experience for her comment on China's lack of human rights to be credible. Brown describes people being "dragged away" by police, contributing to the image of vulnerable and powerless citizens. According to Brown "the trial of Pu is extremely sensitive. There were extraordinary glimpses of defiance by a small group of supporters." Describing "defiance" of the Chinese government as "extraordinary" suggests activism or protesting is uncommon in the country, illustrating a powerful and dangerous authoritative government. The

article specifically highlights Zhiqiang's support of globally-renowned artist, Ai Weiwei. This both increases the article's news value and supports South Africans' existing perceptions of China's human rights violations.

China's economic success reportedly comes at the cost of "such niceties as environmental and worker protection" (*M&G,* 2015/08/21). Chinese environmental and human rights are thus not perceived as needs, but privileges. China sacrifices human rights "to do something about [poverty]", which illustrates China as merely pragmatic. This suggests that China is pursuing a greater good, the reduction of poverty, at the cost of human rights, which are portrayed as less important. According to Davies, South Africa is "lost in these theoretical, ideological conversations". He adds: "You know what the Chinese are doing? They're doing business" (*M&G,* 2015/08/21). This implies China's economic competitiveness is due to the fact that it is not hindered by a concern for rights. The interviewee calls for non-interference in China's human rights approach: "We can't expect them to do what we do and they can't expect us to do what they do." This quote sets a tone of approval for China's pragmatic approach to rights, which potentially counters the demonisation of China's lack of human rights prioritisation.

In this sample, the predominant frame is that China lacks adequate human rights legislation. Coverage suggests that human rights violations in China are legal, or government-approved. Chinese environmental and human rights are portrayed as privileges, not needs. China seems to sacrifice human rights to achieve potentially greater ends, such as reduced poverty and economic growth. South African media promote the stereotype of Chinese prison labourers and extraordinarily efficient Chinese labourers. Finally, the US and Europe are presented as promoters of human rights, with the authority to scrutinise China, a violator of human rights.

### 2.4. Improvements in China's human rights

An optimistic frame about China's human rights improvements also emerged. Journalists at the *Cape Times* wrote a series of articles on visits to China. One article focuses on Xinjiang's efforts to use "agriculture as a way of taking care of minority groups" (*CT*, 2015/08/13). China seems concerned about its minorities, who are apparently thriving: "47 China minorities survive, also thrive". Minorities often

represent the most oppressed groups in a society, and China appears to support their well-being. The article comes across as promotional rather than journalistic, however. It promotes Chinese sustainable agriculture as beneficial to the minority labourers: "Delicious walnuts are grown in an environmentally friendly way and the quality of the nuts is so good they were voted the best nuts enjoyed by athletes who took part in the 2009 Olympics held in Beijing". "Delicious", "so good" and "best" carry a highly optimistic tone, yet the journalist did not conduct any interviews with actual minorities. (*CT*, 2015/08/13).

China has also been lauded for its humanitarian efforts in the sample. "As workers at Western companies fled West Africa during the world's worst-ever Ebola outbreak, a state-owned Chinese company carried on" (*M&G,* 2015/10/02). China enabled the provision of Guinea's human rights by ending power shortages in the country. "'The Chinese saved us,' Lansana Fofana said." Here, China is portrayed as heroic and selfless. However, according to a Chinese worker that stayed during the Ebola crisis: "'We were scared, but we stayed,' Liu said with a nervous laugh. 'We had to do our jobs'" (*M&G,* 2015/10/02). Liu's "nervous laugh" insinuates that they had no choice but to stay during the outbreak. Chinese workers seem expendable, as their "jobs" outweigh their own well-being. China's portrayal as humanitarian is thus clouded by its apparent lack of respect of the rights of its workers.

While the article highlights "the positive role China can play in Africa", it also alludes to China's bad reputation in Africa: "Chinese companies have been accused of treating workers poorly, building substandard infrastructure and damaging the environment." The article covers "bare-chested Chinese workers" in Guinea who are heaving "rocks into a metal frame" while "huddled under a makeshift shelter at the site's entrance" while "a dozen Guinean men looking for jobs watch enviously as Chinese workers drive trucks and work on the roads". This image illustrates local Africans' resentment of Chinese labour, even though Chinese workers are reportedly working in terrible conditions. According to Yejoo Kim at Stellenbosch University's Centre for Chinese Studies, the Chinese government is reaching out to residents to reduce Africans' resentment of Chinese employers: "They know about the outcry on the ground level and they are trying to rectify that" (*M&G,* 2015/10/02). This illustrates the Chinese government's awareness of their disapproval. Though they

proactively try to improve their reputation, they are aware that "the perception is slowly changing. It's not going to happen overnight." This suggests that China is playing the long game, and so seems strategic and patient.

Articles focusing on China's efforts to redeem its poor human rights reputation often hone in on the human rights violations themselves: "China has released a scholar and human rights advocate detained for almost a year, a rights group said on Tuesday, though his lawyer continues to be held" (News24, 2015/09/15). The Hong Kong-based advocacy group, Rights Defence Network, says, "China's ruling party under president Xi Jinping has tightened a crackdown on intellectuals, lawyers and activists critical of the government, with scores detained and dozens jailed." The article suggests human rights violations have worsened under Xi Jinping's leadership. It also implies that China released the activist only to ease China-US relations: "The scholar's release comes ahead of a visit by Xi to the US later this month. China's detention of dissidents is often a source of contention between Washington and Beijing." The USA is again depicted as human rights defender, in opposition to China as violator, which is affirmed by the article's mention of Chinese lawyer, Chen Guangcheng, who "dramatically sought refuge in the US' Beijing embassy" (News24, 2015/09/15).

Though few articles emerged on this frame, it is significant to mention that a counterframe of China improving its human rights policies is present. China is portrayed as respecting its minorities, offering humanitarian assistance to African countries, and also presented as aware of its human rights reputation and proactively responding to it, for example, by releasing prisoners.

*Human rights summary*

South African media coverage of China's human rights record revealed the following frames: human rights as a natural or man-made disaster issue; China as neocolonial influence in Africa due to a lack of respect or policies for human rights; human rights violations as pragmatic for development; and an optimistic frame about China's human rights improvements, particularly through its humanitarian efforts.

***Conclusion***

In this framing analysis of South African media coverage of China's sustainable development, one of the dominant frames used is China as poacher and key perpetrator in the illegal wildlife trade industry. Frames affirming Chinese anti-poaching policy and actions have also emerged, but they often include skeptical undertones. China as perpetrator is also juxtaposed with the western protectors of Africa, specifically the UK, via the coverage of British royalty. China and the USA were often framed in competition with each other, but the USA's climate change leadership was clearly established. However, references to the USA's lack of credibility as climate leader, particularly due to its own disregard of international environmental law, also emerged. Climate change articles focused heavily on China as top carbon emitter, especially in light of the Conference of Parties (COP21) coverage, but frames of China's proactive policies, growing leadership, and its solidarity with developing nations in the climate negotiations also emerged.

South African media coverage focused closely on China as a polluted country, drawing specifically on two events to characterise that – the Tianjin blast and Beijing's smog alerts. South African media relied on official Chinese sources and state media to report on these events, and used emotive language to illustrate the severity of the pollution in China. However, a strong optimistic frame also emerged – China was positioned as source of green technology and renewable energy investment, particularly to the benefit of the African continent. China's innovation and increasing commitment to solutions for sustainability contribute to the larger frame of China shaping itself to be a leader in the field of climate change, and its ability to challenge current western environmental leadership. Finally, India as key climate leader and future African partner also emerged. South African media portray China and India as developing nations with the highest carbon emission record, but a continuing discussion of their influence on Africa diffuses this ecological frame. India appears as a challenge to Chinese influence on the continent, based on a seemingly more genuine solidarity with Africa than China.

Regarding human rights coverage, compared to sustainable development, human rights received limited coverage in South African media during the same period. South African media coverage of China's human rights often focuses on natural or man-made disasters related to China. Human rights coverage relied on a variety of

sources, including the Chinese government, human rights groups, individuals on the ground, and South African and international journalists. This section showed that China is often accused of neocolonialism in Africa, characterised by its lack of respect for human rights. China is furthermore portrayed as currently lacking human rights legislation, and that its legal system allows or encourages human rights violations. An optimistic frame about China's human rights improvements also emerged, mostly through a series of promotion articles written on journalists' visits to China. Finally, some articles lauded China for its humanitarian efforts, but this coverage is not significant enough to outweigh the depiction of China as human rights violator.

# Chapter Six: Influences on South African Interviewees

This chapter explores journalists' perceptions of China and other potential influences on their coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights records, through an analysis of 11 qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with South African journalists. Using Reese's hierarchy of influences (2001) as a guide, these interviews explore influences on journalists' news coverage on individual, routine, organisational, extra-media and ideological levels.

South African journalists were selected based on their environmental and human rights beats. However, it was found that few beat journalists are still employed at South African publications. This in itself is indicative of the current changes within newsrooms – as the number of full-time employed journalists declines, beat journalism is virtually impossible to maintain, and the opportunities for freelance work increases.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 on methodology, all the South African interviewees work or have worked for either News24, the Independent Media Group or the *Mail & Guardian*, which together represent a key part of mainstream South African media. As discussed in Chapter 5, the framing analysis of South African media was also based on these three publications (in the case of the Independent Group, the *Cape Times* was analysed). As such, interviewees were sampled purposively to ensure a link between the interviews and the framing analysis. This chapter reviews the results of interviews with South African journalists, while Chinese journalist interviews are in Chapter 7.

As noted in Chapter 4, news items are the products of the interplay of routines, norms, values, organisational constraints and dominant ideologies that exist in a particular historical and social context (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Drawing on in-depth interview responses, this chapter analyses these various levels of influence on the coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights. The interview questions (Appendix I) were formulated with Reese's (2001) five influences as guidelines, to determine how elements such as personal opinions of China, background, work experience, knowledge of soft power, editors, ownership and

commercialisation might influence journalists' coverage. The responses were analysed within the hierarchy of influences framework.

## 1. Individual influences

The individual level points to the attitude, training and background of the journalist and considers factors such as education, age, gender, ethnicity, personal values and beliefs of the individual journalist (Reese, 2001). This study coded the interviewees' responses according to the strongest themes that emerged – essentially journalists' personal perceptions of China. This section discusses how these values operate and how journalists experience these influences, particularly in light of covering China.

*Perceptions of China's sustainable development record*

According to Reese (2001), personal views can affect journalists' coverage of a certain topic. Interviews with South African journalists explored their perceptions of China's sustainable development and human rights records. Many journalists hesitated to provide an opinion on China's sustainable development, because of their limited knowledge about the topic.

Journalists mostly cover China as it becomes relevant to their existing sustainable development or human rights beats. South African journalists trained in sustainable development or human rights are not necessarily knowledgeable of China itself. This could lead to misunderstandings about Chinese perceptions of sustainable development and human rights. Though few journalists have experience covering China, according to Interviewee 11, "if you're working on the [African] continent, you're only a couple of steps away from a Chinese story".

The journalists generally believe that China is exploitative, extractionist, careless and harmful towards the environment. The interviewees commented that China fuels this skepticism through a lack of transparency: "Not keeping accurate data, or refusing to release accurate data, there being massive discrepancies between official state data on things like air or water pollution, and independent checks and balances on those kinds of things" (Interviewee 9).

Journalists draw on what they consume in the media or hear from peers to inform their opinion of China's environmental impact. "I really know very little about it, so

I'm a bit reluctant to… I mean they don't have a good reputation. I mean obviously what I see in other media about things like air quality – they've got some massive environmental problems" (Interviewee 7). Media reports on China can reach journalists indirectly, through hearsay or conversations with peers. "I think, I'm not sure if I'm imagining it, but I heard that sometimes when the pollution is too bad they basically halt production for a few days. But I'm not sure if this is true" (Interviewee 5). This could lead to journalists' coverage reflecting such rumours about China.

Few journalists have directly engaged with China. Interviewee 9 was sent to China to write motivational pieces about economic opportunities for Africans in China, which revealed the country's complexities to her, especially regarding its population size. Interviewee 10 experienced health problems in China due to air pollution. She developed a mistrust of the Chinese government and their environmental policies: "How things work there is, because they have a lot of international pressure, from the United Nations and all these groups concerned about the citizens, they're making a lot of promises and setting a lot of deadlines that I know they're not going to keep."

Few journalists reported firsthand encounters with Chinese companies, government or industry in Africa. Interviewee 7's encounter negatively influenced him. "When I went to Lesotho two and a half years ago, they were building the Roof of Africa route…we were actually appalled at the way it was being done. I mean they're just using drills and dynamite, sort of blowing it up, it was a mess. If that's the way they are doing big projects you know, I think there's a real problem" (Interviewee 7). These experiences create a critical outlook on China.

Some South African journalists view China's environmental impact in Africa as a logical side-effect of development. Development itself is considered the problem, not necessarily Chinese failure at sustainability. "You know, development means death. Any development initiative is necessarily going to cause an enormous amount of environmental damage" (Interviewee 11). This perspective acknowledges China's environmental impact, but links it to a sacrifice for development, rather than intentional disrespect for the environment.

While China is often singled out as environmentally destructive, some journalists perceive them to be on par with other nations operating in Africa. "I would say that they are no worse, in fact they are probably better, than the Canadians or the

Australians or anyone else working in that sector" (Interviewee 11). Interviewee 11 highlights developed nations' large-scale environmental destruction. "This was true of the United States, this was certainly true of the British during the Industrial Revolution, and right now that's exactly the problem that the Chinese are dealing with at home." China doesn't have a "premium" on environmental destruction, and some journalists are aware of its essentialisation in Western media (Interviewee 11). China is considered the "big bad of this century" (Interviewee 3) and is therefore scrutinised more often. Some South African journalists are thus not highly critical of China's environmental impact in Africa as they perceive China's impact as similar to developed countries'. The perception that China does not necessarily intentionally disregard the environment, can complicate how journalists incorporate the terms "environmental destruction" or "sustainable development" when covering China.

In the interviews with these journalists, Africa emerges as the victim in its relationships with other countries. "But no-one cares about Africa. Because you can walk away from it. And that's what the colonial Europeans did, that's what America's been doing, that's what China does. When it comes to Africa everyone's bad. Everyone is just here to get land for agriculture and take stuff out of mines" (Interviewee 3). The general consensus among the journalists, whether they regularly cover China-Africa or not, is that Africa is exploited by this relationship. This perception, likely influenced by preconceived ideas of the China-Africa relationship, might distract from focusing on African agency and governance in China-Africa coverage. This could increase a critical outlook on China. While some South African journalists are highly critical about China's environmental destruction, others see it as a logical side-effect of development. China's environmental impact is perceived as on par with that of Western countries.

*Perceptions on China's human rights record*

South African journalists perceive China as negatively impacting human rights in Africa. Some are critical of "eternal economic growth" that generally leads to exploitation (Interviewee 4). Some journalists blame capitalism, rather than China's impact on human rights in particular. "It also comes down to consumerism – because cheap stuff is made in China, they have cheap factories where people's human rights are abused" (Interviewee 6).

Capitalism also seems to fuel a lack of accountability. According to Interviewee 3, "no company cares about human rights and the rights of its workers unless it's a threat to their profit". He explains that Western corporations and mining companies, such as Anglo American, are only concerned about human rights as far as it affects their reputations. These corporations experience no consequences at home for "workers getting silicosis from poor safety equipment". According to Interviewee 11, while "the Chinese are certainly not kind at all", even South Africa is guilty of mistreating its workers. This contributes to the view that China is not worse than other countries regarding exploitation.

Interviewee 9 argues that China's careless human rights record is an automatic side-effect of economic growth. "I think that it's well-acknowledged that there's [sic] many brilliant things that the Chinese have done; they've revolutionised themselves in a way that other countries can't, but I think that it is also fairly commonly accepted that their lax relationship [with human rights] has allowed them to be so competitive. Whether a country like South Africa could ever achieve that kind of success while maintaining its human rights record is quite doubtful" (Interviewee 9).

Interviewees also contrast China with South Africa, which is perceived as respecting human rights. However, this respect is perceived to impede South African economic success. The human rights concept appeals to individual journalists in different ways. The interviewed journalists raised topics ranging from political prisoners, such as Ai Wei Wei (Interviewee 5), to censorship (Interviewee 10). However, many journalists have little knowledge on these topics, and again demonstrate a reliance on hearsay. "Wasn't there recently a woman – they said she was released but her husband has not heard from her yet. Something like that" (Interviewee 5).

South African journalists perceive Chinese company human rights violations in Africa as common. Interviewee 9 perceives the Chinese labour situation as "the classic story of the sweat shops". Labour violations, however, are linked to the definition of human rights, which is culturally determined.

South African journalists identify closely with Western approaches to human rights, but some are aware that this is in conflict with other ideologies. Interviewee 11 explains the normalisation of labour practices in China: "What a Chinese administrator, or foreman, or work boss, would think of as natural, to us are totally

[unacceptable]". In contradiction, Chinese tend to view South Africans as "lazy" and "unwilling to make sacrifices for the future of our citizens" (Interviewee 11). South African journalists' conditioning might influence them to monitor human rights according to the Western approach, thus reporting anything outside of that rights framework as a violation.

Some journalists critiqued Chinese civil society's reluctance and inability to question their government. However, Interviewee 10 acknowledged Chinese citizens might not regard this as a violation: "I think that one of the most fascinating things for them, is say for a country like America where the individual freedom is everything, it's like wow, how does America even function day to day? With all that freedom?" Many South African journalists are aware of the cultural differences in interpreting human rights violations. "Of course there's also a very big cultural difference – so some type of behaviour might seem oppressive to me, but it could be something that's merely a cultural difference" (Interviewee 9). This understanding might influence journalists to incorporate terms like human rights and violations more contextually. "We would consider freedom of speech to be a human right", says Interviewee 9, who also believes that culturally, the Western and Chinese approaches to human rights are incompatible because of "the way that Chinese society has evolved".

According to Interviewee 11, many African countries subscribe to a Western human rights approach: "Most African nations, what we've adopted, is effectively a Western paradigm for enshrining individual rights." However, Interviewee 11 argues that these policies are challenging to implement, and in countries with high unemployment rates, labour is easily exploited: "You know time off is not fairly given, time off is not fair, and most importantly, pay isn't fair. Now, that's kind of what happens in a surplus labour market" (Interviewee 11).

The journalists' alignment with the Western definition of human rights is affirmed through their references to "we" and "our" when talking about South Africa's Western-based human rights practices. Journalists' approach is thus influenced by their nationality. This could further the "us vs them" ideology when covering China, because of their conditioning that South African and Chinese human rights are fundamentally different. Again, anything outside of the Western human rights framework might be covered as a violation.

Interviewee 1 views China's human rights reputation as "propaganda". He accuses South African audiences of believing China does not respect human rights, while their approaches are merely misunderstood. These misperceptions are influenced by the West: "Academics, etc use Western media as their main sources of information. Western media is slanted, and they don't understand China." Western media especially misrepresent the issue of "individual vs social or collective freedom". In China, "the Communist Party is more important to them than individual rights" (Interviewee 1).

Interviewee 1 blames the "western colonial history" and "neoliberalism" in Africa that he has witnessed firsthand, for fueling misperceptions of China. "China wants Africa's natural resources and minerals, but they pay for it." A sense of solidarity emerges from Interviewee 1's perception that China is "not neocolonial". "I am also critical about China, but I know where they come from" (Interviewee 1). Interviewee 1 prioritises staying informed about China through the consumption of South African, global and Chinese media. This practice might influence his perception on China's development.

This section discussed the individual influences from Reese's (2001) framework, including the influence of journalists' educational background, work experience, and journalists' perceptions on China's sustainable development and human rights. The following section moves on to examine routine influences.

## 2. Routine influences

"As a social practice, routines are the ways of working that constitute that practice, including those unstated rules and ritualized enactments that are not always made explicit" (Reese, 2016:399). Routine influences on journalistic coverage focus on newsroom dynamics, including aspects such as deadlines, and the constraints and challenges that journalists experience.

*Deadlines*

According to Wits' State of the Newsroom 2017 report (Finlay, 2017), South African newsrooms are contracting, due to financial instability and a digital transition. The journalists interviewed agreed. "There are so few journalists in print these days, and

now even fewer than originally" (Interviewee 5). This means quicker and more pressured deadlines, involving multitasking, which leads to "basically just churning the stuff out" (Interviewee 2). The developing churnalism (Davies, 2009) culture pushed Interviewee 2 to leave, as she perceives it doing "more harm than good". Her idea of "proper" journalism requires time and resources, which most journalists are not granted.

Interviewee 3's deadlines are in a transitional phase. His publication is "daily online, but a weekly paper. And we're still figuring out how that works." Interviewee 3's editorial team prioritises what is perceived as quality journalism instead of churnalism. His editorial team does not have a strong influence on his content, but a lack of funding does.

*Challenges and limitations*

According to Reese's (2001) model the challenges, constraints and limitations journalists deal with, especially in the newsroom, form part of the routine influences that can impact journalists' coverage.

Financial constraints are the key challenge South African journalists face when covering China-Africa. Interviewee 11 explains that the "I want it free" mentality of news consumers forces "reconceiving our models for how we build our news gathering institutions". The coverage of China-Africa is particularly under-resourced. Interviewee 11 describes being unable to pursue a China-Africa story past threatened arrest from the Chinese government, because of a frustrating lack of resources. Financial limitations can restrict investigative journalism, particularly in cases where journalists or publications require legal backing.

To get around this challenge, some publications experiment with reconceptualising their financial situation. Interviewee 3's publication has increasingly sought outside funders. To underline their impartiality, the publication adds a disclaimer to acknowledge their financial contributors. However, they have no space to elaborate on the funders, their agenda, or why they agreed to the funding. Interviewee 3's publication protects its journalistic integrity because, if it is ever compromised, "it can never be rebuilt" (Interviewee 3). Individual journalists also team up with extra-media funders, in particular non-profit organisations such as Gift of the Givers, Red Cross or

Greenpeace. Donor funding could influence journalists' angles, depending on their own agenda.

Additionally, South African journalists struggle to push environment stories onto the news agenda. This, according to the interviewees, is partially due to editors' implicit or explicit lack of understanding, interest or concern about sustainable development. South African newsrooms generally see a quick turnover of news editors. "It's a high-pressure job, so they will be there for about a year and then burn out" (Interviewee 6). This compounds the problem, as journalists find it challenging to continually explain the importance of environmental stories to new editors.

Journalists complain that South African audiences suffer from what Interviewee 11 calls "an inbred parochialism" or a lack of interest in the outside world – and other African countries, in particular. "It's a pervasive intellectual tendency that is quite endemic throughout the entire press corps in this country." This illustrates the difficulty for journalists of pushing China-Africa onto the news agenda. Interviewee 1 found it challenging that his editors and colleagues view China through a Western framework with "Western standards and criteria". This has led to adapting interesting or sensational angles on China.

The routine influences of journalists (Reese 2001) highlighted in this section include deadlines, challenges, limitations and the impact on coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights. The following section examines organisational influences in a similar manner.

## 3. Organisational influences

"The walls of these organizations have become more fluid as they enter into collaborative relationships, and they take on a range of new emerging forms from the large-scale enterprise of daily news gathering to the small-staff, minimalist blogging operation" (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016:400). The organisational influences in this study are defined by journalists' perception of objectivity, target audiences, and their awareness of the impact of ownership and commercial interests on their publications.

*Objectivity*

South African journalists generally believe objectivity is impossible. People are shaped by their background, upbringing, work environment, identity and values that influence how they cover a story. Some journalists are strongly opined that all journalists are subjective (Interviewee 1; Interviewee 9).

Journalists draw on the conceptual framework taught in South African journalism training institutions to discuss the concept of objectivity – a search for "truth" through "neutral", "balanced," "nuanced" reporting via the "right of reply" (Interviewee 3; Interviewee 5), all of which is not necessarily a tangible goal, but rather "an attitude" or a "lifetime attempt" (Interviewee 2). Journalists were taught to use multiple sources to improve objectivity. However, "the journalist already knows this is my angle, this is what I want my reader to think about once they're done reading the story" (Interviewee 10).

Journalists are taught the inverted pyramid type of journalism which focuses on the facts of an occurrence. Interviewee 3 calls it "as dispassionate as possible." This is a typical Western, liberal-individualist normative value linked to "professionalism" and what Tuchman (1972) terms a "strategic ritual" of objectivity – essentially relying on the appearance of impartiality. Interviewee 3 disapproves of the learned notion of objectivity in particular. His rejection of his formal journalistic education might affect his journalistic style.

Rejecting so-called "watchdog" journalism might open some journalists up to constructive journalism, an approach that China favours. Constructive journalism differs from watchdog journalism in the sense that, in the latter framework, journalists are expected to simply provide facts, without focusing on solutions. Moeller (1999) suggests that, unlike traditional media approaches, constructive journalism deliberately leaves grey areas in coverage in an attempt to avoid negative emotional impact on both audiences and journalists. Chinese constructive journalism aligns with the concept of "development communication" (Christians et al., 2009), which is associated with "positive psychology" (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016:96). Constructive journalism has received criticism for its lack of objectivity – particularly its nation-building approach could lead to slanted or uncritical reporting that marginalises alternative narratives (Lull 1991; Zhang, 2006).

Journalists strive to achieve objectivity as part of journalistic professionalism, regardless of their views on its achievability, again reflecting Tuchman's (1972) "strategic ritual" of objectivity. "Listen, I try very, very hard to be an objective journalist" (Interviewee 4). "I try, as much as objectivity exists, which is relative" (Interviewee 6). Some journalists admittedly avoid covering environmental or human rights beats because they find it impossible to remain objective (Interviewee 5). Editorial policies can limit objectivity: publications requiring a "juicy angle" (Interviewee 5) might lead to potentially slanted stories. Interviewee 10 believes a quote "covers your base as well, and your objectivity – this is what somebody said, you know, this is not just because I believe [it], this is what that person said".

Journalists tend to compare their own objectivity with other journalists as a measuring stick of how successfully they are able to achieve it. "I write from my own experience and I think I understand both China and Africa. So I would say that I am more objective than 99.9% of journalists" (Interviewee 1). The comparative and competitive measurement of objectivity and accordingly, professionalism, might lead journalists to strive for less subjective coverage of China. However, their motivation might stem from being fairer than their peers, rather than intending to give China fair coverage.

*Blurring lines of journalism vs activism*

Some journalists disregard objectivity because they consider their journalism to be a form of activism. These journalists submit to the righteousness of their subjectivity. In fact, objectivity might interfere with their advocacy of ideas. Interviewee 3 uses his journalistic platform to critique capitalism. Interviewee 4's colleagues have pointed out her biases in environment stories, and Interviewee 7 openly promotes sustainability in his articles. "So in that sense I did write from a green point of view. I always understood the need for balance in reporting, but it also depends on how it's presented. You have to weigh up the seriousness of the other arguments. For me in all of those there was absolutely no question, in terms of biodiversity conservation, to protect what we have" (Interviewee 7).

Interviewee 11 perceives himself as practicing objectivity through disrupting the status quo or the main ideologies of "mediated" society. "I feel like it's my job to complicate an issue rather than to explain it, or to tidy it up or to offer some

description to make it better. I want my readers to understand that reality is a construct." He is not an activist, but perceives himself as a journalist producing knowledge to encourage critical thinking. He believes his role is to improve the current simplistic coverage of the China-Africa relationship. "How can an engagement between 1.1 billion Africans and 1.4 billion Chinese be summed up once every two months by the *New York Times?* In some bullshit article about elephant tusks? I would think not very well at all" (Interviewee 11).

The blurring lines between journalism and activism, and how journalists perceive their role in society is a key influence on how China-Africa is covered. Their perception that China might be a threat to sustainable development or human rights in Africa might reflect in their coverage, as these journalists aim to achieve a perceived greater good of advocating for conservation and labour rights, which cannot necessarily be achieved through objective reporting. These journalists might give more weight to environmental or human rights NGOs critical of China, as it aligns with their activism, than Chinese government responses.

Some journalists, however, do not want to be associated with activism. "I'm an environmental reporter and I try not to be an environmental activist" (Interviewee 6). This is based on the belief that activism in the journalistic role is not professional, and as environmental reporters they need to report the facts, as told by science. "Based on the scientific evidence, this should not be happening. That's not a bias; that is fact" (Interviewee 4). The pitfall of science-based journalism is the belief that science is automatically objective. Science journalists argue their reporting is accurate because it does not reflect personal opinion, but they often blindly trust scientific information.

*Ownership*

Most South African journalists agree that ownership does not play a direct role or have an explicit influence on their editorial content. However, the ownership changes in South African mainstream media in recent years have had an impact on newsrooms and, accordingly, news coverage. Journalists are acutely aware of the developments in media ownership. Ownership shifts give journalists a sense of the direction the company is heading in. Interviewee 6 is aware that her publication's owners "do very well on the stock exchange, but newspapers are a dying breed to them".

Many journalists experienced ownership influences as big shifts in their publications' ownership or management occurred. In 2013/14, Chinese investors participated in the acquisition of South Africa's second-largest publishing group, Independent Media, by Sekunjalo Independent Media Ltd., from its previous Irish owners (Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2018). Sekunjalo is owned by Dr. Iqbal Survé, a doctor and businessman with close ties to South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress. "The Chinese capital came from the China–Africa Development Fund, a government-led investment group, and China International Television Corporation, the overseas arm of China's state-run broadcaster" (Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2018:6).

During "the sale" (Interviewee 9), Interviewee 4 witnessed changes at her publication, that made the ownership shift obvious – including splash articles about new management with close ties to the owners. However, she views Iqbal Survé's editorial interference as insignificant: "He wanted the newspaper for ego purposes, and when he did interfere, it was mostly to pump himself up, not to interfere in political reporting" (Interviewee 4). Survé's firing of Alide Dasnois sent "shockwaves" (Interviewee 9) through the company, however.

"The sale" led to resignations due to the organisational rework, which created "a culture of fear, of speculation, of uncertainty" (Interviewee 9). This was also followed by tighter budgets because of the insecurities during the transition. "Financial uncertainty is probably, I would imagine, the biggest censor of journalism in South Africa or globally. Because if newsrooms don't have the resources to do certain stories, you know people are often not even going to pitch them, because they feel that they know that there won't be space or there won't be time" (Interviewee 9).

Interviewee 4 recalls prominent editorial influence from the Independent Media at the China-Africa summit in 2015, during which they were "pumping China on the front page, in a huge way, above and beyond actual news stories". Journalists at the Independent were embarrassed by the positive angle on China, an "agreement" that was "very much pre-planned" (Interviewee 4). The journalists' powerlessness at having to cover a topic with prominence and angles they were dissatisfied with, illustrates how ownership might outweigh personal opinions when covering China.

*Commercial interests*

The commercial interests of South African publications have little influence on journalists' editorial content. The firm separation of newsrooms and their advertising departments creates a "healthy tension between the sections" (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 3 believes his publication's journalistic freedom attracts advertising, because advertisers are then granted credibility themselves. "And you imagine, if you're advertising in the *Mail & Guardian,* you are also advertising because of that."

South Africa's global multimedia brand, Naspers, has invested in Tencent, a leading Chinese online media company (Harber, 2013). Journalists from Media24 are generally aware of this close relationship, and claim they are not encouraged to write positive articles on China. Interviewee 1's former publication pulled his article on China because it was too pro-China. "I wrote about Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International – they receive most of their funding from the USA, as well as the National Endowment for Democracy – to which the Dalai Lama is connected. This article was too much against the West" (Interviewee 1). He claims that South African newspapers generally have a Western bias, and journalists are unaware of the strong Western influence on them. South African journalists are not critically consuming Western media: "But the problem with our journalists is that time is against them – deadlines, so they Google something and take that as the alpha and omega" (Interviewee 1). The Western influence on journalists' and editors' perceptions of China might outweigh their companies' ownership and commercial interests.

*Audiences*

Most journalists have a keen awareness of who their audiences are. Audience research containing information about the Living Standards Measure (LSMs) and other characteristics of their target audiences are conveyed by their editors. They referred to "the decision-makers," "the Ruperts," "influential people," (Interviewee 1); "national," "Afrikaans," (Interviewee 2); "conservative Afrikaners," "Christian" (Interviewee 5); "the affluent new black diamonds that have emerged" (Interviewee 6); and "(speakers of) Kaaps-Afrikaans," "my auntie" (Interviewee 10) to distinguish their audiences. The interviewed journalists mostly write for educated, middle class, white, black, and "coloured" readerships. Journalists face the challenge of making China's sustainable development and human rights relevant and newsworthy to their

different audiences. “There always needs to be why do you have to care about this issue, how will it affect you?” (Interviewee 6).

South African journalists try to push their audiences’ boundaries. “You have to keep your audience in mind, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that you should keep them comfortable” (Interviewee 2). This often leads to editors’ pushback. In her coverage of marginalised communities, Interviewee 5 was told by her editor “it’s not ‘our church’s people’”. She made her stories relevant to her middle class, white, Afrikaans-speaking audience by highlighting the universal aspects of a topic. “It’s just a general human rights story – you can’t stay away from that” (Interviewee 5). Many journalists are idealistic and perceive their journalistic role to create awareness, challenge ignorance or represent unheard voices. However, stories must sell. “They don’t mind pushing boundaries, but the balance tends to be in favour of the readers” (Interviewee 2).

Grassroots journalists have a clear idea of who they write for, and their stories aim to send specific, relevant messages to their readers. In contrast, other journalists believe in an inevitable disconnect between a publication and its readers. “There’s always a disconnect in media between who you imagine your audience is, and who they really are” (Interviewee 3). He argues that “you never know who your audience is really”. This allows journalists to choose from a broader range of news values. China-Africa is more likely newsworthy at mainstream publications because they cater to a broader audience, and regularly cover international news. These findings point to the need for further research on the grassroots vs mainstream media aspect influencing South African journalists’ coverage of China.

This section explored the organisational influences on South African journalists, examining their perceptions on objectivity, ownership, commercial interests, and their audiences. Most journalists strive for objectivity because it is at the core of their journalism education and their perception of professionalism. The coverage of China-Africa is likely influenced by the blurring lines between activism and journalism. Most South African journalists agree that ownership and commercialisation have little impact on their coverage. Journalists are aware of their audiences, and try to both satisfy and challenge them.

## 4. Extra-media influences

Also referred to by Reese and Shoemaker (2016) as the influence of social institutions, extra-media influences focus on the journalists' relationship with the broader society and elements outside of the newsroom. This includes their sources, their relationships with government and non-profit organisations, how they use press releases, and their media consumption.

*Interviewing sources*

Most South African journalists interview sources to provide balance or credibility to their stories, as prescribed by their journalistic training. "At journalism school, I was taught that you've got different layers of interviewees and you should be careful of focusing too much on official voices and the official narrative" (Interviewee 9). To avoid punting the official narrative, Interviewee 9 prefers to interview "your person on the street", and Interviewee 2 prefers interviewing those directly affected by an issue. Ideally, South African journalists include a multiplicity of voices. "If it is possible for you to speak to about 8-10 people, it's just so much deeper than one informed person at one institution. It adds extra voices that challenge your own filters" (Interviewee 2).

It is common for journalists to interview experts when covering sustainable development. Experts can include "professors, economists, and renewable energy companies" (Interviewee 6) or "international relations analysts" (Interviewee 4). Interviewee 4 uses experts only for in-depth stories – which are rarely on China. Investigative stories at Interviewee 10's publication also almost never focus on China. For a story such as air pollution in China, Interviewee 3 uses secondary sources, which he tracks via Google, to find out who is writing and researching on China.

South African journalists tend to use government spokespeople only for confirmation of, or comment on, a statement. The relationships between journalists and government entities vary – rather than an official spokesperson, some journalists use opposition parties, local governments or mayors as sources. Journalists may obtain official government comment only to fulfil their "need from a legal and ethical standpoint" (Interviewee 9). Officials are considered a time-intensive source, because of their slow response time. "These [spokespeople] are not people I would use as primary sources. I very seldom speak to politicians about environmental issues" (Interviewee

2). Political statements are only considered newsworthy when "it's a position someone has taken on something".

Nevertheless, some journalists find official comments newsworthy. Interviewee 1 includes official quotes when writing about China-Africa. "Sometimes I will refer to what South African or Chinese government said. For example, I recently quoted Deng Xiaoping." Interviewee 6 interviews policymakers about renewable energy, but they are hard to track down. Regarding nuclear energy, she also interviews people from Eskom, Russia's Rosatom or the countries involved. She finds that sources from China, who also support nuclear development in Africa, are quite invisible and hard to access for comment on nuclear energy – compared to Rosatom, in particular, who are very open.

Interviewee 3 bypasses political rhetoric, and interviews people in government offices involved in the actual work of the topic he covers. "There's always a person doing the work, so you try and find them." These employees respect his publication, and "they're human. And they get angry and they get frustrated and they want things to change" (Interviewee 3). Similarly, Interviewee 9 uses "inside sources in government that could speak out". Again, journalists corroborate their stories by adding a stratification of voices. "Even if you went to some political rally, you wouldn't just report what Zuma or Malema says, you would talk to a lot of people in the crowd." Interviewee 9 balances official government responses with opposing political party responses. "Oppositional political parties are keen to expose things that are happening." Opposition parties are "almost spying" on departments, and they share information with journalists as a part of their political mandate. However, Interviewee 9 uses information from opposition party members "with caution".

Interviewee 5 relies on government departmental research. Some government departments' initiatives are managed by reputable researchers in collaboration with universities, schools or research units at universities. Even though Interviewee 5 finds working with the spokespeople challenging, their statistics are reliable, particularly because they work with credible organisations, such as the United Nations agencies.

Journalists also find it challenging to access government sources. They spend a lot of time trying to navigate through "the doorstopper-effect" (Interviewee 4) – a powerful strategy by spokespeople to keep stories out of print. "Sometimes you'll find the exact

Director-General who knows about an issue, but you can't talk to them directly. You have to go through the spokesperson. And I've had this situation sometimes where the DG would be willing to talk to me, but then says, 'Just send these questions via the spokesperson', and then the spokesperson would just be like, 'Oh no, the DG doesn't want to'" (Interviewee 4). Journalists eventually have too many other stories to further pursue responses.

Journalists need mentorship to guide their pursuit of official state sources, particularly when hitting a dead end. "This is the thing, if the spokesperson says, 'No', I don't know what to do after that" (Interviewee 4). As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the Chinese government offers a constant stream of information to Chinese journalists, while South African journalists consider their government to be inaccessible.

The interviewed journalists often use non-governmental organisations as sources. According to Interviewee 9, "in journalism the relationship between NGOs and journalists is fairly good". However, they try to ensure a critical engagement with them. "When I use an NGO as a source, I make sure that I include a caveat, because these organisations are not objective nor authoritative" (Interviewee 1). Journalists expect NGOs to be critical of government. Interviewee 9 uses government quotes in opposition to NGOs, because "those are two people on a similar level of authority".

Journalists are aware of NGOs' "specific filter," which is their need for exposure (Interviewee 2). "Don't make a mistake, they are driving their own agenda" (Interviewee 2). NGOs have different levels of credibility as news sources. "With environmental NGOs, I sort of learned over time that they were on a sort of a spectrum – which ones were closer to sort of being very polite to government, and which ones were happy to speak openly, and which ones were just plain crazy" (Interviewee 4).

Journalists refuse to include NGOs that "are not credible sources", such as "climate change deniers" (Interviewee 6) and "crazy animal rights groups" (Interviewee 4), in their articles. Interviewee 5 focuses on reputable organisations, such as the Human Rights Commission, and only interviews individuals sourced through the organisation.

Some journalists "try to stay away from the NGOs" (Interviewee 11). Interviewee 3 calls working with NGOs "easy journalism" – which he perceives as unprofessional.

"The worst kind of journalism these days is where an NGO comes to a journalist and says here's our issue, here's our community, here's our problem, and the NGO organises everything for the journalist, the journalist goes to the place, speaks to the people the NGO has chosen." However, this saves journalists time and resources. "Someone comes to you and says here's a story, and then you do it and then it's done, because you've got one day" (Interviewee 3).

*South African journalists' media consumption*

Apart from Interviewee 1, South African journalists do not regularly consume news about China. Interviewee 1 considers background knowledge of, and visiting, China as crucial in covering China. "I am critical of journalists who have never been to China and then write critically about China. They write that China wants to colonise Africa, but at least they're willing to pay for it." Interviewee 1 consumes Chinese media such as *China Daily*, *People's Daily* and CCTV every day, hoping it will increase the quality of his coverage.

The rest of the interviewed journalists consume both local and international news sources. Regarding South African media outlets, some journalists prefer the *Cape Times*, *Die Burger*, *Sunday Times, Sunday Tribune, The Star, Business Day and Business Report* (Interviewee 4; Interviewee 7). South African journalists seem to prefer international, particularly western, media – the majority indicating a preference for *The Guardian*. "*The Guardian* is my go-to; they are the winner, always. I read *The Guardian* every day. I'm a religious *Guardian* reader" (Interviewee 6). Other media include BBC, BBC News, Sky News, the *New York Times, Huffington Post*, *Mother Jones*, *The Atlantic, Washington Post* and *LA Times* (Interviewee 2; Interviewee 4; Interviewee 6; Interviewee 7).

Interviewee 3 accuses mainstream international publications of not being "left-wing" enough. He rather consults "all the leftie lawyers who are doing human rights cases, and university professors who do this kind of courses, and then just Google it". Journalists often consult information sources outside of mainstream media, the most common being social media. "I go to news websites very seldom. I get stuff on Twitter. I would click through from a link on Twitter, but I curate my Twitter feed to provide me with things that I am interested in" (Interviewee 5). She finds traditional

news sources unnecessary "because Twitter is so instant. And a lot of news sites will also have streaming: BBC, CNN, eNCA" (Interviewee 5).

*China-Africa coverage*

South African journalists can be separated into two groups: those who write regularly about China, and – far more common – those who write rarely about China.

Firstly, South African journalists tend to cover China when it features in an environmental or human rights story. "It's been a while since I looked for something specific on China policy-wise, so it depends whether it is an environmental type of thing. I might refer to them in a cursory manner" (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 2 adds: "I have to tell you honestly, China is not high on my radar." Interviewee 7 similarly views China as a conduit for environment stories. "China came into rhino poaching and ivory smuggling, but you know I didn't ever go to China. I don't recall ever asking China trying to get hold of a Chinese diplomat or anything like that" (Interviewee 7).

Secondly, interviewees who regularly focus on China, believe the topic is "not a big thing in South Africa" (Interviewee 3). He argues that South Africans are uninformed about China. "And that's what's weird about it; it's thousands of years of uninterrupted history. We know nothing about it." Interviewee 3 highlights the problem of an "actual Chinese voice" in the coverage of the country: "The problem is that research is often US-sourced. I mean just language is a problem. Like the Chinese internet doesn't exist to us because we can't access it. Chinese research doesn't exist because we can't access it. It is very dangerous, because there are no points at which you can engage with China, realistically speaking. Unless you go to a Confucius Institute, but really. There are people who are experts on China, at South African universities or UK universities, but they're not speaking from China's side. China just doesn't have the voice."

The lack of accessibility to information on China means that journalists are particularly suspicious of Chinese companies' lack of transparency. "It is hard to find information on where they're listed, or who owns them" (Interviewee 3). According to Interviewee 6: "China is a strong contender for the nuclear deal, although they are quiet about it." China's interaction with the media about the nuclear deal has been

"quite the opposite of France and Russia", in that "we don't get any information from them" (Interviewee 6).

Interviewee 6 argues that China's diplomacy is weak in South Africa's nuclear deal compared to the Russian media management. "If I take the Russians – they are a great example of diplomacy. The media was very negative about them, when that story broke that we had struck a deal with them. Then the Russians came in and worked very hard on their public perception. They built relationships, and took journalists to Russia to show us how hard they've worked and that they don't have the deal. It was very well communicated. They built really strong relationships. Journalists are always suspicious if you don't know the people" (Interviewee 6). She can access a range of sources when covering Russia, citing a "host of contacts". She says that, because she knows most of them well, they can assist in finding an answer.

She does not have a similar relationship with China, although they are strong contenders for nuclear power. "If I hear a rumour tomorrow of Zuma receiving this much money from China for a nuclear deal, I wouldn't know who to ask. I don't know anybody from China. I've never been invited. What I read, I get from other sources. And I've never even received a press release from them. I don't know them at all" (Interviewee 6). These journalists have little access to Chinese information, sources or contact points, which makes reporting on the China-Africa issue more difficult. Interviewee 3 believes his publication does not get press releases because they are "a lost cause. They've given up on us" (Interviewee 3). This inaccessibility is damaging for the China-Africa representation in South African media.

Interviewee 6 tracks down the Chinese press attaché, but "that also changes often. I've done stories on poaching etc., and in most cases they simply don't get back to you" (Interviewee 6). And yet, she also perceives the South African government as inaccessible. "If they give me proper answers, I will treat it as such. But if they tell me, you know, 'No comment at this stage', or just one short sentence response, then I won't value it." Engaging with South African government has become increasingly difficult. "In the past two years the SA government has closed up a lot" (Interviewee 6). Interviewee 6 generally works through the ministerial spokespeople, "but it feels like there's a different spokesperson almost every month". She is concerned about the South African government's "tightening of information". "They play their cards very

close to themselves, they don't share much. They want to make it too much effort to get your PAIA" (Interviewee 6).

*Distrust of Chinese media*

A common thread with South African journalists seems to be that they do not necessarily seek out *Xinhua*. "I didn't go there on purpose; I came across it when I was Googling information" (Interviewee 6). South African journalists deeply distrust *Xinhua News Agency*, and actively avoid consuming any Chinese media. One journalist described Chinese media as "just government propaganda. And it's quite boring, besides like being very pro-government" (Interviewee 10). *Xinhua* is perceived as "obviously propaganda, or spinning" (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 3 is inclined to focus on what *Xinhua* articles try to hide.

Some journalists are conflicted about the hypocrisy of their distrust. "The problem with those is, again it's hypocrisy; because they're owned by the government you don't trust them. But, like technically, the BBC is owned by the government and we trust them" (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 4 experiences a similar inner conflict. "Instinctively I wouldn't trust Chinese media, but then I would instinctively also worry about the Western media bias where they would automatically see everything through their lens. I see this in our own newsroom sometimes when there's just an automatic assumption that anything coming out of the Chinese newsfeed is false. So I would trust neither us nor them. We really don't trust *Xinhua* at all."

This section explored the journalists' engagement with extra-media influences (Reese, 2001), and how their sources and media consumption might influence their coverage of China. South African journalists rarely deliberately cover China and inherently distrust Chinese media sources, which resonates with findings from Madrid-Morales and Wasserman (2018). Journalists do not trust *Xinhua* in particular, because its content is considered to be pro-government propaganda, spinning false and uninteresting. Journalists admit to being more comfortable consuming western media, even if they are also state-owned. Additionally, South African journalists perceive China as inaccessible – Chinese companies lack transparency, which leads to distrust of Chinese business and government. Media sources and expertise generally reflect a western perspective on China. Additionally, China's soft power is damaged by their

close relationship with the increasingly inaccessible South African government, as South African journalists have a deep mistrust of their own government.

## 5. Ideological influences

This section explores the ideological or "social systems" (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016) influences on South African journalists' coverage of China. The influence of social institutions in this study refers to journalists' regard of the importance of the China-Africa topic, and their perception of China's soft power efforts.

*China-Africa as newsworthy topic*

Despite the fact that most of the journalists interviewed rarely cover the topic, they all regard the coverage of China-Africa as important. Journalists who feel strongly about the significance of the topic, try to write about China regularly and therefore seem to know more about the relationship. Some journalists argue that a focus on business practice is crucial, while others suggest power relationships are more important.

Experienced writers on China believe it is an "absolutely essential" topic for South African media. "You can't understand the last fifteen years in Africa, which has effectively been a massive shift in growth on the continent without understanding the relationship with China. There's [sic] been many misconceptions about how this relationship unfolds across the continent, largely because very few people on this continent know anything about China. So much of the thinking around this issue has been rumour-based and misconception-based" (Interviewee 11).

According to Interviewee 11, China-Africa coverage should explain how Chinese business works. He highlights the Chinese state-owned SinoHydro's projects in Botswana as a case study. "SinoHydro was doing terrible work. Botswana's regulations with regards to how a company tenders, and how a company produces, is [sic] very strict. What they were faced with is the world's single largest engineering firm, a foreign policy initiative effectively of the Chinese government, a partner they need, was doing terrible work in Botswana." He argues that most African countries would have allowed this to continue. While he perceives Botswana holding SinoHydro accountable as an optimistic step for African countries, he argues that public blame is now misdirected at the Chinese government. "SinoHydro has two

stakeholders: first… the CCP (Chinese Communist Party), second, its own management. If you know that, it becomes a little bit easier to understand who you're dealing with."

Few journalists deliberately distinguish between Chinese business and Chinese government as separate but interlinked entities. Interviewee 4 differentiates between the impact of China as a country, its government, and individual businessmen. "Can we really be, like, China is doing that? Or is this, like, a businessman out of millions of businessmen? I feel like we look at it as this big country, and every Chinese business venture, I think we conflate it with Chinese government. We see government's influence, where perhaps it's just business expanding."

Journalists feel it is important to understand how Chinese state-owned enterprises work because they are deeply connected to China's diplomacy: "Basically they are Chinese foreign policy – this go-out policy that the Chinese have been instituting for the past ten years – their state-owned enterprises are an adjunct of those policies. They need to be out there. Now that's a really nice negotiating tool if you know SinoHydro needs to be in your country in order to give folk certain initiatives that have been sent by the Chinese government" (Interviewee 11).

Chinese companies increase their competitiveness by cutting labour costs to African and Chinese employees. Along with "underpaying African labour", Chinese companies also cut costs "with their own management, where an American foreman on a Botswana site will likely demand 10 000 dollars a month salary, if a Chinese guy gets a tenth of that, he's doing well" (Interviewee 11). There is little recourse for Chinese companies flouting labour regulations, and Interviewee 11 suggests that even companies such as SinoHydro are in "vicious competition" with other state-owned companies in a battle for survival.

The competition among Chinese companies can be a "negotiating tool" if understood, "but very often African countries tend to be poor negotiators" (Interviewee 11). He experiences that "African countries very often don't have an appetite to enforce their own environmental or labour regulations". Furthermore, "tender processes aren't particularly transparent, so it's very difficult to know how these tenders are ratified, how they're handed out, what the processes are, and whether they are legal".

Journalists' clearer understanding of the Africa-China relationship could lead to coverage that empowers African audiences.

*Neocolonialism*

Journalists who rarely cover China perceive its impact in Africa as neocolonial, although, as Interviewees 7 and 10 suggest, these journalists often don't have "enough knowledge to actually back it up" or don't "really understand it". Interviewee 7, who has written about China when covering illegal wildlife trade, is concerned about a "one-sided" relationship where China takes Africa's resources. "And obviously poaching, and ivory, and rhino horn. I think that China is involved there. I understand that they're trying to crackdown, or I've read that they're trying to crackdown, but, I mean, I have no idea how effective that is or if it's fronting or whatever." The perception that China's policies on poaching might be a "front" illustrates a distrust of the Chinese government.

Interviewee 10 is also concerned about neocolonialism in Africa, based on the continent's history. "I am very skeptical and I don't trust, you know, with the history of colonisers coming here and the history of whoever has the most power and the most money being able to cause the most damage, I'm very skeptical. Even though I don't really understand it, but the fact is our poor continent has been taken advantage of so many times and still is and will continue to be." Her concern is also based on Chinese governance. "And based on the fact how they run their own country, it just can't be a great thing for us" (Interviewee 10).

Interviewee 2 also perceives China's environmental approach as neocolonial – and her coverage might warn readers. "The stuff that one reads, and I don't know if it's just perception, but it feels like everyone is just giving consent to this new colonial power." Regarding climate change: "They are probably one of the quiet, stalking countries, well they aren't even quietly stalking anymore, they used to and now they are, like, an obvious key player" (Interviewee 2).

Interviewee 9 does not perceive China as typically neocolonial, however. "We see on the African continent, China really massively investing in various types of infrastructure to access those raw materials that we need to sell to them. And, unlike the colonisation we saw happening with the west when they colonised Africa, at this stage we don't appear to see too much political interference. As far as I'm aware…

we don't see China police perhaps the way we have seen other global powers choose to do, when they have a stake in something." However, she believes China has the potential to interfere. "When it's an issue China cares about, like Taiwan, like the Dalai Lama, we do see African presidents bowing to that. Maybe we haven't seen interference, just because there hasn't been an issue that they really wanted to interfere on, but not necessarily because they see it as below them, or from some kind of moral sphere of reasoning" (Interviewee 9).

Interviewee 10 is concerned about powerful countries' general global impact. "China is one of the world's superpowers. China and America now are synonymous in your mind. And we've all seen what America has done to the world. Do we really want superpowers here on our continent? But what can you do, it's all about money, it's about opportunities, investments, it's about the economy" (Interviewee 10). She illustrates many journalists' perception that Africa is powerless against superpowers, which might lead to covering China as an imperialistic threat to Africa.

China thus appears as a superpower vs a powerless Africa. Interviewee 9 argues that some African nations do not have "enough land to feed their own population because they've sold off that land to powers like China". She is concerned that Africa does not benefit from its own natural resources. "So we kind of find ourselves in a difficult position where we are kind of like the poor cousin" (Interviewee 9). She refers to South Africans as "cautious" about Chinese issues, particularly labour conflicts. Chinese labour "raises suspicion", and Interviewee 9 thinks there is "concern about a tipping point, that there may come a point where we've given away too much of our power, and we don't feel then that we can call the shots for ourselves". Journalists who have less experience or knowledge about China, indicate higher levels of skepticism and pessimism towards China.

*China-Africa and the South African audience*

Journalists seem to feel that the China-Africa topic is not necessarily important to all South African audiences. "The topic is fairly interesting. Topics such as Brexit, the USA elections, the EU, Russia etc., is more interesting to the average Afrikaans reader" (Interviewee 8). Journalists find their audiences' "South African outlook" challenging, because it limits their interest in China-Africa stories. "The average South African is completely broken. I mean we consider our own problems here to be

kind of the apex of all of the world's problems. And we don't tend to see a larger picture. There's a very strict wall on our northern border, an intellectual and policy wall on our northern border" (Interviewee 11). Nuanced coverage also does not seem to appeal to South African audiences. "We first of all don't think much about the rest of Africa if we think about it at all. We think even less about the rest of the world outside of simplistic notions like America = bad, Russia = bad. It's a very unsophisticated outlook that runs all the way up. Almost through policy circles straight into the foreign relations departments of the government, and certainly the political parties" (Interviewee 11).

The China-Africa topic is therefore considered by journalists to be primarily of academic interest at the moment, as Interviewee 11 suggests. He classes the work at Stellenbosch's Centre for Chinese Studies and the Wits China-Africa reporting programme to be "very good work" conducted by people who "know exactly what's going on", but also believes Africa-China knowledge currently exists in "isolated academic pockets," and apart from his own book and a few others, there's "very little real work that's been done" (Interviewee 11).

Wasserman (2016) found that South African journalists are interested in the China topic from an economic and political point of view, which Interviewee 4 echoes; "The China topic is important to South Africans. I mean any country that comes and makes sort of big investments in Africa is something that we should be aware of, because this continent has been so exploited" (Interviewee 4). She argues that South Africans are "weary" of China's investments, while western countries are not interrogated. She puts this down to assuming that the "US must have good interests; they're here to protect us", whereas China is not afforded the same assumption.

Interviewee 2 also considers the economic news value as key to South African audiences because of the role of Chinese businesses in South African society. "The role of China in the markets, and a lot of our business has major interests in China... And then just generally migration – there's not even a small rural town that doesn't have a Chinese shop. So it is kind of like East meets West – and China is already here. It's not on a map – it affects people already" (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 9 goes further and believes Africa is actually dependent on China. "In terms of South Africa's opportunities I think to a certain extent we probably, we do need China."

Regarding manufacturing, "it's sort of a chicken-egg situation because the rise of China and other Asian countries has made our locally produced products no longer competitive" (Interviewee 9).

Journalists might be skeptical about the China-Africa trade relationship, but acknowledge its importance. "I say I don't trust the Chinese government, but I also think if we didn't trade with China at all we'd have a problem" (Interviewee 5). Interviewee 5 does not perceive China to be the greatest international threat to South Africa, which she feels is "our relationship with Russia" because she thinks "Putin is likely a psychopath… I think China is more comfortable with westerners than Russia is. And it's more open to westerners."

Besides economics, China also has political news value to journalists, as Interviewee 6 explains that the ANC are "huge fans of China's political model". However, this angle seemingly does not appeal to South African audiences either. "The ordinary South African doesn't really care about some Chinese official visiting the country; we're going to have to break it down for them: why this is important, why it matters" (Interviewee 10). China-Africa remains an economically and politically important topic to journalists, even though they may have to adapt frames to sell it to local audiences.

Interview findings suggest that journalists also believe in the news value of China's sustainable development and human rights. China "has definite footsteps on the continent" and they are important to environmental journalism because "it's one of the biggest polluters" (Interviewee 2). Although Interviewee 6 recognises the importance of the China-Africa relationship, neocolonialism and environmental impact is still an overriding worry, China has "relevance for sustainable development in South Africa. China's influence remains big in Africa, they're very strong contenders for a nuclear deal that will possibly be one of the largest flows of money from one country to another. Their influence is growing – they are opening more and more mines, and that is also a worry for me. To see the mines they are constructing in Africa – coal mines – and they have a very bad environmental track record here. They don't meet environmental regulations – or that's what I've seen, I don't want to say all of them, but a large majority" (Interviewee 6).

*China's image and the media*

All the interviewed journalists believe the media can impact China's image, aside from Interviewee 8, who suggests that "the media plays no role in improving China or South Africa's image. The media have to report as objectively as possible and analyse it" (Interviewee 8).

Interviewee 9 argues that "the media can influence people's perceptions. Just as any story that you read can influence you or provide you with a certain factual basis for your thinking, obviously stories about China can do that." She argues that the media use "buzzwords" such as "xenophobia," or "economic opportunities" to "drum up fear" or "drum up support," when covering China. "I don't think that we really see a lot of overtly negative reporting in South Africa on China; it probably more has those undercurrents of suspicion, of caution, of unpredictability that we see in society." Regardless of positive or negative reporting on China, Interviewee 9 doubts coverage affects government policy. "I'm not sure that if there were a lot of negative reporting on issues around Chinese cooperation that that would necessarily sway government's position."

Some journalists believe media coverage has already affected China's reputation. "I think in the liberal media, the Chinese have inevitably been villainised. I don't think there's been a proper understanding of how much has changed geopolitically, with regards to how the Chinese have behaved on the continent" (Interviewee 11). For example, the media lacks coverage of China diverting from its non-interference policy by sending its military to South Sudan, taking responsibility for its investments. Interviewee 11 argues that, overall, South African media do not cover the progression of China's policies in Africa. He argues that a lack of coverage stems from a lack of understanding, especially of China-Africa multilateral initiatives, such as the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). These initiatives have led to "almost the beginnings of a Cold War in Africa" with regards to how Japan, Russia and the USA perceive their involvement in Africa.

Chinese media investments can increase journalists' skepticism of China, whether the investment is manifest or latent, says Interviewee 3, who is mostly concerned about editorial influence. Interviewee 3 assumes China's media investments are meant for influence, because media in South Africa is "not an entirely profitable industry". Journalists tend to be more skeptical about China's media investments than that of

other countries. According to Interviewee 3, the former Irish ownership at the Independent was less threatening. “Because we imagine we understand them, and that they’re not bad people. The main thing is that we know fuck all about China. It’s always cast as this thing. And it’s always China, it’s never… when Chinese people smuggle ivory – China did it. It’s like China is a single entity that’s either evil or nice or whatever. And we know absolutely nothing about the politics of China” (Interviewee 3). This links to the argument above that journalists who are more knowledgeable about China might produce more nuanced coverage.

Journalists fear that China’s media interference might impact media freedom in South Africa. “Our government speaks so glowingly of China. It makes it difficult not to link things like this, like when they come back and write entire articles in the newspaper, and how much they’ve learned from the Chinese government, and then at the same time try to implement something like the Secrecy Bill. Well who did you learn that from? You’ve got two people you’re learning it from: the Apartheid government and the Chinese government” (Interviewee 4). Again, China’s close relationship with the South African government might damage its image. “And I wonder perhaps if a lot of the distrust that particularly the middle class feels for South African government sort of spills over to the Chinese government. About China – we don’t like them so much and then the ANC doesn’t like them, well we do. There’s such a tendency to be pro-anything that the ANC hates, and anti-everything the ANC loves” (Interviewee 4).

Lastly, Interviewee 3 commented on the lack of China coverage and how that impacted on the perception of the country in South Africa. The problem is that “Europeans, to South Africans, have a face you know – we will be angry about Brexit or Boris Johnson, or Angela Merkel doing things to Syrian people, but they’re humans. And once they’re humans they can’t really be mean, because they’re people. But China is a thing, and once it’s a thing, you can give it any sort of motive. There’s no face to China. When you say China did this, they don’t think of the Premier, there really isn’t a face, isn’t a person, it’s not relatable at all” (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 3 does not consider Xi Jinping to be China’s relatable face. “In other African countries it’s a big thing, because obviously he goes there and it’s big news. If the Chinese premier comes [to South Africa] and you write about it, it seems like you’re writing a feel-good story. So you stay away from it.” Coverage of Chinese leadership

might come across as supporting Chinese public relations but, conversely, the lack of coverage objectifies the China-Africa issue and makes it less relatable.

*Understanding China's soft power*

Many South African journalists have a vague understanding of the notion of "soft power", but it seems journalists experienced in writing about China have a deeper understanding of the concept and how it operates. Journalists who are unfamiliar with soft power associate it with fear and danger. Interviewee 10 wonders if "it's not overt, right? It's subtle but it's just as dangerous, right? It's almost like the idea that we're coming here to help you, but at the end of the day, they take over everything." Interviewee 5 is similarly confused: "What it sounds like to me, is soft power in relation to hard power – so then soft power would be a more material government or leadership. And I would say soft power is stuff that's more implicit, for example something is not illegal, but it is understood that you are not allowed to do that. But I really don't know." This misconception is potentially because of the word "power", which is generally associated with exploitation. Soft power might be understood relative to hard power, which gives it a negative connotation amongst the journalists interviewed.

Some journalists are aware of soft power strategies, such as China's media investments, without necessarily being familiar with the terminology. "No I can't say that I have [heard of soft power]. Look, I mean a Chinese consortium owns a quarter of Independent Newspapers, so you know, if that's the kind of thing you're talking about then, ya. It's real. Isn't there a government-owned TV station? And Sekunjalo had sent two of my former colleagues to China to go and work there – so there is some cross-pollination a bit" (Interviewee 7).

Most journalists assume soft power is exerted by China in the China-South Africa relationship, but Interviewee 2 questions the power flow. Particularly regarding the Naspers-Chinese relationship, she says: "I'm not exactly sure where soft power begins and ends. Who influences who there? But if you think about countries globally, that you should take seriously, I'd say Lesotho has a lot less soft power than China" (Interviewee 2). She views South Africa and China's influence to be comparable, and might therefore be less likely to cover China as neocolonial. Some journalists are only aware of South African soft power. "I've heard it in relation to

South Africa, in their sort of softer policy, and taking that reputation as diplomatic and conflict-resolving and using that in international negotiations. So that's what I understand by soft power, it's not a direct influence as much as a reputation influence, diplomatic influence. In relation to China, I don't know" (Interviewee 4).

The interviewed journalists also link soft power to a country's reputation. Interviewee 4 thinks that soft power is "more like a branding issue, like the way your country is perceived in other places, and the sway that can lend you within the global sphere". She compares the soft power of Obama in other countries, "as opposed to a military power or an economic power. So it's like less tangible than traditional forms of power, and is more perspective-based" (Interviewee 4).

Journalists assume soft power also extends beyond nations. Interviewee 2 wonders if the "sphere of influence" is limited to countries. She calls soft power the "brainprint", which sectors they stand out in, and in which they lead. "For example, if you're looking towards someone that's working with solar power then they think of the Chinese. I'm not sure exactly how to define it, but it's a diplomatic term. And diplomacy is not just operating in big halls or conference rooms" (Interviewee 2).

China's economic influence is also commonly recognised as part of its soft power. "When I think about their influence it always comes back to economics. And again my gut intuition is that, if you have that much Chinese business interest in South Africa, how that might influence politics. I mean there's a whole lobby group that we're not necessarily thinking about. The mining companies themselves are an entire lobby group. They've been around for centuries" (Interviewee 4).

*The effect of accessibility on soft power*

Journalists in this sample suggest that Chinese lack of accessibility limits media engagement and, accordingly, soft power. For example, the Chinese embassy invited Interviewee 3 to visit China, in an effort to soften his coverage of a Chinese company's involvement in illegal fishing. "The Chinese embassy sent a press release saying it's all a misunderstanding, they couldn't speak English. So the Chinese spokesperson said why don't you come to China on a visit so you can better understand us?" (Interviewee 3). Interviewee 3 instead responded with questions, but claims he cannot "even get answers out of the Chinese embassy". He further suggests that China's inaccessibility can harm its soft power efforts such as the "year of China

in South Africa": "It is bizarre how basically our biggest ally and trading partner, and the person the ANC is staking its future on – we know nothing. But I imagine all of China's allies are like that. Zambia?" Interviewee 3 argues that media in other African countries differ from South Africa, and they therefore engage differently with China. For example, an official Chinese state visit is "a big issue in those countries, whereas here, like that when the premier visits, or like three weeks ago when the head of the Chinese navy visited, which is big right? For South African issues. Nothing." The journalist also suggests that South African audiences do not trust their state media: "Because, if the SABC goes and reports on it, people just say it's all lies. And then it's not an issue. So that could be another thing, we have enough media; there isn't one tone on what China is" (Interviewee 3).

According to Interviewee 5, China's soft power is damaged by their close relationship with South African government, as South African journalists deeply mistrust their state departments. "Our government has quite a friendly relationship with China, so I don't know if I could find anything of substance from, for example, DIRCO. They'd probably give me a quote from government, and I wouldn't rely on it." She also consults news stories that have already been written by "reputable organisations" such as Al Jazeera. "I wouldn't necessarily rely on CNN – I don't trust American news organisations" (Interviewee 5).

However, some of China's inaccessibility could also benefit its soft power efforts through what Interviewee 3 calls "anti-media": "It's like every time you send questions to the Chinese embassy – if you just don't answer things, what are people gonna do? You can't get outraged if someone just completely ignores you. So if you have Chinese vessels sailing around Africa, plundering all the fish, and that company and the embassy never say anything about it, so what?" (Interviewee 3).

Some journalists believe China's soft power efforts are pointless without successful media engagement. "Confucius Institutes, etc. are all efforts from China's side to improve their soft power. China doesn't know how to work with the media. They write a press release and boom, there you go" (Interviewee 1). Many journalists had never heard of Confucius Institutes. China's content and distribution of information are considered inadequate, and a key barrier to media engagement is language. "All countries have propaganda. China needs to translate theirs into Western terminology.

The biggest obstacle is the language. But now you can learn Mandarin in so many places in South Africa" (Interviewee 1).

China's South African media investments also do not necessarily translate into soft power success. "They don't have any. At all. I suppose that's why China has to buy influence. It's very obviously money, money, oh well, we'll build you a tar road, or a dam. They don't have Hollywood or Top Gear" (Interviewee 3). Compared to cultural initiatives such as Confucius Institutes, China's investments in South African media are potentially counter-productive. This might feed suspicion of China, rather than building a positive image. "Sure, they have set up institutes at Rhodes, Wits and Stellenbosch. But I guess also in a weird way, something like buying up Independent, is almost sort of such an easy way to get people's backs up" (Interviewee 9).

*Does Chinese soft power need South African media to succeed?*

Interviewee 11 believes that soft power via media investments is virtually unattainable. "Soft power is very, very hard to do. There was a great story about a TV news channel in Arabic that the Americans started right around the kick off of the war on terror, called *el-minhar*. It was like an Arabic Fox or an Arabic CNN. And it completely bombed. Now if the Americans couldn't do it – you know, the people who basically invented the 24 hour news cycle, who invented CNN, who invented cable television. If they couldn't do it – I'm not quite sure what the Chinese were thinking when they started a number of these kind of soft power news ventures." He also questions China's media diplomacy in the robust South African media market. "At first, I think some of the CCTV stuff was relatively successful, and I think in countries like Kenya, and some other countries it's become slightly more entrenched, but here – the media market is so competitive. While Independent Newspapers does have Chinese money, and while there is Chinese money in South African media, South African media is also in the Chinese market. It's not like it's totally a one-way street." He also claims that China's soft power fails partly because they underestimate Africans' knowledge of when they are being influenced. "I also don't think Africans are as dumb as people make us out to be… It may or may not be appreciated, and Chinese ties with the country may or may not be strengthened, but nonetheless it's understood what the game is" (Interviewee 11).

China's soft power does not necessarily reflect its relevance to the African continent. In fact, journalists suggest that the discussion around China's soft power successes diverts attention from how they have already been proven invaluable. "The relationship is really, really important. It's provided an alternative to the west that's literally bumped up GDPs across sub-Saharan Africa, by 5.5 %. So I mean to decouple and start thinking of the relationship in manipulative terms with regards to soft power initiatives, tends to steer you away from how important the relationship actually is. It provides an alternate market to the west that is 1.4 billion people strong. We can't afford to turn away from that" (Interviewee 11).

There is also a perception amongst the journalists that China inefficiently engages with South African media, which then pose the question whether China needs the media to implement soft power at all. "I would argue that the soft power initiatives that do work: clinics, to a much, much lesser extent, education, but you know that kind of cultural exchanges is as old as the hills. I would argue that they should be going with what works." Interviewee 11 believes health diplomacy is more relevant than media diplomacy. "Soft power is also clinics, soft power is also education – the expansion of the Confucius Institutes, the fight against ebola, the fight against tuberculosis. There are a number of really interesting Chinese soft power ventures, most of which outside of health, I would argue have been unsuccessful."

Interviewee 11 suggests that China "go with stuff that works". He argues that media investment does not. "The media stuff – buying up media… any country needs to be fairly considerate about how much foreign ownership is allowed in its media corporations. But for obvious reasons, here, that's far less of a consideration than sanction battles within the ruling party. So I would be very nervous about more than 49% ownership in South African media institutions" (Interviewee 11).

China's concrete solutions, such as health diplomacy, have the potential to fulfil even a charm defensive mandate. "I think the Chinese know better than most that you can't turn around perceptions in an afternoon. If indeed they are, as they say they are, playing the long game, any Chinese diplomat or bureaucrat or policymaker you speak to will tell you that this is the long game, then chill out. One great way to implement a soft power strategy is to do it for a while, and to have it work, and for it to benefit the people it's supposed to benefit in the long run. Reconceiving really skillfully built

notions of the Chinese as neocolonial powers and oppressors, many of which are justified, and human rights abusers, which are entirely accurate, that's going to take time" (Interviewee 11).

This section discussed South African journalists' knowledge of China's soft power efforts, as well as their perception on the importance of the China-Africa topic. There are potential ideological influences on South African journalists' coverage of China (Reese, 2001). In this chapter, it seems that most South African journalists acknowledge their lack of substantial knowledge about China, as they focus on China in a cursory manner. Journalists who rarely cover China, seem to be skeptical and pessimistic about China's influence on the African continent, deeming it neocolonial. They also distrust Chinese environment policies, and Chinese governance as a whole. South African journalists are concerned about the exploitation of Africa by powerful nations in general, because they perceive Africa as powerless. This might lead to covering China as an imperialistic threat to Africa.

Journalists who cover China-Africa often, tend to display a more nuanced perception of China. Some journalists believe China-Africa coverage should educate readers about how Chinese business works, especially because it is deeply connected to China's diplomacy. Knowledge of China in Africa can be empowering to African audiences – the competition among Chinese companies in particular can be a useful negotiating tool, especially since Africa is considered a poor negotiator. Few journalists deliberately distinguish between Chinese business and Chinese government as separate but interlinked entities.

Journalists feel the China-Africa topic is not necessarily important to all South African audiences. They perceive the topic remaining stuck in academia, as little concrete coverage is being done. Wasserman (2016) found that South African journalists are interested in the China topic from an economic and political point of view. This study finds that journalists also believe in the news value of China's sustainable development and human rights. Some journalists perceive China's environmental approach as neocolonial – and their coverage might be aimed at warning readers.

The majority of the interviewed journalists believe the media can impact China's image, and some believe that it has already done so. Chinese media investments can

increase journalists' skepticism of China, particularly regarding potential editorial influence and media freedom in South Africa. While some journalists believe China's soft power efforts are pointless without successful media engagement, others believe media investments do not necessarily translate into soft power success, and China's inaccessibility harms its soft power efforts. Journalists believe concrete solutions, such as health diplomacy, hold more value in Africa than media diplomacy.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter analysed the results of interviews with South African journalists to determine the potential individual, routine, organisational, extra-media, and ideological influences on their coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights. The results of these interviews seem to show that South African journalists only cover China in a cursory manner. They perceive China as exploitative, extractionist, careless and harmful towards the environment, but South African journalists tend to draw on what they consume in the media or hear from peers to inform their opinion of China's environmental impact. Journalists perceive China's environmental impact in Africa as an expected, normalised side-effect of development. They believe China does not necessarily have an intentional disregard for the environment, and that their environmental impact is not worse than that of developed countries in Africa. Journalists are pressured to provide stories that sell or get clicks. Rhino poaching news sells, and, since South African media portrays China as the key perpetrator of poaching, it is likely to feature on the news agenda often.

Journalists also perceive China as negatively impacting human rights in Africa, particularly in favour of capitalism. China's lax human rights are viewed as an automatic side-effect of economic growth. Journalists' lack of understanding of China's approach to human rights vs a western approach, could further the us-vs-them ideology when covering China. Anything outside of the western human rights framework might be covered as a violation.

Financial constraints are the key challenge South African journalists face when covering China-Africa. South African journalists strive for neutrality despite the fact that it is idealistic, again reflecting Tuchman's (1972) "strategic ritual" of objectivity. Some journalists disregard objectivity because they consider their journalism to be a

form of activism. Journalists' perception of their role in society – the blurring lines between activist and journalist – might influence their coverage of China.

Journalists experienced ownership influences as big shifts in their publication's ownership occurred, primarily as Chinese-linked Sekunjalo took over Independent Media. These journalists felt powerless when having to cover China with prominence and a positive angle that they were dissatisfied with, illustrating how ownership outweighs personal opinions when covering China.

South African journalists aim to include a multiplicity of voices in their articles. State sources are sometimes used, but journalists find both the South African and Chinese government to be inaccessible. They also have a positive relationship with NGOs as sources. Journalists are concerned that press releases tend to be western sources that are highly critical of China, but seem to prefer international, particularly western, media to stay informed.

Overall, this study has found that South African journalists rarely write about China. When they do, they find China either inaccessible or inherently distrust Chinese media and sources. South Africa has enough independent media available for the public not to rely on the public broadcaster or other official sources. While state media in other African countries promote visits by Chinese officials, in South Africa it can harm China's image, because South Africans tend to distrust its public broadcaster. Generally, China's soft power is damaged by their close relationship with South African government, as South African journalists have a deep mistrust of their state. South African journalists also do not trust *Xinhua* in particular, because it is considered to be pro-government propaganda, spinning, false and uninteresting. Some journalists are conflicted about their hypocrisy of distrusting *Xinhua*, while consuming western state-owned media. Journalists admit to being more comfortable consuming western media, even though it inadequately portrays Africa.

The nuanced coverage of China is rare, because most journalists don't know much about China because of inaccessible media sources and engagement, and so can't interact with the China-Africa topic in depth. When journalists do cover China, they tend to deem the influence in Africa as neocolonial. These journalists feel the China-Africa coverage should empower South African readers, not only with how Chinese business works but also with China's diplomacy, because these two topics are so

deeply connected. Unfortunately, because of the lack of media engagement, the coverage of China is limited.

The China-Africa topic is not considered to be of importance to all South African audiences. The topic is therefore considered to be largely of academic interest and is not high on journalists' news. This finding confirms Wasserman's (2016), namely, that South African journalists are interested in the China topic from an economic and political point of view. This study finds that journalists also believe in the news value of China's sustainable development and human rights. Some journalists perceive China's environmental approach as neocolonial – and their coverage might be aimed at warning readers.

Journalists believe the media can impact China's image. However, regardless of positive or negative reporting on China, journalists doubt it affects government policy. Journalists do not consider Xi Jinping to be China's relatable, human face, perpetuating the villainisation of China while the west is humanised.

Finally, journalists fear that China's media interference might impact media freedom in South Africa. China's close relationship with the South African government re-emerges as possibly damaging to China's image. Journalists unfamiliar with soft power, associate it with fear and danger. Some journalists are aware of Chinese soft power strategies without necessarily being familiar with the terminology. China's media diplomacy in South Africa is also perceived as unsuccessful, and China's investments in South African media are potentially counter-productive. This might feed suspicion of China, rather than building a positive image. Soft power via media investments is virtually unattainable, particularly in such a robust media system as South Africa's. South African journalists' perception that China inefficiently engages with South African media then poses the question whether China needs the media to implement soft power at all. China's soft power does not reflect its relevance to the African continent, through concrete solutions such as China's health diplomacy, which has the potential to fulfil even a charm defensive mandate.

# Chapter Seven: Influences on Chinese Journalists

This chapter explores the influences on Chinese journalists when covering China's sustainable development and human rights. It follows a similar approach to Chapter 6, where South African journalists were interviewed according to Reese's hierarchy of influences model (2001).

Chinese journalists were selected on the premise that they are, or have been, employed at what this study considers mainstream Chinese media, therefore China Radio International (CRI), China Daily, China Central Television (CCTV) (now CGTN) and Xinhua News Agency. Employment at mainstream English-language Chinese publications ensures that their responses are directly relevant to their publications' content aimed at African audiences. The selected journalists are from a wide variety of backgrounds, but throughout this study I refer to them as "Chinese journalists". Many are from mainland China, and currently living in China, or correspondents in Africa. Some interviewees are from Africa and currently living in different African countries. The journalists were interviewed in China, South Africa or via technological means if they were based in other African countries. Unlike the South African journalists in Chapter 6, the Chinese journalists could not be selected regarding their beats, as it seems mainstream Chinese media rarely has any form of beat journalism.

The interviewees have a relatively strong command of the English language, which facilitated communication during the interviews. Mandarin-speaking interviewees, who were less confident about their English-language skills, used iPhones to enhance their understanding of my questions, as well as to formulate their responses. They translated words or phrases using translation apps on their mobile phones, and conveyed their understanding of my questions. I would only record their responses once we both agreed that the translation accurately reflected both my questions and their responses. This was a time-consuming process, since we sometimes had to change the words or sentence structures to ensure clear interpretation without assumptions in the asking and answering of questions.

Access to Chinese journalists proved challenging, mostly because they could not obtain editorial permission to be interviewed for this study. Several journalists were

contacted via snowball sampling through WeChat, email, Whatsapp, Facebook, telephone and middlemen, and many rejected my requests for interviews because their editors or managers prohibited this interaction. I often had to change the content and tone of my requests – eventually explaining to journalists that it might be beneficial to China to air their perspectives on sustainable development and human rights. This led to a higher rate of respondents.

Censorship thus played a role in the interview process of this study, and its broader impact on Chinese media as an organisational influence will be further discussed later in this chapter. For example, two journalists explicitly asked for their identities to be protected. One responded via email: "NB: I think this information will get me in trouble with my editor. Is it possible to omit my name and some information and work experience which can expose me?" The other journalist only agreed to the interview if I could guarantee anonymity. They did not reveal their names or any identifiable information to me, and we conducted our interview via a WeChat account they created especially for the interview. I do not have an email address or any other contactable information for this journalist. Despite the other journalists' relative willingness and openness, I treat their anonymity with the same sensitivity, and have therefore tried to navigate their identifiable information by omitting unnecessary details that could reveal their identities.

## 1. Individual influences

This section explores the background education, work experience and journalists' perceptions of China's human rights and sustainable development, which could influence their coverage (Reese, 2001). The interviewees are journalists at the English services for abovementioned news agencies, also acting as writers, researchers, hosts, anchors, correspondents, translators or editors.

*Educational background*

Many of the interviewed journalists have Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees as their background education, while the China-based journalists' education includes studying English. Interviewee 19 did not study journalism, but was trained via his publication. Chinese publications do not necessarily recruit journalism graduates, though

Interviewee 19 perceives it as an advantage. “If you have the background of media studies that will be good, or better, because you can then do your job efficiently and faster than other people. But it is not a necessarily requirement. It’s a plus if you can speak English, especially if you are covering the international reports.”

*Work experience*

Many of the journalists at Chinese publications consider their positions at the mainstream state media institutions as admirable. “CCTV is a state broadcaster so the position was very attractive. People who work for them are high up. [In South Africa] we seem like ordinary people, but in China national media gets a lot of respect” (Interviewee 13). Interviewee 19 explained that he applied to Xinhua during what he calls “graduate season”, “because it is the national news agency so it is very famous and very powerful”. He was awarded the position after a six month internship. “About 2 000 people applied for that job and only two people were appointed.” The competitiveness to work for a state-owned media agency is based on the perception that they offer good, honourable jobs. “Although I got other offers, I rejected them and I think at Xinhua this is a very good job.”

Xinhua in particular is considered special as it involves “the top leaders in China”. Xinhua “not only has the right to report like other news agencies, but also it has the right to write internal reference[s].” Other people cannot write internal references, which are ultimately submitted to top leadership, such as ministers. Internal references are not published, but are “private” (Interviewee 19) and used by the government as information pieces on a certain topic. Interviewee 19 recently wrote an internal reference on Confucius Institutes in Africa. “Because I remember in 2014 America shut down one Confucius Institute. I [told] my supervisor that there are a lot of Confucius Institutes in Africa, and I [wrote] a kind of report or internal reference, and he thought it’s okay”.

“At Xinhua journalists work for local government, which means you represent essential government” (Interviewee 19). Interviewee 16 helped promote Chinese media in South Africa. He spent time in Beijing, New York and South Africa as a correspondent for Xinhua’s TV channel. “We have many clients, some in South Africa I have helped develop. In South Africa, I was sort of the public relations manager of Xinhua” (Interviewee 16).

Interviewee 17 has become a translator for Chinese people in South Africa that are affected by crime, and take their cases to court. She also translates for people who have been accused of poaching. “These individuals are innocent – local lawyers are paid off.” She accuses the South African police of being involved with these cases, along with individuals from Hong Kong, Vietnam and Taiwan. Interviewee 17 explains that big syndicates are using local people or average Chinese people. “These Chinese people go to jail and the big syndicates bail them out. They don’t even speak any English. The syndicates say it is all organised – ‘gangster’. They are controlling the poaching from far away.”

Many of the Chinese-speaking journalists are employed because of their English skills. “I was good at English. Our English is not as good, but we practice with international students from USA and African countries at my university. Grammar was a big focus in high school” (Interviewee 16). Journalists’ strong command of English could open them up to exposure from different news sources outside of state-owned Chinese publications, which might be critical of China. However, as journalists are given clear guidelines what to report on, their English skills might simply only increase their chances of employment at English-language Chinese publications. Journalists employed at English-speaking Chinese publications often find these positions as markers of esteem – particularly because of their proximity to the Chinese government. This increases the competition amongst journalists to be employed at Xinhua in particular.

*Journalists’ perceptions of China’s sustainable development*

According to Reese (2001), journalists’ personal opinions of a topic can influence their coverage. This study therefore explores Chinese journalists’ perceptions of China’s human rights and sustainable development to determine the potential influences of these perceptions on their coverage.

China is perceived by some journalists as prioritising economic growth above sustainability. “I think the Chinese government is trying to engage with environmental issues but there is a hesitancy to enact any real meaningful change at this point, as China’s economic success has been largely at the expense of the environment” (Interviewee 12). Other journalists, however, argue that environmental protection receives higher priority than economic development. “[We] don’t want to

disrupt the environment for the growth of the economy. Sometimes I think the environment is valued more than the economy" (Interviewee 13). China's pollution has been a key factor in prioritising sustainability. "Pollution is serious in Beijing. A lot of companies are trying to make more money without the environmental protection facilities. We need some time, but not a lot of time. We will pay a lot for the environment" (Interviewee 14). Sustainability thus requires time and money, and the environment is perceived as an economic investment that China can "pay" for.

Sustainable development is a relatively new concept in Chinese society, which some journalists were exposed to during primary education. "In the old times we didn't have a sense of it. We just knew we were poor. We were told to protect the environment" (Interviewee 14). "China now realises the importance of the environment. Even with Hu Jintao, he believed in the sustainable development concept. The whole of China wants to work together to protect the environment" (Interviewee 13).

China's goal has been not only to prioritise sustainability but also be a global leader in this field. "The country is trying to lead the global society on sustainable development" (Interviewee 16). Many journalists illustrate faith in the Chinese government's significant measures to improve its sustainability. "We are trying our best to control this. Things will gradually change – give it 8-10 years. We never miss our promise." Interviewee 16 is optimistic about the already visible "positive direction" of China's sustainability. "Compared to 30 years ago – you notice the difference. Now it is on government and policy level and local people are aware."

China's "huge population" (Interviewee 16) and unique development seem to complicate their sustainable development. "Addressing ecological challenges as a developing nation has its own unique set of problems. Using western ideals and norms might not necessarily be the best thing for addressing the issues China faces in this regard" (Interviewee 12). China's environment policies, such as decreased coal mining, have improved and are increasingly recognised by Chinese citizens, but, according to Interviewee 15, "it is complex". "We have to create jobs for those people. China suffers from over-capacity" (Interviewee 15).

Interviewee 15 believes for China to maintain a favourable image, communities affected by China's environmental impact have often been silenced. "On a strategic

level, it is good for government if they can carry it out. But the media needs to look at it independently. Like the Peruvians protesting about China affecting their environment – those voices are silent in Chinese media" (Interviewee 15). Interviewee 12 claims that most Chinese journalists' mandates are to cover international cooperation, and therefore he rarely covers environmental issues, such as wildlife trafficking. "I have not seen much focus on this issue. Most of the focus is geared toward addressing issues surrounding infrastructure and cooperation across nations."

Other journalists claim that Chinese media coverage of sustainability has increased. "Under the new leadership, I mean President Xi Jinping, or Premier Li, we have paid more attention and even focused on sustainable development. Lots more reports on pollution in China" (Interviewee 19). However, this coverage does not extend to the China-Africa relationship. "But in terms of African countries, we still emphasise the hardship of Chinese shop owners, the hardship of Chinese businessmen. We do not mention environmental protection or environmental pollution. Domestically, we have more and more, but for African countries we have not done a lot about it" (Interviewee 19). Interviewee 14 is concerned about China's environmental impact in Africa. "I worry a lot about affecting Africa because the African landscape is beautiful."

FOCAC's focus on sustainability illustrates the importance of environmental protection in the China-Africa relationship, which could lead to increased sustainability coverage. "In the following years I think the cooperation or the protection launched by Africa and China will be more than before and we can do more reports about Chinese people who cause pollution in cases in Africa" (Interviewee 19). Interviewee 19 highlights journalists' valuing of the Chinese government's official strategies. Journalists display faith in the Chinese government implementation of an official strategy, such as those outlined in FOCAC. On the other hand, Interviewee 20, a Zimbabwean citizen, doubts whether such policies will be implemented: "Recently we are hearing that China is taking a serious stance against climate change. We wait to see if the talk and pledges would translate to action."

Chinese journalists believe that sustainability is increasingly prioritised by the Chinese government, and they have faith in their government to implement

environmental protection policies. They have seen an increase in media coverage of China's environmental impact, though they aware that this coverage does not extend to the China-Africa relationship, and that, globally, disconcerted communities remain silenced in Chinese media.

*Journalists' perceptions of China's human rights*

Some Chinese journalists believe China does not respect human rights, and others have faith that China can improve its human rights policies. "Chinese people, like the rest of the world, will always respect human rights. But sometimes we have to change our policies to address certain problems" (Interviewee 13). Interviewee 16 is less confident that Chinese companies will implement the Chinese government's human rights policies. "Companies are told by government you should have this and this protection", "but it is a big country" (Interviewee 16). This interviewee claims department regulators are understaffed and inefficient. Not implementing these laws seems to be attributed to a lack of resources rather than a lack of respect for human rights.

Similar to sustainable development, human rights is also a new concept in China. "Like the black lung disease that coal miners had in a poor village in China… Fifty coal miners had that disease for a long time and didn't think it was connected to human rights. The owner was a miner before – he has no knowledge of black lung disease. But the government should know" (Interviewee 14). Interviewee 19 suggests that China's primary human rights success in recent years has been its poverty reduction. He suggests the Chinese government's goal to "pull people out of poverty in the next three years or five years", will result in a positive international reputation for China.

Some Chinese journalists believe the "human rights" term is a strategic ploy by the West to frame China in a negative light. "I don't agree with the term 'human rights'. Western people judge the human rights of China" (Interviewee 14). Interviewee 15 argues that western media are biased when covering China's human rights. "But in the West, they are actively intent to exaggerate the human rights issues in China. That's the nature of media – everything gets exaggerated." Western and Chinese media coverage of human rights differs. "There's a difference in what I see in China vs USA coverage of human rights. You can't ignore the activists and labourers. It's

good for Communism but bad for civil society. Average people are getting more aware of this topic" (Interviewee 15). The increased awareness of human rights makes the Chinese government "nervous" and "they continuously refresh their rhetoric". The Chinese Foreign Minister is "vague, not specific" about human rights. "By not mentioning it, you are saying something. That you are denying it" (Interviewee 15).

Many Chinese journalists associate human rights with China's former one-child policy. In 1979, the Chinese government introduced a one-child policy that allowed most couples to have only one child, or face potential fines, sterilisations, and abortions. In 2013, China introduced a relaxation of the policy, which was eventually lifted in 2016, mostly because of an aging population (Clarke, 2015). "We had a one child policy and now have a two child policy, it is still controlled. The USA would often comment on the one child policy but they have no idea how big the population is" (Interviewee 14). The policy was implemented to conserve resources. "Our natural resources are limited. If you don't have control everybody will be starving and they won't have a good life. The birth control ensures a decent life. Every coin has two sides." A large population is also why one-person-one-vote might not work in China. "Democracy for billions of people? You will spend a whole year calculating the votes" (Interviewee 16).

Chinese journalists also focus on the labour aspects of human rights. "Labour conditions has improved a lot in recent years, salaries are getting higher. Before we had a problem: not paying informal workers on time. Now that has changed. In Africa, labour department [has] lots of laws to protect their workers. China wants to catch up with the rest of the world to change conditions and protect their rights" (Interviewee 13). Interviewee 16 claims that China's human rights have already improved, and African labourers are not treated poorly. "As far as I know the labourers in Africa get paid even more than me. I'm in the government system too. No Chinese companies force their labourers to go to Africa. They are quite willing" (Interviewee 16).

While China has improved some aspects of its human rights record, it has seen a worsening of freedom of speech. "Before our president took power, we thought Xi Jinping is a very open-minded person and will be the person who protects our media's rights – the freedom of publication, and the freedom of speech. But when he took

power, the academia, the scholars, and also our intellectuals and our journalists realised the supervision has only been increased, rather than reduced. And the human rights will only be more difficult to talk about than before" (Interviewee 19).

Media workers are under increased pressure. According to Interviewee 19, a journalist recently disappeared after reporting critically on the Chinese government. Interviewee 19 claims that the journalist posted a letter from other party members to ask President Jinping to reduce his power, "to allow some more freedom to the general public". He describes Xi's power in Chinese society: "Mr President Xi, the major of China and also the leader of the Communist Party, and is said to be the most powerful leader since the First Chairman, Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao is the most powerful person in Chinese history, and President Xi is the second one." The journalist mistakenly posted the letter on social media. It was deleted within a few minutes, but had quickly been distributed. "That media worker was missing about one week. And his friends are also missing. Any related person to him will be checked." The journalists were eventually released, but refused to reveal what happened to them. "And that is one case to demonstrate that. You can check the BBC news report and you will see one report that explains what happened. But we don't know. Unless you report for BBC" (Interviewee 19).

The Chinese government expects positive reporting from their reporters. "Mr President has held a meeting with the journalists from Xinhua News Agency, and *People's Daily,* and CCTV. And he said in that conference we have to focus, we have to hold the right political direction in our news reports. We have to do more positive reports. Which means you have to follow the party's laws, so the media firstly works for the Party rather than the people" (Interviewee 19). Journalists are therefore seemingly pressured to prioritise the needs of the Communist Party. "So there is one word in Chinese called *dao mein xing dao* which means your parents are the Party and so you have to pick parents firstly. So we kind of lose the function to serve the general public. We have to take a great attention about our reports. We cannot do anything harmful towards the party" (Interviewee 19).

Because human rights is a new point of focus in China, many Chinese journalists are aware that China has a poor human rights record, but they believe this concept is used by the West to create a negative image of China. While China has improved some of

its human rights policies, such as fair labour treatment, Chinese journalists believe that the freedom of speech situation is regressing. Chinese journalists are censored and surveilled, and under increased pressure to serve the Communist Party with positive reporting.

This section explored the individual influences (Reese, 2001) that potentially impact Chinese journalists' coverage. Journalists are given clear guidelines on how to cover China, which means their journalistic skills are potentially less valuable than a strong command of the English language to be employed at English-speaking Chinese publications. These journalists often find their positions at Chinese publications to be admirable, particularly because of their close connection to the Chinese government.

Chinese journalists believe that sustainability is increasingly prioritised by the Chinese government. They have seen an increase in Chinese media coverage of China's environmental impact, though they are aware that this coverage does not extend to the China-Africa relationship, or other silenced communities. Many Chinese journalists are aware that China has a poor human rights record, but they believe that the concept of human rights is used by the West to create a negative image of China. Chinese journalists are experiencing worsening freedom of speech, with tighter censorship, surveillance and pressure to serve the ruling party.

## 2. Routine influences

According to Reese & Shoemaker (2016), routine influences on journalistic coverage include the implicit, unstated rules and ritualised enactments of the newsroom, such as deadlines, relationships with editors, and challenges that journalists experience. Journalists in Chinese newsrooms are under pressure to conduct positive coverage of China. This limits their ability to be critical of their government. "The story needs to have a China perspective or angle. We won't admit it but we are on the government's side. Everything that comes from the US, Xinhua is very critical about. The amount of coverage of Obama should never surpass Xi. There is a limit on Obama" (Interviewee 15). He adds: "When Xi goes abroad it is the most important task we have."

Some journalists believe their roles are to disseminate Chinese propaganda. "Our government is trying hard to find techniques to use propaganda. This is done

implicitly" (Interviewee 15). According to Interviewee 15, international news requires professional journalism. "I'm not pro-America, but international news needs to be dealt with very calmly, wherever it is from. Xinhua is very careful to report on North Korea. Behind the scenes the journalists call Kim Jong Un crazy but they are meticulous when reporting on him." He currently finds a lack of professionalism in Chinese journalists' international coverage, partly because of journalists' government-led mandate to compete with western media. "There is no independent thinking, they pay attention to foreign ministry or government documents. We tend to team up with developing nations such as the Syrian government." Interviewee 15 views this as unprofessional and subscribes to the professionalism underlying watchdog journalism. "Professional journalism requires editorial independence, your own voice independent of government, balanced view and different angles" (Interviewee 15).

Correspondents for Chinese publications in African countries are mandated to write "good news stories" on their regions. "We only write about good news for Xinhua, such as culture, art, charities, or other interactions between Chinese and Africans. Xinhua has a neutral style, tries to avoid negativity towards SA" (Interviewee 18). During the 2010 World Cup Soccer, Chinese journalists were robbed three times, and the third time it was not covered by Chinese media. "They will tell the bad news but only to a certain level. Xinhua also has the responsibility with what they report – you need to be sensitive because you don't want to cause a riot" (Interviewee 17). This illustrates journalists' perception that Chinese news has a potentially influential impact on its audiences.

*Editor-journalist relationship*

Topics and angles at Chinese publications are approved by filter departments and journalists tend to experience censorship in a layered hierarchy. Regarding news topics, "the upper hierarchy decides, not the editor. At CCTV there is a top layer, then a second layer" (Interviewee 13). According to Interviewee 14, CCTV has 44 channels run by different departments and centres, and within the departments there are different programs, editors and journalists. "We have a WeChat Group for each of the seven regional headquarters. Certain editors can be experts on that and tell you what to focus on" (Interviewee 15).

Despite directives determining which stories are favoured, “there is some degree of autonomy in that hosts and anchors can choose their own topics if they can justify the news value of it. Stories favouring a China focus tend to be given precedence over international stories” (Interviewee 12). Journalists sometimes receive requests, especially around coverage of FOCAC or BRICS, but can also submit suggestions for a “hot topic” (Interviewee 19), which will be approved or rejected by their directors. Approved stories might be edited without journalists’ knowledge. “I guess you know how these guys operate. You know the Chinese are cagey at times, they edit especially where their country is painted in a bad light and they do not tell you. When I check the stories online, I sometimes find many essential points removed” (Interviewee 20).

Interviewee 15 explains that propaganda is maintained through the news production process. Sometimes up to four people work on one article. Editors receive articles from journalists, and then “experts” edit them, focusing specifically on the article’s English language use. Articles are then sent to “releasers” to determine if it is “politically correct” (Interviewee 15). Releasers are not officials, but “they carry a lot of responsibility” (Interviewee 15). With breaking news, the releaser receives a “flash” – only a title and short paragraph, and decides whether the story has news value.

According to Interviewee 19, distributing propaganda is a key part of Chinese journalists’ jobs. Government officials “tell us what to report or not to report”, and stories that are not part of “a propaganda task” are heavily reviewed before publishing. In his newsroom, the three reviewers include the news editor, then the department director, and then the shift editor. “So after all three people agree that this report is okay, this report is not sensitive, it can be published. Especially for the politics...” If the report is not approved, “you have to delete it, or keep it and review” (Interviewee 19). During specific events, like the “sensitive time” of the National Conservative conference, more censors are added to the process, including the director of the news agency.

Interviewee 14 views his propaganda work as a service to Chinese society. Through the propaganda task, “we can let people know that we are trying to help and let other people know they should help”. For example, he believes journalists are crucial to

achieving China's goal to reduce poverty. "Seventy million poor people in China, and we are the national TV station. We want to help them. This is a national task. There is a deadline for local government to relieve poverty for the whole country before 2020 that Mr Xi proposed" (Interviewee 14).

Journalism as public service is a concept that has grown in recent years, especially through Chinese investigative journalism. Chinese economic growth has increased the need to expose misconduct and negligence of business. "The media was not so developed. In the past 10 years China has changed a lot – that is the good stuff" (Interviewee 14). Interviewee 14 investigates events or requests they receive from email, WeChat or phones. He compares his work to the American show *60 Minutes*. "Someone says they need our help. It is important to influence a lot of people and impact them." He explains that their job is to "unveil the 'black curtain', the dark secret of the story. Every business area has this side."

Regarding international influence, a special team reviews any article going out of China. "In China central or local government, there is a department called International Relations Department – they will check your report. They have to check every single report that's published by social media, by news agencies, and if they find something wrong, they will direct us to delete it. And the propaganda reports also pass by them. They will hand the propaganda task to us, and will ask the news agency to write some article that is positive [about] the government." These articles are also disseminated to the rest of China's media. "That department will share those articles with all news agencies in China. They will ask you to also post them on all your channels like mobile apps or websites" (Interviewee 19).

Xinhua is perceived as "the loudspeaker of government. Government requires you to represent them". Interviewee 15 believes international media rely on Xinhua for credible information on China's government because "they think it's authentic". Xinhua newsrooms are therefore additionally managed by the Chinese foreign ministry, also in a hierarchy. "The foreign minister is the leadership. Xinhua is at an equal level with the communications department of government. At the top there is the President of Xinhua, then the Editor of Chief, then four or five Vice-Presidents. Then there are different departments, for example international news, domestic news

and external news" (Interviewee 15). The editor is essentially the "departmental boss".

Once stories are collected, the Chief Editing Department organises topics and sends an email to the internal system. "Each person has two PCs, one with the internal internet (to submit articles) and one for external internet (to use for resources). Through the portal, bullet points information is submitted on what is being reported on and the feedback from readers." Chinese journalists distribute their news via social media, but require a VPN to do so. "Why don't they trust Xinhua with this? It is a battlefield to compete with foreign media. We have to make our voice heard" (Interviewee 15). China's internet restrictions thus hamper local journalists' efficiency, which, in turn, affects its own messages being distributed. It also limits the ability of their news agencies to compete with international media.

The Chinese government heavily invests in Xinhua's technological advancement via their "new media centre" to make them competitive. "Xinhua is seen as outdated. Partnerships have been created with tech companies to improve this, but it is hampered by the system. There is no advancement at Xinhua because it is propaganda in nature. If our content is not attractive then technology won't help. An online TV station has also been set up for abroad but it has no signal in China" (Interviewee 15). Technology is a point of competition among Chinese news organisations, suggests Interviewee 15: "A contentious nature exists between Xinhua, CCTV and *People's Daily*. This is focused on technology, we compare each other. There is an internal fight but they all should be very different."

Because journalistic practices are determined by the state, Interviewee 15 perceives Chinese journalism to be "easy". Xinhua journalists can be easily trained "because you just follow the government's sayings. These journalists can be very critical, but when assigned a story, [have] to do what's good for government." Journalists' articles do not necessarily align with their personal opinions. "There is a gap between their career and their off-the-record life. For example, one guy is very critical, but he has to edit the article in accordance to the requirements." Interviewee 15 enjoyed the "professional journalism" he experienced at the US edition of *China Daily*. He accuses Xinhua of unprofessional journalism. "Xinhua wouldn't send me to a critical event, it's more focused on government. What Xinhua does in USA is not

professional. They are lazy – they plagiarise what's being reported by other news and just rephrase. I cannot accept this kind of journalism" (Interviewee 15).

*Deadlines*

Chinese online media compete with other online publications for deadlines on breaking news or press conferences. Correspondents outside of China are influenced by time zone differences. "I film the story the same day it happens and then it is broadcast the next day. But the time difference is six hours. If you are the first with a story, you will get the compliment. Early bird catches the worm" (Interviewee 13). Journalists thus consider meeting tight deadlines an achievement. The immediacy of deadlines is sensible to some journalists. "It is a common sense thing in our media industry – the news is the news because it happens right now and it won't become news if it is reported on another day" (Interviewee 19). Deadlines are influenced by the amount of work left to a sub-editor, the "expert", as mentioned before. "The quality of English stories at Xinhua is poor. They get some grammar wrong" (Interviewee 16).

According to Interviewee 19, if a topic is approved, he generally has one day to complete the article, but investigative stories can be particularly time-consuming. "When we investigate, the cameraman and journalist [go] together. We do editing, write articles, and packaging ourselves. It can take days, weeks, months. There are 2 800 counties in China – not all have airports. China is very big. It usually takes a day to travel to rural areas" (Interviewee 14). Some Chinese journalists therefore find their deadlines stressful. Interviewee 19's colleague commented on extraordinarily tight deadlines: "If I really do things often like this, I think I won't live long!" (Interviewee 19).

*Challenges and constraints*

Journalists find it challenging to penetrate the western media system. Interviewee 16 experienced this in South Africa in particular. While "many said that Xinhua is quite good", South African journalists use western wires like Reuters "because their boss told them to". Xinhua's political position does not suit South African journalism. Chinese journalists are frustrated that South African journalists prefer western-based

newswires, because they perceive these wires to put little effort into covering Africa. “Their in-depth coverage is not good. At AP they have one reporter from headquarters employed to cover Africa. We have 40 reporters and 21 offices in sub-Saharan Africa. Not a single western media company manages to do this” (Interviewee 16).

Interviewee 19 finds writing propaganda challenging “because, in the propaganda task, they do not only ask you to be politically right, but also attract the public’s attention”. These articles have little news value because they focus on “appreciation of officials, appreciation of the government, and our audience does not really care about it” (Interviewee 19). Journalists have to be both “creative” to satisfy the audience, and “careful”, because the “propaganda task” leads to being closely scrutinised. “It is a big challenge for our minds and for our writing capacity. We are under really big pressure over every single word we have written. So we have to really think about is it okay to be published?” (Interviewee 19).

Additionally, journalists often clash with their editors about news values. “As editors tend to be Chinese and I’m a foreigner, there are often cultural differences in terms of what is considered news” (Interviewee 12). Statistics and numbers get a lot of airtime at CRI. “That doesn’t necessarily mesh with my news sense that has been instilled in me either through my training or through the news culture in my home country” (Interviewee 12). Since this journalist is South African, this illustrates that potentially there are differences in journalistic training in South Africa vs China that could impact their perceptions of news values. It also highlights differences in news values between South African and Chinese newsrooms, and that a journalist’s personal perception of news value is outweighed by that of their editors.

On a practical level, some journalists experience technical challenges working for Chinese media, such as Internet access in African countries (Interviewee 17). Chinese journalists also experience safety issues in countries such as South Africa. “Sometimes personal safety is a problem in SA – such as the Marikana shootings. I was there with a bodyguard. It was quite tense. There were tens of thousands of people. They could do something unexpected but my bodyguard had a gun. CCTV provided me with a bodyguard when asked, like for other journalists covering in war zones. They also provide drivers, translators, informants, bodyguards” (Interviewee 13).

This section explored the routine influences on Chinese journalists' coverage of China. These include layered hierarchies of censorship at journalists' individual media organisations, which are restrictive in many ways. Many journalists consider their work for the Chinese government to include a "propaganda task". Propaganda is maintained through the news production process, as each article goes through a series of internal gatekeepers. Some journalists see their propaganda work as a service to Chinese society.

Xinhua newsrooms are managed by the Chinese foreign ministry – the International Relations Department, which reviews all articles going out of China. Because journalistic practices are determined by the state, journalists believe journalistic experience is not as crucial to employment as a strong command of the English language. Journalists find the "propaganda task" challenging, as they have to balance it with also attracting foreign audiences. A key challenge for Chinese journalists is to penetrate the western media system.

## 3. Organisational influences

The organisational influences (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016) in this study are defined by journalists' perceptions of their objectivity, their target audiences, and their awareness of the ownership and commercial impacts on their publication.

*Objectivity*

China media encourages new ways of looking at Africa. This kind of "positive" or "constructive" reporting is a key characteristic of Chinese state-owned media's coverage (Wasserman, Mano & Zhang, 2016). Constructive journalism differs from watchdog journalism in the sense that it aims to leave more grey areas (Moeller, 1999), and empowers people by constructively offering information while remaining accurate and critical. Chinese media have adopted this role that is linked to "development communication" (Wasserman, 2014), which is also associated with "positive psychology" (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016).

Constructive journalism has received criticism for its lack of objectivity. In watchdog journalism, communication workers are expected only to provide facts without a

deliberate focus on solutions. Constructive journalism's nation-building approach can result in an institutional and uncritical style which marginalises alternative narratives (Lee, 2003; Lull, 1991; Zhang, 2006). Zhang (2013) found that Chinese state-owned news media is perceived to have little to no criticism of government.

Many Chinese journalists consider themselves objective. "I think I'm very objective. That is the slogan for our programme. Tell the truth by telling you the facts. You use the facts to talk" (Interviewee 14). His objectivity stems from his deeper understanding of China's current issues. "I know there are problems in China, we need to face it and solve it." He believes that reducing poverty will increase the education levels in China, which will eventually lead to an improvement in human rights and sustainability. "Environmental protection and human rights will get better. First solve the problem of surviving and then think about other things" (Interviewee 14).

These journalists consider themselves objective because their publications require it. "Our organisation always reminds us to be objective" (Interviewee 16). Objectivity is also included in some of the journalists' training. "When I [took] up the job of the media, we got lots of training from our company. They say always be objective" (Interviewee 13). However, Interviewee 13 strives for objectivity, motivated by a fear of making mistakes and the repercussions that follow. "Even if you lose the time, you have to double check and make sure. Otherwise there is a big mistake and you will have to pay for it. I always remind myself to be objective."

According to Interviewee 15, Chinese journalists' fear of making mistakes impacts their coverage. "Journalists are afraid of committing faults, so they translate the English articles directly from the Chinese versions. Their English is not so readable. This is all because the publication is state-run." Employees of state-run publications are unable to be objective, because they are required to report what they are told. "Xinhua journalists use positive tones – they have a trademark of clichés. They use it frequently, it has become a habit. That is what government requires them to do" (Interviewee 15).

Journalists' objectivity is compromised by their expected loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. "When you're working in the media you know your direction, you know your principles and when you're working in such media you have to make the

Party laws a top priority. You know the corruption is happening, you know that official is corrupted, but because they hold power, it does not allow you to write nasty reports about them, including internal references. So how could you be objective? It's not possible" (Interviewee 19).

However, these journalists do not consider western media objective either. "They say China lacks human rights, or our President Xi Jinping is a kind of dictator because he holds power, the most since Chairman Mao. But they also have to look at other sides of China – you see the reduction of poverty. In the following years there will be no poor people in China, for Chinese standards and that's a huge success in human history" (Interviewee 19). Finally, some journalists do not believe in "true objectivity". "Biases exist unconscious or otherwise" (Interviewee 12). He tries to present a balanced view, but only because "it, generally speaking, makes for a better, more engaging story". The concept of objectivity in Chinese newsrooms is convoluted and journalists' ideals often clash with what is expected of them. While some journalists consider themselves objective, even though they toe the Party line, other Chinese journalists considered true objectivity a myth. There is thus a deeper concern around Chinese journalists' understanding of objectivity, or how it operates in Chinese newsrooms.

*Audiences*

The interviewed journalists' target audiences include African and other international audiences. CCTV's headquarters are in Kenya, and they air on Channel 409 on DSTV, a paid satellite television service available to most African countries. Regardless of where journalists are based, their material is generally sent to Beijing, where it is distributed globally. Xinhua Newswire's coverage is aimed at a broad range of audiences. "We have been covering a lot of international news. We cover everything and we don't have enough reporters" (Interviewee 16).

Some of their important clients, such as Russia 24, request stories from them for a specific audience. To broaden their reach, Xinhua offers a wire service and social media news. "Our news is used by international print media. We share our news with AP, AFP, Sputnik, Reuters" (Interviewee 15). Their social media, especially Facebook statistics, show that they are popular in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan.

"We do our own statistics – it's not for the public, but for the reference of officials" (Interviewee 15).

Xinhua also offers regional news for its local Chinese audiences (Interviewee 19). Interviewee 14 considers his current investigative show unique because it targets Chinese audiences critical of government. "Our programme is special. Our show is one of the highest rated on Chinese TV. Every person in China knows this programme; it has a history of 20 years." The show's "supervision report" is popular, because even though it is state-owned, they are permitted to undermine and broadcast government's "mistakes". "Westerners think we are under government control, but still there is this programme. So the audience expects a lot from us. We have audience feedback and try to be interactive" (Interviewee 14).

*Ownership*

Reese and Shoemaker's (2016) model is concerned with organisational level power that is exercised periodically, implicitly, and not overtly, and, as a result, is not so readily available to direct observation. Journalists anticipate organisational boundaries, which manifests in their self-censorship. This self-policing is more effective than direct censorship, however, because outsiders are often not even aware that anything has taken place.

The organisational influences in Chinese media, however, are rooted in an overt expression of power by the Chinese government. Yet this power also leads to self-censorship among journalists. The interviewed journalists are all aware that their media institutions are owned and managed by the Chinese government. When asked to identify the ownership of his publication, Interviewee 15 responded: "Government of course. State department, branch of government on the same level as ministries. The president of Xinhua is on the same level as the foreign minister. My superiors are journalists who became officials."

State-ownership of Chinese media is therefore characterised by censorship. "Anything bad about the Chinese government [we] cannot say" (Interviewee 15). He cited an example of Xi Jinping's Czech Republic visit that was framed as "a strategic partnership and historical visit". However, Xinhua omitted coverage of anti-Chinese protests sparked by the visit. "The former president of Czech Republic was pro-

human rights. He was even a friend of the Dalai Lama, a novelist, the first president after the Soviet Union. At the protests, the Chinese flag was defaced, but it was quickly replaced. Those stories, anti-Xi, are never seen on Xinhua." Because the Czech Republic is seemingly important to the Silk Road Initiative, the Chinese government requires positive coverage of this relationship.

Journalists are also prescribed what not to report. "You will see less reports about corruption, you will see less reports about the failures of policy issued by the government. You will see less and less reports" (Interviewee 19). Journalists fear they are being surveilled and scrutinised. "So we are really under pressure for our words and what we did, because of the Party. So that's why I ask you don't issue my name for this interview because all our media workers are under pressure." Stepping out of line with the official mandate could have negative consequences. "They will see, and if they see something wrong in your job, they will have some punishment or crackdown on your position" (Interviewee 19). Further highlighting journalists' caution, Interviewee 13 asked to skip the question of how ownership influences his coverage at CCTV.

To avoid negative repercussions, journalists apply self-censorship in their articles. "Xinhua editors cut out certain topic areas, such as nudity. For example when we wrote the four stories about Afrika Burn, we had to cut out the images of people smoking weed. We kind of have to use self-censorship" (Interviewee 18). These journalists believe that China's censorship could influence South African media. "Just like South Africa with the SABC broadcaster – they are going to clamp down on the Internet. China influences South Africa media censorship, like with the Facebook police – they pick up everything you write. We don't know what is the truth, we believe what we are fed" (Interviewee 18).

Though most social media platforms are censored in China, journalists manage to get around it. "You know, Facebook is blocked in China, Google is blocked in China, but BBC – the mobile app – is not blocked, and the *Guardian* mobile app is not blocked yet. So you can still receive those news reports, through your mobile, but not through the websites. It's the website that is blocked" (Interviewee 19). In China, journalists use social media, such as Weibo and WeChat, for news. On WeChat, users can post information, articles or photos in "moments", which are open to the public. "So

people can access those news reports through the mobile agency like BBC, *Guardian*, and also read the article and share it in WeChat, Weibo or post it in Line. If that article contains some sensitive words, they might be deleted, but before that you can take a picture and you can share it with people and then they cannot detect your data" (Interviewee 19).

Interviewee 19 believes that online media can never be completely censored. "The information age provides a lot of conveniences to people to share their ideas. And the government cannot supervise everything. They are trying to do that but I don't think they can." Some journalists argue that censorship extends to western media, and is not unique to China. "This kind of thing does not just happen in China – look at the coverage of Occupy Wall Street, how that was covered up. But people always just notice this thing about China" (Interviewee 16). There is a thus a perceived hypocrisy in the way that Chinese media are criticised compared to western media.

Despite some journalists' frustration with censorship, there are incentives to work at Xinhua. "The payment is good and the welfare is very good". Xinhua provides "very big welfares", ranging from cash or gifts awarded at special events. Journalists reiterate that working for mainstream Chinese state-media, especially Xinhua, is also considered admirable. "Because of China's tradition, being an official in Chinese peoples' minds is, in a way, honourable. And being a journalist in Xinhua News Agency probably is equal to being an official. Sometimes the power is above the official, because they have the right to write internal reference[s]. So it's a kind of honour that you brought to your family" (Interviewee 19).

*Commercialisation*

Capital force became a component of the Chinese media system after the relaxation of policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. When the media found a strong motivation to make profit in the form of media buyers, capital owners invested money into media and exerted media content (Zhao 1998, 2004; Sparks 2008; Murphy 2007; Stockmann 2012). Scholars have therefore referred to the Chinese media system as "Commercialised Authoritarianism" or "Marketised Authoritarianism" (Luo, 2015:52). Broadly, both private and state-owned media buyers include advertising agencies and direct sponsors, who sign contracts with media entities to publish

advertisements, build partnerships with media or purchase product placement opportunities. Commercialised Chinese papers can be owned by private capital or joint capital between the private sector and either government or Party organisations (Stockmann, 2012). According to Luo, Chinese media's "capacity to carry advertisement has reached its limits and sometimes is already overused" (2015:55).

Although all Chinese news outlets are state-owned, they have increasingly included a commercial model wherein journalists need to write stories that appeal to their wide range of audiences. "The government encouraged Xinhua to go commercial for the international media market. Only this way we can compete. We need to make profit" (Interviewee 16). Xinhua also has other avenues of generating revenue. "We also sell ads in newspapers and magazines we own in China. We are not affiliated directly, we own shares or are stakeholders. We own a screen in Times Square in New York. We act as a manager and clients pay to rent out our space. Some countries rent the space to put up their tourism videos" (Interviewee 16). They also sell images. Interviewee 13 suggests that government-owned Chinese media has similar commercial aims as other media. "But other media also have ads, right? [They] have to make money for survival. Survival is the first priority" (Interviewee 13).

However, Interviewee 20 argues that commercialisation "does not apply" because of state-ownership. He has seen changes in the Chinese government's censorship. "In the past, they did not want us to criticise the SA government, saying it's their friend; but slowly they are embracing criticism of ANC and government. In the past, they rarely accepted coverage of the opposition parties, but have since changed" (Interviewee 20).

This section discussed Reese's (2001) organisational influences on journalists' coverage, by exploring how Chinese journalists' perception of objectivity, audiences, ownership and commercialisation impacts their coverage of China. Most Chinese journalists consider themselves objective, because it is a requirement from their publications. Journalists' objectivity ideals seem incompatible with their expected loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. Chinese journalists believe that western media is not objective either.

Some Chinese media programmes offer material for Chinese citizens that is critical of government, but, at the same time, Chinese journalists are aware that their publications are state-owned, which is characterised by censorship. They fear the repercussions of making mistakes, and believe they are being scrutinised and surveilled. Despite the impact of censorship, there are incentives to work at Chinese publications, such as financial benefits, and journalists' positions in relation to the state are considered admirable. While Chinese publications are state-owned, these have increasingly become commercialised, and experience the same pressures to make profit as most other media.

## 4. Extra-media influences

Extra-media influences, or the influence of social institutions (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016), focus on journalists' relationship with the broader society and elements outside of the newsroom. This includes their sources, their relationship with government and non-profit organisations, and their media consumption.

*News sources*

Many Chinese journalists consume mainstream English media such as the BBC, Bloomberg, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal* (Interviewee 12, Interviewee 15). Those based in Africa use South African media outlets such as IOL, News24, TimesLive, EWN, the *Sowetan*, and *Business Day*, especially for story ideas (Interviewees 13 and 20).

Some Chinese journalists consult Russian media, such as Sputnik and Russia Today. "I regard Russia Today as a better attempt than China to challenge the West. They hire a lot of native English speakers" (Interviewee 15). Interviewee 15 thus perceives strong English skills to be advantageous in challenging western media.

Interviewee 19 prefers the Hong Kong-based Phoenix for local Chinese news. "It is more open-minded than us, because it is owned mainly by Hong Kong." Phoenix is allowed more journalistic freedom because its headquarters are in Hong Kong, while other publications are based in Beijing. "If it's in mainland China you have to fully obey the central government's rules, but if your headquarter is in Hong Kong, the

control is weaker. So that's why Phoenix can report on things that we cannot do" (Interviewee 19).

For China-Africa news, some Chinese journalists rely on Xinhua, because "they are the most well-known and trustworthy. They are top in China" (Interviewee 13). Many journalists rarely consult African or western sources on China, but, regarding western sources, they "sometimes consult how they look at a story. They give different views to look at. Their perspective is different from my own perspective; I just want to compare" (Interviewee 13). Madrid-Morales and Wasserman (2018) found that African journalists engage with Chinese media sources to varying degrees – they can be categorised as adopters, pragmatists, undecided and resisters. Journalists labelled as unconvinced or resisters do not see a need to turn to Chinese media for news. A trend emerges where African journalists do not make use of Chinese media for news on China, and, as shown by the interviewees in this study, Chinese journalists also do not consult African media for news on Africa. Chinese journalists consult few African news sources because they consider local African media to be underdeveloped and "mainly dominated by the CNN or BBC" (Interviewee 17).

Some journalists consult Xinhua for positive news on Africa. "The West never sees the bright side; you seldom read that" (Interviewee 16). However, according to the interviewed journalists, stereotypes about Africa are common in Chinese society and vice versa. "Africa is still perceived as a bad place to go: poor, not abundant. Xinhua sends young people to Africa, especially who majored in French or English. Africa is at the bottom of the hierarchy for journalists, so they get a lot of subsidies to motivate them to go" (Interviewee 15). The journalists suggest that Chinese audiences generally prefer stereotypical negative reporting on Africa. "In China, people don't really read the positive reports about African countries. Chinese people somehow prefer the negative reports. Like the kidnapping, or shootings or somehow something bad in Africa for the general public" (Interviewee 19). Furthermore, Chinese media coverage of Africa generally focuses on political angles and is therefore not necessarily newsworthy. "The headlines that will be African related is always about the African leaders in China, or President Xi Jinping's reception of those leaders" (Interviewee 19).

Some journalists choose their sources based on writing style, to improve their own English writing. “If you use the BBC app on Apple you can check the meaning of vocabulary of some words. But when you have CNN it doesn’t seem to have this function. It is not convenient for me if I read some words that I don’t understand, and I have now to find a dictionary and check that. But with BBC I can just check that word and it helps with the translation and I can go on. It is very convenient for me and it is also like this on the *Guardian*” (Interviewee 19).

*Interview sources*

Chinese journalists most commonly use government officials as their sources. According to Interviewee 15, for Xi Jinping’s trips abroad, Xinhua’s content is copywritten by the foreign ministry. “The international desk then just translates and reorganises it to be more acceptable for foreign readers. But it has to be exact and correct. A quote needs to be exact.” Because the outgoing articles are so tightly regulated, journalists generally choose interviewees that will be approved by the state, as unacceptable sources will simply be deleted. “Because every reporter goes through the three kinds of reviews, so, if there is something wrong, they will delete it” (Interviewee 19).

Thus, while politicians are preferred sources, experts or intellectuals are also accepted. Interviewee 15 explains that Xinhua has a set pool of experts that provide them with government-approved quotes. “There are not so many experts Xinhua can turn to. We find the ones who can tell us what you want. These experts are used the Xinhua way – they can be more like a diplomat.” According to Interviewee 19, “intellectuals are more acceptable than NGOs” (Interviewee 19).

Many Chinese journalists have good relationships with both NGOs and political parties. “We want to contribute to good causes” (Interviewee 13). Others are cautious about interviewing NGOs. “If you want to interview an NGO you have to think very carefully. We don’t interview NGOs, maybe just ones in foreign countries.” Chinese journalists generally cannot interview NGOs that are critical of the Chinese government. “If you want to interview NGOs, okay, it has to be governmental NGOs.” However, they can interview opposition parties. “We interview both, not just

[the] leading party. There are lots of political parties in China; we don't just interview the Communist Party" (Interviewee 13).

Journalists are often contacted for stories by "informers" (Interviewee 14). Although articles are heavily censored, Interviewee 14 tries to balance articles by interviewing sources beyond officials. For example, for a story on bad carrot seeds in Inner Mongolia, Interviewee 14 interviewed "everyone connected. We interview the police, farmers, the company, the government." Their journalism played a public service role, because China's Agriculture Department is in charge of the seeds. "We need to warn farmers where good seeds can be found. We let people know, they don't know the law, they are uneducated" (Interviewee 14). Through communicating on behalf of the Chinese government, the journalists therefore feel that they provide the service of engaging government with civil society.

This section explored Chinese journalists' sources, their relationship with government and non-profit organisations, and their media consumption – all of which form part of the extra-media or social institutions influences on journalists' coverage (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). Chinese journalists consume mainstream international English media, a variety of local Chinese media and mainly South African-based African media sources.

Chinese journalists generally rework official government press releases, and most commonly use government officials as their sources. Experts or intellectuals are also accepted, but are selected from a pool that will offer commentary that is accepted by government. Journalists are cautious about using NGOs as sources, and cannot interview NGOs that are critical of government. Finally, some journalists play a public service role because they interact with citizens and communicate on behalf of governmental departments.

## 5. Ideological influences

This section explores the ideological or social systems (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016) influences on Chinese journalists' coverage of China. This includes journalists' perception of the importance of the China-Africa topic, their understanding of soft

power, and their perception of the media's role in advancing China's soft power efforts.

*China-Africa relationship*

Most Chinese journalists believe that the China-Africa relationship is crucial and of increasing importance (Interviewee 12). According to Interviewee 16, the China-Africa relationship "is in its honeymoon phase right now", although some journalists note that the relationship is not new. "The relationship developed thousands of years ago. The navy admiral during the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He, came to Africa with a massive ship, containing porcelain and ceramics. He took back two giraffes as a gift to the emperor" (Interviewee 13).

The relationship has since maintained its mutual advantages. "When I was a kid I was told that Africa are our good brothers" (Interviewee 14). He refers to the African support that China had received to become part of the United Nations during its Going Out campaign. In exchange, China offered assistance to Africa, which "was not very developed" and "associated with natural disasters, poverty", but he adds that China was not a rich country itself. "We've heard of the neocolonialism concept, but we don't agree. But I know more than the average person. Sure, we build more mines and factories in Africa, which will cause some damage to the environment" (Interviewee 14).

Western discourse often debates whether China is a neocolonial force practising "Chinese imperialism" in Africa. China aims not to infringe on African countries' sovereignty, and therefore present themselves as non-hypocritical and more respectful (Wagner & Cafiero, 2013). While China's "no-strings attached" policies are economically beneficial to Africa, some argue that "the vestiges of colonialism evident in this relationship raise questions about the true cost of realizing these benefits" (Manero, 2017). A journalist in the *Guardian* recently asked: "Is this the dawn of a new colonialism, they wonder, a new scramble for Africa in which the continent is once again left in tatters? Or is it the beginning of an era during which Africans shake off old colonial masters and look elsewhere for direct investment and aid?" (Poplak, 2016).

Chinese journalists believe the China-Africa relationship is not colonialism. "There is a larger media narrative that China is using Africa and that this forms some kind of

neocolonialism, albeit with Chinese characteristics. However, I don't think this is necessarily the case. There seems to be a lot of mutual exchange" (Interviewee 12). In fact, they argue that China has been praised by African countries for not colonising. "But we don't colonise. Robert Mugabe spoke at the FOCAC opening and said that China was the only country who has come to Africa and helped without colonisation. Africa needs development and they need the money. We don't have the money but China is willing to offer mutual benefits" (Interviewee 16).

The "mutual benefits" theme recurs throughout the China-Africa conversation. Several Chinese journalists perceive Africa as needing China's influence for infrastructure improvement and assistance in the health sector. "Africa needs the help. It's really a win-win situation. China helps with infrastructure, like railways. With the Ebola situation, China sent lots of medical groups and they rescued the people. During the process they created friendly relationships with people there. When they left, the kids cried" (Interviewee 13). China therefore not only seems needed, but also wanted. According to Interviewee 20 "many South Africans or Africans have a keen interest to know what they are benefitting from the relationship which their government has with China." He wants to see "that the mutual benefit is realised and not on paper only".

Africa is perceived as necessary for natural resources and political clout. "China has a massive population; it needs to import from African countries like South Africa, who provides mineral resources. China and Africa rely on each other. China realises the relationship should improve with Africa. China keeps a close eye on it" (Interviewee 13). China's relationship with Africa strengthens its competition with the West. "We need Africa's support on the international platform. China needs recognition by the global society. The system of globalisation was made by the West – America especially. We want to be part of it, but America doesn't want China to lead. They lead and they don't want their power to be divided" (Interviewee 16).

While the "top leaders know the significance of the China-Africa relationship" (Interviewee 19), this significance is yet to gain importance among the general Chinese population. China's official reports emphasise the importance of the relationship, but "the general population do not think it's a priority or recognise the importance of [the] China-Africa relationship. They're still thinking that China-US or

China-UK relationship is more important" (Interviewee 19). The general Chinese population seems to have a stereotypical view of Africa, and therefore do not acknowledge its importance. These stereotypes include a lack of awareness of the 54 individual countries on the continent, or its overall size. "The space of that continent can contain Russia, US, Canada and all those big countries. But people still think Africa as a whole – and they think Africa is full of war, rape, HIV, or starvation, poverty" (Interviewee 19).

*Chinese coverage of China-Africa*

According to Chinese journalists the abovementioned stereotypes are perpetuated by Chinese media. "I think this is a mistaken picture that is somehow created by our media. Because we always report those negative reports to the general public to attract their attention" (Interviewee 19). The Special Envoy of the Chinese government to Africa agrees that, due to Chinese media coverage of Africa, "the Chinese general public thinks that Africa is left behind and is not developed" (Interviewee 19). China's centrality to an article on Africa dictates its tone. "Chinese media shows a very Oriental view about Africa. When China is involved, the coverage on Africa will be positive, but when it is only on Africa it will be negative" (Interviewee 15). The journalists' regional study groups ensure that coverage is positive towards China, but do not focus on doing the same for Africa.

Some journalists have been relatively unaware that African countries are skeptical of China. Interviewee 19 used to believe the China-Africa relationship was "always in harmony – no conflict, no dispute. We are brothers. China always gives donations and help to African countries, so we are kind of [the] big brother to African countries." While studying, however, he realised "the western academics don't think so, and the reality is not as I expected. We have disputes. And the African people don't really think we are the good man. We are good to some extent, but to some extent we are not good. Our relationship is in ups and downs." He now views China as "taking resources. We are taking the money, we are taking the jobs away from Africa. And we leave the pollution and disputes". He cited the example of Michael Sata's labour protests in Zambia. "The Chinese people [take] the jobs from Zambian people, and because of this, he became the president of Zambia. And we have kind of noticed this thing in Zambia at that time" (Interviewee 19).

However, journalists are mandated to maintain a positive image of China-Africa in Chinese society. “But the Chinese media doesn’t cover much about that. When I want to report disputes about China-Africa relations, it is not really allowed.” Interviewee 19 has to “present a harmonious, good picture of China’s foreign relations” so that the public thinks that “China’s foreign relations is always good.” After realising how other countries might perceive China, he discussed it with his Chinese colleagues, but found that “they still think the China-Africa relationship is in harmony. Although they have a lot of access to other ways of information, they’re still in that old mindset” (Interviewee 19). Access to a wider variety of information might eventually challenge China’s curated image. “But in recent years, with the growing of the social media, you can have access to a lot of other data and information. So I think more and more people will realise that Chinese people are not that popular on the African continent or South American continent. There’s the reality” (Interviewee 19).

The significance of the China-Africa relationship has been highlighted by the Chinese media coverage of FOCAC. “We usually only broadcast international activities for President Xi. For FOCAC we sent 80 journalists to South Africa for many days of coverage” (Interviewee 14). The China-South Africa relationship is particularly important. “They are both members of BRICS. Nelson Mandela visited China, Thabo Mbeki got consultation from China” (Interviewee 13). However, Interviewee 12 believes that China chose to base its media in Kenya, because South Africa’s watchdog journalism and Chinese constructive journalism are incompatible. “South Africa’s traditionally vocal media system would it make it difficult for Chinese-style journalism, which sees the media much more as an agent of the state as opposed to a watchdog role, to take hold there.”

*Soft power*

As discussed in Chapter 3, soft power is the ability to produce outcomes through persuasion rather than coercion or payment (hard power), or influence on a foreign country without threats or inducements (Nye, 2004). Chinese journalists understand the term “soft power”, and generally know what it entails. They are informed about China’s specific soft power efforts and goals. Soft power is “different from military power. It’s the more cultural side” (Interviewee 13). “Any power in [a] non-coercive way, more about ideology, values, exchanges” (Interviewee 15). Soft power was

"created by an American scholar" and can be "that influence of one country to other countries" (Interviewee 19). "The idea behind soft power is that diplomatic progress is made and strengthened via non-official means" (Interviewee 12).

"I know the word. I've known it since I was a kid. It was part of traditional Chinese education" (Interviewee 14). Chinese soft power is also tied to Confucianism, a central part of modern and historic Chinese culture. "Confucianism has influenced every Chinese. The key word there is benevolence and kindness. But first be strong or powerful enough, and then give kindness and love to the whole world" (Interviewee 14). Among Chinese journalists, culture is one of the defining aspects of Chinese soft power. "Our products, our customs, our culture – all are included in the soft power" (Interviewee 19). Chinese history is a key aspect of its culture that can be used to wield soft power. "China wants people from outside to know more about them. China has a long-standing culture. 5 000 years – so we have a lot to show. We want to expand our relationship with the world through culture" (Interviewee 13). China's Confucius Institutes also recur as a reference to China's successful soft power initiatives in the interviewee responses.

According to Interviewee 19, China has to "work hard to increase our soft power" because it is not as successful as countries such as Japan and South Korea. "Because we really like the cartoons used by Japan, and we like the South Korean programmes – they even take those programmes to Iran, or Iraq – the Arabic world. They really enjoy those programmes produced by South Korea. So that's the soft power, you can influence other people, not by your military, not by your wires. You can influence people by your TV programmes, by your teaching, by your language" (Interviewee 19).

Some journalists thus believe that successful soft power initiatives are not necessarily rooted in media diplomacy. Other journalists are aware that the media are central to soft power. "Soft power according to me, is the use of the media to further one's interest" (Interviewee 20). Interviewee 15 explains that the "Chinese government has a hard time exporting their ideological values – even of their economic model." Chinese journalists are a key part of China's strategy to improve this, through promoting particular terminology in the media. "We are encouraged to use certain key terms like the One Belt, One Road Initiative. These are the key terms of the national

strategy. Xinhua is spending a lot of time doing propaganda for these terms, and terms such as 'good for morale', 'aligning national strategies'" (Interviewee 15).

The Chinese central government hosts media exchanges with African journalists to influence their reporting on China. Interviewee 19 recalled one such exchange in Yiwu, China, where 30 journalists from countries such as Botswana, Zambia, South Africa, and Ethiopia were invited to a conference through scholarships. The aim of such exchanges is to promote positive reports in African countries. "They can see how Chinese people work and can see the Chinese generosity towards African people. So when they report to the local community they will know how China is" (Interviewee 19).

The exchange aimed to improve coverage of topics such as the South China Sea dispute. "The director asked the African journalists, African brothers, to do more of explanation reporting and more of the positive reports to African countries." However, that "explanation" had to entail that China holds full sovereignty of the Southern sea, and that the Philippines and America create disputes. "So it has a political purpose to provide these scholarships. It's not only about the positive reports about China; it's also about gaining support from the African countries towards the Southern sea dispute. Then we can say to the international communities, look, we have a lot of African countries support[ing] us, and we are justified." These conferences make use of a top-down approach in engaging with the journalists. "In that meeting with the director, the journalists are not allowed to ask questions" (Interviewee 19).

Some journalists view China's soft power as a "charm defensive" approach (Shi, 2013). Chinese journalists' role is therefore to defend China's reputation, which has been shaped by western discourses and media coverage. The USA is perceived to block China from being able to reconstruct its reputation. "Europe and the USA used their military. China wants its own soft power in the global system. Right now everything is in the US" (Interviewee 16). Interviewee 16 believes a powerful western media dominance impedes Chinese journalists' role to promote China's soft power. "Xinhua needs to play our part – but even if we write what's true, people will still rather follow Reuters." This is mostly at the instruction of editors. Many Chinese journalists view China's soft power efforts as being in collaboration with the

improvement of Africa's image. Therefore, Chinese journalists also play a role in Africa's "charm defensive". "Even the West, that has never been to Africa, think it is conflict, wars and chaos. That is the West's soft power. Xinhua has the most branches in Africa and gives a positive account of Africa. The western media only notice negative stories" (Interviewee 16).

Though China is new to the international communication sphere, it has progressed rapidly. "China in the past was not like the West where they could use the media for propaganda. China has also joined this. In the past, China had no journalists from different parts of the world. China now has [an] Africa editor in Kenya" (Interviewee 20). The presence of Chinese-employed journalists in Africa is important to advancing China's soft power on the continent. "This is why we are here. We want to let local South Africa know more about China and vice versa" (Interviewee 13).

As mentioned above, China's soft power efforts also impacts Africa's soft power. Chinese journalists aim to give their audiences a "new perspective" on Africa. "Cape Town has informal settlements like Khayelitsha. China thinks South Africa is like typical Africa but Cape Town is called the 'backyard of Europe'. We just want to present the real image to Chinese people." He explains how Chinese journalists' unique reporting has been beneficial to South Africa's image. "Last year, there was xenophobia in Durban and Johannesburg. Some media present the untruthful side. We collected information from all around, presenting the real situation here. At the time, tourism was affected and lots of people cancelled from China. So it is our duty to present the real situation" (Interviewee 13).

Some journalists argue that the global media often do not reflect China's improvements. Interviewee 19 points to "the huge success" of the Chinese government's poverty eradication in China. He notes that President Xi Jinping is the key figure to this perception of progress and "hope" in China. "When I spoke to one journalist who has been working for Xinhua News Agency more than 15 years, she told me, before Mr Xi took the power, many people don't see the positive side of our country. Our country seem[ed] more corrupt than everywhere else, most officials are corrupted, lots of these reports, we really lose our hope. But when President Xi Jinping took power, he resumed that. He launched a movement to crack down on

corruption. He worked with Premier Li to crack down on the environmental protection. We see the hope."

However this "hope" seems to come at the cost of media freedom. "And when you see the hope, you have to accept that it is overshadowed by thinking our pressure has been increased, our freedom has been somehow reduced, but we at least get hope that our country is going to lead and not be affected by poverty or environment" (Interviewee 19). These journalists feel that western countries do not understand China's sacrifices. "The western side, they really don't report those things. They only see one piece of the picture, how our rights have been decreased, how our freedom has been decreased, how the pressure has been increased – that's true of course, it's part of the picture. But you have to hold a full picture of how our country operates".

Chinese journalists' experience of China's misrepresentation in western media make Africa's misrepresentation in Chinese media relatable to them. "That's also how Chinese journalists have to hold up a full picture of African countries – Africa is not full of poverty, they have rich people. It's not about the wars – the war is in small countries. Africa generally is peaceful, is prosperous, is developing very well. But I think every single journalist has to have a picture about the world. So I understand that they report on a small side of China, because we also report on a small side of Africa." He further tries to be understanding of western journalists. "I think some western journalists are also under pressure from authorities or the general public. I understand our business of being a media worker. I also hope the western side can understand us, at least with personal communication like this, we can understand each other. We can talk to each other, so we can reach mutual understanding" (Interviewee 19).

This section explored the ideological influences (Reese, 2001) on Chinese journalists by focusing on their perceptions of the China-Africa relationship, and China's soft power strategies. Culture is one of the defining aspects of Chinese soft power among Chinese journalists – and they therefore consider China's rich history and the modern and historical influence of Confucianism to be at the core of China's soft power. They are aware of the importance of the China-Africa relationship to wielding soft power, and this relationship is generally viewed as mutually beneficial, rather than

neocolonial. Journalists are mandated to maintain a positive image of Africa in Chinese media, yet negative stereotypical reporting of Africa remains.

Chinese journalists believe that they play a central role in wielding Chinese soft power abroad, particularly by promoting official terminology. Chinese journalists in Africa are important to China's soft power partly as a "charm defensive" approach – in response to negative coverage of China by western media. China's "charm defensive" develops in collaboration with Africa's, particularly as African misrepresentation in Chinese media is relatable, because of China's own misrepresentations.

***Conclusion***

This chapter explored the influences on Chinese journalists as proposed by Reese (2001) and Reese and Shoemaker (2016) in a model that focuses on individual, routine, organisational, extra-media and ideological influences on journalists' coverage. Media ownership, an organisational influence, appeared to outweigh all other influences on Chinese journalists, as state-ownership of Chinese media strongly impacts journalists through every level of Reese's proposed hierarchy.

At the individual influences level, this chapter found that Chinese journalists are given clear guidelines on covering China, which means their journalistic skills are potentially less valuable than a strong command of the English language to be employed at English-speaking Chinese publications. These journalists' positions at Chinese publications are considered admirable, particularly because of their proximity to the Chinese government. Chinese journalists believe that sustainability is increasingly prioritised by the Chinese government and have seen increasing media coverage of China's environmental impact, although that excludes China-Africa coverage. Many Chinese journalists are aware that China has a poor human rights record, but concurrently believe that the concept of human rights is used by the West to create a negative image of China. Chinese journalists currently experience a tightening of freedom of speech, with increased censorship, surveillance and pressure to serve the ruling party.

At the routine influences level, Chinese journalists experience layered hierarchies of censorship at their individual media organisations. Journalists are mandated to write positive stories about China, internal references for the Chinese government that are

not published, and a "propaganda task". Propaganda is maintained through the news production process, as each article goes through a series of internal gatekeepers for its politically correctness, including editors, "experts," and "releasers." Some journalists see their propaganda role as a service to the Chinese society. Because journalistic practices are determined by the government, English language skills are considered more valuable than journalistic experience. Journalists find it challenging to balance propaganda with also attracting foreign audiences. A key challenge for Chinese journalists is to penetrate the western media system.

At the organisational influences level, most Chinese journalists consider themselves objective, because it is a requirement from their publications. Chinese journalists thus compartmentalise their learned objectivity – an unattainable ideal – and what is expected from them as loyal to the Party. Chinese journalists believe that western media is not objective either. Chinese journalists are aware that their publications are state-owned, characterised by censorship, scrutiny, and surveillance, and fear the repercussions of making mistakes. Despite the impact of censorship, there are incentives to work at Chinese publications, such as financial benefits, and status for working closely with the state. While Chinese publications are state-owned, they have become increasingly commercialised, and experience the same pressures to make profit as most other media. Some Chinese media programmes offer material for Chinese citizens who are critical of government.

At the extra-media or social institutions influences level, Chinese journalists consume mainstream international English media, local Chinese media and, rarely, African media, apart from South African publications. According to the interviewed journalists, Chinese audiences generally prefer stereotypical negative reporting on Africa. Chinese journalists most commonly use government officials as their sources, but experts or intellectuals are also accepted if selected from a pool that will offer acceptable commentary. Journalists are cautious about using NGOs as sources, and are not allowed to interview NGOs that are critical of government. However, journalists may interview opposition or political parties other than the Chinese Communist Party. Additionally, for some Chinese journalists, their journalism plays a public service role, because they represent governmental departments in civil society.

Finally, at the ideological or social systems level of influences, culture seems to be a defining aspect of Chinese soft power among Chinese journalists, who therefore consider China's rich history and Confucianism to be at the core of China's soft power. Journalists are aware of the importance of a mutually beneficial China-Africa relationship for wielding soft power, which they perceive not to be neocolonial. Journalists are mandated to maintain a positive image of Africa in Chinese media, yet stereotypical reporting of Africa remains. Chinese journalists perceive their role in China's soft power abroad as crucial, particularly through their promotion of official terminology. Chinese journalists in Africa are important to China's soft power partly as a "charm defensive" approach – in response to negative coverage of China by western media. China also collaboratively develops Africa's "charm defensive" because of the relatable misrepresentation that Africa has experienced in Chinese media.

# CHAPTER EIGHT: CHINESE MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHINA'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

This chapter analyses the findings of a qualitative framing analysis of Chinese media coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights impact on the African continent. This study explores six months of coverage from China Central Television (CCTV) and Xinhua News Agency. As discussed in Chapter 4, data were collected through online searches of Xinhua's archives using the keyword "China" in conjunction with other relevant keywords, including poaching, climate change, environment, sustainable development, human rights, and labour. The CCTV sample included all *AfricaLive* episodes for the six-month period. Inserts containing these keywords were then transcribed and analysed through a qualitative framing analysis.

The framing analysis of sustainable development revealed the following six dominant frames: China's climate change leadership in the COP21 coverage, US-China collaboration, repercussion for environmental violations, China's green technology and innovation, pollution in China, and Chinese environmental aid. The following three frames were identified about human rights coverage: Chinese jobs empowering Africa**,** improved labour conditions, and official human rights engagements. This chapter explores each of these frames in detail.

## 1. Sustainable Development

### 1.1. COP21 coverage – China's climate change leadership

Chinese media coverage of China and climate change during the sample dates centered on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21). Chinese media referred to China as a climate negotiations leader, having made seemingly "important contributions" to a global sustainable development plan (Xinhua, 2015/08/02). "China, on Tuesday, called on all countries to speed up negotiations to reach accord at the UN climate summit in Paris" (Xinhua, 2015/09/08).

Xinhua's coverage of Chinese leadership featured endorsements from key climate roleplayers. According to the UNFCCC president, Christiana Figueres, "there is peer pressure among emerging countries. When China commits billions to help developing countries fight climate change, it helps change minds" (Xinhua, 2015/10/07). During the coverage, former French president, Francois Hollande, emphasised China's "vital role" in climate change, which includes China involving "other emerging countries in the fight to mitigate climate change". Hollande seemed optimistic "because a great country, China, has supported us" (Xinhua, 2015/11/03). Additionally, World Bank vice president, Rachel Kyte, was reportedly "extremely positive when describing the announcement of China's climate aid to developing countries as 'an extraordinary new development'" (Xinhua, 2015/11/04). These quotes create the perception of optimism around China's climate leadership and its influence on developing countries, in particular.

China is further represented as an influential leader through a quote from Energy Foundation's (EF) CEO, Eric Heitz: "But no matter what happens in Paris, it will still be true that China has stepped up as global leader on global warming" (Xinhua, 2015/11/19). China's apparent commitment seems more significant than the outcome of the overall climate negotiations, and essentially more significant than the commitments of the rest of the world. According to Heitz, these new commitments could highlight China's leadership image as "many people, including the Chinese people, don't know that China has become a global leader" (Xinhua, 2015/11/19). However, Heitz is employed by EF, a U.S. non-profit organisation assisting China's transition towards clean energy. His credibility is therefore questionable due to this vested interest. His comments could be a public relations strategy of EF, rather than true praise for China's sustainability progress. Furthermore, Heitz's inclusion creates the perception that regardless of China's power, the country still requires western input to guide its climate change policy.

Xinhua also quoted Hollande's credit to China for catching up with the climate movement: "[N]ow the country tops the world in terms of energy conservation" (2015/11/03). China's catch-up and the word "now" contribute to the perception of China's sustainable development progress, which could affect its environmental reputation. According to Xinhua (2015/11/04), formerly, Chinese growth was

described as “rapid, breakneck and even reckless”, but going forward, “the word on every China watcher’s lips will simply be ‘green’”. China’s environmentally aware communication could suggest a charm defensive (Shi, 2013), in which Chinese media set up a counter narrative to the criticism China usually receives in the global media for its environmental impact.

Many articles award China with climate leadership authority because of its proactive responses to climate change. Xinhua reported that China “aims to cut carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by at least 60 percent from the 2005 level by 2030” (Xinhua, 2015/09/08). China’s climate responses are described as “ambitious” and “extremely commendable” (Xinhua, 2015/10/15). Additionally, CCTV focuses on Chinese leadership’s grappling with obstacles, but instead of honing in on the challenges, it highlights the government’s proactive responses. “China will build a low-carbon energy system and help green construction. Are the tasks ahead daunting? China says it will strive to fulfill its commitments” (CCTV, 12/01/2015). The words “will”, “exploring” and “strive” indicate active responses by government. Chinese media coverage of China’s response to climate change displays characteristics of “constructive journalism”. Central to this journalistic approach is following up on solutions – how a problem was solved, by whom, and what lessons can be learned from that (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016). The portrayal of the Chinese government’s proactive responses of finding and implementing environmental solutions thus reflect this solutions-focused and optimistic reporting style.

China also seems to transform challenges into opportunities throughout this coverage. While China’s climate change representative, Xie Zenhua, admits that “for China, we are suffering a lot from climate change”, China’s optimism is covered in response. “We don't take climate change as a burden; instead we take it as a good opportunity for us to transform our growth pattern, and an opportunity for economic restructuring, industrial restructuring and restructuring of our energy mix” (Xinhua, 2015/09/15). China appears as turning an environmental challenge into a development opportunity. Particularly, reporting that China’s renewable energy industry “employs around 39 million people” positions job opportunities as a silver lining to China’s climate problem. This again displays optimistic framing, characteristic of constructive journalism.

Articles tend to list the Chinese government's future plans. "From now on, low-carbon production will come through better technology" (Xinhua, 2015/09/15). This reflects constructive journalism, but also what Christians et al. (2009:30) call "collaborative journalism", which refers to the collaborative role between media and the state, in particular to support national interest or development goals. Some articles list China's range of strategies, including "introduction of a national carbon cap-and-trade system before 2018; 20 billion yuan in promised aid to other developing countries to help them adapt to and combat climate change; and cutting $CO^2$ emissions per unit of GDP by at least 40 percent from the 2005 level by 2020, and at least 60 percent by 2030". The inclusion of deadlines in the coverage of these goals illustrates tangibility, pragmatism and urgency. This framing positions China as organised and strategic, as articles often include a plan on how their goals will be met. Official quotes often affirm these plans. "'It is crucial for the country in avoiding the middle-income trap and improving competitiveness', said Pan Yue, vice minister of environmental protection" (Xinhua, 2015/11/04).

China prioritises multinational cooperation in the Xinhua coverage. The Chinese government often expresses respect and support for foreign governments. Spokesperson Hong Lei says, "China appreciates France's efforts so far for hosting the [COP 21] summit." China also "attaches importance to the role of France as the host of the talks…, and is willing to enhance communication and coordination with the nation" (Xinhua, 2015/09/15). China's commitment to climate change mitigation is depicted as a valuable diplomatic strategy to create and maintain official relationships with countries such as France, which is considered a "diplomatic partner of priority".

China's communication indicates a high level of respect for official processes and systems, including those determined by the United Nations. "The Paris agreement should help meet the goals of UNFCCC, follow the rules set out in the UNFCCC to contribute to its full and effective implementation" (Xinhua, 2015/09/09). The coverage of China's support of the UN could potentially be viewed as an attempt by Chinese media at creating a counter-frame of the China-UN relationship, as China has generally been perceived as challenging the UN's current authority. China's cooperation with the UN was covered by phrases such as "willing to work with all

parties", "reach a comprehensive and balanced accord", "common but differentiated responsibilities, equity and respective capabilities". Articles further carried Chinese rhetoric on multinational cooperation, including "build consensus to the greatest extent" with "utmost sincerity" (Xinhua, 2015/09/09). China is portrayed as a trustworthy, well-intentioned and respectful partner for cooperation.

China is portrayed as cooperating with other developing nations on climate mitigation. "China will also provide assistance to small island nations including Grenada under the framework of South-South cooperation" (Xinhua, 2015/09/10). Grenada is presented as an important cooperation partner of China, because it supports China's sovereignty: "China appreciated Grenada's adherence to the one-China policy, and was ready to further strengthen the two countries' political mutual trust and cooperation." China's assistance to developing nations appears as a form of diplomacy that fits within an overall frame of China's climate leadership. Grenada's leadership "hailed the fruits" (Xinhua, 2015/09/10) of the China-Grenada cooperation, which further establishes the image of mutual benefits for China and its developing world partners.

Xinhua focuses on China's developing country status throughout its coverage. An article on China's South-South Climate Cooperation Fund, quotes a Fijian climate change director, Peter Emberson, saying "the Fijian government welcomes the 'bold step' made by China, a developing country" (Xinhua, 2015/10/15). The parenthesis emphasises China as a developing country, presenting its climate aid to other developing countries as particularly extraordinary and selfless. While climate donations are expected, and even required, from developed countries, assistance from a developing country is presented as a "bold step," "encouraging" and an "exemplary move" (Xinhua, 2015/10/15).

According to the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), "here is another case of a large developing country, in the spirit of South-South cooperation, doing their contribution to the global efforts in not only reducing emissions, promoting clean energy, but also supporting the less-endowed countries like the Pacific SIDS". China's assistance appears to transcend expectations of developing countries, because it is not their responsibility but rather offered in the "spirit" of solidarity. The image of solidarity suggests that China is part of the in-group of "South-South cooperation"

– an exclusive position that has created a potential out-group – most likely nations from the Global North. The idea that solidarity (while also being a donor and leader) is exclusively available to China is further emphasised by the mention that PIDF told Xinhua "in an exclusive interview at the PIDF's Suva-based secretariat" (Xinhua, 2015/10/15).

China's perceived solidarity with developing nations is based on the notion that China shares and understands their particular challenges. According to Emberson, China's funding "affirms that China recognizes the importance of mobilizing climate finance to transition towards low-carbon futures, whilst building resilience to climate change in developing countries. This assistance is also China's recognition of the special circumstances of least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states and the African countries alike" (Xinhua, 2015/10/15).

China seems to advocate on behalf of developing nations for their shared agendas. "President Xi Jinping said it is crucial to Paris talks to address economic differences between nations, and allow different countries to develop their own solutions to the problem of global warming" (CCTV, 12/01/2015). Xi reportedly highlighted the importance to "respect differences among countries, especially developing countries, in domestic policies, capacity-building and economic structure" and respect "developing countries' needs to reduce poverty and improve people's living standards" (CCTV, 12/01/2015). China is portrayed as the voice of the developing world, contributing to the frame of its climate leadership.

Chinese media characterise Chinese leadership through its country leader, President Xi Jinping. "Chinese President Xi Jinping urged world leaders at the UN climate conference to work together to ensure an agreement is reached" (CCTV, 12/01/2015). CCTV emphasised Xi's "tightly scheduled agenda" in New York. "At the invitation of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Xi Jinping will also attend a working lunch on climate change where he and other leaders will discuss ways to address climate change" (CCTV, 26/09/2015). The mention of Xi's busy schedule suggests he is a sought after, and therefore important, leader. The emphasis on the UN Secretary-General's "invitation," suggests this is exclusive, contributing to the image of his importance. An article titled "Xi's worldwide diplomacy benefits China, the world" reported that under Xi's leadership, "the world will continue to benefit from China's

development" (Xinhua, 2015/01/05). This article creates the idea that Xi is single-handedly leading the world through his leadership of China.

Chinese coverage tended to focus on official COP21 events or communications. Xinhua articles are filled with quotes from Chinese officials: "'China has attended the whole negotiation process in a constructive manner,' Wang Min, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, said to reporters" (Xinhua, 2015/09/15). These quotes are obtained through interviews, press releases or other official engagements: "State Councilor Yang Jiechi made the comment in a strategic dialogue with Jacques Audibert, diplomatic advisor to the French president" (Xinhua, 2015/10/15). Many articles also report on official responses from other governments to China's climate change leadership. "Audibert said his country looks forward to working with China to make the Paris meeting a success" (Xinhua, 2015/09/15).

This section discussed how Chinese media's COP 21 coverage portrays China as a climate leader, particularly through its solidarity with developing countries, its proactive responses to climate change, and its leadership through President Xi Jinping.

### 1.2. US-China collaboration

In its sustainable development coverage, Chinese media focus particularly on the China-US relationship. China and the US are often described together as "the world's top two emitters of greenhouse gases" (Xinhua, 2015/09/12). They are referred to as "the world's two largest economies", highlighting China as "the world's biggest developing country" and the US as "the biggest developed country". China is presented as a potential competitor to the US for global leadership, although the emphasis on its developing country status suggests that China is positioned as leader of the developing world, and the US of the developed world.

Chinese media coverage focuses on China-US cooperation – highlighting their similarities, while often negating their competition. China-US collaboration is presented as a joint leadership – they will reportedly "jointly push international climate change negotiations for a new agreement". Xinhua reported that the "two countries put their heads together in an effort to help the world reduce greenhouse gas

emission more effectively". Furthermore, Chinese Premier Li states that "a long-term stable and sound development of the China-U.S. relations is not only beneficial to the two countries, but also a contribution for world peace, stability and development" (Xinhua, 2015/11/13). This contributes to the image of the US and China as climate leaders, but also leaders in other crucial global issues.

While collaboration is generally pertinent to China's climate strategy, the US is singled out as partner: "Climate change is of high importance to China, and we hope to work with other parties including the United States to build a fair, reasonable and win-win global climate governance system" (Xinhua, 2015/09/09). China's climate strategy is again illustrated as a diplomatic strategy. "Cooperation on climate change is not only critical to the future of our planet, but a major milestone in the U.S.-China relationship" (Xinhua, 2015/09/14). Rhetoric, "the human use of symbols to communicate" (Foss, 2004:4), is a symbolic choice, resulting in seeing the world in one way rather than another. The China-US frame often centres on collaboration, which includes the following rhetoric: "increasing cooperation", "close cooperation", "win-win results", "joint efforts from both sides", "jointly promote", "maintain the sound momentum of dialogue", "cement dialogue" (Xinhua, 2015/09/12; Xinhua, 2015/09/09).

Chinese media predominantly illustrate amicable China-US collaboration despite their existing power struggles. However, some coverage reflects competition with which country is leading the other. Some articles portray the US offering leadership to China: "Los Angeles' great efforts in combatting smog is well-known in China. And according to the mayor, Los Angeles has more Chinese residents, visitors, and students than any other American city" (Xinhua, 2015/09/14). Not only can Los Angeles lead Chinese efforts to combat smog, but the article suggests Chinese citizens themselves prefer being in Los Angeles than in China. Conversely, others portray China leading the U.S. China's climate responses were described as "very impressive" by Todd D. Stern, the Special Envoy for Climate Change at the U.S. State Department (Xinhua, 2015/09/15).

China and the US are portrayed as collaborating regardless of their differences. Premier Li Keqiang is quoted saying, "it is normal for the two countries, with different history, culture, social system and development stage, to have different view

or even dispute some issues, but they share more mutual interest than disputes" (Xinhua, 2015/11/13). Xinhua highlights China's respect and support of official US policies, processes and systems. "China attaches great importance to parliamentary exchanges and cooperation with the US." In return, the US House of Representatives Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi, reportedly "spoke highly of China's development, especially in poverty reduction. She said the United States is ready to strengthen contact with China in a friendly and candid way to enhance mutual understanding and consensus" (Xinhua, 2015/11/13). The inclusion of Pelosi's emphasis on the "friendly" and "candid" tone, suggests that this might not be characteristic of the China-US relationship.

Most coverage of the China-US relationship focuses on official meetings and statements. Xinhua covered the "First Session of the U.S.-China Climate-Smart/Low-Carbon Cities Summit" aka the "Climate Leaders Summit" report (Xinhua, 2015/09/16), and focused on multiple Chinese and US cities signing the Climate Leaders Declaration, the California-China Urban Climate Collaborative (CCUCC) and the Memorandum of Understanding between Shenzhen and Los Angeles (Xinhua, 2015/09/15). These agreements again illustrate China's respect for official processes and systems.

Chinese media prioritise official sources. In the China-US coverage, Chinese media include both Chinese and US officials in one article, in many ways illustrating that these two parties are in conversation with each other – strengthening the collaboration frame. "Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli met with Brian Deese, senior advisor to US President Barack Obama" (Xinhua, 2015/09/09), and "Yang Jiechi, the Special Envoy of President Xi and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden will attend the closing ceremony Wednesday." While Xi Jinping is consistently addressed as "President", one article doesn't afford his counterparts the same treatment: "During his visit to the United States, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his U.S. host Barack Obama are likely to exhibit even stronger aspiration and resolution to help our planet" (Xinhua, 2015/09/12). Chinese media showcase a high level of respect for their president. A wide range of Chinese officials are also mentioned, which illustrates respect for Chinese officials; even those working on lower profile projects are given credit, similar to community media practices.

Chinese media emphasised praise that China received from the US leadership. “Bill Gates hailed the achievements made by China in coping with climate change and developing new energy industries” (Xinhua, 2015/11/13). Gates was quoted expressing optimism about US-China leadership, since “the combination of advantages of companies from the two countries could push forward technological innovation and the industrialization process”. Premier Li responded that “China is ready to work with other countries” (Xinhua, 2015/11/12). The word “ready” illustrates progress in China’s ideology on the environment, as the article suggests there had been a time when China had not been prepared to collaborate on the issue. The US and China received joint credit from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. “This announcement bolsters prospects for a universal, meaningful agreement in Paris this year. It further signals the shared vision and seriousness” (Xinhua, 2015/09/25).

This section discussed Chinese media’s framing of the China-US relationship, which generally reflects cooperation but also competition for global leadership between the two countries.

### 1.3. Repercussions for environmental violations

China appears to have strict environmental laws, rules and regulations, as well as heavy punishment for violations of those laws. Xinhua’s sustainability coverage focuses heavily on a crackdown by the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) after their Environmental Protection Law took effect in 2015.

A recurring theme in this coverage is the Chinese government’s application of surveillance, scrutiny and supervision. Officials have been urged to “intensify supervision” (Xinhua, 2015/08/31) to detect environmental “violations” through “inspection teams” (Xinhua, 2015/08/3). Additionally, the MEP aims to “check on pollution prevention and control”. References to surveillance in news articles on China’s sustainable development, implies a strategic effort by the Chinese government to avert a negative environmental impact. This commitment to environmental protection creates the counterframe that conservation is prioritised in China.

Environmental violations in China are reportedly harshly punished. “The ministry ordered local environmental authorities to harshly punish the polluters and submit

rectification measures to the ministry within 20 work days" (Xinhua, 2015/08/03). The Chinese government is portrayed as responding to environmental violations with gravity. Chinese media often focus on the MEP – a source that tends to highlight the repercussions for environmental violations. "China has imposed punishment in 25,164 environmental violation cases in the first half of 2015, with 9,325 companies having their doors sealed, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said" (Xinhua, 2015/08/03).

One form of punishment is heavy fines. The 2015 Environmental Protection Law allows "unlimited fines accumulating on a daily basis to be imposed on enterprises that fail to rectify violations, which aims to fix the loophole of cheap one-time penalties" (Xinhua, 2015/09/10). Another punishment is public naming and shaming. "China's environmental watchdog on Monday named and shamed Hohhot, capital of North China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region for poor air and water quality" (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). This was done by the MEP, here referred to as "environmental watchdog", which again refers back to the image of surveillance by the Chinese government. Coverage of these punishments not only potentially deters future environmental violations, but also contribute to the image of China's seriousness about environmental protection.

Characteristics of constructive journalism, specifically solutions-focused coverage, are evident. Xinhua focuses on government responses to environmental violations, including efforts to keep violators accountable, instead of the violations itself. "China has cleaned up 1,790 crime cases involving environmental pollution from January to July" (Xinhua, 2015/09/14). "Environmental authorities have closed down companies, limited or suspended on production, and detained wrong-doers" (Xinhua, 2015/08/05), and "740 cases of suspected environmental crime have been transferred to the police for criminal investigations" (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). The Chinese government is illustrated as proactive, having found solutions even before problems had been publicised. However, some articles suggest that the crackdown serves as damage control to China's environmental reputation after the Tianjin blast. "Lessons must be learned from the recent Tianjin warehouse explosions, Wang said, urging effective precautions to prevent serious accidents" (Xinhua, 2015/08/31). The Chinese

government is portrayed as rectifying its mistakes and making reparations for Tianjin via implementing new, stricter environmental policies.

The issue of environmental violations is reported to go hand in hand with corruption. Business applications were rejected "because information supplied for them was false, the ministry said" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). Coverage of the Chinese government's environmental crackdown therefore simultaneously illustrates its intolerance of corruption. Some companies have "passed their assessments even though they emitted excessive pollutants, which proved that the assessments made by some agents were falsified". Since, according to environmental researcher, Chang Jiwen, corruption "has discredited the authorities" (2015/08/08), the crackdown could serve as a form of retaliation at corrupt companies or individuals that might have damaged the Chinese government's reputation. The Chinese government aims to rebuild its anti-corruption image through transparency: "The ministry plans to build an online platform on its website this year to manage assessment information and make it more accessible to the public" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08).

Articles on corruption also tend to focus on the proactive implementation of solutions, rather than the violations itself. "Six of those agents have already delivered a plan to reform their working processes, …and one has lost its license to operate, the ministry said" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). This might again reflect constructive journalism, as well as "development journalism", which is centred around collaboration between media and the state, "premised on a commitment by the press to play a positive role in the processes of development" (Christians et al., 2009:200). Violations are generally mentioned alongside an already determined repercussion, establishing the frame of a proactive Chinese government. Additionally, Chinese media reported that Xiong Yuehui, head of the Department of Science, Technology and Standards of MEP is "under investigation for suspected serious violations of discipline and laws" (Xinhua, 2015/08/19). The public shaming of the Chinese government's own corrupt members could establish trust in the accountability of Chinese governance.

Xinhua reported that all Chinese officials, both government and Party, will be subject to "a lifelong-liability system", meaning punishments can be imposed retroactively. The new regulations also reportedly "banned promotion for officials found guilty of misconduct", and those officials will "receive an unfavorable appraisal in their

performance assessment". The threat to their political reputation as punishment illustrates the importance of a political career to Chinese officials, as well as Chinese government's regard of the gravity of corruption. Additionally, "all environmental impact assessment agencies must cut their links to governments at all levels by the end of 2016 to avoid corruption" (Xinhua, 2015/08/07). The separation of environmental regulatory bodies and government again implies the Chinese government's commitment to anti-corruption, but also highlights the role that the Chinese government might have played in environmental damage in the past.

Chinese non-governmental organisations enforce accountability for environmental violations, indirectly supporting the state's crackdown. "Eight firms are being sued for dumping untreated waste in northwest China's Tengger Desert as part of a high-profile public interest litigation filed by a non-profit organization" (Xinhua, 2015/08/18). Cases for illegal dumping were filed by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, leading to investigations and shut downs of companies. The organisations "hoped the case would serve as an example of 'a typical public interest lawsuit' and a warning for other polluters". After drawing the attention of the state, the firms were asked, among other reparations, to "issue an open apology on national press" (2015/08/18). This illustrates the collaboration between the Chinese state and the national press: the state uses the press as a platform to put pressure on corporations to follow its environmental policies.

Ironically, a segment on CCTV reported that Chinese commitment to environmental laws was lacking at the Chinese Mamba cement plant in South Africa. According to manager John Mettley, South Africa's environmental laws were "impressive", while "there was some lack on China's side but we managed to get it right" (CCTV, 11/13/2015). This interview differs from other frames in Chinese media, portraying China as lacking commitment to environmental policies. However, "get it right" also contributes to the frame of improvement and progress of Chinese environmental protection.

### 1.4. Green technology and innovation

The Chinese media analysed in this study portray China as a promoter of sustainability, using innovation and technology to respond to climate change. “China is already the global leader in clean energy investment”, EF’s Eric Heitz said, listing China’s areas of expertise: “clean wind power, solar energy, electric vehicles, LED lighting that uses less power but gives very good lighting, more efficient appliances like refrigerators or washing machines, and more efficient industrial equipment” (Xinhua, 2015/11/19). Listing China’s innovations creates an image that China is involved in a wide range of renewable projects, contributing to the frame of its proactive attitude towards sustainable development.

Xinhua also portrays China as advancing renewable energy technology. An article titled “China tops global list of clean energy investment” reports that China “invested 89 billion U.S. dollars in clean energy in 2014, the largest among 55 nations surveyed in a global report, representing the country's commitment to a low-carbon future” (Xinhua, 2015/11/23). The Climatescope 2015 report is based on surveys conducted by Britain's Department for International Development and the U.S. Agency for International Development. China appears as a world leader in renewable energy development, a frame that is established by the credibility of the two organisations sponsoring and conducting the research.

UN Under-Secretary General Achim Steiner, another globally respected source, said China is “poised for greener growth and a better environment”. Steiner’s credibility is highlighted not only by his official position, but also because he is “a frequent visitor to China”. His firsthand experience in China illustrates familiarity and personal insight. Steiner acknowledged the “intense government promotion and support” of China’s new energy vehicle production, as well as the Chinese government’s encouragement of “consumers, domestic and international producers to ensure that cars have low emissions” (Xinhua, 2015/06/11). China extends its focus abroad, encouraging other countries to follow its lead on green technology, a narrative that contributes to the frame of global climate leader.

However, the Chinese Association of Science and Technology’s vice president, Xie Kechang’s views differ. He stated that “China lags behind developed countries in the energy sector, relying on imported core technology”. Kechang has called for the government “to spark an ‘energy revolution’ by forming specialist policy think tanks

and building showcase projects as well as pouring in investment and encouraging innovation" (Xinhua, 2015/11/25). This article also suggests that, while China tries to curate its image as global climate leader, its leadership is discredited by the fact that its current coal consumption is at "35 percentage points higher than the global average" (Xinhua, 2015/11/25).

China's technological innovations reportedly boost its environmental surveillance. According to the MEP, "China will build a space-air-ground integrated sensing system to detect and stop pollution." The monitoring system will enable a unified standard and an automatic early warning using "surveillance sites across the country" (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). This again highlights the importance of surveillance by the Chinese government to ensure environmental protection.

China's technological innovation also promotes conservation. A 70-million-USD "eco-friendly overwater highway" was designed to "avoid damage" to a mountain range in China's ecology. Along with a thumbs up emoticon, Twitter user, Shankar Sharma, said "we can have development and still protect the environment" (Xinhua, 2015/08/11). Ironically, Xinhua sourced Twitter for a quote on the approval of the highway, while this platform is currently banned in China. Although Sharma is not a Chinese citizen, his comment serves as the public's approval of advancements in Chinese conservation. This potentially illustrates Chinese media's high regard for foreign comments of approval, since they could just as easily have sourced similar quotes from locals on Weibo.

Many articles emphasise the amount of money the Chinese government has invested in environmental projects. "The government has allocated more than 400 billion yuan (around 65 billion U.S. dollars) to projects returning farmland to forest since 1999" (Xinhua, 2015/08/07). Showcasing the large amounts spent on conservation confirms the Chinese government's commitment to sustainable development. Most articles contain statistics in an attempt to quantify governmental efforts and results. "A new system comprised 2,729 natural reserves, and a number of forests, wetlands and geological parks, covering over 1.7 million square kilometers, 18 percent of China's land territory" (Xinhua, 2015/08/06). Covering results using quantitative data implies that the Chinese government's results are tangible and, therefore, successful.

This section discussed the framing of China's contribution to conservation through green technology and innovation.

### 1.5. Pollution in China: Smog and Tianjin blast

Although Chinese green technology emerges as a frame, the majority of coverage focuses on pollution in China. Many of these articles focus on the 2015 Tianjin warehouse blast. "A total of 112 bodies have been found, and 95 people remained missing, including 85 firefighters, after two explosions took place in a warehouse for hazardous chemicals following a fire" (Xinhua, 2015/08/16). Articles generally draw on official information on the blast, provided, for example, by "Gong Jiansheng, vice head of the city's publicity department" or "rescue authorities" (Xinhua, 2015/08/31).

Chinese media coverage from this sample focused on the Chinese government's swift response to the blast. Coverage created the image of a proactive government, mostly referencing actions, through verbs such as "using hydrogen peroxide", "building cofferdams", "trucking away", "will be processed and drained", "needs to be treated" (Xinhua, 2015/08/16; Xinhua, 2015/08/18). Articles also focused on the successes of the government's crisis response: "People living up to three kilometres from the site have been evacuated and advised to wear masks and long pants" (CCTV, 2015/08/14).

The Chinese government's crisis response reportedly relied on expertise, which illustrates the extent of the government's response efforts and its capability to control the situation. "Specialised anti-chemical warfare troops" and "chemical specialists" searched for survivors in the area (CCTV, 2015/08/14; Xinhua, 2015/08/18). Additionally, CCTV reported that the Chinese government's extensive response efforts included deploying a "rescue force", "extra medics", "psychologists" and "professional psychologists" (CCTV, 2015/08/14).

Surveillance of the area again formed part of the reported response. "Only safe levels of harmful gas were detected near the blast site" and hydrogen cyanide levels were reportedly "much lower than the national safety standard" (Xinhua, 2015/08/16). However, when some water samples contained "28.4 times more than the standard" cyanide levels, stricter monitoring was implemented. China's State Oceanic

Administration (SOA) began “keeping closer track” and implemented more “urgent” monitoring (Xinhua, 2015/08/23). The SOA was covered “promising” (Xinhua, 2015/08/19) to prevent the spread of cyanide, indicating the government’s confidence in its capability to effectively handle the crisis.

Another response included transparency, such as “releasing data on air pollution to the public every two hours” (Xinhua, 2015/08/18). Publicising information was translated into policy after the blast, illustrating the gravity of the Chinese government’s response. “Air pollution following environmental emergencies should be monitored and details made public, according to a latest revision to the draft amendment to the Air Pollution Control Law currently under deliberation” (Xinhua, 2015/08/28). Accountability also formed part of the crisis response. Xinhua reported on the Supreme People's Procuratorate’s (SPP) announcement of its investigation into the Tianjin blast (Xinhua, 2015/08/16), inspecting “abuse of power or dereliction of duty” and holding responsible officials who “fail to effectively carry out supervision, or approve environmentally disqualified projects, or attempt to shirk the responsibility of protecting the environment” (Xinhua, 2015/08/18). Chinese media coverage of the government’s response to the Tianjin blast thus focused on the deployment of expertise, monitoring and supervision, transparency and accountability.

However, some locals found government attempts at transparency to be insufficient. Families of missing firefighters said “they’ve been treated with sufficient food and water and a place to live” but instead they want “more information, specific information about the people they’ve lost in the explosions” (CCTV, 2016/01/25). Chinese media reported on the families’ frustration with insufficient government communication after they demanded open “communication channels” about the crisis, indicating somewhat critical reporting of the Chinese government. However, CCTV explained that the officials were “overwhelmed” and therefore “disappointingly” could not provide more details (2016/01/25). “Disappointingly” could either mean unfortunately, in which case CCTV responds in defense of the Chinese government, or it could express disappointment in the Chinese officials’ lack of response, reflecting criticism of officials.

During the aftermath, Chinese media tried to illustrate that the crisis had been successfully managed. “More than 300 primary and middle schools in the Binhai New

Area, where the port is located, opened for the new semester on Monday as scheduled" (Xinhua, 2015/08/31). This implies that, despite the impact of the blast, and due to the government's efficient response, Chinese society was not completely disrupted. Schools symbolise a key part of society returning to normal. Xinhua reported that the local Tianjin government promoted development in the area, "including relocating companies that handle dangerous chemicals or goods" (Xinhua, 2015/10/14). Xinhua further included improvements such as safety checks, repairing infrastructure damages caused by the blast, and providing housing for those affected by the blasts. This contributes to the image that Chinese government's effective control over the situation means the community can move forward.

*Smog coverage*

Reports on air pollution feature heavily in Chinese media. Articles on the increase of the pollutant PM2.5 and ozone pollution illustrate a dire situation, with "no sign of improvement" in cities like Shanghai (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). Many articles warn about ozone pollution's impact as a result of automobile exhaust and industrial emissions. "Potential symptoms arising from prolonged exposure to ozone include respiratory diseases, coughing and damage to the immune system" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). Coverage illustrates the disruption of Chinese citizens' daily lives due to the smog. "Environmental departments advise people to avoid outdoor activities when the pollution is the most severe between 2 to 3 o'clock in the afternoon" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). Additionally, Beijing has implemented a "ban on outdoor barbecues" (Xinhua, 2015/06/15).

Reports on the disruption of Chinese daily life emphasise the gravity of China's pollution problem. The severity of the smog's impact is further highlighted by a focus on children. There have been "heated discussions" over shielding "children from the harm of foul air" (2016/01/22). Xinhua reported that the Chinese government had created special research committees to study the effect of smog on schools. Government plans to install purifying facilities at schools, and children will "attend school on clear days, and stay at home on smoggy days" (Xinhua, 2016/01/22). Children essentially represent a vulnerable part of society, and the media's focus on this group solidifies the image of smog as harmful, dangerous and even villainous.

The villainous image of smog is further established by an article illustrating how air pollution affects the sacred religious practices in China, as "religious personages advised people to burn shorter incense at temples" (Xinhua, 2016/01/22). Beijing's renowned Yonghe Lamasery began providing free shorter and natural "environmentally friendly incense" to followers and visitors. Smog seems more than just a health threat to Chinese society, but is also a potential threat to Chinese tradition, culture and religion. Yonghe's Hu Xuefeng has called on other temples and followers to "take actions to follow the call of the society, and make concerted efforts to clean our air" (2016/01/22). The publication of Hu's call suggests that Chinese media could be a helpful tool in mobilising the public to participate in anti-pollution efforts.

Pollution articles generally referred to MEP or other official reports, but also source Chinese expertise such as the National Meteorological Center (NMC) or engineers such as Meng Xiaoyan with the China National Environmental Monitoring Center (Xinhua, 2015/08/31). Government often issues warnings to the public to respond to pollution. Xinhua reported that "the public has been warned to take precautions", or that Xi'an "activated an air pollution emergency response." The NMC "issued a yellow alert and advised children, the elderly and people with respiratory diseases to stay indoors" (Xinhua, 2015/10/20). Furthermore, articles educate local and global audiences on the smog alert system. "China has a four-tier color-coded weather warning system, with red representing the most severe weather, followed by orange, yellow and blue" (Xinhua, 2015/10/20). These reports illustrate how Xinhua is instrumental in the government's efforts to inform and educate the public on air pollution.

Chinese media rarely focused on individuals' personal experiences of smog. However, one article reported on the frustrating experiences of environment inspector, Jia Lifei, in Xingtai, which has earned the reputation of "a city of smog". Jia reportedly "felt embarrassed as an environment worker because my hands were tied" (Xinhua, 2015/09/20). Jia's case infers that, while individuals might want to respond to pollution, poor governance leads to structural constraints. However, a new coordinated pollution plan means "Xingtai may finally get a break from years of

entrapment by polluting industries" (Xinhua, 2015/09/20). The word "entrapment" illustrates a hopeless situation, yet "finally" indicates relief, suggesting progress.

Similar to the formulae mentioned earlier in this study, articles on the government's response to pollution rely on quantitative data, such as the amount of money spent on decreasing pollution: "Beijing will earmark 16.5 billion yuan (about 2.57 billion U.S. dollars) to improve air quality in 2016" (Xinhua, 2016/01/24) and the expected percentage decrease: "breathable particles PM2.5 in Hebei province decreased by 23 percent, compared with the same period last year" (Xinhua, 2015/09/20). Many articles include a hopeful caveat, implying positive outcomes. "As long as the local governments persist in the battle against smog, improve the industrial structure and step up efforts to curb pollution, blue skies will stay in Xingtai and other northern Chinese cities" (Xinhua, 2015/09/20). These articles often convey a positive trajectory for Chinese citizens to look forward to, indicating progress and change. This contributes to the frame of the Chinese government's capability to resolve the smog problem, as well as other societal challenges. While coverage of smog generally creates a negative image of China, focusing on the government's proactive response suggests that the smog crisis is improving.

Coverage of important public diplomacy events hosted in China reveals how pollution relates to Chinese nation branding. "China on Monday unveiled temporary measures to guarantee clean air for the Sept. 3 military parade commemorating the end of World War II" (Xinhua, 2015/08/17). Environment Minister Chen Jining said "clean air was integral to the success of the parade, as it would showcase the good image of the national capital" (Xinhua, 2015/08/17). The article reports on China's great lengths to improve its current image as a heavily polluted country. "Some coal-fired power plants will be shut down for maintenance, more than 10,000 factories will close or reduce production, and construction at nearly 9,000 sites will be halted" (Xinhua, 2015/08/17). Similar drastic measures were taken for the IAAF World Championships, and initially achieved success during the 2014 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings. "Measures to control pollution prior to and during big political events" had led to "excellent air" and "record lows" of air pollution measurements (Xinhua, 2015/06/15). Chinese netizens even coined the phrase "APEC Blue" to refer to the event's success in pollution control.

Chinese air pollution impacts China's soft power potential. Xinhua affirmatively reports that "air pollution has been identified as a major obstacle to Beijing's bid for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games" (2015/06/15). Hosting a major sporting event is significant in wielding Chinese soft power, and therefore China took drastic measures to eliminate any potential threats to this opportunity. With an investment of 130 billion US dollars, the president of the Beijing 2022 Bid Committee, Wang Anshun, is "confident that we can have fresh air in Beijing" (Xinhua, 2015/06/15). These measures illustrate the severity of China's pollution problem, as well as the extent to which the Chinese government will respond to curbing pollution in aid of its soft power success.

Xinhua frames air quality improvements as extraordinary cases compared to the normalised smog. According to Xinhua, after a "heavenly week" of "unprecedented" blue skies, gray haze greeted Beijing commuters. The article suggests that some citizens had become so accustomed to smog, they preferred it. "Some people, like Chen Shan, welcomed the return of old friend smog, as it was a sign the city was back to 'normal'" (2015/06/15). Here, Chinese citizens seem passive and unperturbed by Beijing's pollution. Chen posted on Weibo that "the more cloudy the sky, the more we should remember its blue times" which illustrates a rarity of unpolluted air in China. "The dreamy sky was a hot topic across social media, and even made headlines", and blue sky images "went viral" (Xinhua, 2015/06/15), which further portrays smog as a normal feature of Beijing, to the extent that blue skies are newsworthy.

One article featured a businessman going for a walk because he did not want to waste the "excellent weather" by staying in the hotel, "like I normally do." The article sets a hopeful tone as the businessman claims that "if the sky in Beijing stays blue like this, I will enjoy my job even more" (Xinhua, 2015/06/15). This suggests that under the current smog employees in China might be experience low job or social satisfaction. Xinhua provides readers with a potential smog-free future that could make the country attractive to visitors and employees. However, currently, air pollution "remains the top concern of many citizens" (Xinhua, 2015/08/31).

This section discussed the framing of China's pollution problems by specifically focusing on the Tianjin blast and smog. While smog in particular appears disruptive

to Chinese society, articles tend to focus on the proactive government response, consistent with elements of "constructive journalism".

### 1.6. Chinese environmental aid

Many articles focus on Chinese foreign aid for environmental protection, showcasing an aspect of China's soft power. According to UN official, Wu Hongbo, "it is widely recognized that China has been offering its support to countries in need to promote global sustainable development" (Xinhua, 2015/08/14). China has built sustainable infrastructure in Ethiopia, including wind power plants and an urban light rail, which "impressed" Wu "a lot". Wu noted that "these are quite common in China, but they are all new to this African country" (Xinhua, 2015/08/14). The superior tone from the official stems from the connotation that Africa lacks infrastructure abundant in China. China thus seems more advanced than Africa, and its assistance comes across as paternalistic. As the "largest developing country in the world", China has taken sustainability under the South-South cooperation framework as a "serious obligation" (Xinhua, 2015/08/14). Its duty to assist Africa, as determined by its size and leadership position, contributes to this paternalistic tone.

Coverage often indicates that developing countries experience dire circumstances, which, in some way, justifies the need for Chinese assistance. For Sri Lankan villagers, "clean and potable water has always been a problem as far as they could remember". The China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) launched the Greater Kurunegala Water Supply and Sewerage Project to provide clean water to the village. The project has led to "a sigh of relief" from locals, and "has brought hope to thousands of local residents who have long been denied a basic necessity, that of clean drinking water". China seems heroic, as a Chinese-owned corporation has solved a crucial problem for the community. Coverage suggests the Sri Lankan villagers "are very grateful to China for this project" (Xinhua, 2015/08/07). Chinese ambassador, Yi Xianliang, said, "China has always supported Sri Lanka's efforts to improve the quality of life of its people", implying consistent support from China to its allies. Coverage of the CMEC illustrates how Chinese industry is tied to the brand of China itself – for better or worse.

China reportedly offers aid despite that onus being on developed countries. “North-South cooperation is the mainstream of global partnerships today. South-South cooperation is just a supplement” (Xinhua, 2015/08/14). This assistance seems to be outside of China’s mandate, which suggests the selfless country is going the extra mile for sustainability. A key theme in the coverage of China’s assistance in Africa is that of mutual benefits. “We have witnessed a lot of examples of win-win cooperation. And they are welcomed by developing countries” (Xinhua, 2015/08/14). The caveat that Chinese assistance is “welcomed” in Africa could serve as a charm defensive (Shi, 2013) in which Xinhua provides a counter frame to coverage that portrays China as unwelcome or harmful in Africa.

While Chinese foreign aid commonly takes the form of loans, private Chinese corporations also reportedly provide assistance. According to Xinhua, “the Chinese telecom company ZTE has expressed its commitment to supporting Ethiopia's green growth strategy by actively participating in the annual tree planting program in the East African country” (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). Under the theme of “Green action”, around 100 ZTE staff planted about 2 000 trees in Addis Ababa. ZTE stated: “[I]n this era of climate change, Ethiopia's determination to follow a different path is appreciable and ZTE is committed to supporting this effort in every way possible” (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). “Ethiopia’s determination” indicates African agency in its sustainable development, and China is “supporting”, rather than leading. This provides a counter frame to the paternalism illustrated above, because China only supports African agency.

According to Xinhua, both Chinese and local ZTE staff are “happy about their participation in the tree planting program” (Xinhua, 2015/08/05), creating a sense of amicable collaboration between the Chinese and Ethiopians. Employee, Zeng Qing, confirms that ZTE's participation strengthens the “cooperation and friendship between the peoples of Ethiopia and China” (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). In this coverage, the project promotes Chinese diplomacy. According to ZTE employee Abi Eshetu, the project goes beyond “participating in network expansion or network building” but also reflects ZTE’s “social responsibility”. The coverage thus creates an image of respect for the locals and their environment by a Chinese-owned company.

Additionally, “over 50 employees, including 12 Chinese” (Xinhua, 2015/09/20) at China Wuyi Company participated in a beach cleanup event in Mombasa, Kenya. The emphasis that Chinese employees also participated creates the perception that Chinese employees respect the local environment as much as the local employees. This might again create a counter frame to the existing narrative of Chinese citizens’ disregard for the environment in Africa. The Chinese company “joined environmentalists” and were “lending hands” (Xinhua, 2015/09/20), again suggesting a supportive instead of leadership role to African agency in local conservation. The sampled Chinese media provide a counter frame to existing coverage that portrays China’s disregard of conservation in Africa.

Coverage reveals a generally positive attitude amongst local Kenyans towards Wuyi. Wuyi is considered a “major partner” in conservation, and was “embraced by a good number of residents who have turned up in the cleanup” (Xinhua, 2015/09/20). Wuyi’s good standing in Kenya is due to its regular conservation efforts, as well as its sustainable job creation. A local employee’s quote is followed by the parenthesis “who has been working in the Chinese company for 7 years” (Xinhua, 2015/09/20), which potentially challenges claims that China does not create long-term or sustainable job opportunities for local Africans. Xinhua portrays China as a sustainable influence on the African continent – regarding both conservation and employment.

Many articles on sustainability focus on China’s multilateral relationships. CCTV announced that Chinese President Xi would co-chair the 15$^{th}$ FOCAC summit in Johannesburg with South African President Zuma, in which “cooperation” around “green development” would be a focus (CCTV, 2015/11/27). Additionally, China’s Special Representative Yin Hengmin voiced China’s support to the Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC) of which cooperation to “protect the environment” would be a focal point (Xinhua, 2015/8/22). These official meetings characterise the coverage of China’s multilateral cooperation for sustainability.

Kenya has also increased cooperation with China as “a strategic partner” in sustainable development based on China’s position as “a source of expertise and innovations” (Xinhua, 2015/11/01). While a partnership suggests an equal power relationship, Xinhua reports that “Kenya looks up to China” (Xinhua, 2015/11/01).

China leads Kenya in its transition to clean energy, capacity development, skills transfer and conservation. The Sino-Kenyan partnership is not only portrayed as leading to a renewable energy transition in Kenya, but Kenyan officials express confidence that China will offer "strategic leadership" in the Paris climate deal.

Coverage of China positions it both in solidarity with developing countries, as well as being their climate leader. "Developing countries regard China an important ally in advancing our mutual interests like green economy" (Xinhua, 2015/11/01). China's South-South cooperation commitment is trusted to "steer the climate change agenda effectively" (Xinhua, 2015/11/01). Kenyan officials even consider China an ally in "the war against climate change". "War" suggests an image of two sides, and China is portrayed as both an ally and leader of Africa in the climate battle. According to Green Belt Movement chairperson ,Wanjira Maathai, "China is leading the world in green energy revolution" (Xinhua, 2015/11/1). China's leadership is acknowledged and associated with progression and change by Wanjira Maathai, the daughter of the late Wangari Maathai, a globally renowned environmental activist. Maathai therefore has credibility in the environmental field, and her endorsement of China might boost its environmental reputation.

Some articles focus on China's multinational cooperation to end illegal environmental trade. "Myanmar and China will effectively cooperate in addressing the issue of illegal timber production, Myanmar Environmental Conservation and Forest Minister U Win Tun said". A Chinese Forestry official stressed that the issue requires more "deepened cooperation than ever", which suggests urgency in eradicating the illegal trade. Tun warned that the illegal timber trade in the Myanmar-China border area could "tarnish the image of the two countries" (Xinhua, 2015/09/24). This again illustrates the importance of environmental conservation to a country's reputation, which further contributes to the idea that China's conservation efforts can contribute to its soft power success in Africa.

Some articles showcase attempts by Chinese role players to prevent wildlife trafficking, which could redeem China's reputation as lacking environmental concern. CCTV highlights efforts in China to create awareness around poaching. "The message is loud and clear, and it's been broadcast across China: Stop buying ivory. It comes from China's newest wildlife ambassadors, popstars, CEOs and television

personalities, who have joined forces with the International Fund for Animal Welfare to stop the illegal trade in elephant ivory" (CCTV, 2015/11/13). According to CCTV, IFAW attributes Chinese ivory consumption to ignorance about poaching's impact. The broadly publicised message suggests that "behind ivory is murder, death and the destruction of the environment and communities in Africa" (CCTV, 2015/11/13). This insert suggests that Chinese society is unaware of the impact of poaching, a problem solved through a powerful awareness campaign. The portrayal of Chinese society's ignorance suggests that their ivory consumption is innocent, and therefore not ill-intentioned.

Additionally, a team of Chinese playwrights "donated motorbikes and other gear to Kenyan conservancies that are to be used in the fight against poaching". According to Kenyan official, Judi Wakhungu, the donation "has injected fresh impetus in wildlife protection". Xinhua explains this group joins "a growing list of Chinese animal lovers involved in wildlife protection". This illustrates increasing advocacy in China, which could improve its reputation as poaching perpetrator. Highlighting this group's efforts also challenges the essentialisation of China as supporting illegal wildlife trafficking. Overall. "We have strengthened cooperation with China to combat illegal wildlife trade from both the supply and demand side. This cooperation has brighter prospects" (Xinhua, 2015/08/10). Though "combat" indicates the current gravity of poaching, "brighter" suggests improvement on the issue, in particular due to Chinese-Kenyan cooperation.

This section examined the framing of Chinese environmental aid, which again presents China as both a leader and in solidarity with developing countries.

The overall section found the following frames in the sustainable development coverage in the Chinese media studied: Chinese climate leadership in COP21, China-US collaboration, repercussions for environmental crime, Chinese innovation and green technology, pollution in China, and Chinese environmental aid.

## **2.** Human Rights

Chinese media covered significantly less human rights news than sustainable development. Of the 97 articles collected and analysed, only 17 contained coverage of human rights, while 80 covered sustainable development. Human rights articles mostly focused on China's efforts to improve working conditions locally and abroad, and some articles covered Chinese human rights violations.

2.1. Chinese jobs empower African communities

Many human rights articles cover different Chinese role players' efforts to create job opportunities and improve working conditions, locally and in Africa. According to CCTV, the Chinese-built Standard Gauge Railway Project in Kenya is "changing the lives of local communities" (CCTV, 2015/11/05). Chinese operations seem efficient, as CCTV reports the new railway is "ahead of schedule". Interviewee Mololo Kioko explains that the project offers "a rare opportunity" because he now gets a regular salary, "which makes all the difference". Xinhua reported that at Kioko's former public sector employment, "money is not guaranteed". This coverage suggests that China provides financial security to Kenyan locals, which is reportedly uncommon for Kenyans. The article emphasises China's capability to offer better job opportunities than local Kenyan government or businesses, which implies Chinese superiority in this regard.

An emphasis on Kioko, "father of one's", parenthood implies the Chinese project is beneficial to more than just individual employees but also their families, and, by implication, the broader community. This reportedly requires some sacrifice. "Mololo will be spending several months away from his family, but he says, it's a sacrifice worth making" Chinese-owned companies also reportedly make sacrifices for its employees. While the copper price has dropped to a record low, the China Non-Ferrous Group-owned Chimbisi copper mine in Zambia "will not cut production, or reduce staff or investments" (CCTV, 2015/11/27). Assistant CEO of NFC Africa, John Mtonga, explains that they are "responsible for looking after so many people working for NFCA" (CCTV, 2015/11/27).

CCTV praises the NFCA, "the largest Chinese investor in Zambia", for creating 140 000 jobs in Zambia. Since job creation is "paramount" to Zambians, Chinese investment seems crucial to the survival and well-being of Zambian communities. According to Zambian officials, only job creation can "improve their standard of

living, the quality of life" (2015/11/27). The insert includes a caveat to put to rest the skepticism of unsustainable Chinese employment in Africa. "There is no doubt that Chinese investors have been sustainable, they have not been here today gone tomorrow. They have remained with us in difficult times and in good times" (CCTV, 2015/11/27). This can again serve as a form of Shi's (2013) charm defensive, as the coverage provides a counter image to an existing negative narrative about Chinese employment.

As mentioned above, China's influence through business and industry seems beneficial to the well-being of African communities. In Zambia, "NFCA also funded a hospital offering free medical treatment for local staff". NFCA has agreed that "employees can claim medical treatment for up to four family members" (CCTV, 2015/11/27). Additionally, China's Zhong Gan Engineering and Construction built the Chinese-designed Tsabong Unified Secondary School in Tsabong, rural Botswana. The project employed 20 Chinese along with 420 Batswana. "The number of local employees is expected to reach 550 as the project is going on" (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). Xinhua emphasises the inclusion of local employees, which provides a counter-narrative to existing ideas that Chinese companies in Africa mainly employ Chinese citizens. School head, Segametsi Matlho, noted that "the school has received a lot of assistance from the company, which is very friendly" (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). This suggests a positive relationship between Zhong Gan and Tsabong, contributing to the image of mutually beneficial relationships between African communities and Chinese business.

The community seems generally satisfied with the Zhong Gan's community involvement. A parent says, "the buildings they are constructing have impressed me, I can see they will be better than old ones in the junior school" (Xinhua, 2015/08/05). The school project reportedly surpasses mere "assistance" but is also "implementing social responsibilities", such as HIV tests, and prioritises the "local community's other requests for help". Xinhua reported that Zhong Gan collaborates with the Botswana Construction Industry Trust Fund (CITF) to provide skills training to employees, such as Edwin Selabe. "Zhong Gan provided me trainings like scaffold erecting, which have improved my skills, I'm happy with that. Through trainings, I have changed my stage from a labour to a trained man", Selabe said. These personal accounts portray Chinese business as empowering its African employees. They also

highlight local satisfaction. Selabe added: “I’m satisfied, but if I have any problems, I could talk with the site manager directly. So there was no problem working with Zhong Gan. I'm happy.” Africans therefore seem highly satisfied with Chinese business in Africa.

### 2.2. Improved labour conditions

Some articles mention China’s successes in improving labour conditions. “China had 38.6 percent fewer deaths resulting from coal mine accidents in the first eight months of 2015 than it did in the same period last year” (Xinhua, 2015/09/24). Additionally, the State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS) reported “no accidents with more than 30 deaths for 29 months in a row”. However, SAWS spokesperson, Huang Yi, said coal mines “are still dangerous and need to be more strictly supervised” (Xinhua, 2015/09/24). Coverage of labour conditions relies on statistics and numbers. “Coal mine accidents that killed 10 to 30 people declined 83.3 percent from a year ago. Last year's deaths represented a sharp decline from about 7,000 in 2002” (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). Coverage of deaths in Chinese coal mines through statistics rather than personal profiles or names, creates the impression that the employees’ lives are dispensable, as they are treated as numbers.

Coverage of Chinese employment safety often includes government responses. “Huang vowed that the administration would promote safety precautions and inspect workplaces to make sure there are no violations” (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). Proactive responses are reportedly already implemented by the Chinese government. “China's Cabinet has ordered the closure of 1,052 mines this year, with nearly half of them closed already” (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). This again demonstrates constructive journalism – coverage of a problem is followed by a solution (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016). However, while the article implies coal production cuts are intended to improve labour conditions, it reveals that it is a “move mainly aimed at curbing slumping coal prices” (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). Xinhua thus portrays a predominantly economic decision as human rights driven. This illustrates Chinese media’s framing that could be designed to improve China’s image.

Coverage of improved labour conditions includes accountability for human rights violations. Xinhua reported that according to SAWS, enterprises “will be put on the

blacklist" (Xinhua, 2015/08/10) if they have records of illegal activities, such as major work safety accidents. SAWS will reportedly release the blacklist quarterly, and "conduct random checks on blacklisted firms" annually. The blacklist will "expire after one year but the term will be extended to three years if the firm goes on the blacklist again" (Xinhua, 2015/08/10). This article explains SAWS' elaborate strategy to prevent corruption and negligence affecting labour safety. It serves as an educational source of information explaining the Chinese government's latest labour policies. This demonstrates a form of "development journalism" (Christians et al., 2009) wherein media are used as a tool to empower communities through knowledge. Additionally, SAWS will increase surveillance, targeting "industries related to dangerous chemicals, explosives, fireworks, elevators, non-coal mines, public transportation and ports" (Xinhua, 2015/08/18). This highlights the role of supervision in China's human rights improvements. Additionally, its focus on chemicals suggests that the government's new labour policies form part of its response to the Tianjin blast mentioned above. Xinhua's coverage thus serves as damage control to the Chinese government's image, harmed by the incident.

As mentioned above, some articles portray economically-driven government policies as motivated primarily through human rights. According to Xinhua, the Chinese government's well-intentioned leave policies are in conflict with its labour culture. Employers "have forced workers to take paid leave, without regard for workers' choice and individual circumstances" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). The article states that 50 percent of employees do not take paid leave "due to concerns that taking vacation might give their bosses the impression they are lazy and influence future job promotions". Additionally, while employees should receive reimbursement for unfulfilled vacation, violations are "common in many sectors". The policy thus has the "good intentions of advocating rest" but employees are reportedly unfairly penalised for taking paid leave.

The same article eventually reveals the economic motivation of the policy – it impacts local tourism. Chinese authorities promote paid leave "as part of the country's plan for economic restructuring, promoting consumption and developing the service industry. They hope the time off will give people a chance to shop and spend on travel and leisure" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). This again illustrates how an economically-driven

policy promotes human rights in Chinese media coverage. Workers' "recreational rights" including a potential half-day Friday, intends to give them "extra time for weekend travel and boosting the tourism industry" (Xinhua, 2015/08/12). Additionally, these measures help employees avoid the peak traveling season, which could "tap the full potential of tourism consumption" (Xinhua, 2015/08/12).

Citizens are reportedly concerned about the policy's implementation. "We cannot take annual leave in the first five years of work, not to mention more holidays", employee Zhang Ying said. According to Zheng Dongliang, the Work Science Research Institute's director, employers may struggle to implement more paid leave because "many enterprises are struggling during the ongoing economic transformation. Increasing holidays means more labor costs for businesses" (Xinhua, 2015/08/12). Thus, while the leave policy intends to improve working conditions, "forced labor, forced extension of work hours, withholding back pay and refusal to buy insurance for workers are lasting problems in some parts of China and violations of basic labor rights" (Xinhua, 2015/08/08). This article illustrates a mistrust in policy implementation, as well as a lack of focus on Chinese citizens' true priorities. An image of disconnect and tension between the Chinese government and its labour force thus emerges.

According to Xinhua, the Chinese government promotes vocational training to ensure its citizens' employability. The Ministry of Education's labour education in schools will focus on "skills such as sewing, craftsmanship, cooking, housework and other essential tasks. Students will also attend internships at farms, factories and service companies in order to nurture more hands-on skills and accentuate the value of labor" (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). The Chinese government is reportedly concerned that "manual jobs and productions are undervalued" among young people, and the shift "is to help cull the admiration for 'becoming rich overnight'" (Xinhua, 2015/08/04). This article illustrates China's pragmatic approach to labour, and highlights the importance of Chinese citizens' buy-in to the greater Chinese economic strategy. At the same time, Xinhua reported that because of a greater commitment to labour rights – "rising wages" – the Chinese government now has to "replace human labor with robots" (2015/08/04).

### 2.3. Official human rights engagements

Human rights coverage in Chinese media focuses on official conventions and policies. This includes policy coverage, such as China's ratification of the "2006 Maritime Labor Convention (MLC)" (Xinhua, 2015/08/29), and its involvement in official events, such as the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament. Coverage tends to highlight the calibre of events China engages in. For example, China's "top legislator", Zhang Dejiang, spoke at a human rights event at "the United Nations headquarters" where UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reportedly delivered opening remarks. The focus on official and influential individuals emphasises the high level of the conference, leading to the conference theme becoming secondary to the event itself.

Xinhua also reported that Zhang met with IPU President Saber Chowdhury and IPU Secretary-General Martin Chungong, "who thanked him for his participation in the conference". These mentions portray the Chinese government as highly respected. IPU also thanked China for "its long-term support" and reportedly looked forward to "deepening the cooperation" (Xinhua, 2015/08/31). According to Xinhua, Zhang attended Chowdhury's reception where he engaged with other speakers on mutual concerns. The Chinese government's portrayal as included in the inner circle of human rights organisations and individuals creates the image of cooperation and collaboration, which contributes to the frame that China has improved its human rights record.

Xinhua reports that China's development path reflects "distinctive Chinese features", which include a Chinese interpretation of human rights (Xinhua, 2015/09/01). This interpretation partly emphasises non-interference. Zhang advocates that "all countries should abide by the international law and universally recognized basic norms governing international relations, respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs" (Xinhua, 2015/08/31). The Chinese government has called for respect for sovereignty, particularly to prevent organisations such as the United Nations from interfering with China's tense relationships with its neighbours, which have been perceived as violating human rights.

Finally, coverage also compared human rights in China and in the US. An article on the 19th Human Rights Dialogue, hosted by the two countries, reported the US and

China “exchanged views in a candid and professional manner”. This explicit mention suggests the civil engagement is newsworthy, which, in turn, implies tension between China and the US around human rights. According to a news release published in Xinhua, China and the US cooperate, despite differences in approaches to human rights. “China and the U.S. should take a comprehensive and objective view on each other's human rights situation and handle their differences in a constructive way” (Xinhua, 2015/08/15).

The dialogue focused on “legal and conceptual perspectives of human rights” (Xinhua 2015/08/15). The Chinese delegation advocates for human rights implementation to suit national realities rather than be imposed upon by other countries. This statement is in defense of the Chinese government’s continued scrutiny by developed countries, such as the US, for China’s human rights violations. According to Xinhua, the Chinese government turned the lens on the US itself, pointing out its human rights problems, such as “racial discrimination, excessive use of force by police, and the violation of the human rights of other countries through massive surveillance activities” (Xinhua, 2015/08/15). Highlighting the US’ own human rights violations discredits them, which leaves their criticism of China with less substance.

This section explored Chinese media’s framing of China’s human rights. The following frames were established: Chinese jobs empower African communities, improved labour conditions, and official human rights engagements.

Additionally, this chapter discussed the coverage of China’s sustainable development and human rights record in Chinese media. China is primarily portrayed is a climate leader, particularly of developed nations. Its status as developing country and its solidarity with developing nations are emphasised throughout the coverage. Coverage of China’s progressive responses to climate change in Chinese media displays characteristics of constructive journalism – focusing on the Chinese government’s solutions for climate problems. China’s commitment to climate change mitigation is depicted as a valuable diplomatic strategy to create and maintain official relationships with collaborative partners. Chinese media characterise Chinese leadership through its country leader, President Xi Jinping. China is presented as a potential competitor to the US for global leadership.

Chinese media further portray China as a country with strict environmental laws, rules and regulations, as well as heavy punishment for violations of those laws. A recurring theme in this coverage is the Chinese government's application of surveillance, scrutiny and supervision. China is portrayed as advancing renewable energy through innovation and technology. However, a large amount of coverage focuses on pollution in China, characterised by the 2015 Tianjin blast and smog. The analysed Chinese media coverage focused on the Chinese government's swift, proactive response to the blast. Reports on air pollution created the image of a dire situation, often highlighting the severity of the impact of the smog on Chinese citizens. Coverage of important public diplomacy events hosted in China reveals how pollution relates to Chinese nation branding. This study found that coverage of Chinese air pollution impacts China's soft power potential. Chinese media also focused on Chinese environmental aid, portraying China as heroic, extraordinary and selfless. Coverage of China's contribution to conservation highlights the importance of conservation to China's soft power success in Africa.

Human rights coverage was quite scarce in Chinese media. Many articles cover different Chinese role players' efforts to create job opportunities and improve working conditions, locally and in Africa. China is portrayed as providing sustainable employment and being beneficial to the well-being of its African employees' families and communities. Some articles mention China's successes in improving labour conditions. Coverage of Chinese employment safety often includes proactive government responses. Coverage also indicates Chinese media's portrayal of economic decisions as human rights-focused decisions. Human rights coverage in Chinese media focuses on official conventions and policies. The Chinese government's portrayal as included in the inner circle of human rights organisations and individuals creates the image of cooperation and collaboration, which contributes to the frame that China has improved its human rights record. Finally, coverage also implies tension between China and the US around human rights.

# CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to make a contribution to the conceptual framework of soft power by examining the role of the media in the light of the increasingly important relationship between China and Africa. The China-Africa relationship has seen significant growth in recent years since the implementation of China's "Going Out" policy, encouraging China to increase trade and diplomacy with African nations. As mentioned at the outset of the study, this relationship has been controversial. In Chapter Three some of the criticism against China's presence in Africa was summarised. This included accusations of China acting like a neocolonial power and lacking concern for good governance, transparency, press freedom, and labour and human rights, and environmental protection in particular.

This study focused on the media dimension of the China-Africa engagement. This focus is important, as China's media expansion is aimed at improving perceptions of its engagement with Africa. By investing in the "Going Out" of its state-owned media platforms such as Xinhua, China Daily and CCTV (now CGTN), China aims to wield its soft power to prove itself a reliable and trustworthy trade partner. South Africa, through its BRICS membership, as well as other diplomatic relations, is one of the key countries China seeks to improve ties with.

This study discussed the media's role in China's pursuit of wielding soft power, specifically while China is perceived as having a lack of respect for human rights or environmental protection. China's negative sustainable development and human rights reputation could hamper its soft power successes in Africa, as China might be perceived as neocolonial, rather than a peaceful trade partner. The study was conducted using a qualitative framing analysis to examine the coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights in both South African and English-language Chinese media. It further explored the potential influences on both South African and Chinese journalists when covering China, through in-depth interviews.

Ultimately, this study aimed to address the following Research Questions:

RQ1) How China's human rights and sustainability record is portrayed in South African media; RQ2) How China's human rights and sustainability record is

portrayed in Chinese media in return; RQ3) What South African journalists' attitudes towards Chinese soft power efforts are; and RQ4) What Chinese journalists' attitudes towards Chinese soft power efforts are.

## 1. Summary of overall findings

*RQ1: South African media:*

*Sustainable development*

This study found that a dominant frame in South African media coverage of China is China as key perpetrator in illegal wildlife trade and poaching. China in its entirety is often portrayed as responsible for wildlife destruction in Africa, and the study found a lack of nuanced coverage of the poaching issue – particularly regarding the specifics around who is involved and in what way. Frames affirming Chinese anti-poaching policy and efforts also emerged, but they often include sceptical undertones, and ultimately China is unable to escape its reputation as poacher in South African media. The study found that South African wildlife coverage often centres around the duality of good and bad: China as perpetrator is also juxtaposed by the western protectors of Africa, specifically the UK, via the coverage of British royalty. Additionally, through coverage of the poaching of Cecil the Lion as discussed in Chapter 5, the USA was positioned as destructive to African wildlife, and in relation, China was presented as the conservationist and ally. Ultimately, nuanced representation of poaching is crucial to China's reputation, and poaching can impact China's ability to wield soft power in Africa.

China and the USA were often framed in competition with each other, but the USA's climate change leadership was clearly established, as well as the USA's paternalistic attitude towards China. However, references to the USA's lack of credibility as climate leader, particularly due to its own disregard of international environmental law, also emerged. This illustrated the USA's success in wielding soft power – they have managed to be perceived as the global climate leader, and in particular with authority over China, while there is no basis for them to be in this position.

Climate change articles focused heavily on China as top carbon emitter, especially in light of the Conference of Parties (COP21) coverage, but frames of China's proactive policies, growing leadership, and its solidarity with developing nations in the climate negotiations also emerged. China's solidarity with developing nations is particularly important in light of climate change – as a developing country itself, according the United Nations' climate agreements, China is exempt from offering mandatory funding to global sustainable development, while developed countries are not. China's climate funding as a developing country was portrayed as selfless and an expression of true solidarity with its fellow developing nations. Through the solidarity frame, South African media itself thus showed some solidarity with China in both embracing its developing country status and placing its green funding in high regard.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the association with China as both a developing nation that is to some extent exempt from climate funding, and at the same time a self-appointed climate funder, as well as a developing country going beyond UN expectations to reduce its carbon emissions, successfully contributes to its wielding of soft power. This is further illustrated in COP21 coverage that is critical of the USA's emissions and underperformance in climate mitigation, in particular as a developed country – which challenges the USA's soft power success mentioned above. Again a good bad duality arises from the coverage in South African media: as the USA is seen in a negative light, a positive light on China increases.

South African media coverage focused closely on China as a polluted country, drawing specifically on two events to characterise that - the Tianjin blast and Beijing's smog alerts. This coverage painted a dire picture of China and emotive language illustrated the severity of its pollution. The coverage was highly critical of the Chinese government, had an undertone of fear and evoked a sense of pity towards the impacted, vulnerable Chinese citizens. Ironically, aside from the preferred western sources they were able to access, South African media had to rely on official Chinese sources and state media to report on these events.

Because South African media sourced Chinese media, it therefore essentially adopted both critical and constructive journalism (as discussed in Chapter 3) as it was used in Chinese media. Chinese media contained some critical coverage in this period focusing on citizens' dissatisfaction, as well as constructive journalism, which

focused on the Chinese government's proactive response. Because South African media were relying on these media sources, they essentially reproduced similar frames of both citizen dissatisfaction and government responding proactively. The Chinese coverage of these events is discussed in more detail below. South African media coverage was also critical of the Chinese government's efforts to apply censorship during these two events, particularly from Chinese social media platforms.

While the South African media coverage of China's sustainable development contains pessimistic frames about China's negative environmental impact – such as its role in wildlife trafficking or pollution – optimistic frames also emerged, such as China's climate leadership. Additionally, China was positioned as a source of green technology and renewable energy investment, that benefits the African continent in particular. China's innovation and increasing commitment to solutions for sustainability contributes to the larger frame of China shaping itself to be a climate leader, and to be a worthy competitor against current western environmental leadership.

Finally, India as competitor for global climate leadership and future preferred African partner also emerged. South African media often portrayed China and India together as the developing countries with the highest carbon emissions. While coverage generally positions China as proactively reducing its carbon emissions, India is portrayed as resisting doing the same, as a form of protest against developed countries. In this and other ways India is suggested as able to offer Africa more genuine solidarity than China. India in fact openly challenges the Chinese influence on the continent. South African media coverage of India illustrates how solidarity with Africa is firmly rooted in the extent of a partnering country's resistance to the west.

*Human Rights:*

Compared to sustainable development, human rights received limited coverage in South African media during the same period. South African media coverage of China's human rights often focus on natural or man-made disasters related to China, and depicts China as creating unsafe work environments for both local and international employees. Human rights coverage relied on a variety of sources,

including the Chinese government, human rights groups, individuals on the ground, and South African and international journalists. This section showed that China is often accused of neocolonialism in Africa, characterised by its lack of respect for human rights, which is emphasised through grassroots interviews for South African media's human-interest stories. China is furthermore portrayed as currently lacking human rights legislation, and that its legal system allows or encourages human rights violations. In its current economic framework, Chinese human rights are not perceived as needs, but privileges – and human rights violations are portrayed as Chinese pragmatism. However, the image of China lacking respect of the law also implies that it is a risky trade partner for Africa.

An optimistic frame about China's human rights improvements also emerged, mostly via a series of promotion articles written on journalists' visits to China. Finally, some articles lauded China for its humanitarian efforts, but the coverage is not significant enough to outweigh the depiction of China as human rights violator. For example, Chinese anti-torture legislation is overshadowed by NGOs' publicisation of its monitoring of China's human rights violations. Coverage suggests China is aware of perceptions of its human rights impact and recognises that these will slowly change over time.

*RQ2: Chinese media:*

*Sustainable development*

Chinese media's coverage of China's sustainable development optimistically portrayed China as a climate leader, particularly of developing nations. Key roleplayers in the climate movement, including from western nations, are often quoted praising China's carbon reduction efforts. It is ironic that despite China's competitiveness with the west, for climate leadership in particular, Chinese state media rely on endorsements from western influential figures for credibility. China's status as developing country and its solidarity with developing nations are emphasised throughout the coverage, and similar to the South African coverage mentioned above, China is praised for exceeding international expectations as both developing country and selfless climate funder of other developing countries. Although as mentioned above, China's reliance on its developing nation status to promote solidarity with

Africa and other developing countries may prove successful in its competition with the USA and other developed countries, but might end up being less credible to other potential forces on the African continent like India, who claim they can provide a more genuine solidarity.

Coverage of China's progressive responses to climate change in Chinese media displays characteristics of constructive journalism – focusing primarily on the Chinese government's solutions for climate problems. China's commitment to climate change mitigation is depicted as a valuable diplomatic strategy to create and maintain official relationships with collaborative partners. As part of its cooperation frame, China is also portrayed as a country that respects official structures and systems, including the United Nations and the USA – both of which China has been viewed to have tension with. Chinese media characterises Chinese leadership through its country leader, President Xi Jinping. This is again in contrast to South African media which does not present Xi or any other individual as the "face" of China. South African journalists in this study noted that there is no human face to China which contributes to it being viewed as mysterious and potentially dangerous.

China is presented as a potential competitor to the US for global leadership. China is also presented as amicably cooperating with the US despite their ideological differences. As mentioned above, Chinese media coverage of the USA-China relationship often includes praise from influential US figures. It is ironic that Chinese state media portrays China as receiving approval from the country they are currently competing with.

Chinese media further portrays China as a country with strict environmental laws, rules and regulations, as well as heavy punishment for violations of those laws – this coverage again represents constructive journalism. A recurring theme in this coverage is the Chinese government's application of surveillance, scrutiny and supervision of its environmental impact. China's application of supervision for conservation illustrates its environmental commitment, which could improve its environmental reputation. However, censorship and surveillance is one of the key reasons China's global influence on freedom of expression is feared, and therefore this frame might in fact emphasise the supervision itself more than its intentions towards conservation. China is further portrayed as advancing renewable energy through innovation and

technology. Voices from key figures in organisations such as the UN were again sourced to give credibility to China's green technology. Chinese journalists noted in their interview responses that NGO or expert sources need to be approved by the Chinese government.

Coverage of important public diplomacy events hosted in China revealed how pollution relates to Chinese nation branding, and how air pollution in China can impact its soft power potential. A large amount of coverage focused on pollution in China, characterised by the 2015 Tianjin blast and smog. The analysed Chinese media coverage focused on the Chinese government's swift, proactive response to the blast and essentially emphasised the Chinese government's capability to deal with an environmental crisis. Reports on air pollution created the image of a dire situation, often highlighting the severity of the impact of the smog on Chinese citizens, and the disruption of their daily lives. Although rarely, reports also contained critical coverage of the local governments – particularly focusing on citizens' dissatisfaction with a lack of transparency by the Chinese government in dealing with both the blast and smog events. This study found that Chinese state-owned media produced critical coverage of the Chinese government during the Tianjin blast and smog periods, which contradicts the stereotype that Chinese media is incapable of producing coverage critical of government because they are purely the government's propaganda arm.

Chinese media also focused on Chinese environmental aid, an aspect of Chinese soft power, and portrayed China as heroic, extraordinary and selfless. Reports suggested a potential sense of superiority of China over Africa, and its assistance comes across as paternalistic. However, because Chinese assistance is portrayed as so well-received by Africa, coverage of China's conservation aid, highlights its importance, and the importance of associating China with conservation, to China's soft power success in Africa.

*Human Rights:*

Human rights coverage was quite scarce in Chinese media. Many articles covered different Chinese roleplayers' efforts to create job opportunities and improve working conditions, locally and in Africa. China was portrayed as providing sustainable employment and being beneficial to the well-being of its African employees' families

and communities. This can be interpreted both as a charm defensive – responding to the stereotype of China's exploitative and unsustainable nature of employment, but at times a sense of superiority regarding China's ability to provide better job opportunities to Africans emerged.

Human rights coverage in Chinese media focused primarily on official conventions and policies. Some articles mentioned China's successes in improving labour conditions, which included coverage of the Chinese government's proactive responses to employment safety. The Chinese government's portrayal as included in the inner circle of international human rights organisations and individuals, creates the image of cooperation and collaboration, which contributes to the frame that China has improved its human rights record. Coverage also implied tension between China and the US around human rights and showcased Chinese government challenging the USA's self-righteous position regarding human rights, while having many of its own violations.

Finally, coverage indicated Chinese media's portrayal of economic decisions as human rights-focused decisions – indicating how the Chinese media uses framing to improve China's human rights reputation, and accordingly increase its soft power potential.

*RQ3: Influences on South African journalists:*

Chapter 6 of this study analysed the results of interviews with South African journalists to determine the potential individual, routine, organisational, extra-media, and ideological influences as determined by Reese (2001) on their coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights reputation. The results of these interviews show that South African journalists only cover China in a cursory manner – as it becomes relevant to their current journalistic focus. A key focus of this chapter was South African journalists' perceptions of China's human rights and environmental impact, which revealed a variety of views. Most South African journalists perceive China as exploitative, extractionist, careless and harmful towards the environment. However, some of these journalists have not directly engaged with China and reported to draw on what they consume in the media or hear from peers to inform their opinion of China's environmental impact. Some journalists perceive

China's environmental impact in Africa as an expected, logical and normalised side-effect of development, and that China does not necessarily intentionally disregard the environment. These journalists also maintain that China's environmental impact is not worse than both the historical and current environmental impact of developed countries in Africa.

South African journalists reported that they are pressured to provide stories that sell or get clicks, due to the financial pressure of South African newsrooms. They indicated that news about rhino poaching sells well, and for this reason is likely to feature on the news agenda often. As mentioned above, South African media portrayed China as the key perpetrator of poaching, and its frequent coverage could further contribute to China's poacher reputation, negatively affecting its soft power potential.

Journalists also perceive China to negatively impact human rights in Africa, particularly in favour of capitalism. Similar to environmental exploitation, China's perceived lax human rights is viewed by South African journalists as an automatic side-effect of economic growth. Journalists' lack of understanding of China's approach to human rights vs the western approach that South Africa currently aligns with, could further the us vs them ideology when covering China. South African journalists could cover anything outside of the western human rights framework as a violation. One viewpoint that emerged was an agreement with Chinese journalists that China's human rights reputation has been shaped by western "propaganda".

Financial constraints are a key challenge South African journalists face when covering China-Africa, as the culture of "churnalism" (Davies, 2009) further develops, and because China-Africa is a particularly expensive topic to research, as one journalist pointed out. South African journalists strive for objectivity, a principle embedded in their journalistic education, despite the fact that they recognise it to be idealistic, reflecting Tuchman's (1972) "strategic ritual" of objectivity. Some journalists interviewed in this study disregard objectivity because they consider their journalism to be a form of activism. Journalists' perception of their role in society – the blurring lines between activist and journalist – might influence their coverage of China, especially taking in account their abovementioned perception of China's environmental and human rights impact.

Though most South African journalists agree that ownership does not directly or explicitly influence their editorial content, journalists employed at Independent Media experienced big shifts in their publication's ownership, primarily during "the sale" – Chinese-linked Sekunjalo's takeover. These journalists felt powerless when instructed to cover China with prominence and positive angles that they disapproved of, illustrating how ownership outweighs personal perceptions when covering China.

South African journalists aim to include a multiplicity of voices in their articles including government, NGOs, experts and ideally, people directly affected by an issue. Regarding state sources, South African journalists complain about the inaccessibility of both the South African and Chinese government, and they are considered time-intensive sources because of "the door-stopper effect" (Interviewee 4). With only one exception, South African journalists interviewed for this study do not consult Chinese media or press releases. They prefer staying informed via international, particularly western, news sources, even though some of them are concerned that these sources or press releases might be overly critical of China.

Overall, this study has found that South African journalists find China either inaccessible or inherently distrust Chinese media and sources. South African journalists also do not trust *Xinhua* in particular, because it is considered to be pro-government propaganda, spin, false and uninteresting. Some journalists are conflicted about their hypocrisy of distrusting *Xinhua*, while more comfortably consuming western state-owned media, which they acknowledge inadequately portrays Africa. South African journalists often refer to the contention between the South African press and the South African government – essentially characterised by a deep mistrust of the state by South African media. These journalists argue that China's soft power is damaged by their close relationship with the South African government as it contributes to South African media's mistrust of China.

Journalists' lack of knowledge and understanding of China, as well as China's inaccessibility, has hampered South African journalists' in-depth engagement with the China-Africa topic and led to a lack of nuanced coverage, often contributing to China's image as neocolonial. For example, few journalists deliberately distinguish between Chinese business and Chinese government as separate but interlinked entities. South African journalists believe China-Africa coverage should empower

South African readers, not only with how Chinese business works but also with China's diplomacy, because these two topics are so deeply connected.

Though South African journalists believe China-Africa relations is a crucial topic, coverage remains limited, and it is not viewed as important to all South African audiences. South African journalists therefore consider the topic to be largely of academic interest and not high on their news agenda. This study confirms Wasserman's (2016) argument that South African journalists are primarily interested in the economic and political aspects of the China topic, but additionally found that journalists also believe in the news value of China's sustainable development and human rights reputation. South African journalists that perceive China's impact in Africa as neocolonial – might produce critical coverage of China aimed at warning readers about its influence.

South African journalists believe the media can impact China's image and some believe it already has. However, regardless of positive or negative reporting on China, journalists doubt it affects government policy – however they remain cautious about Chinese media interference impacting South Africa's freedom of speech. This is particularly due to the Chinese government's own applications of censorship in China, and its close relationship with the South African government, which leads to further skepticism of the Chinese government. Journalists do not consider Xi Jinping to be China's relatable, human face as is seen in Chinese media coverage. Instead, South African journalists argue that coverage of China further perpetuates the villainisation of an unknown China while the west is humanised.

South African journalists regularly covering China understand soft power, but those journalists who rarely cover China, associate soft power with fear and danger. However, some journalists are aware of Chinese soft power strategies without necessarily being familiar with the terminology. This is in contrast to Chinese journalists' heightened awareness of China's soft power efforts. South African journalists perceive China's media diplomacy in South Africa to be unsuccessful, mostly because of its inaccessibility. China's media investments in South Africa are viewed as potentially counter-productive and might in fact feed suspicion of China, rather than building a positive image. Soft power via media investments is virtually unattainable, as one journalist notes that not even the USA with its great soft power

has been successful in this regard. South Africa has a particularly robust media system, and media investments might not lead to an audience penetration with positive news on China.

South African journalists perceive Chinese government and business to ineffectively engage with South African media, and therefore pose the question whether media engagement is important to China's soft power at all. According to the journalists, China's soft power does not reflect its relevance to the African continent, particularly as wielded through media investments. The journalists perceive China's most successful wielding of soft power to stem from concrete solutions such as China's health diplomacy, which has the potential to fulfil even a charm defensive mandate.

*RQ4: Influences on Chinese journalists:*

Chapter 7 of this study explored the influences on Chinese journalists as proposed by Reese's (2001) hierarchy of influences. This study found that China's state media ownership, an organisational influence, outweighs all other influences on Chinese journalists.

Chinese journalists' coverage is clearly dictated by the Chinese government, which has led to their journalistic training and skills being less valuable than a strong command of English to be employed at an English-language Chinese publication. The Chinese journalists interviewed consider their journalistic positions to be admirable and competitive, particularly at *Xinhua*, because of Chinese state-owned news organisations' close proximity to the Chinese government. This is true for Chinese citizens employed as journalists at Chinese publications in particular – though one journalist noted that they might be considered ordinary in foreign countries, while their jobs are perceived as good, honourable and well respected in China.

Regarding their perceptions of China's sustainable development and human rights impact – a key focus of this study, Chinese journalists believe that sustainability is increasingly prioritised by the Chinese government. Some journalists even claim that the Chinese government prioritises sustainability over their economy, because of China's ambition to be a global climate sustainability leader. The journalists reported seeing increasing media coverage and overall awareness of China's environmental impact, although that excludes China-Africa coverage. Some journalists are aware

that for China's positive environmental reputation to be preserved, some communities have been silenced.

Many Chinese journalists are aware that China has a poor human rights record, but argue that the concept of human rights is used by the west to create a negative image of China. Chinese journalists believe human rights to be a new concept in China, and therefore believe that the Chinese government has the ability to improve its human rights record. However, Chinese journalists currently experience a tightening of freedom of speech, with increased censorship, surveillance and pressure to serve the ruling party, through positive coverage in particular. One view emerged that Chinese journalists believed human rights would improve under Xi Jinping's leadership, but have disappointingly experienced it worsening from a media freedom perspective.

Chinese journalists experience layered hierarchies of censorship at their individual media organisations. Journalists are mandated to write positive stories about China, internal references for the Chinese government that are not published, and a "propaganda task." Propaganda is maintained through the news production process, as each article goes through a series of internal gatekeepers for its politically correctness, including editors, "experts", and "releasers". Distributing propaganda is a key part of Chinese journalists' jobs. One Chinese journalist, that idealises typical watchdog journalism, views this type of government-led journalism as "unprofessional" (Interviewee 15). However, another journalist noted that there is some degree of autonomy in choosing topics if the news value can be justified. Additionally, some journalists see their propaganda role as a service to the Chinese society, as they can potentially empower communities with information, particularly around nation-building issues such as China's poverty reduction goals.

Xinhua newsrooms experience a particular type of censorship as they are managed by the Chinese foreign ministry, who reviews all their articles going to their international audiences. According to the journalists in this study *Xinhua* is also viewed as the loudspeaker of the Chinese government, which requires tighter censorship. Chinese journalists find it challenging to balance fulfilling their propaganda task with also attracting foreign audiences, and especially penetrating the western media system.

Most Chinese journalists consider themselves to be objective, because the concept of objectivity is required from their publications. Chinese journalists thus

compartmentalise their learned objectivity, an unattainable ideal, which is ironically promoted by their training at state-owned institutions, and their expected loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party and government. The Chinese journalists in this study believe that western media is not able to achieve objectivity either. Chinese journalists are highly aware of the state-ownership of their publications, which has been characterised by censorship, scrutiny, and surveillance, and they fear the repercussions of making mistakes, which often leads to self-censorship. Journalists are willing to navigate the impact of censorship for the incentives that Chinese publications offer, such as financial and other benefits, and particularly status for working closely with the state.

It is important to note that while censorship is a key influence on Chinese journalists, some journalists reported that their media programmes do offer material to Chinese citizens who are critical of government. Furthermore, Chinese journalists easily manage to get around social media censorship, which interferes with their international digital marketing of their publications, and maintain that complete online censorship is impossible. Although Chinese publications are state-owned, they have become increasingly commercialised, and experience the same pressures to make profit as most other media.

Regarding their media consumption, Chinese journalists rarely consume media from African publications, apart from a few South African sources. They generally stay informed through local Chinese publications or mainstream international English-language media. According to the interviewed journalists, they have found that Chinese audiences generally prefer stereotypical negative reporting on Africa. Unlike South African journalists' choices of sources, Chinese journalists most commonly use government officials as their primary sources, but experts or intellectuals are also accepted, if selected from a government-approved pool that will offer acceptable commentary. Similarly, journalists have a good relationship with government-approved NGO sources, but are not allowed to interview NGOs that are critical of government. However, one journalist noted that they may interview opposition or other political parties than the Chinese Communist Party.

Finally, Chinese journalists are highly aware of the importance of the China-Africa relationship, which they emphasise is not new and also do not consider to be colonial,

but mutually beneficial. They believe that Africa is necessary to China for resources and political clout. This relationship is thus crucial to China's soft power strategy, which is essentially based on Chinese culture, and at its core includes China's rich history and Confucianism. Some journalists have been unaware of countries' skeptical attitude towards China about the China-Africa engagement.

Chinese journalists, highly aware of China's soft power goals, perceive their role in promoting Chinese soft power abroad as crucial, particularly through their promotion of official terminology. In contrast to South African journalists, Chinese journalists are convinced that media is central to soft power. Some Chinese journalists view their importance to China's soft power as a "charm defensive" approach – defending China's negative reputation that has been shaped by western media. China also collaboratively develops Africa's "charm defensive" through positive coverage of Africa, because Chinese media relates to being misrepresented in international media. According to the journalists, while Chinese media is mandated to maintain a positive image of Africa, they often further perpetuate stereotypical reporting of Africa.

## 2. Discussion of Findings

To fill the gaps identified in the literature review in Chapter 3, this study examined journalists as both receptors of soft power, as well as tools to promote soft power. The focus on Chinese and South African journalists and their local media contexts also addresses a weakness in current public diplomacy research of failing to expand beyond the scope of the United States. This study specifically looked at the coverage of human rights and sustainable development, to determine how these neglected topics are covered in South African and Chinese media.

*Chinese media as propaganda*

The theme of Chinese media as propaganda has emerged in this study in several ways – while South African media distrusts Chinese media because they consider their content to be propaganda, Chinese journalists themselves refer to their jobs including a "propaganda task", and do not necessarily refer to this in a negative way. South African journalists rarely consult Chinese media because they distrust its credibility due to government ownership and control. This study corroborates Wasserman (2016)

and Madrid-Morales' (2016) findings that South African journalists do not use Chinese media as a source, particularly in comparison to western media sources, and that *Xinhua* is especially disregarded as a source of propaganda. This study therefore highlights Chinese journalists' challenge to act as a mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party through their "propaganda tasks" and trying to be a credible and interesting news source. South African journalists indeed do not find Chinese media articles credible or appealing.

Even though Chinese media's access to a wide range of resources, including journalists in the field, can theoretically produce a greater variety of stories, their content is automatically rejected as propaganda. In this study, Chinese journalists proudly emphasised their bigger presence in Africa compared to western outlets, however, these advantages are clouded by Chinese media censorship, close monitoring of journalists and propaganda tasks. In South Africa, serious doubts are cast on any media content that is perceived as propagandistic, which again points to the credibility Chinese media need to be successful as instruments of soft power.

Additionally, the framing analysis in this study found evidence of China's state-owned media's aims to provide an alternative and authentic view of China in Africa (Yanqui & Matingwina, 2016), but as mentioned above, found these efforts to be irrelevant to South African journalists because they disregard Chinese news sources. South African media trusts western media more, and rely on Chinese media mostly when they have no other western options, as seen in South African media coverage of the Tianjin blast. CGTN's (2019) attempts at strengthening China's global reporting ability, as well as expanding its mobile platforms and media convergence, is thus futile as the expansion does not solve the issue of their content, that is rejected as propaganda.

China has come to better understand that its image in the foreign media partly stems from the bias of reporters covering China, and they have therefore suggested journalistic training to reduce journalists' prejudice. The South African journalists in this sample are relatively aware that this bias and a hypocrisy towards Chinese media exists, however reject Chinese state-led training as propaganda as well.

While the literature calls for distinguishing Chinese journalism from just propaganda or positive reporting, as mentioned above, the Chinese journalists interviewed for this

study themselves refer to their reporting as "propaganda tasks." Chinese journalists consider distributing propaganda as a key part of their jobs. While some Chinese journalists experience frustration with their propaganda tasks, and find it unprofessional, other Chinese journalists view their propaganda reporting as a public service role – being a tool of government that informs and empowers its citizens.

This study has thus found that Chinese journalists use different styles of reporting, including constructive journalism and collaborative journalism, as well as other public service roles such as educating and empowering citizens – characteristic of development journalism. Constructive journalism was particularly visible in the Chinese media coverage of the Tianjin blast and smog, which illustrated the Chinese government's proactive response to societal challenges. Collaborative journalism was highlighted in one viewpoint, emphasising the importance of being able to communicate current issues or government policy to disconnected people in rural areas on behalf of the Chinese government.

Furthermore, while censorship is a key influence on Chinese journalists, Chinese media do also at times publish content that is critical of the Chinese government. This critical coverage is rare, however, for example in the case of Chinese media coverage of pollution in China, which revealed both complacency among citizens, as well as outright tension and frustration with government. On the other hand, South African media and media training in general align with the western style of watchdog journalism. This study found however, that some South African journalists criticise this "detached" style of reporting.

Both South African and Chinese journalists find themselves in a complex position in negotiating journalistic objectivity. True to the watchdog journalism reporting style, South African journalists strive for objectivity as an ideal, reflecting Tuchman's (1972) "strategic ritual" of objectivity. However, some South African journalists interviewed in this study disregard objectivity because it interferes with their perception of their role in society – they have positioned themselves within the blurring lines between activist and journalist. On the other hand, Chinese journalists compartmentalise their strife for an unattainable learned and required objectivity, and their expected loyalty and service to the Chinese Communist Party. As mentioned

above, some Chinese journalists view their inability to be critical of government as unprofessional, while others view their propaganda reporting as a public service role.

Finally, Nye (2008) noted that public diplomacy's degeneration into propaganda can be unconvincing and in fact undercut soft power. This seems to be the case with Chinese media investments in South Africa, that have left the journalists interviewed for this study even more cautious of Chinese soft power. The counteractive impact of media investments in Africa will be further discussed below.

*Chinese-South African governments' relationship:*

South African media's reception and portrayal of China's relationship with South Africa could be influenced by their current antagonistic stance towards the South African government. In the interviews conducted for this study, South African journalists suggested that China's close relationship with the South African government can harm its soft power efforts, as according to the interviewees, South African media have a strained relationship with the South African government. This mistrust extends to both the South African public broadcaster as well as Chinese state media. Ironically, China has generally directed its efforts towards foreign government officials and elites, securing cooperation on policies, but neglecting engagement with civil societies (Jijun, 2016). China's close relationship with the South African government is thus negatively impacting its ability to wield soft power among South African journalists.

*Mutual benefits:*

China frames its engagement in Africa as mutually beneficial, rather than asymmetric, (Madrid-Morales, 2016; Tan-Mullins, 2016) through key terms such as a "win-win situation", "partners", "south-south cooperation", "mutual respect" and "non-interference". Chinese journalists view their "propaganda tasks" to include the promotion of this terminology. The strong focus in Chinese media on mutual benefits steers the conversation away from China as neocolonial in Africa, essentially fulfilling a charm defensive mandate.

Chinese journalists generally view Chinese soft power as benign. While some Chinese journalists firmly believe in the mutual benefits of a China-Africa

relationship and do not perceive it as neocolonial, other journalists have become aware that China is in fact treated with skepticism by some African countries.

In particular, this study found that both Chinese and South African media present the China-Africa relationship as rooted in solidarity, expressing camaraderie with "the victimized" (Zhang 2013; 2016) developing world. Both media often emphasise China's developing country status, and present western countries as disapproving of this status – partly due to China's own high carbon emissions. In both South African and Chinese media China is praised for exceeding international expectations as both developing country and selfless climate funder of other developing countries – which affirms China's solidarity with developing nations, and successfully contributes to its wielding of soft power.

However, while China's reliance on its developing nation status to promote solidarity with developing countries may prove successful in its competition with developed countries, it might end up being less credible to other potential forces on the African continent like India, who claim they can provide a more genuine solidarity. This study found a strong frame of competition for leadership in Africa between China and India. China and India are both portrayed as trying to leverage their solidarity with Africa, particularly through anti-western sentiment. However while China's solidarity is mostly based on assistance, India is presented with a stronger, more relatable anti-western attitude because of its shared colonial history with Africa.

Furthermore, China is presented as both climate leader of and in solidarity with Africa. This leadership might create an unequal power dynamic within the China-Africa relationship. Ironically, some South African journalists did bring up the concern of power dynamics in this relationship, but because few South African journalists perceive China as an environmental leader, none of these were based on China's leadership, but rather on the perception of China as neocolonial.

*Neocolonialism:*

South African media often accuse China of neocolonialism in Africa, characterised by its lack of respect for human rights. South African media coverage ultimately reflects tension between a Chinese disregard for environment and Chinese government's

responses to its environmental impact. Journalists' perceptions of China as neocolonial fluctuate: some do, like Zeleza (2008) says, vary from glee to gloom, but there are also more nuanced responses, both from Chinese and South African journalists. South African journalists do not necessarily view China as neocolonial, but generally do view them as exploitative of Africa.

Similarly, South African journalists' responses vary on China's environmental impact. Some journalists argue that China's environmental exploitation is a side-effect of development, not worse than developed countries' historical or current impact. Most South African journalists feel that development from China is going to mean environmental damage, but it is a sacrifice, or side effect, rather than intentional damage. Some journalists' perceptions on China as exploitative has been informed by hearsay or media consumption, as they have not directly engaged with China themselves. Chinese journalists perceive China's sustainable development and human rights status as improving, and that sustainability is even prioritised over China's economy. Chinese journalists also perceive China as a global climate leader and that there is a growing awareness in China about the concept of sustainability. Some journalists are aware that for China's positive environmental reputation to be preserved, some communities have been silenced.

South African journalists also perceive China to negatively impact human rights in Africa, particularly in favour of capitalism. China's lax human rights is also viewed by South African journalists as an automatic side-effect of economic growth and development. Journalists' lack of understanding of China's approach to human rights vs the western approach that South Africa currently aligns with, could influence them to cover anything outside of the western human rights framework as a violation. This study also found that watchdog journalists – both western and South African, are seemingly awarded with the credibility to monitor China's human rights. The current lack of understanding of cultural differences between China and African countries might hamper South African journalists from incorporating terms like human rights and violations more contextually.

Many Chinese journalists are aware that China has a poor human rights record, but argue that the concept of human rights is used by the west to create a negative image of China – which one South African journalist agreed with. Despite improvements in

China's human rights under Xi Jinping, Chinese journalists currently experience a tightening of freedom of speech, with increased censorship, surveillance and pressure to serve the ruling party.

*Limitations to nuanced coverage of China:*

Zeleza (2008) argues that the various positive and negative portrayals of China in African media could fit into one of three frames: imperialism, globalisation and solidarity. These frames were found to be visible in the content analysed in this study, but proved too simplistic for the coverage of China's sustainable development and human rights impact. China is framed as important to the field of climate change, and possibly a global climate leader, while also framed as neocolonial or exploitative. China's role in climate mitigation is optimistically acknowledged, particularly for its renewable energy and green technology contributions. Human rights barely features, but its coverage differs from sustainable development – more optimistic frames about China's climate change involvement emerged; but generally pessimistic frames about Chinese labour exploitation emerged.

Limited resources were found to limit South African journalists' nuanced coverage of China. Journalistic professionalism, within the watchdog journalism framework, is compromised by financial constraints, and funding dictates editorial decisions on covering the China-Africa relationship. However, this study found that China's inaccessibility might be a bigger reason why nuanced coverage of China has not emerged. South African journalists interviewed in this study were of the opinion that China is misunderstood because information on the country is inaccessible, which contributes to the perception that they are threatening. China's inaccessibility is discussed in further detail below.

This study also backs Wasserman's finding that South African journalists recognise the importance of the South Africa-China relationship, even though few of them ever cover the topic. South African journalists find coverage of the topic crucial, particularly to keep China accountable in Africa for environmental or human rights violations. South African media frames China as poachers, with little focus on actual Chinese policy – this is because poaching articles increase readership and clicks.

*Charm defensive:*

China has implemented a range of strategies to challenge the western discourse on China (Zhao, 2011). Its African media headquarters in Nairobi is aimed at deflecting western criticism, and its FOCAC strategies are aimed at countering the western bias in coverage of the China-Africa topic in particular (Gagliardone, 2010). As mentioned above, this study found that the China-Africa relationship is essentially framed as mutually beneficial in Chinese media, countering claims of Chinese neocolonialism in Africa. Additionally, Chinese journalists often make use of the "charm defensive approach" in their coverage of China, but this study found that Chinese journalists find it challenging to penetrate the western media system, and that South African journalists do not consume of trust Chinese media.

South African media coverage varied in the way that it positions the west in relation to China. The frame emerged of a western patronising attitude towards China in the British colonial tropes in poaching coverage, as well as the USA's claim to superiority in climate change coverage. The study also found however, that the USA was crucified in South African media for its involvement in the poaching of Cecil the Lion, which inevitably elevated the depiction of China as an ally to Africa. The study also found contradictory coverage of the USA in climate change – while it was clearly positioned as global leader in most articles, much coverage also criticised the USA for its lack of climate mitigation efforts, which again led to an elevation of a seemingly proactive Chinese government. Coverage of the USA in relation to China pointed out both the failures and successes of the USA's soft power linked to its environmental reputation.

From a human rights perspective, Chinese media also framed China as contributing to the well-being of Africans, challenging the existing narrative that Chinese employment in Africa is exploitative. Chinese media in fact portrayed China's job opportunities in Africa as superior to Africa's own opportunities – thus, through its charm defensive, China created a patronising image of itself towards Africa. Chinese journalists, and Chinese media coverage, have underlined the hypocrisy around the USA and other western nations' supervision of China's human rights, while perpetrating their own human rights violations. Similarly, South African journalists admitted their own hypocrisy in trusting western state news sources and dismissing Chinese sources as propaganda.

Additionally, this study found that Chinese journalists can relate to Africa's misrepresentation in Chinese media, as they perceive China as having been misrepresented in western media. Chinese journalists view their media coverage as a charm defensive, and recognises a need for something similar for Africa's misrepresentation. They thus recognise the need for increasing fair coverage of Africa to assist Africa with its own charm defensive. Ultimately, in this study evidence of defending China's presence was clear in Chinese coverage, but the charm offensive was unclear. China's climate leadership, for example, was portrayed as in competition of that of the US, which is more characteristic of a charm defensive.

*Is media relevant to China's soft power?* Chinese and South African media coverage indicates the importance of sustainable development to China's image – China's pollution negatively impacts its public diplomacy and therefore soft power potential. Emotive language is used in coverage of China's pollution to create the image of a dire situation in China, which damages its environmental reputation. Economic decisions are often portrayed as human rights-driven, showcasing Chinese media's role in determining the narrative around China's human rights.

China is portrayed as enforcing strict environmental laws and regulations, as well as rooting out corruption, primarily making use of surveillance and monitoring, all in aid of conservation. Chinese jobs in Africa are also framed in a positive light and Chinese media coverage suggest an improvement in China's human rights status. Additionally, according to Chinese media coverage, China shows great respect for official systems, process and plans – even from institutions such as the UN or USA.

However, the stricter limitations on freedom of speech that has increased under Xi Jinping's rule, can negatively impact China's reputation. While Chinese journalists believe human rights is culturally determined and currently used as a ploy by the west to harm China's image, they do express disappointment about the increased censorship of media.

Chinese journalists believe culture and Confucianism are at the core of Chinese soft power. Chinese journalists are very familiar with the concept of soft power, illustrating the coherent Chinese soft power strategy – while on the other hand, South African journalists are generally unfamiliar with the concept, and China's soft power strategies in particular. As mentioned above, South African journalists rarely consume

Chinese media, and they therefore question the role of Chinese media in wielding Chinese soft power. They challenge Tan-Mullins' (2016) view that China's involvement in international aid requires mass media and public engagement, if it wants its soft power to gain traction.

Both South African and Chinese journalists in this study pointed out that China is not successful at wielding soft power, particularly as promoted by media diplomacy – echoing Nye's argument that "China is weak in its soft power" (2012:4). South African journalists explained that this is a territory owned by American media, and even they are not succeeding with media investments in Africa. Chinese journalists, on the otherhand, pointed to the fact that while they are packaging propaganda for African audiences, it will remain challenging for them to wield soft power. Instead, a Chinese journalist pointed to South Korea and Japan, illustrating that their media is more successful at soft power.

This study echoed Madrid-Morales' (2016) findings that South African journalists are skeptical of Chinese media investment. Instead, China's defeat of poverty is a more appealing aspect of Chinese soft power to influence African audiences. Some South African journalists note that China's development assistance to Africa, which takes many forms, but essentially respond to the concrete needs of African communities, has more soft power potential than media investments. This study's framing analysis of Chinese media coverage of China found that China's soft power can be successfully wielded through its perceived selfless environmental aid, which is well received by developing nations and therefore positively impacts its reputation. Thus, within the broader definition of soft power, which includes investment and aid, China is recognised by South African journalists for successfully wielding soft power.

The question of the soft power potential of Chinese media investments vs aid also touches on the question on whether economic power is hard or soft (Zhang, 2016). China's ability to lift its people out of poverty is admired by South African journalists and is covered with respect in both Chinese and South African media. However, it raises the question of whether the image of China as defeating poverty is enough to contribute to its wielding of soft power, or whether that rather presents a promise or possibility of assistance to African countries to do the same – and this assistance thus

reflects soft power potential. This could reflect Zhang's idea of "soft power with Chinese characteristics."

Furthermore, new public diplomacy extends beyond government operations to the activities of the private sector and broader society. The interconnectedness of Chinese state and business is visible in the coverage of Chinese business in Africa. They are framed as tools of Chinese public diplomacy, and as mentioned above framed as well received in Africa. Coverage of Chinese environmental aid and assistance, as well as its job provision, intends to illustrate that soft power has reached public levels and are not just aimed at the elite. On the other hand, this study found that in South African media, "China" is sometimes depicted as a single entity, and coverage tends not to distinguish between Chinese government, business or individuals. China is thus rarely presented with nuanced coverage.

*Inaccessibility of Chinese sources:*

This study found that the greatest threat to Chinese soft power, according to South African journalists, is the inaccessibility of Chinese government and business. South African journalists prefer to interview sources that provide balance or credibility to their stories, but often have to rely on secondary sources in their coverage of China because of a lack of engagement or relationship with Chinese sources – in particular Chinese government and business. South African journalists find using Chinese official, state or business sources difficult, because of China's lack of media accessibility. One particular journalist suggested that the lack of media accessibility from China, in terms of sources and information, actively dehumanises China – there "isn't a face, it's not relatable at all" (Interviewee 3). Xi Jinping does not seem to be the humanising face of China for South African journalists. Ironically, on the other hand, Chinese media promotes Xi Jinping as that humanised face of China, placing him at the centre of coverage emphasising China's leadership.

South African journalists reported that the South African government itself is also increasingly becoming inaccessible. Some journalists pointed to the "door-stopper effect" that makes interviews with the South African government near impossible. As mentioned above, South African journalists suggest that China's close relationship with the South African government can harm its soft power efforts, as South African media have a strained relationship with the South African government.

The inaccessibility of Chinese sources is perceived as damaging to Chinese soft power, but journalists also raise the point that perhaps media engagement is not necessary for China's soft power success. Journalists are confused as to what soft power actually means, and journalists accuse China of being bad at media engagement and soft power. For some journalists, media engagement might in fact increase suspicion of China and therefore damage China's soft power. As mentioned above, these journalists believe that Chinese soft power efforts that in fact respond to the needs of Africans, such as health diplomacy, will actually wield more success.

## 3. Limitations

One key limitation of this study is potential language barriers, as most of the Chinese journalists interviewed are first language Mandarin speakers and the interviewee is a first language Afrikaans speaker. Although both parties use English as their second language, both the interviewer and interviewees are fluent in English (the Mandarin-speaking interviewees are all employed at English-language Chinese publications), and English was the choice for the interviews. Great care was taken to understand each other – as mentioned in Chapter 4 on methodology, smartphone technology was used to interpret and contextualise questions and answers.

Additionally, while South African environment or human rights beat journalists were selected for this study, Chinese beat journalists essentially do not exist, and therefore the study sought out Chinese journalists working at English-language publications. Regarding the South African beat journalists, most of them are now freelance or employed in other media sectors, which also meant that much of their responses were based on previous experiences, when they were employed as beat journalists.

Another limitation was the choice of South African publications. The three mainstream publications provide a sense of the South African media discourse on China, but the sample excluded grassroots or tabloid publications, that could reflect coverage that lower income societies are exposed to. Furthermore, the study also excluded social media, which could provide insight into the range of messaging that South Africans might be exposed to, especially if audiences are now leaning more towards social media platforms to receive their news.

## 4. Future research

Regarding the significance of audiences, the social media space could also make or break China's soft power ambitions on the African continent. (Zhang, Wasserman & Mano, 2016). This study also argues for future research on the discourse on China on South African social media platforms.

Future research is also required on China's soft power impact on both elite and public audiences (Hartig, 2012). As mentioned above this study did not consult tabloids or grassroots publications, and the inclusion of *Mail & Guardian* might therefore reflect what the elite audiences are consuming. Future research can compare grassroots publications such as *GroundUp* or tabloids such as the *Daily Sun's* coverage of China. Future research can also measure whether the results above changes over time.

These elements ultimately culminate in the comment made by Thussu (2016): "But who is ultimately watching Chinese programmes and with what effect remains an open question". Who do SA and Chinese journalists consider their audiences to be? This study recommends further research with reception studies to determine how China's sustainable development and human rights impact is perceived by African civil societies, and whether media coverage has an impact on these perceptions.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the role of the media, and specifically in China's soft power efforts, in the increasingly important China-Africa relationship, by answering the following research questions:

RQ1) How China's human rights and sustainability record is portrayed in South African media; RQ2) How China's human rights and sustainability record is portrayed in Chinese media in return; RQ3) What South African journalists' attitudes towards Chinese soft power efforts are; and RQ4) What Chinese journalists' attitudes towards Chinese soft power efforts are.

To answer these questions, two methodologies were used: Firstly, a qualitative framing analysis of both South African mainstream media and English-language

Chinese media; and secondly in-depth interviews with both South African and Chinese journalists, guided by Reese's (2001) hierarchy of influences model.

This study found that the perception of Chinese media as propaganda plays a crucial role in how English-language Chinese media content is received by South African journalists. South African journalists distrust Chinese media because of its government ownership and control, and do not find the content appealing. Chinese journalists, on the other hand are faced with navigating their role as mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party, and producing interesting and credible news content. Essentially, this study found that as long as South African journalists disregard Chinese media as propaganda, China's efforts to leverage their media to wield soft power in South Africa will likely fail.

Chinese journalists are aware that they conduct "propaganda tasks" and while some consider that unprofessional journalism, others consider it a helpful service delivery tool to the Chinese government. This study found that Chinese journalists use different styles of reporting, including constructive journalism and collaborative journalism, as well as other public service roles characteristic of development journalism. Furthermore, while censorship is a key influence on Chinese journalists, Chinese media also at times publish content critical of the Chinese government. On the other hand, South African media and journalistic training generally aligns with the western style of watchdog journalism, but some South African journalists criticise this detached style of reporting as detached.

Both South African and Chinese journalists find themselves in a complex position in negotiating journalistic objectivity. South African journalists strive for Tuchman's (1972) "strategic ritual" of objectivity, characteristic of watchdog journalism, but also disregard objectivity because it interferes with their perception of their role in society as activists. On the other hand, Chinese journalists compartmentalise their aim for an unattainable learned and required objectivity, and their expected loyalty and service to the Chinese Communist Party.

This study also found that South African journalists' skepticism of China is not only based on China's propaganda, but also on China's current close relationship with the South African government – towards which the South African print media displays an antagonistic attitude. China has generally directed its soft power efforts towards

foreign government and elites, but this could harm its soft power efforts in South Africa.

China frames its engagement in Africa as mutually beneficial, which steers the conversation away from China as neocolonial, essentially fulfilling a charm defensive mandate. This study found that South African journalists do not view China as neocolonial, but as exploitative of Africa – a perception influenced by hearsay and not direct engagement with China. South African journalists also generally perceive China's negative environmental impact as a logical side-effect of development – on par with the impact of developed countries – and therefore not intentional environmental damage. Chinese journalists perceive China's sustainable development to have improved to the extent that it is now prioritised over the economy. Chinese and South African media coverage indicated the importance of sustainable development to China's image, and negative coverage of China's environmental impact therefore limits its public diplomacy success and soft power potential.

South African journalists similarly perceive China's negative human rights impact as an automatic side-effect of development, particularly in favour of capitalism. However, South African journalists' lack of understanding of China's approach to human rights vs the western approach that South Africa currently aligns with, could influence them to cover anything outside of the western human rights framework as a violation, and therefore hamper their ability to contextualise this coverage. Chinese journalists argue that the concept of human rights is used by the west to create a negative image of China. Additionally, Chinese journalists currently experience a tightening of freedom of speech, with increased censorship, surveillance and pressure to serve the ruling party. Economic decisions are often portrayed as human rights-driven in Chinese media, showcasing its role in determining the narrative around China's human rights. Chinese media also framed China's employment as contributing to the well-being of Africans, challenging the existing narrative that Chinese employment in Africa is exploitative.

This study found that both Chinese and South African media present the China-Africa relationship as rooted in solidarity, expressing camaraderie with "the victimized" (Zhang 2013; 2016) developing world, which contributes to its soft power. Both media often emphasise China's developing country status, and present western

countries as disapproving of this status. Additionally, competitive forces such as India, claim to offer Africa a more genuine solidarity than China. China and India are both portrayed in South African media as trying to leverage their solidarity with Africa, particularly through anti-western sentiment. China's solidarity is based on assistance, while India offers a stronger anti-western sentiment to Africa, because of their shared colonial history.

Furthermore, Chinese journalists often make use of the "charm defensive approach" in their coverage of China, but find it challenging to penetrate the western media system. South African media coverage showcased frames of both paternalism and a superior attitude of western developed countries towards China. Both media emphasized the China-USA relationship – South African media framing it as competitive and Chinese media framing it as collaborative. Additionally, Chinese journalists can relate to Africa's misrepresentation in Chinese media, as they perceive China as having been misrepresented in western media. Chinese journalists view their media coverage as a charm defensive, and recognise the need to assist Africa with its own charm defensive.

While Chinese journalists are very familiar with the concept of soft power, most South African journalists are not. South African journalists question the role of Chinese media in wielding Chinese soft power, challenging the view that media is central to soft power. Both South African and Chinese journalists believe that China is not successful at wielding soft power. Some South African journalists instead recognise China's development assistance to Africa as soft power success, because it responds to the concrete needs of African communities. Chinese media's framing of China's perceived selfless environmental aid as well received by developing nations, can contribute to Chinese soft power success.

Additionally, China's defeat of poverty is a more appealing aspect of Chinese soft power to influence African audiences. However, it raises the question of whether the image of China as defeating poverty is enough contribution to its wielding of soft power, or whether that rather presents a promise or possibility of assistance to African countries to do the same – thus reverting to the fact that China's assistance might be more influential than its reputation. While media investments are still aimed at the

elite, China's aid manages to reach broader civil society, leading to a potentially broader impact.

Finally, this study found that despite the perception that media is not crucial to China's soft power, South African journalists attribute China's soft power failure to inaccessibility to China's government and business. South African journalists experience a lack of engagement or relationship with Chinese government and business sources. China's lack of media accessibility actively dehumanises China – there "isn't a face, it's not relatable at all" (Interviewee 3). Xi Jinping does not seem to be the humanising face of China for South African journalists, even though he is promoted as such by Chinese journalists. The inaccessibility of Chinese sources is perceived as damaging to Chinese soft power, but South African journalists also raise the point that perhaps media engagement is not necessary for China's soft power success. Media engagement in fact increases suspicion of China and therefore has the counter-effect of damaging China's soft power. As mentioned above, these journalists believe that Chinese soft power in forms such as health diplomacy, will actually wield more success.

This study, through the use of framing analysis and interviews, contributes to our understanding of how Chinese soft power operates in different contexts. The frames found in this study reveals how China is portrayed in South Africa media, in comparison to how China portrays itself in its outgoing media, and therefore how it aims to be perceived. The interviews with South African and Chinese journalists on the other hand, provides insight to the influences that produce these two types of coverage of China. This contributes to our understanding of China's soft power successes and failures thus far, and the role that the media plays in wielding that power.

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