

Full Length Research Paper

# The portrayal of Sino-African relations in the Western Media: Who is actually neo-colonializing Africa?

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The aim of this article is to contribute in a reflexive way to the hot debate about China and Africa relations. The criticisms that China has received for her activities in Africa usually come from western countries that have their own interests in the area. Specifically, as it will be seen, countries like France and the United States have developed a deep military, political, economic and cultural influence in Africa that makes them the actual neo-colonial powers in the region. Paradoxically, the western media plays an important role in emphasizing some negative news related to China's activities in Africa, accusing it to have neo-colonialist behaviours; while they strategically cover and underreport activities from their own countries in the continent. Actually this media strategy can turn to be really effective considering the emphasis and efforts that China makes in improving its own international image.

**Key words:** Neo-colonialism, media, China, Africa, waves of misinformation.

## INTRODUCTION

*"Aid is a method by which the United States maintains a position of influence and control around the world....*

*I put it right at the top of the essential programs in protecting the security of the free world"*

John F. Kennedy

This article will start in a non-orthodox way, by presenting the following scenario to its readers: In our days, a very important company from a powerful country opens a factory in a developing country to take advantage, among other things, of its cheap labor. The working conditions are deplorable and some workers have declared to have

worked for more than 12 h a day without any free days. Even the suicidal rate among the workers is increasing. The workers are local, but the leaders of this company are not; they do not make any effort to learn the local language and they do not look really interested in making any effort to integrate into the new country where they are living in. Of course most of the benefits from the company will go to its motherland, but the pollution problems and other social negative side effects will remain in the developing country. What countries are we talking about? The example corresponds to a factory that makes products for the American company Apple in Shanghai, which in the last decade has recorded among its workers increasing cases of suicide (Lau, 2010), and

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worsening working conditions:

*“Exhausted workers were filmed falling asleep on their 12-h shifts at the Pegatron factories on the outskirts of Shanghai. One undercover reporter, working in a factory making parts for Apple computers, had to work 18 days in a row despite repeated requests for a day off. Another reporter, whose longest shift was 16 h, said: “Every time I got back to the dormitories, I wouldn’t want to move. Even if I was hungry I wouldn’t want to get up to eat. I just wanted to lie down and rest. I was unable to sleep at night because of the stress” (Bilton, 2014).*

The suicides scandal took place in 2010 and “the top managers of Apple escaped blame because these deaths happened in factories in another country (China) owned by a company from yet another country (Hon Hai, a Taiwanese multinational)” (Chang, 2013). In 2010, Apple did say that they would try to improve the working conditions, but as we can deduct from the last paragraph (from December 2014), still nowadays, the conditions have not improved that much.

Let us consider another case that helps to brake stereotypes: A democratic developed country “holds the national reserves of fourteen African countries in its central bank, it has a web of military bases across West Africa, unparalleled to any other foreign power, and it exercises deep political and commercial influence on the continent” (Bishara, 2014). What country are we talking about? To answer this question, we might easily be tempted to think about the United States and its interventionist style. But, this is not the case; we are talking about France, the same country that paradoxically condemned the United States intervention in Iraq. Doesn’t it sound like neocolonialism?

After these reflexives examples, this article will be organized as it follows: in its second part the characteristics of neocolonialism will be presented; in the third part, these characteristics will be related to the case of China, France, and the United States relationship with African countries. In the fourth part we will focus on how the Western media has strategically reported, or underreported, the activities of China in Africa. And finally some conclusions and considerations will be presented.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article will mainly use western (especially from the United States) journalistic, academic articles and literature regarding China-Africa Relations to analyze what is the general idea that they project into their audiences about this relationship, which is usually labelled as neo-colonialist.

According to an early definition of it, from 1965, the essence of neocolonialism is: “(...) the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent, and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. But, in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (Nkrumah, 1965).

Another interesting way to explain neocolonialism (especially considering that this definition comes directly from the countries

affected by this phenomenon), is the definition from the “Resolution on Neocolonialism All- African Peoples’ Conference” that took place in Cairo in 1961.

*“The survival of the colonial system in spite of formal recognition of political independence in emerging countries which become the victims of an indirect and subtle form of domination by political, economic, social, military or technical, is the greatest threat to African Countries that have newly won their independence or those approaching this status” (Resolution on Neocolonialism, All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo, 1961).*

This declaration is really useful, because it also includes and points out directly who are the agents driving the neocolonialist activities (mainly “Colonial embassies and missions serving as nerve center for espionage” through civil servants or military technicians, military personnel and police, puppet governments, radio, press and literature propaganda controlled by the neocolonialist countries, the “so-called foreign and UN technical assistants who ill advice and sabotage national, political, economic and educational social development” and the representatives from imperialist countries under the cover of “religion, Moral Re- armament, cultural, Trade Union and Youth and Philanthropic organizations”)(Resolution on Neocolonialism, All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo, 1961), and also goes further on denouncing the ways how neocolonialism manifests in Africa:

- “1. Puppet governments represented by stooges and even fabricated elections (...).*
- 2. Regrouping states, before or after independence, by an imperial power in federation or communities lined to that imperial power.*
- 3. Balkanization as a deliberate policy of fragmentation of states by creation of artificial entities such as Katanga, Mauritania, Buganda, etc.*
- 4. The economic entrenchment of the colonial power before independence and the continuity of economic dependence after formal recognition of national sovereignty.*
- 5. Integration into colonial economic blocks which maintain the underdeveloped character of African economy.*
- 6. Economic infiltration by a foreign power after independence, through capital, investment, loans and monetary aid, or technical experts under unequal concessions, particularly does extending for long periods.*
- 7. Direct monetary dependence, as in those emergent independent states whose finances remain directly controlled by colonial powers.*”(Resolution on Neocolonialism, All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo, 1961)

This definition will be complemented with some other characteristics of neocolonialism that some researchers from Fudan University used to develop an empirical analysis about China’s behavior on Africa.

- “1. The neocolonialist imports resources, raw materials and unprocessed products in a very low price, and simultaneously exports manufactured goods and daily necessities to colonized regions and countries.*
- 2. The colonized countries cannot at all compete with those similar goods from the colonial powers whose competitive advantage in price and quality will seriously undermine the traditional or fledging industries of colonized countries. Under this condition, the colonized don’t have any other options except for embracing the floods of colonizing power’s goods.*
- 3. Colonized country’s economic relationship with the colonial power is only related to several goods, fields and industries (especially those regarding colonized countries’ economic lifelines), which makes the colonized countries highly rely on foreign colonists.*
- 4. Due to the political control, cultural penetration and economic*

*exploitation in colonized countries or regions, the colonial power always economically or financially controls those key areas, industries, institutions of the colonized countries and regions” (Junbo et al., 2014).*

Neocolonialism is commonly perceived as an economic phenomenon, but as we can see from these definitions above it is composed by four dimensions:

1. *Economic dimension: This dimension would mainly embrace the last characteristics mentioned by Junbo and Frasher, plus, the “economic infiltration (...) through capital, investment, loans and monetary aid, or technical experts under unequal concessions, particularly does extending for long periods” (Resolution on Neocolonialism, All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo, 1961) and the direct monetary dependence of countries whose finances are controlled by foreign powers.*

2. *Political dimension: This dimension would refer to any attempts of neocolonial powers trying to undermine the political independence of the country and trying to interfere in its internal political affairs, for example, conditioning aid to certain specific governmental conditions and political changes. Other manifestation would be: puppet governments, fabricated elections, reagroupation of states and “balkanization as a deliberate policy of fragmentation of states by creation of artificial entities.” (Resolution on Neocolonialism, All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo, 1961).*

3. *Military dimension: The emergence and origin of this dimension is linked to the last two ones, according to Rouves et al., African elites were “shielded from the impetus to develop economic resources to pay for national security. (...) By shielding their clients from financing their own security concerns, ex-metropoles and superpowers offered protection, but at the price of continued dependence from the periphery on its former or new patrons” (Rouves et al., 1994). This dimension has evolved adopting other manifestations in time: direct military interventions or the establishment of military bases using them as a control system “disguised as protection.” (Scott, 2014)*

4. *Cultural dimension: It mainly refers to the efforts of foreign powers to influence and shape, reshape or undermine the cultural, social or religious values of other countries according to their own vision, or “in order to justify the (...) political economic system” (Scott, 2014) that they have created for their own benefit. The major means used to develop this dimension would be media, but also the already mentioned “religion, Moral Re-armament, cultural, Trade Union and Youth and Philanthropic organizations” (Resolution on Neocolonialism, All African Peoples’ Conference in Cairo, 1961). The attempts to influence the curriculum and educational system of other countries would also be included in this dimension.*

## RESULTS

### China, the United States and France in Africa

China’s increasing relations with Africa have been one of the most debated topics from the last decade, between 2002 and 2003, two ways trade climbed 50% “to US\$18.5 billion, the fastest growth China has seen in any geographical area” (Mooney, 2005). In 2009 the PRC had surpassed the United States as major trading partner, and in 2015 bilateral trade between China and Africa reached 220 US\$ (FOCAC, 2016). Besides economic relations, the PRC does not have any military bases in the continent and from a political point of view, it holds a “no strings attached” policy.

Some voices in the United States, like Secretary Clinton, have warned that developing countries, such as African countries, should be wary of China and its neocolonial interests in the region (The China Times, 2014). This campaign to discredit China in Africa reflects the United States fears to lose influence in the region. And also, while pointing China as a neocolonialist power, with the excuse of the war against terrorism and promotion of democracy, the United States military has expanded in the continent, for example, it “has built a base in the strategic location of Djibouti (...), and has earmarked 100\$ million a year to support counterterrorism efforts. The U.S. used Camp Lemonier to train Ethiopian forces in the lead-up to December 2006 invasion of Somalia” (Weinstein, 2008).

Also the United States intervention and help in African countries has not been really successful in attaining its apparent main objectives, as Glennie points out referring to Clinton’s warnings:

*“It is hard to imagine a more absurd statement from a U.S official, given the countries role in previous scrambles for Africa – not to mention its weak record (with other donors) of building capacity over more than 50 years of aid giving. From the cold war to aid conditionality supporting its own interests, to the pouring of money into the Horn of Africa after the 9/11 attacks, the US pretty much wrote the book on how to use aid to ensure strategic interests. Clinton should remember John Kennedy’s assertion in 1962: “Aid is a method by which the United States maintains a position of influence and control around the world....I put right at the top of the essentials programs in protecting the security of the free world” (Glennie, 2012).*

Of course besides a power factor, the United States is also concerned about its own economic interests in Africa that somehow overlap with Chinese operations in Africa:

*“It is instructive to compare hard American interests in Africa with those of China. First, the United States wants to maintain access to natural resources, especially oil. Second, it seeks to maximize its exports to Africa. Third, it desires to obtain political support in international forums of as many African States as possible. Do these interests sound familiar?” (Shin, 2011)*

Other rising countries have also increased their role in Africa, such as India, Brazil or Saudi Arabia. But no criticisms have been raised against them by the United States and that is probably due to the fact that their global power doesn’t look as challenging for the United States as China’s power does.

But why are we including France in this article? This apparently exemplar old European democracy, since the independence of African states in 1960, has intervened militarily more than 30 times in Africa (Marcoux, 2004). Actually, nowadays, France has military bases in Gabon,

Senegal, Djibouti, Mayotte and Réunion (Weinstein, 2008). And the “French Army is also deployed in Mali, Chad, Central African Republic, Somalia and Ivory Coast” (Weinstein, 2008). And, for example, we might have heard about the attacks to Chinese citizens in Africa, but is less reported that:

*“(…) the former colonial power (France) sees itself as at risk of becoming a target for terrorist attacks. Since 2010, radical Islamists have held four French employees of the Areva energy company captive in Mali. And the terror network al-Qaeda is now threatening further kidnappings and attacks in France and against the approximately 5,000 French citizens living in Mali” (Baig, 2013).*

France is one of the biggest exporters of raw materials in the region. And as we have seen in the introduction, even if underreported, France’s influence in Africa is really important, and it even has a specific name “*Françafrique*”. This term, in the initial moment it had a positive meaning (Marcoux, 2004), but nowadays, is usually related to the complicated military, economic and diplomatic relations between some African countries and France (Bishara, 2014), and therefore it involves a less positive meaning. The French language is spoken by 96.2 millions of people in Africa, and that makes it a *lingua franca* that allows speakers from different African countries to communicate with each other. Language not might seem like a big deal, but it actually is in terms of intelligence and espionage (Bishara, 2014) and in the impact that the French media can have in the region.

If we have a look back to the characteristics and dimensions that have been used to define neocolonialism in the second point of this article, we can see which ones of these three powers have had a more neocolonialist attitude towards the African continent during the last decade.

As we have mentioned before, both the United States and France have intervened into internal affairs of African countries, especially the second. Five years ago there was a strong anti-French movement in Francophone Africa, but the actors speaking against France have been suspiciously replaced. For example, in Ivory Coast, France military intervened to establish a ruler more favorable to France (Bishara, 2014). In Mali, France military intervened to stop a popular indigenous movement in the north and established a southern pro-French leader “through what you can barely call, real elections” (Bishara, 2014). A final example is Niger. A former employee of the French Uranium is now the president of Niger and “has signed a concession giving away Niger’s only natural, non-renovable resource, Uranium” (Bishara, 2014).

France is also still trying to keep its cultural legacy and media influence in African speaking countries.

*“(…) France strives to maintain its cultural legacy, with a*

*significant portion of development funding going towards education, scholarships and cultural institutes. Various inter-governmental organizations and conferences have operated under the hub of the Agence de Cooperation Culturelle et Technique in an effort to institutionalize the linguistic, cultural and educational links between France and francophone Africa, and even the dedicated Ministère de la Francophonie was set up in 1988. Promotion of the French language is a priority, not only for encouraging conditions conducive to positive economic relations within la francophonie, but also, its(…) Mission Civilisatrice [Civilizational Mission], because of the strong French connection between their language and the values and culture of the ‘Latin’ world, distinct from the English speaking Anglo-Saxon world and its less-than-admired traits. As the originator, France plays a significant cultural role and places great importance on maintaining that legacy in Africa, especially the resulting identity-construction encouraged within la francophonie (…)* (Marcoux, 2014).

As Martin points out, “to the extent that it implies the inclusion of people outside France in the culture of France itself, *francophonie* is a truly neo-colonial concept” (Martin, 1995).

As mentioned before, France also “holds the national reserves of fourteen African countries in its central bank” (Bishara, 2014) and the number of military bases across West Africa, cannot be compared to the ones of any other foreign power in the area (Bishara, 2014).

Therefore, in the case of France we can identify that its neo-colonialistic influence in the region has economic, military, political and cultural dimensions.

Regarding the United States government, besides its well-known and already mentioned interventions in the horn of Africa, has other ways to influence in African internal affairs:

*“The government of the United States asked its envoys to gather intelligence on African United Nations representatives, including South Africa’s Baso Sangqu and Uganda’s Ruhakana Rugunda; that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was prepared to risk a nuclear disaster because he was angry with the UN, and that Kenya in 2008 covertly transported Ukrainian tanks to south Sudan. (...) Cables published by Wikileaks also reveal that Washington has instructed US diplomats to gather information on various countries’ UN delegates – including African UN representatives - and collect their email passwords, credit card account numbers, frequent flyer account numbers and work schedules” (Taylor, 2010).*

In the case of China, on the other hand, its cooperation with Africa has been led by the seven principles of equality, mutual benefit (the so-called Win-Win Co-operation), real results, efficiency, sincerity, credibility and

no strings attached. But there have been some accusations of neocolonialism, on the bases of what Deborah Brautigam calls “waves of misinformation” (Brautigam, 2009) in China – Africa relations (if these waves are intentional or unintentional, that is another debate) that have developed some stereotypes regarding this cooperation. For example, one of the criticisms done more often is that China is just interested in maintaining contacts with those African countries that have abundant natural resources; but when being properly investigated this criticism has been proved to be wrong (Brautigam, 2009). China is also often criticized because its companies working in Africa usually rely on Chinese workforce and not on the local people, regarding this point Brautigam says:

*“The reality is that the ratio of Chinese workers to locals varies enormously, depending on how long a Chinese company has been working in a country, how easy it is to find skilled workers locally, and the local government’s policies on work permits. In Sudan, where Chinese companies have been working in the oil industry for over a decade, 93 percent of workers in China’s oil operations were said to be Sudanese. Research by Tang Xiaoyang in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo showed that Chinese companies resident for five years had halved their ratio of Chinese employees compared with newly arrived Chinese firms” (Brautigam, 2009).*

But Brautigam does agree with one of the negative effects of China’s cooperation with Africa that is usually mentioned in the media: “Concerns about Chinese exports crushing African manufacturing are very real” (Brautigam, 2009). But in this point, China, being aware of this fact in 2006, for example, “put a self-imposed quota to restrict the total exports of textile and garment products to South-Africa” (He, 2007), one of the countries more affected by China’s exports<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed it is really difficult to develop in a short article, an accurate analysis of the impact of each power in Africa. At the same time, each country in this continent is a case of study by itself. But, in general terms, in this short presentation of some examples of activities conducted by France and the United States, we can denote: puppet governments, fabricated elections, the continuity of economic dependence after formal recognition of national sovereignty, economic infiltration through capital, investment, loans and monetary aid, or technical experts under unequal concessions and direct monetary dependence.

China’s influence in the continent cannot be compared to this deep control that France and the United States have developed in Africa. Maybe in an economic way, but definitely not comparable in the political, military and

cultural control and influence in internal affairs that these two western countries have in the region.

In conclusion, China may present some characteristics of the economic dimension of neocolonialism that have been pointed out before, but as we will see, it’s trying to find ways to relief the negative impacts that their economic activities can have in the region. But the US, and especially France, activities in Africa include all the dimensions that compose neocolonialism, the economic plus the cultural, political and military ones, which converts them in the real Neocolonialist Powers in Africa.

### **China and Africa relationship in the western media**

To develop this point we could start with this question: Is the western media reflecting the actual feeling in Africa regarding this relationship? Of course Africa it is a huge region, and it is impossible to consider its perception of China’s activities in the continent as a whole, but it could be possible to represent the different points of view that it includes. But usually, in the western media, just the most negative points of view are presented. Let us see an example:

*“Jacob Zuma, South Africa’s president, who long cultivated Chinese contacts, was forced last year by domestic critics to change posture. In Nigeria the central-bank governor recently excoriated the Chinese for exuding “a whiff of neocolonialism” (The Economist, 2013).*

But what is not mentioned is that, when China received the criticisms from Nigeria’s Central Bank governor, its point of view was that this shows that African powers are empowering themselves and showing freely their own points of view. Probably, other countries like the United States wouldn’t be as receptive to criticism as China has showed to be.

In a world like ours, where media and information are power, strategically reporting or underreporting some facts can be more crucial than we think, is actually an important and soft weapon. The media, especially in the United States, usually promotes and reflects the interests of the economic elites and of the government. As Noam Chomsky (2002) has argued, “The major media-particularly, the elite media that set the agenda that others generally follow-are corporations “selling” privileged audiences to other businesses” (Chomsky, 1989). By the same token, the journalists are affected by this system since it is difficult for them “to make their way unless they conform to (...) ideological pressures (...)” (Chomski, 1989).

The already mentioned “waves of misinformation” regarding China-Africa cooperation, are also one of the elements that affects the partiality of Western Media when reporting about this topic. Here is an example:

*“In 2004, The Economist reported an erroneous figure of*

<sup>1</sup>According to HeWenping, the flood of Chinese merchandise has forced to close down in South Africa an important number of business, an impact that has led to high unemployment rates (He, 2007).

\$1.8 billion for China's "development aid" for Africa in 2002. This was repeated in a *Boston Globe* article, which became the source for an article in *Current History* that said the 2002 figure of \$1.8 billion was the "last" time "official statistics" on Chinese aid to Africa were released. The *Current History* article was subsequently cited by researchers at the World Bank, who repeated soberly that "The last officially reported flows are for 2002. For that year, China's government reported that it provided \$1.8 billion in economic support to all of Africa." An International Monetary Fund study cited the World Bank report as its source for the same figure. Apparently, no one checked to see if there had actually been any official statistics reported by China in 2002 or at any point before or since for its annual aid to Africa (there were not)" (Brautigam, 2009).

How the information regarding Sino-African relations is also an important factor to consider. In the West, media is one of the actors that, with some exceptions, like to question China's relations with African countries. Titles like the following ones are pretty common: "China's Challenge in Africa: Avoid Blame of Neocolonialism" (Chin, 2014), "China: a neo-colonialist country?" (Molette, 2012), "Into Africa: China's Grab for Influence and Oil" (Brookes, 2007), "Chinese Colonialism?" (Grammaticas, 2012), "China's involvement in Sudan: Arms and Oil" (Human Rights Watch, 2003), "China in Africa: A close Friend or a Neocolonialist?" (Deepak, 2014), "The New Neo-Colonialism in Africa" (Tiffen, 2014), "Mbeki warns on China Africa Ties" (BBC News, 2006), "China's African Safari" (Mooney, 2005) or "China Focuses on oil, not Sudanese Needs" (Harman, 2008). More specialized literature and research also presents some examples of this tendency: "A New Scramble for African Oil? Historical, Political, and Business Perspectives" (Frynas and Paulo, 2007), "China's Global Hunt for Energy" (Zweig and Bi, 2005) or "China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa" (Taylor, 2006).

How titles can influence the reader can be understood through the importance of "framing", that 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" (Entman, 1993).

Even if some of these articles tend to point out the positive and negative elements of China – Africa relationship, their titles, are already being partial and focused on some stereotypes making them more salient, and moving the reader to perceive some neocolonialist dimension in China and Africa relations and promoting a moral evaluation of this relationship based on a neo-colonialist frame, a rhetoric that is not spread regarding other powers that operate in this continent.

Other important voices regarding China and Africa's are less well-known and not commonly mentioned in the West. For example, the African researcher Aubrey

Matshiqi says: "I did not experience China as a hegemon. It is America and Europe that imposed themselves to us. (...) My experience of the hegemony of the West has largely been that of a gap between its liberal democratic aesthetic and the moral content of its relations with the "Third World"" (Matshiqi, 2012). Djibuti's Health Minister affirmed: "China offers unconditional donations while asking us for nothing, which few countries do. Countries that never helped us but point fingers at China's cooperation with us might just be jealous" (Wang, 2014). Also China is promoting tourism in Africa, and cancelling debt (China had altogether canceled 20 billion yuan by the end of 2013) (Wang, 2014), something barely mentioned.

Some western researches that hold a positive image of China's role in Africa and have raised strong criticism against the accusations that the United States has been presenting against the PRC, such as Deborah Brautigam, that has been studying *in situ* China and Africa relations since the 80s, are not really well-known.

Of course China's presence in Africa has caused some negative impacts, but there has been the desire to change and improve. Actually the PRC is concerned about the main criticism that has received from its activities in Africa, and has shown a really receptive attitude to them, trying to improve its work and discourse regarding Africa. France and the United States, on the other hand, after several decades of non-successful intervention in Africa have never shown any kind of receptivity versus the discontent of African people. We should ask ourselves: Which attitude is more democratic and sympathetic?

## DISCUSSION

China's relationship with Africa is probably perceived by African people (and has been proved to be) as more fair than the one they have with countries like the United States or France, who are criticizing and using the media to present China as a neocolonial power, even though they keep developing and strengthening political, cultural and economic neocolonial ties with Africa, and their aid system has been proved not to be successful since the formal independence of Africa started.

Why this is happening is probably due to the perception of China as a "threat" or "competence" in what these *status quo* powers consider their own sphere of influence. They are aware that China's strategy in Africa is being more effective, and they know how China cares about its own image as a developing country and as the second economic power in the world, and its emphasis on stating that her relations with Africa are South-South and mutually beneficial based (a Win-Win cooperation model). So, especially the United States by presenting China in their media (more worldwide spread the Chinese media) as an imperialist and dangerous country, and



recommending African countries to be aware of China's growing influence in the area, is developing a soft deterrence strategy against what the United States considers the "China threat". While the activities of other countries, that are actually acting like real imperial powers, like France (that its establishing puppet governments, manipulating elections, developing military bases, trying to maintain their cultural colonial legacy through different institutions, realizing espionage activities and strengthening the economic and resources control of some African countries), are clearly underreported and not condemned.

To counteract this media strategy the generic recommendation would be to keep investing and promoting China's soft power.

First, being more transparent in some key elements of Sino-Africa cooperation, such as foreign aid, would help to reduce the flow of "misinformation waves" and to end some of the stereotypes that surround this relationship.

A second recommendation is to keep spreading and making more available the Chinese media around Africa, especially TV channels coverage. It is also important to consider that "the extent of China's success will be constrained by the amount of journalistic and editorial legitimacy it can build in the eyes of African" (Day, 2013). Therefore regarding its content, it could be interesting to increase the spaces in the different media in which Africans could "tell their own story" (Day, 2013), and to invest "in local knowledge and local partnerships, going beyond the token presence of African faces on television screens and engaging in greater depth with local worldviews and unusual perspectives on the developments reshaping Africa" (Galiardone and Verhoeven, 2012).

In third place, it is important to find ways to counteract the common framing that the western media has used in China-Africa relations (usually related to neocolonialism) and the impact that it has caused in its audience. Regarding this point, it is important not to negate the frame, therefore is better not to use defensive sentences like "China is not a Neocolonialist Power", because "when we negate a frame, we evoke the frame" (Lakoff, 2004). This idea is related to the "Suppression Thought Theory" or "The White Bear Problem" formulated by the psychology professor Daniel M. Wegner, that refers to the "psychological process whereby deliberate attempts to suppress certain thoughts make them more likely to surface" (Wegner and Schneider, 2003). It is usually exemplified with Dostoevsky's sentence: "Try to pose for yourself this task: not to think of a polar bear, and you will see that the cursed thing will come to mind every minute" (Dostoevsky, 1955). Another clear example of how this psychological process works is the following one, included in George Lakoff famous book "Don't Think of An Elephant":

*"When Nixon addressed the country during Watergate and used the phrase, "I am not a crook," he coupled his*

*image with that of a crook and thereby established what he was denying. This example embodies another important principle of framing: when arguing against the other side, don't use their language because it evokes their frame (...)." (Lakoff, 2004).*

Therefore, in our case instead of negating the neo-colonialist frame usually used for Sino-Africa cooperation in the western media; the best strategy is to use and emphasize other frames that actually define Sino-African Relations, like "Win-Win Cooperation" or "Mutual Benefit Relationship".

Last, but not the least, if China's alternative and creative policies and cooperation approach continue to achieve good results in Africa, helping the continent to develop and to improve in a successful and sustainable way, showing that, indeed, there is a successful alternative to the western model; this will be the best and ultimate legitimating soft power that China can project to the world.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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