

# **Chinese Soft Power through the Eyes of Chinese and African Media**

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## **Abbreviations**

**AU:** African Union

**BRI:** Belt and Road Initiative

**CCD:** Community of common destiny

**CCTV:** China Central Television Network

**CGTN:** China Global Television Network

**FDI:** Foreign Direct Investment

**FOCAC:** Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

**IR:** International Relations

**PRC:** People's Republic of China

**SABC:** South African Broadcasting Cooperation

**SOE(s):** State-owned enterprise(s)

**UN:** United Nations

# 1. Introduction

In September 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping<sup>1</sup> spoke at the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Xi called for China<sup>2</sup> and Africa to build “a China-Africa community with a shared future that assumes joint responsibility, pursues win-win cooperation, delivers happiness for all, enjoys cultural prosperity, ensures common security, and promotes harmony between man and nature” (Xinhua 2018c).

According to the PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The FOCAC is a platform established by China and friendly African countries for collective consultation and dialogue and a cooperation mechanism between developing countries, falling into the category of South-South cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2004). Its primary focus is on two aspects, namely pragmatic cooperation, i.e. to strengthen consultation and expand cooperation, as well as equality and mutual benefit, i.e. promoting both political dialogue and economic cooperation and trade, seeking mutual reinforcement and common development (Ibid.).

Sino-African cooperation has surged in recent decades. According to statistics from the General Administration of Customs of the PRC, its total import and export volume with Africa was US\$204.19 billion in 2018 (Ministry of Commerce of the PRC 2019). In 1995, it was only US\$4 billion (Zhu 2013, 29). Chinese SOEs have built a vast amount of infrastructure across the African continent, mainly in the form of (rail-)roads, dams, and hospitals (Ibid.) Moreover, the Chinese government has been more proactively trying to gain the support of African states in the UN, a desire mostly enhanced by the fact that Africa has the most votes of any continent in the UN (Ibid., 39). To this end, several Chinese government departments have engaged in both humanitarian and financial aid as well as cultural diplomacy, using means such as education to try to create a favorable image of China among Africans (King 2013, 209).

IR scholars have attempted to analyze the possible implications of China’s involvement in Africa. However, their research mainly focuses on China’s possible strategic goals in Africa and the role that soft-power and cultural diplomacy could play in achieving them, analyzing soft-power instruments such as the Confucius Institutes (see Chey 2008; Wang 2011; Hughes 2014; He 2010; Ding 2008). Far fewer scholars have considered the influence of the media.

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<sup>1</sup> All Chinese names in this thesis are written according to Chinese conventions, i.e. family name first, given name second.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, “China” refers to the People’s Republic of China.

Media outlets such as Chinese state media but also African news outlets exert an important influence on the outcomes of Chinese soft power in Africa and Sino-African cooperation, since they decide to a large extent how soft-power initiatives reach broader audiences. This is especially visible in media discourse concerning the FOCAC, as it is the most far-reaching attempt at institutionalizing Sino-African cooperation. Therefore, this thesis analyzes how particularly influential media outlets in China and four African countries (Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) have reported on the FOCAC. The thesis analyzes *Xinhua News Agency* and *CGTN Africa* for the Chinese discourse. For the African discourses, the thesis analyzes *Ahram Online* from Egypt, *Daily Nation* from Kenya, *Vanguard* from Nigeria and *The Star* and *SABC News* from South Africa. It poses the following research question: What are the implications of these different discourses of the FOCAC for China's soft power in African countries?

An analysis of the discourses of media outlets from both China and African countries is crucial for understanding how the Chinese government tries to use cultural diplomacy to convince African audiences of its benign intentions and how African news outlets present Chinese cultural diplomacy to these audiences. Such an analysis opens up various new avenues for future research and contributes to the school within IR that tries to comprehend South-South cooperation from a Global South perspective (see Acharya and Buzan 2010; Nayak and Selbin 2010). This is in turn beneficial to the globalization of IR as a field of study, which can perhaps contribute to a more comprehensive outlook on real-world events and more mutual understanding between different parts of the world.

This thesis consists of five chapters, the first of which is this introduction. Chapter 2 provides a recent overview of scholarly research concerning Chinese engagement in Africa. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods and theories I have used for the three different analyses of the FOCAC that follow in Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, I conclude that the discourses reveal two different paradigms that are irreconcilable, resulting in tensions that could have severe consequences for Chinese soft-power endeavors in Africa.

## **2. Studying China in Africa**

Past works on China's engagement with Africa have primarily considered three main areas of study. 1) China's political and economic interests in Africa; 2) Sino-African cooperation as a model for South-South cooperation; and 3) the Chinese government's use of soft power and cultural/public diplomacy in its attempts to win over African audiences. This literature review

provides a brief overview of the first two areas of research, but focuses primarily on the third area, especially on the role that the media play within the Chinese government's soft-power strategy.

Sino-African cooperation has predominantly been researched through a political or economic lens. For example, past works on China's aid and investment in Africa have mainly considered Chinese SOEs' strategic interests and the possible consequences for African host countries. Moreover, research primarily focuses on China's search for natural resources which, some consider a form of neocolonialism, as well as its fast-increasing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in African countries and so-called "debt traps" supposedly introduced through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (see Maswana 2015; Dollar 2018).<sup>3</sup> For instance, several case studies focus on projects Chinese SOEs have set up in African countries to analyze what their strategic interests could be (see Dreher et al 2018; Devadason and Gold 2018).

Other scholars alternatively center on how Sino-African cooperation could be considered a model for South-South cooperation. Their main point can be summarized as follows: Following China's rapid economic development and increased political influence, the Chinese government now wants to export its model of governance to gain more support from African countries in international bodies like the UN (Amanor and Chichava 2016; Asante 2018; Bae and Ku 2012). Simultaneously, African states also use their closer ties with China as a form of South-South cooperation to gain more political influence on the global stage (Ibid.).

A third group instead focuses on how the Chinese government supposedly uses soft-power instruments such as Confucius Institutes to gain political influence among African countries (Chey 2008; Ding 2008; He 2010; Hughes 2014; Wang 2011). This group contends that the Chinese government uses cultural diplomacy to counter the so-called "China threat theory", according to which China is a revisionist state that presents a menace to the current global order (see Broomfield 2003).

In extension of how the Chinese government uses soft power, several scholars focus on how Chinese and African media present each other in their respective narratives, illustrated by case studies from one or more African countries (Diakon and Röschenthaler 2016; Gagliardone 2013; Zhang, Wasserman and Mano 2016). More specifically, there are also studies concerning how African media frame Sino-African cooperation, embodied by organizations like the

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account of the BRI, see Shichor 2018; Zhang (Zhexin) 2018; Berlie 2020.

FOCAC (Wekesa 2013; Zhang and Matingwina 2017). However, these studies do not highlight the implications of Chinese and African media for China's soft power in Africa. Joseph Nye (2012) aptly captures the importance of the media in one of his presentations on soft power, noting that "the new narrative is not whose army wins but it is also whose story wins."

In general, the media, defined as "the main means of mass communication (broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet) regarded collectively" (Oxford Dictionary Lexico 2019), exert a crucial influence on public opinion and people's perceptions of cultural diplomacy efforts. As Chinese media scholar Cao Qing explains, there is a close link in China between the mass media and the country's notions of soft power, for they disseminate and mediate the Chinese government's soft-power discourse (2011, 9).

Notably, Chinese soft-power advocates know a different conception of soft power from that proposed by Joseph Nye, which is widely used by IR scholars. As Cao Qing points out, most scholars broadly share Nye's definition of soft power as an intangible, non-material, and often abstract power that produces certain capacities to influence perceptions and attitudes towards another country (see Pan 2006; Huang et al 2006). Nye (2004, 5) primarily examines soft power in terms of its instrumental values: "getting others to want the outcomes that you want." The Chinese conception, however, instead stresses soft power's communicative values - to reach an understanding of the imperative to build a strong, coherent national culture and identity as the basis for China's soft power (Cao 2011, 12).

In his book about misconceptions of Chinese soft power, Michael Barr (2011, 15) indicates that some scholars view Nye's theories on soft power as a standard upon which they can conduct further research. Nevertheless, others argue that China has dramatically expanded the definition of soft power beyond Nye's original meaning (Barr 2011, 17). They hold that China uses "nonmilitary inducements including culture, diplomacy, foreign aid [...]" (Lum, Morrison and Vaughn 2008). Hence, as Barr explains, it seems that there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes Chinese soft power (2011, 19).

Consequently, this thesis adopts the definition of soft power proposed by Joseph Nye and combines it with those of other scholars from China and elsewhere, to create a hybrid understanding of the term, which is more fitting in the context of Chinese soft power in Africa.

In accordance with this, the thesis stresses the notion of *xuanchuan* (宣传). While this word is often translated to "propaganda", it does not carry a negative connotation to either the CCP or

the Chinese populace. As David Shambaugh (2007, 48-49) explains, Chinese state-run media outlets use *xuanchuan* aimed towards foreign audiences to “tell China’s story to the world, publicize Chinese government policies and perspectives, and promote Chinese culture abroad.”

Moreover, to support its soft-power endeavors, the Chinese government, much like many other governments, uses so-called “cultural diplomacy”. Defining this term is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, scholars disagree on the scope of the term. For instance, some, like Milton Cummings (2003, 1), argue that cultural diplomacy refers to “the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding,” thereby advocating a comparatively narrow understanding of cultural diplomacy. Conversely, others, such as Liu Xin (2019, 657), contend that the term should be considered more broadly and that “everyone involved in cross-cultural communications can be considered informal ambassadors in cultural diplomacy.”

Secondly, cultural diplomacy is often confused with public diplomacy, and therefore used synonymously. Yet, there is certainly a difference between the two. Michael McClellan (2004) defines public diplomacy as “active, planned use of cultural, educational and informational programming to create a desired result that is directly related to a government’s foreign policy objectives.” Following this description, cultural diplomacy can be considered a subcategory encapsulated in the broader term that is public diplomacy, which is in line with the views of scholars like Ingrid D’Hooghe (see D’Hooghe 2014). This thesis uses Nicholas Cull’s definition of cultural diplomacy, being “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad” (2009, 19).

A prime example of Chinese cultural diplomacy is the FOCAC. The forum showcases 53 African countries interacting with China in the economic, political and cultural spheres and can thus grant a vast amount of information about how China tries to use cultural diplomacy to create a favorable image of itself in African countries, and how this is perceived in those African countries.

In sum, by focusing on media discourses of both Chinese and African news outlets, this thesis fills a long-existing gap in the literature, thereby adding a new angle to scholarly discourse of Chinese soft power and cultural diplomacy in Africa.



### 3. Methodology and Theory

This thesis analyzes the discourse of both Chinese and African media outlets concerning the FOCAC. While there are many plausible definitions of the term “discourse”<sup>4</sup>, in this thesis I use Schneider’s (2013b) definition, meaning that “discourse refers to communication practices, which systematically construct our knowledge of reality.” This thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative method is content analysis, and the qualitative methods are textual discourse analysis and visual discourse analysis.

Firstly, this thesis conducts a content analysis. It analyzes news articles of the following Chinese and African media outlets:

Chinese	African
Xinhua News Agency	The Star - South Africa
	Daily Nation - Kenya
	Vanguard - Nigeria
	Ahram Online - Egypt

*Table 3.1 Textual sources used in this thesis*

There are several reasons for this choice. Firstly, Xinhua News Agency is the main state-run Chinese news outlet. Its primary task is to promote any initiative the Chinese government proposes, including the FOCAC and the BRI (see Xin 2008; Zhao 2000; Brady 2017). As for the African news outlets, I have chosen four outlets that represent four different African regions both geographically and culturally. In addition, they represent four of the African countries that have traded most with China in recent years (Workman 2020).

*The Star* is part of Sekunjalo Independent Media Consortium, which is partly owned by Chinese investors (20%). The reason for choosing this news outlet is that it is one of South Africa’s largest news outlets and it has reported extensively on the 2018 FOCAC summit. The second African news outlet is *Daily Nation* from Kenya. The reason for choosing this news outlet is that it is owned by Nation Media, the largest independent media house in East and Central Africa (Nation Media n.d.). There is no direct connection between *Daily Nation* and the Chinese government or Chinese investors. *Vanguard* is published by Vanguard Media, which was established by a group of journalists (Vanguard n.d.). Like *Daily Nation*, it is an

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<sup>4</sup> For examples of different definitions of “discourse”, see Schneider 2013b.

independent newspaper without any direct ties to the Chinese government or Chinese investors. *Ahram Online* is majority-owned by the Egyptian government. The government owns a controlling share of the stocks and appoints the editors, who are generally considered loyal to the state (Press Reference n.d.). *Ahram Online* is, like *Xinhua*, primarily concerned with promoting and legitimizing any initiative the Egyptian government proposes or participates in, including the FOCAC. I have chosen it based on its extensive reporting on the FOCAC as well as its use of English instead of Arabic or French.

There are two main reasons why I have chosen to only analyze English language sources in this thesis. Firstly, using only one language for analysis saves me precious time and helps to remain within the word count, since I do not have to translate Chinese or other language sources. Moreover, all of the sources publish official English-language articles, which are thus fully representative of the news outlets' discourses.

I create a database containing all the articles these media outlets have published concerning the seventh FOCAC summit in Beijing in September 2018. By examining the content of Chinese and African media outlets on the FOCAC, one can gain an understanding of how Chinese and African media frame the FOCAC in ways that benefit their readers or viewers. Furthermore, it reveals what content is emphasized and what discursive elements are understated. I set the time period of the data from 27 August 2018 to 11 September 2018. I choose this period because, stretching from one week before to one week after the seventh FOCAC summit, it includes the most important media reports on the summit while still limiting the analyzed timeframe.

For the content analysis, this thesis uses a text analysis tool called "Voyant tools" (Voyant Tools n.d.). Voyant Tools is an open-source, web-based application for performing text analysis. It supports the interpretation of texts and is in particular used by scholars in the digital humanities (Ibid.). I use the application to distinguish and explain patterns throughout the news articles and reports of Chinese and African media outlets. This further creates an overview of their discourse.

In the textual discourse analysis, I dissect this overview and use it to draw conclusions on what these discourses imply for Chinese soft-power efforts in Africa. These conclusions are based on multiple facets of the discourse that Chinese and African media outlets created, including recurring terms or concepts and emphasized or understated elements or notions in the respective discourses. Aside from Voyant tools, this thesis also builds upon previous

methodologies of content and discourse analysis, most notably those of Florian Schneider (2013c).

Finally, I also engage in visual discourse analysis. While textual and visual discourses are fundamentally different, which renders their comparison a fairly difficult endeavor, this difference is also precisely why I compare them in this thesis. A comparison of both textual and visual materials provides a wider spectrum of data, more examples to analyze and more varied elements that all constitute the discourses of the news outlets.

The visual analysis primarily draws from Gillian Rose's work on visual methodologies, as well as Schneider's sources on (moving) political images (Rose 2016; Schneider 2013a). The analysis examines YouTube videos of Chinese (*CGTN Africa*) and African (*SABC News*) television news broadcasts regarding the 2018 Beijing FOCAC summit, which have been chosen based on their high degree of similarity. The videos are suitable for comparison, as they both contain speeches and interviews.

In the analyzed timeframe (27 August – 11 September), *CGTN Africa* published fourteen videos in total. Their content ranges from short and elaborate introductions to the FOCAC, to interviews with various African experts and politicians, as well as short videos on what benefits the FOCAC supposedly brings to African countries. Notably, all videos shed a positive light on the Chinese government and the FOCAC summit, emphasizing its strong points while downplaying its weaker areas. Most videos feature rather static atmospheres, including interviews and speeches taken in one camera shot, but some videos also show more variation, including switching between the news anchors in the studio, cinematics, reporters at the summit and reports from across the African continent.

*SABC News* published eight videos. Like *CGTN Africa*, the videos include a short introduction to the FOCAC, as well as an interview with an African expert. Conversely, however, *SABC News* is much more critical of the FOCAC, not afraid to ask sensitive questions concerning the negative effects of Sino-African cooperation, which demonstrates that *SABC News* is not as constrained as *CGTN Africa* in terms of editorial guidelines. While most videos show quite traditional images of news anchors reading from autocue, sometimes there is more interaction between the news anchor or reporter and the guest or interviewee. The news outlet tends to focus on South Africa in most of its reporting, but also incorporates views from across Africa.

For the visual analysis, I chose one video per news outlet. This is because I want to examine two videos in depth rather than analyzing many videos only broadly. Video 1 is a *CGTN Africa*

video titled “Talk Africa: FOCAC Beijing Summit 2018”, published on 1 September 2018, the first day of the summit (CGTN Africa 2018). I chose this video because it features a wide range of discursive and visual elements, including speeches, interviews, commercials, and a discussion with experts.

Video 2 is an *SABC News* video called “Forum on China-Africa Co-operation Summit (FOCAC) concludes”, and was published on 4 September 2018, the last day of the summit (SABC News 2018). Even though video 2 is considerably shorter than video 1, I still chose this video because it is the longest video *SABC News* published about the 2018 FOCAC summit, offering a wide enough range of visual elements. Furthermore, the video also includes an interview with an African expert, which increases the similarity and therefore the comparability of video 2 with video 1.

I analyze the videos through a semiotic analysis in which I examine what terms are emphasized and what elements are left out. These factors are crucial to distinguish the respective messages that the different news outlets convey. This information is then used to pinpoint differences, either subtle or obvious, in the way that news outlets from different countries portray the FOCAC in their television news broadcasts. Finally, I compare how the television items differ from or are similar to the written news articles on the FOCAC from the Chinese and African media outlets.

According to its website, *CGTN Africa* (previously *CCTV Africa*) is a *CCTV* news production center that was launched in Nairobi, Kenya in January 2012. I have chosen *CGTN Africa* since, like *Xinhua*, it is a news outlet owned and run by the Chinese state, which focuses on African news and perspectives as well as international news (CCTV 2015). *SABC News* is one of the five TV channels of the SABC, one of South Africa’s largest SOEs. According to its website, the SABC’s mission is to be “a high-performing, financially viable, digitized, national public broadcaster that provides compelling informative, educational and entertaining content via all platforms” (SABC n.d.). *SABC News*’s motto is “Independent. Impartial” (SABC News n.d.). I have chosen *SABC News* from South Africa because, from the four African countries, it was the digital news outlet that provided the most visual materials through YouTube.

It is worth mentioning that while YouTube is blocked by the Chinese firewall, Chinese media outlets do use it to reach global audiences. Hence, I have chosen to use YouTube to analyze television broadcasts of these two media outlets. The choice for television broadcasts through

YouTube rather than social media videos or other forms of digital media is based on the fact that *CGTN* and *SABC* use YouTube as their main platform to broadcast news online.

Finally, it is important to note that this thesis only researches the discourses of Chinese and African news outlets regarding the FOCAC. It does not, for instance, analyze the influence of Chinese news media in other parts of the world, nor their effectivity on the African continent. The decision to refrain from analyzing the effectivity of Chinese cultural/public diplomacy is largely based on the fact that measuring this sort of effectivity is difficult in practice. Indeed, as Ingrid D’Hooghe (2014) points out, attempts at measuring the effectivity of public diplomacy “are not entirely satisfactory, because they provide indications of and informed guesses about the effects of public diplomacy but fail to prove a direct link between public diplomacy activities and (changes in) people’s perceptions.”

This caveat notwithstanding, further study into the effectivity of soft power is necessary, and scholars should try to push the boundaries of research to advance new ways of measuring the effectivity of soft power and cultural/public diplomacy.

## **4. Analysis**

I divide the analysis in this thesis into three parts. The first part is a content analysis, the second is a textual discourse analysis, and the third section is a visual discourse analysis.

### **4.1 Content Analysis**

The content analysis consists of three parts. The first part broadly analyzes *Xinhua*’s articles regarding the 2018 FOCAC summit. The analysis focuses on distinguishing recurrent patterns or themes throughout the Chinese articles. In the second part, I repeat this process for the articles of the African news outlets. Finally, in the third section, I compare the two datasets to show the main similarities and differences. This information is subsequently built upon in the textual discourse analysis.

#### *4.1.1 Xinhua News Dataset*

I created a dataset of all articles on the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing *Xinhua* published between 27 August and 11 September 2018. In this period, *Xinhua* published a total of 35 news articles, including speeches by heads of state, short descriptions of meetings, interviews and analyses. The total amount of words examined in this dataset is 18,223, with 2,717 unique word

forms. This includes article headlines and the full texts. I have chosen to exclude all dates, author names, descriptions of photos and recommended texts.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency (%)</b>
1. China	475	2.607
2. Africa	298	1.635
3. cooperation	249	1.367
4. said	246	1.350
5. development	141	0.773
6. African	126	0.691
7. countries	121	0.664
8. President	107	0.587
9. Chinese	105	0.576
10. Xi	103	0.565

*Table 4.1.1 Original 10 most frequent terms in Xinhua news articles*

The table above shows the ten most frequently used terms in the 35 articles. This is the unaltered version of the table; hence, all possible terms have been included. However, I make a distinction between the original most frequent terms and the most frequent terms that are usable for analysis. Consequently, terms which I consider irrelevant based on one of the following criteria have been left out of the final table. The criteria are:

1. The term refers to a geographical location (or someone from a certain location) or personal names. E.g.: “China”, “Africa”, “Xi”

Firstly, geographical locations are left out of the analysis as they merely indicate a place and therefore tell the researcher little about what *Xinhua* emphasizes in its discourse. The reason to exclude place names and personal names is primarily based on the fact that most of the articles mention many names of presidents or other high officials from China and African states. Including these terms would severely influence the analysis.

2. The term is considered commonplace. E.g.: “said”.

Secondly, some terms such as “said”, are of little use to the researcher as they are used in a myriad of different contexts and thus carry no specific weight in *Xinhua*’s news coverage.

3. The term refers directly to the FOCAC. E.g.: “summit”, “FOCAC”.

Thirdly, the terms “summit” and “FOCAC” are excluded as they refer directly to the main topic of the analysis, which is the FOCAC. Again, the term is of no particular importance to *Xinhua*’s discourse.

Based on these criteria, the final table looks as follows.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency (%)</b>
1. cooperation	249	1.367
2. development	141	0.773
3. countries	121	0.664
4. president	107	0.587
5. road	65	0.357
6. people	64	0.351
7. new	59	0.324
8. relations	58	0.319
9. support	56	0.307
10. initiative	54	0.296

*Table 4.1.2 Analyzed 10 most frequent terms in Xinhua articles*

I now briefly analyze the ten terms shown in the table above. The analysis generally follows the order shown in the table, but interlinked terms are analyzed together. I conduct a more detailed examination of *Xinhua*’s discourse in section 4.2.

- “cooperation” (1) and “countries” (3)

The term “cooperation” is a crucial element of *Xinhua*’s news coverage of the FOCAC. The reason for this is that the FOCAC is a forum that focuses on cooperation between China and Africa, i.e. a forum which focuses on state-based cooperation instead of other forms of cooperation. Moreover, *Xinhua* uses the term in conjunction with the term “countries” to refer to cooperation between China and African states. Crucially, *Xinhua* uses the word “cooperation” in all of the 35 articles, underlining its importance.

- “development” (2), “road” (5) and “initiative” (10)

The term “development” is used in 31 of the 35 articles. The term is most often used in either of the following three ways. 1. It refers to African countries’ economic development that is supposedly supported by China; 2. It refers to China’s economic development as an exemplary model for African countries to learn from, which enhances the notion of South-South

cooperation; and 3. It refers to development through China's BRI, thereby explaining the terms "road" and "initiative" which are used to refer to the BRI.

- "president" (4) and "relations" (8)

The terms "president" and "relations" are used in 31 and 27 articles respectively. There is an underlying reason for these high proportions. The FOCAC can be considered a form of so-called high politics, where heads of state (presidents) meet to establish and maintain relations between their respective countries. Hence, these two terms display comparatively high frequencies throughout the articles.

- "people" (6)

The term "people" is used in 27 articles. Interestingly, the term is often used in the phrase "people-to-people exchanges" (eight times), a term that is analyzed in more detail in section 4.2.

- "new" (7)

*Xinhua* uses the term "new" to emphasize the potential of Sino-African relations, often referring to future prospects and possibilities, in phrases including "the new economy", "the new era", etc.

- "support" (9)

*Xinhua* uses the term "support" to emphasize China's role as African countries' biggest supporter. Hence, in many of the bilateral talks that President Xi Jinping held with his African counterparts, *Xinhua* repeatedly mentions the Chinese leader's support for his African counterparts' initiatives.

#### 4.1.2 African News Dataset

I now analyze the content of the four African news outlets: *The Star*, *Daily Nation*, *Vanguard* and *Ahram Online*. For the analysis of the African news articles, I created a second dataset of all articles these four news outlets published on the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing between 27 August and 11 September 2018. In this period, They published a total of 44 news articles, including speeches by high officials, short descriptions of meetings, interviews with Chinese ambassadors to the respective African countries and editorials by political or economic experts. The total amount of words in this dataset is 29,742, with 4,399 unique word forms. This



includes article headlines and the full texts. I have again excluded all dates, author names, descriptions of photos and recommended texts.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency (%)</b>
1. China	473	1.590
2. Africa	363	1.221
3. president	248	0.834
4. Chinese	214	0.720
5. African	213	0.716
6. FOCAC	159	0.535
7. Beijing	141	0.474
8. development	141	0.474
9. cooperation	131	0.441
10. said	119	0.400

*Table 4.1.3 Original 10 most frequent terms in the African news articles*

As with the terms from *Xinhua* articles, I make a distinction between the original most frequent terms and the most frequent terms that are usable for analysis. Consequently, terms which I consider irrelevant based on the aforementioned criteria have been left out of the final table.

Similar to part 4.1.1, I now briefly analyze the ten terms shown in the table above, generally following the order shown in the table. Interlinked terms are analyzed together. As mentioned before, I conduct a more detailed discourse in section 4.2.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency (%)</b>
1. president	248	0.834
2. development	141	0.474
2. cooperation	141	0.474
4. billion	111	0.373
4. countries	111	0.373
6. trade	109	0.367
7. economic	87	0.293
8. infrastructure	71	0.239
9. projects	67	0.226
9. state	67	0.226

*Table 4.1.4 Analyzed 10 most frequent terms in the African news articles*

- “president” (1)

The way in which the African news outlets use the term “president” is more or less similar to how *Xinhua* uses it. However, in *Xinhua*’s articles, “president” had a considerably lower relative frequency of 0.587%, whereas in the African news articles it is 0.834%. Nevertheless, their usage seems to be similar. All of the analyzed news outlets use “president” as a representation of high politics with heads of state (mostly presidents) meeting to establish and maintain relations between their respective countries.

- “development” (2), “infrastructure” (8) and “projects” (9)

The African news outlets use the term “development” largely in the same way as *Xinhua*, with two notable differences. Firstly, the term is used more frequently in *Xinhua*’s articles than in the African articles, with relative frequencies of 0.773% and 0.474% respectively. Secondly, the African news outlets often use the term in combination with “infrastructure”, referring to the Chinese government’s infrastructure investments in African countries over the past years.

- “cooperation” (2) “countries” (4) and “states” (9)

There is a clear divide between the importance that *Xinhua* gives to the term “cooperation” as compared to the African news outlets. This is reflected through the respective relative frequencies of the term, 1.367% versus 0.474%. A possible reason for this disparity is that *Xinhua* is a state-owned media outlet, which serves to promote the Chinese government’s strategies and projects, including the FOCAC. This could manifest itself in higher frequencies of terms that the Chinese government deems important, such as “cooperation”. Like *Xinhua*, the African news outlets use the terms “countries” and “states” to refer to African countries or states that cooperate with China through the FOCAC and the BRI.

- “billion” (4) “trade” (6) and “economic” (7)

Arguably the most apparent difference between the top 10 terms of *Xinhua* and the African news outlets is that the latter focus much more on the economic aspect of the FOCAC than the former. This is reflected by the relatively high frequencies of words like “trade” and “economic”. Notably, all four African news outlets tend to mention the amount of money that China invests or plans to invest in their respective countries. Therefore, “billion” ranks comparatively high on the list.

### 4.1.3 Summary

There are many similarities between the content of the articles of *Xinhua* and the African news outlets. First and foremost, many of the terms that *Xinhua* uses in its articles are also used by its African counterparts. Both emphasize “cooperation”, “development”, “countries” and “president”. Moreover, some terms are not completely identical, but still remarkably similar. Compare, for example, “initiative” to “project”, “road” to “infrastructure” and “countries” to “state”.

However, there are also some notable differences. Firstly, The African news outlets display a more balanced top 10, with multiple terms of the same frequency. *Xinhua*, on the other hand, heavily emphasizes cooperation, which far outranks all other terms in its top 10. Secondly, the African news outlets stress the economic aspects of the FOCAC much more than *Xinhua* does. The high relative frequencies of words like “billion”, “trade” and “economic” reflect this.

All in all, the content of the Chinese and African news outlets seems to be quite similar, apart from the differences mentioned above. However, this part only analyzed the content in a generalizing, broad manner. The next part instead dives much deeper into the discourses of *Xinhua* and its African counterparts. This analysis will reveal more about how similarly the news outlets really reported on the FOCAC.

## 4.2 Textual Discourse Analysis

The textual discourse analysis of the articles focuses on two main categories: emphasized elements and understated elements. I select these categories as they aid me to distinguish commonalities and differences between the two discourses, which I subsequently use to draw conclusions about how the Chinese government’s soft power is sent to and received in African countries.

### 4.2.1 Emphasized elements

When examining *Xinhua*’s discourse on the 2018 FOCAC, one concept is vital and hence emphasized most of all elements: “equality”. This is logical, since the 2018 Beijing FOCAC summit was themed “China and Africa: toward an even stronger community with a shared future through win-win cooperation.” In the following paragraphs I therefore explain how *Xinhua* conveys a message of “equality” in its discourse.

Since *Xinhua* describes “equality” in a comprehensive fashion, the term is at the core of its discourse. Furthermore, I would argue that the term also reflects “Xi Jinping political thought” (*Xi Jinping de zhengzhi sixiang*, 习近平的政治思想), which is a core component throughout the Chinese government’s political discourse since 2013, the year that Xi became president (see Yang 2015). One longer quote and several short fragments from *Xinhua* reports, as well as speeches by heads of state and interviews with African leaders, illustrate the importance of “equality” for *Xinhua*’s discourse and its connection to Xi Jinping political thought.

“China will work with other countries to build a community with a shared future for mankind, forge partnerships across the world, enhance friendship and cooperation, and explore a new path of growing state-to-state relations based on mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation” (Xinhua 2018b).<sup>5</sup>

This first quote comes from Xi Jinping’s opening speech at the FOCAC summit, which *Xinhua* published in full on its website on the first day of the summit, 3 September 2018. I choose this quote as it is comparatively dense in terms of important discursive elements. While the quote contains more than just the underlined three elements, these three are most important for understanding *Xinhua*’s overarching communication strategy.

The first element is the so-called “community with a shared future for mankind” (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*, 人类命运共同体). While the term “community with a shared future for mankind” or “community of common destiny” (CCD) have been used by Chinese leaders and diplomats for at least six years now, a clear definition of the CCD concept is still lacking, as Zhang Denghua explains (2018, 197). What is clear, however, is that Xi Jinping almost exclusively uses CCD in connection with developing countries, including African countries (Ibid., 199). *Xinhua* states that a CCD is “a China-Africa community which is jointly responsible for pursuing win-win cooperation, delivering happiness, cultural prosperity and common security, as well as promoting harmony between man and nature” (Xinhua 2018c).

*Xinhua* uses various examples of supposed similarities between China and African countries to try to convince the reader of the existence of a CCD. For instance, *Xinhua* argues that China and Africa have common interests and aspirations, as well as a need for common security and common development. These examples should be connected to *Xinhua*’s position that China

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<sup>5</sup> All underlining in this thesis is added by the author.

and African countries are all developing, not developed. While *Xinhua* envisages a CCD in which China and Africa thrive on mutual cooperation, the analyzed African media show a rather different picture. Strikingly, they only use the term CCD when referring to the title of the FOCAC summit, after which they swiftly continue discussing other issues such as trade with and loans from China. Hence, it seems that the African media outlets are not genuinely interested in Chinese political notions, or as one article phrases it: “Beyond the conference jargon, interesting trends emerged that African leaders and citizens should pay attention to” (Sebunya 2018).

The second element from the quote is “friendship” between China and Africa. *Xinhua* often refers to African countries as friends and sometimes even “brothers” (Xinhua 2018a). This ties into the Chinese political notion of “Sino-African friendship” (*Zhong-Fei youyi* 中非友谊; see Zeng 2016). Again, *Xinhua*’s African counterparts seem less enthusiastic. The only article that describes China as Africa’s “friend”, is a speech by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa who states that “China is an old friend of Africa” and “It [China] has a long history of engagement, friendship and support” (The Star 2018b). President Ramaphosa is the exception to the rule though, as all other articles refrain from using the word “friend” or any other references to kinship, instead preferring the more neutral phrase of “friendly and mutually beneficial co-operation.”

The third element from the quote is “win-win cooperation”. As Ian Taylor (2011) explains, “win-win cooperation” (*hezuo gongying*, 合作共赢) was introduced by former Chinese President Hu Jintao, and presumably means “utilizing Africa’s rich resources and market potential alongside China’s practical know-how gained in the course of modernization.” *Xinhua* uses the phrase “win-win cooperation” to underline the supposed benefits and results of Sino-African cooperation. *Xinhua* mentions the term in every analyzed article, which further explains the high frequency of “cooperation” in the content analysis of part 4.1. The analyzed African media do not mention “win-win cooperation” as much as *Xinhua* does, but when they do use the phrase, it merely refers to the title of the summit, which is “China and Africa: Toward an Even Stronger Community with a Shared Future through Win-Win Cooperation.” Instead, as I demonstrate in the next part, the African news outlets emphasize other aspects of the FOCAC.

When examining the discourse of the African news outlets on the 2018 FOCAC summit, there is no single concept that dominates the way “equality” dominates *Xinhua*’s discourse. However,

there is a general emphasis throughout their news reporting of the FOCAC. This general emphasis can best be summarized as “financial gains”. The African news outlets tend to emphasize financial gains in a variety of ways, making it the center of their discourse. One main quote and other fragments from news reports, as well as speeches by heads of state and interviews illustrate this.

“The goal of the 2018 FOCAC meeting is the promotion of economic and trade cooperation between China and African economies as it seeks to synergize China’s Belt and Road Initiative, the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the African Union’s Agenda 2063, and the development strategies of individual African countries” (Daily Nation 2018).

This quote comes from a short *Daily Nation* news article called “President Kenyatta heads to Beijing for China-Africa Summit.” It clearly yet concisely demonstrates the emphasis in the African discourse.

The first element of this discourse is “economic and trade cooperation”. This element is significant because it shows how the African media outlets focus mainly on the economic aspect of the FOCAC, instead of stressing altruism or friendly cooperation as *Xinhua* tends to do. Below are three fragments from three of the African news outlets, all referring to the overarching element of “economic and trade cooperation”.

“[...] the launch of an industrial promotion initiative, which will build and upgrade trade and economic zones on the continent” (Ebrahim 2018);

“[...] this [Sino-African cooperation] should generate more resources for everyone, expand markets and create space for African development and broaden its economic prospects” (Shehu 2018);

“[...] we have really very large prospects for economic cooperation, especially that China has been proving serious about expanding its economic relations with Africa [...]” (Ezzat 2018).

The African media outlets not only emphasize economic and trade cooperation in the content of their articles, but they also use clear and short titles that refer to the term, such as:

“Multi-billion dollar SA, China deals to enable economic growth” (The Star 2018a);

“News Insight: Buhari’s \$10billion harvest from China” (Shehu 2018);

“China’s \$60bn investment in Africa: FG, Obaseki, Chinese investors heighten transaction” (Vanguard 2018);

“Egypt’s Sisi in Beijing for an economic outreach” (Ezzat 2018).

The underlined phrases and the titles come from the four respective African outlets, and all refer to the overarching element of “economic and trade cooperation”. In short, both the titles and the content of many of the African news articles stress the economic side of African states’ cooperation with China.

This finding ties into the second element, which is the “Belt and Road initiative”. In their discourses of the FOCAC, the African news outlets tend to use the BRI as a prime example of Sino-African economic cooperation. I would argue that the African news outlets generally have a positive view of the BRI. They often emphasize the economic importance of trade with China, which is Africa’s biggest trading partner, and they sometimes refer to the BRI as an example of South-South Cooperation, which is similar to *Xinhua*’s discourse. There is, however, a key difference in the way they frame the goals of the BRI when compared to *Xinhua*’s view of the initiative.

In brief, the main difference is that the African news outlets tend to link the BRI to the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which is the third noteworthy element in the discourse. This link is most clearly illustrated by an article from *The Star* which states: “Africa looked to China as a valuable and committed partner in advancing Agenda 2063 and in pursuance of this, the continent embraced China’s ‘Belt and Road initiative’” (Frykberg 2018).

It is important to first explain what the AU 2063 Agenda is. According to the organization’s website, the AU 2063 Agenda is a strategic framework that aims to accomplish “inclusive and sustainable development” as well as striving for “unity, self-determination, freedom, progress

and collective prosperity, [...] social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance and peace and security” (African Union, n.d.).

The African news outlets perceive the BRI as a tool that can aid African countries in achieving their goals, including the AU Agenda 2063. Consequently, they view the BRI much more narrowly than *Xinhua* does. While *Xinhua* describes the BRI as “a road of peace, prosperity, openness, green development and innovation and a road that brings together different civilizations” (Xinhua 2018b), the African news outlets instead almost exclusively focus on the BRI’s economic benefits and how it can serve the AU to achieve its 2063 Agenda goals.

It is imperative to note that while the news outlets choose to highlight either the ideological or the financial aspects of the FOCAC summit, other arguably important sides of Sino-African cooperation are left out. I highlight these sides in the next part of the thesis.

#### 4.2.2 *Understated elements*

Understanding a discourse not only requires a researcher to examine what messages the sources convey by emphasizing certain elements. Perhaps even more important is to explore what themes are understated, or even left out of the discourse, and to try and interpret why they might be neglected. Hence, this part of the thesis compares the discourses of *Xinhua* and the African news outlets to the academic literature on China’s engagement in Africa from part 2 to demonstrate what important elements have been understated or completely neglected, either deliberately or unconsciously. I focus on two main examples to illustrate this.

##### 1. **Debt traps**

As described in part 2, China’s engagement in Africa has largely been framed through an economic or political lens. Scholars have therefore often pointed towards China’s FDI in African states which has increased dramatically during the past decades, especially under the BRI framework (see Dollar 2018). Some have accused the Chinese government of practicing “debt-diplomacy” by creating so-called “debt traps”, which would go against the principles of “equality” and “win-win cooperation” that *Xinhua* propagates in its discourse of the FOCAC (Dollar 2018, 291).

*Xinhua* only discusses debt-related issues in one of the 35 articles, titled “Commentary: China helping Africa build development track over debt trap” (Shi 2018). In the article, *Xinhua* rebukes what it calls “debt trap assertions” by stating that “[the assertions] are either ill-informed or ill-intended. They might make headlines in some newspapers, but they have no



market among those with clear eyes and sober minds” (ibid.). *Xinhua* gives three arguments for this. (1) “Africa owes far more debt to Western countries and institutions than to China”; (2) “Chinese loans are mostly concessional, with long maturities and low interest rates”; (3) “Africa’s debt issue is to some extent overblown” (ibid.). The fact that *Xinhua* only discusses debt traps in one article arguably implies that it simply refuses to acknowledge the issue and instead creates a completely separate discursive reality.

Similarly, in *Xinhua*’s attempts to make a convincing case of the Chinese government’s benign intentions when granting loans to African countries, it omits several facts that run counter to its logic. An example of such an argument can be found in the case of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was unable to repay its debt to China, and in a partial surrender of its sovereign rights, it opted to convert debt into equity. Thus, it handed over 80% of the Hambantota port and 15,000 acres of land to a Chinese SOE in December 2017 (Behuria 2018). Having witnessed the far-reaching consequences in the Sri Lanka case, it is logical that African countries could potentially worry about “debt traps” from Chinese loans.

The African news outlets show divided responses to this issue. *The Star* published three articles that mention “debt traps”. The longest of these articles, called “China offers pledge of R890bn to Africa, denies ‘debt trap diplomacy’”, states that “China has denied engaging in ‘debt trap diplomacy’”, and that “the new \$60 billion [proposed by President Xi] will include \$15 billion of aid, interest-free loans and concessional loans” (Shepherd and Blanchard 2018). Both *Daily Nation* and *Vanguard* only mentioned “debt traps” once throughout their entire discourse and *Ahram Online* even makes no mention of it at all.

In part 4.2.3, I consider what possible implications this finding might have.

## **2. Neocolonialism**

Similar to accusations of “debt trap” diplomacy, some have also claimed that Chinese engagement in Africa is a form of neocolonialism (e.g. Maswana 2015). According to these claims, China’s engagement in Africa is purely based on strategic interests, with China searching for and buying raw materials it needs for its economic development, followed by infrastructure spending, strategic sovereign investments, and other modernization pathways, until gradually Africa is nothing but an annexed territory of China (ibid., 111).

Although *Xinhua* discusses claims of Chinese neocolonialism in Africa in two of its 35 articles, in both cases *Xinhua* uses the exact same phrase: “FOCAC refutes the view that a new

colonialism is taking hold in Africa, as our detractors would have us believe [...]”, which was made in a statement by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa (Shi 2018). Interestingly, Xinhua chooses to quote an important African figure to refute the allegations of neocolonialism.

The African news outlets are divided in their views of the accusations and the importance they attribute to them in their respective discourses. Both *Vanguard* and *Ahram Online* do not discuss supposed neocolonialism in any of their articles, therefore neither confirming nor retorting the assumptions. *Daily Nation* only mentions neocolonialism once in its discourse but does so in an article that is extremely critical of Chinese loans. The writer argues that “Africans must critically analyze Chinese lending and act in their best interests, not Beijing’s or the West’s,” and “Africa’s technocrats, intelligentsia, policymakers and political leadership and AU first, and then the UN, must not allow Africans to drive or be driven blind into economic penury” (Opanga 2018). Contrary to *Daily Nation*, *The Star* dedicates three of its articles to rebutting supposed Chinese neocolonialism in Africa. However, the three articles all feature the aforementioned quote of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, which is also used by *Xinhua*.

Thus, quite similar to the debt traps, two of the four media outlets choose to neglect the allegations of neocolonialism, one is extremely critical of China, and *the Star* is the only outlet to refute claims of Chinese neocolonialism in Africa. In the next part, I consider what possible implications these findings might have.

#### 4.2.3 Discussion

As Chapter 3 of this thesis explained, *Xinhua* defends, supports, and praises the Chinese government unconditionally in every article it publishes. This is also the case for articles about the FOCAC. *Xinhua* consistently lauds the Chinese government while refuting any potential criticisms against China. This is reflected in the extensive efforts Xinhua undertakes to stress ideological aspects of the FOCAC, including CCD, “friendly cooperation”, and “win-win cooperation”.

Chapter 3 also stated that *The Star* is partly owned by Chinese investors. Interestingly, however, one of the newspaper’s former employees questioned Sekunjalo Independent Media Consortium’s stance towards China when it decided to cancel the employee’s article about the discrimination of the Uyghurs in China’s Xinjiang province (Essa 2018). In extension of this, I would argue that positive framing of China is certainly visible in *The Star*’s reporting of the

neocolonialism claims, which it actively retorts whereas the other African news outlets either neglect this topic or criticize China.

Furthermore, the methodology section explained that there is no direct connection between *Daily Nation* and the Chinese government or Chinese investors. This could be the reason why it is the only news outlet that warns African governments and companies of accepting Chinese loans. Nonetheless, *Daily Nation* generally focuses on the financial aspects of the FOCAC and the possible gains for Kenya, rather than criticizing Chinese engagement in Africa. A similar pattern is visible in *Vanguard's* discourse. This news outlet also has no ties with Chinese investors or the Chinese government. Its discourse stresses how the FOCAC benefits Nigeria's economy and industry.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, *Ahram Online* is primarily concerned with promoting and legitimizing any initiative the Egyptian government proposes or participates in, including the FOCAC. This is arguably the reason why *Ahram Online* refrains from addressing allegations of Chinese debt traps or neocolonialism. Thus, according to this logic, Chinese soft power is of little importance to whether *Ahram Online* regards China positively.

In sum, the textual discourse analysis has shown that, despite *Xinhua's* extensive efforts to stress ideological aspects of the FOCAC as well as key terms from Xi Jinping political thought, the African news outlets do not value these two aspects as much as they value financial gains. As a result, the different discourses show that the two sides only partly agree on what goals Sino-African cooperation should strive towards. Several scholars have argued that since African states have a common historical background of colonialism, African politicians are wary of China's intentions on their continent as they do not want their constituencies to feel colonized again (see Lumumba-Kasongo 2011; Shanguhya & Falola 2018).

Hence, I argue that Chinese soft power through the FOCAC is far less important for African countries than financial gains. In addition, fears of the period of African colonization still play a large role when it comes to trusting foreign partners, which negatively influences Chinese soft-power efforts.

In the next part, I analyze whether there is a similar discursive dissonance when comparing Chinese and African television broadcasts.

### 4.3 Visual Discourse Analysis

In the visual discourse analysis, I analyze videos of Chinese (*CGTN Africa*) and African (*SABC News*) television news broadcasts of the 2018 FOCAC summit. I first examine salient and underemphasized elements in the news outlets' reporting and then discuss how the videos compare to the print discourse analyzed in part 4.2.

#### 4.3.1 Video 1: *CGTN Africa*

I divide video 1 into nine parts, based on the nine different settings that are featured in the video. These include speeches, background information, interviews, commercials and finally a discussion.

Part name	Duration
1. Opening	00:00 – 00:19
2. Wang Yi's speech	00:19 – 00:49
3. Introduction to program	00:49 – 01:45
4. Introduction to the FOCAC	01:45 – 03:56
5. Interviews with presidents	03:56-07:50
6. Teaser	07:50-08:02
7. CGTN commercial	08:02-08:38
8. FOCAC commercial	08:38-09:13
9. Discussion with guests	09:13-29:28

*Table 4.3.1 Different parts of video 1*

My analysis focuses on parts 5, 8 and 9. I analyze part 5 because it provides insights into the opinions of African presidents on the FOCAC. I include part 8 because it is rich in semiotic resources. Moreover, my analysis also heavily focuses on part 9, due to its length. Comparatively, the remaining parts play a marginal role.



*Figure 4.1 Presenter standing during introduction<sup>6</sup>*



*Figure 4.2 Presenter and guests seated during discussion*

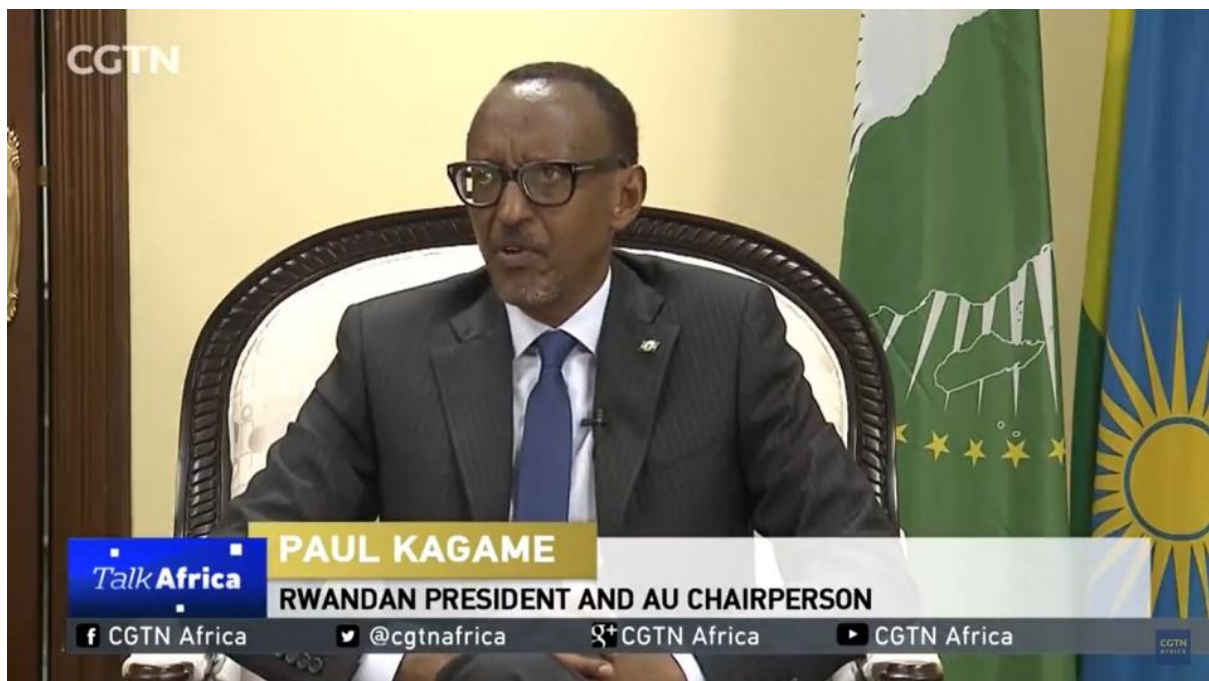
### *The Interviews*

CGTN reporters interviewed eight African presidents who attended the FOCAC summit. They were the presidents of Rwanda, Kenya, Namibia, Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Guinea,

<sup>6</sup> All Figures are screenshots taken by the author.

Uganda and Malawi respectively. In the interviews, the African leaders give their opinions of the FOCAC and share their expectations for the summit.

In the first interview, President Kagame (Figure 4.3), who was also the chairman of the AU in 2018, states that the FOCAC is “a very good forum,” (CGTN Africa 2018). He emphasizes cooperation on “areas that need to be paid attention to,” and “reflecting on what has been happening” [in order to] “continue to advance [Sino African ties] based on a stronger relationship” (CGTN Africa 2018). President Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo (Figure 4.3) makes similar comments, stating that he “looks forward to more achievements in cooperation” and that “the summit will be a success” (CGTN Africa 2018). Furthermore, he adds that “the BRI is a great idea,” which “link[s] Africa to China and the world” (CGTN Africa 2018).

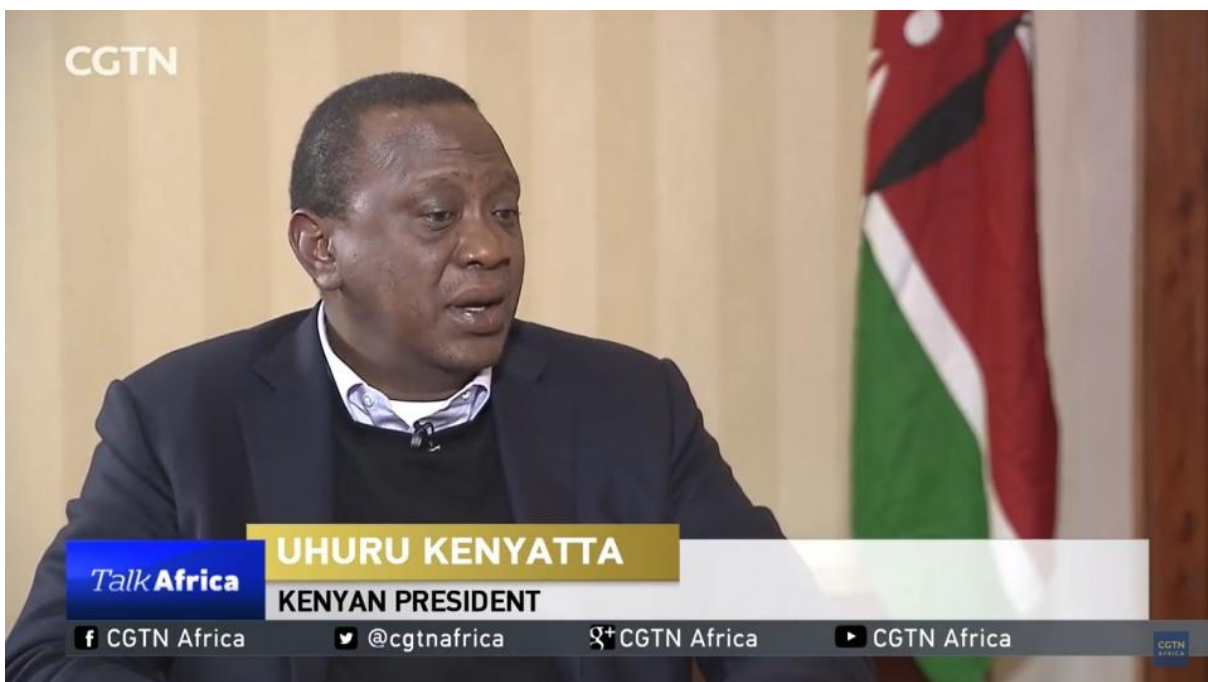


*Figure 4.3 Rwandan President Kagame*

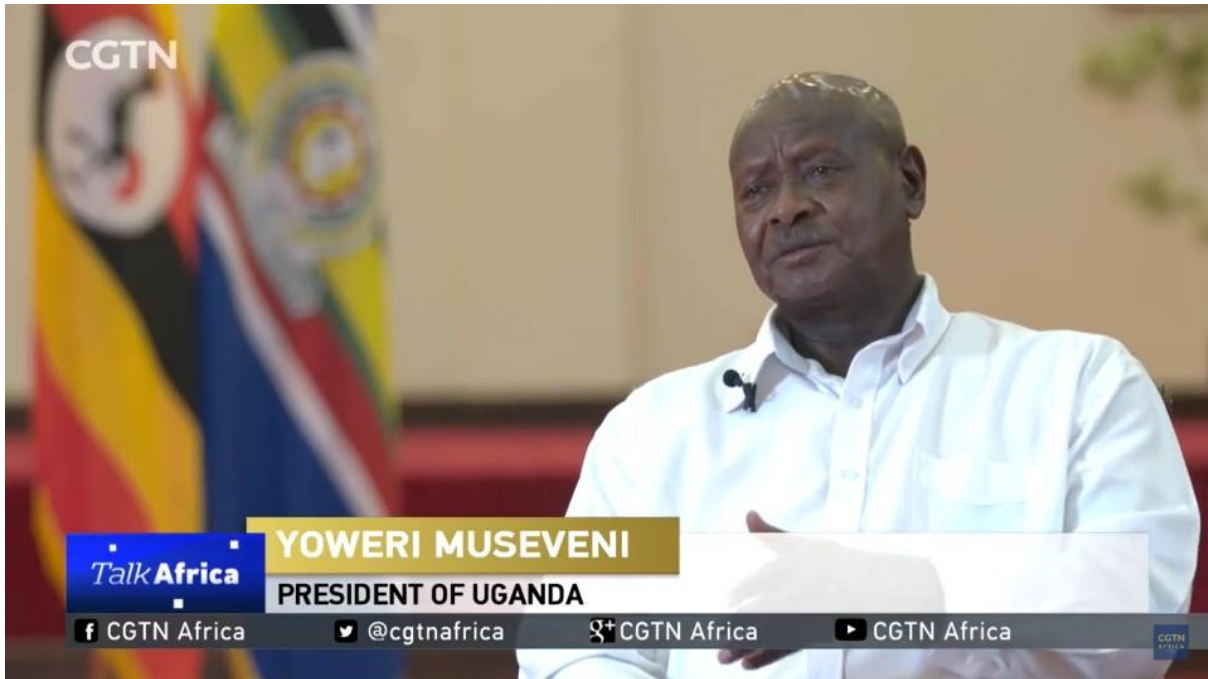


*Figure 4.4 President Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo*

Comparatively, Kagame’s and Sassou Nguesso’s statements are less specific than those of the other presidents. However, it is important to note that this is partly due to *CGTN*, which controlled the length of the interview, the questions asked and the parts that were shown on television. This is the case for all fragments used in the video. Video 1 therefore serves to demonstrate how *CGTN* frames the FOCAC in its discourse and can only partly show how African presidents discuss the FOCAC.

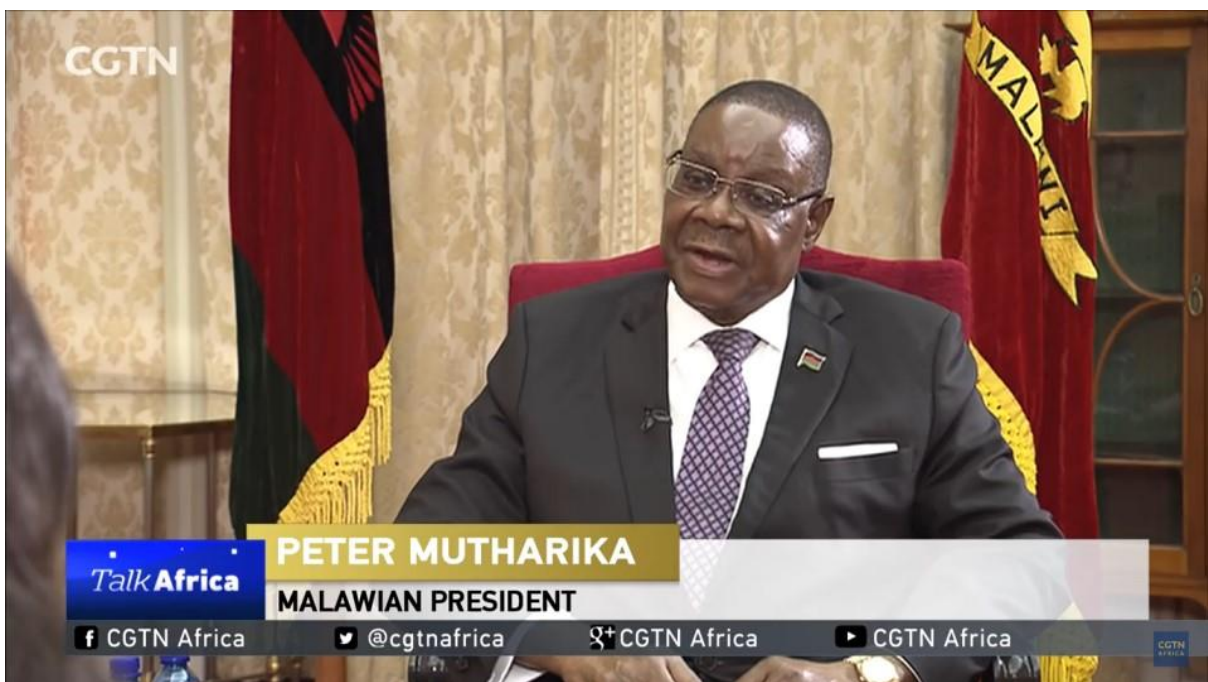


*Figure 4.5. Kenyan President Kenyatta*



*Figure 4.6 Ugandan President Museveni*

Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 show the Presidents of Kenya, Uganda and Malawi respectively. They all emphasize similar elements of Sino-African relations and express the same desires. Firstly, all three argue that the most important goal of the FOCAC is enhancing Chinese investment in their countries as well as Sino-African trade in general (CGTN Africa 2018). Secondly, the investment should specifically be targeted at infrastructure development, as has been the case in the past (CGTN Africa 2018).



*Figure 4.7 Malawian President Mutharika*



In addition, the three presidents state some desired outcomes of the summit that are not mentioned by other presidents. For Kenya, reducing the trade deficit with China is important (CGTN Africa 2018). Alternatively, Uganda’s president states that his country wants to attract more Chinese tourism, while the Malawian president states that he wants his country to focus on skills training to provide its labor force with necessary manufacturing skills (CGTN Africa 2018).



*Figure 4.8 Namibian President Geingob*

The Presidents of Namibia and Guinea, shown in Figures 4.8 and 4.9, take yet a different stance on China-Africa cooperation as well as the outcomes that they desire from the FOCAC summit. They stress the need for industrialization to strengthen economic development in their countries (CGTN Africa 2018). President Geingob of Namibia expounds that industrialization adds value to Africa’s own “road,” presumably referring to the BRI (CGTN Africa 2018). He also mentions the importance of creating more employment opportunities for young people in Africa (CGTN Africa 2018). Guinean President Conde expresses his support for President Xi’s strategic points (Xinhua 2018b) and adds that this FOCAC summit will take Sino-African cooperation “to a new level” (CGTN Africa 2018). He concludes that “it is time to see what Africa can do” (CGTN Africa 2018).



*Figure 4.9 Guinean President Conde*

Finally, Burkina Faso's President Kabore does not focus on any of the aforementioned topics, which are all linked to financial/economic gains or development. Instead, Kabore advocates multilateralism as opposed to protectionism, stating that China and Africa have always defended multilateralism, and protectionism is a threat to international and world peace (CGTN Africa 2018). He concludes that the summit is especially important in showing protectionists that African countries have opted for multilateralism (CGTN Africa 2018).



*Figure 4.10 President Kabore of Burkina Faso*

In sum, the interviews function as an important layer of legitimacy and authority, as they allow the audience to see prominent African figures voicing their opinions of the FOCAC and Sino-African cooperation. It also underlines the importance of the visual discourse analysis, since this additional layer would not have been possible with a mere textual analysis.

### *The Commercial*

Before the discussion, there is a short commercial break which advertises the FOCAC and China-Africa cooperation. The advertisement displays a wide variety of images on which I conduct a semiotic analysis. Such an analysis is important because it examines elements which are exclusive to visual materials, and therefore do not appear throughout the textual analysis. The analysis distinguishes three main elements that *CGTN* emphasizes and explains what the implications of this emphasis might be for *CGTN*'s discourse.

The first element is the way in which the advertisement portrays Africa and its people, which I summarize as “purity”. This purity manifests itself in multiple ways throughout the advertisement. Figures 4.11 and 4.12 serve as examples of this element.



*Figure 4.11 African village (location unknown)*

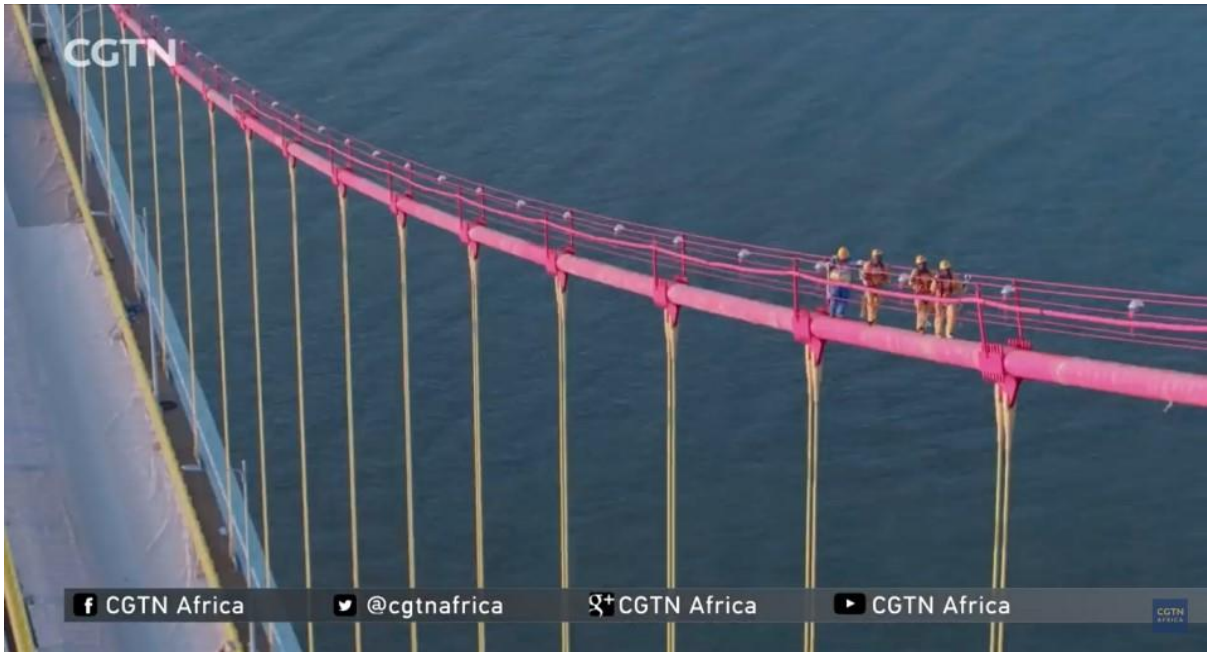


*Figure 4.12 Villagers decorated with face paint dancing and playing drums*

By using several different moving images, the advertisement emphasizes the idea of Africa being a “pure”, unspoiled place. E.g., Figure 4.11 shows a village which consists of small buildings scattered across a plain, which appear to be architecturally primitive. This is followed by Figure 4.12, which shows African villagers dancing and playing drums, which could come across as a traditional way of celebrating a certain event. Moreover, the villagers are decorated with face paint, adding a certain sense of exoticness and distance to the advertisement, which translates to an “us-them” relationship.



*Figure 4.13 Port with Chinese containers and ships*



*Figure 4.14 Chinese engineers walking on a bridge*



*Figure 4.15 Chinese cars in a BAIC factory*

The second element is the portrayal of Chinese engagement with Africa, which I summarize as “transformation”, exemplified by Figures 4.13, 4.14, 4.15 and 4.16.

Embodying the second component of the “us-them” relationship, these three images show an idealization of Chinese engagement in Africa. This idealization manifests itself as a transformation to modernity, which involves trade, investment, industrialization and infrastructure development. Figures 4.14 and 4.16 show several examples of infrastructure

development. The former shows the final product, a bridge presumably designed by Chinese engineers, while the latter shows a series of cranes on a construction site at dusk. Figures 4.13 and 4.15 conversely show Chinese container ships and a car factory owned by BAIC, a Beijing based automotive company, which indicate trade and investment as well as industrialization. These images evoke a sense of modernity with the viewer, which is used to emphasize the achievements of Chinese engagement in Africa as well as its ongoing endeavors.



*Figure 4.16 Cranes at dusk*

The third and most-strongly emphasized element in the commercial is “friendly cooperation”. Figures 4.17, 4.18, 4.19 and 4.20 represent this final element.

Towards the end of the commercial, there is a shift in pace. The drum music in the background becomes louder, and the images succeed one another faster than before. The images stress Sino-African cooperation, showing a group of doctors posing for their picture (Figure 4.17), workers embracing each other (Figure 4.18), and children giving a thumbs up (Figure 4.19), as if commending the Chinese workers that are constructing the soccer stadium in the background.

Finally, there are the construction workers embracing and lifting each other up (Figure 4.20), possibly out of joy for their partnership and perhaps even their friendship. These images should be connected to the aforementioned idea of “Sino-African friendship” (*Zhong- Fei youyi*, 中非友谊).



*Figure 4.17 Chinese and African doctors posing for their picture*



*Figure 4.18 One Chinese and two African workers sitting together on a pile of sand*



*Figure 4.19 Chinese workers and African children giving a thumbs up near a soccer stadium*



*Figure 4.20 African workers lifting and embracing their Chinese colleagues*

### *The Discussion*

The final two-thirds of the program consist of a discussion with two experts on Sino-African relations. The first guest is Prof. Peter Kagwanja, a Kenyan intellectual and expert on security, governance and strategic issues, and the founding President and Chief Executive of the Africa Policy Institute (API) (Africa Policy Institute n.d.). The other guest is Dr. He Wenping, a senior



researcher on African studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) (BRICS Policy Center 2019).

I analyze three main aspects of the discussion. Firstly, the experts tend to complement each other instead of demonstrating contrasting opinions. This is partly due to the presenter, who rarely asks any challenging or critical questions. In fact, most questions tend to either describe the history and expectations of the FOCAC or explain the Chinese government's goals for Sino-African cooperation as a whole (CGTN Africa 2018).

Secondly, none of the questions touch upon the criticism voiced by primarily Western scholars and media, e.g. accusations of neocolonialism. In contrast, most questions are asked from either an ostensibly Chinese or African perspective. Some examples include asking Prof. Kagwanja to recap 17 years of FOCAC progress and achievements, and asking Dr. He to elaborate on Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's comments on elevating China-Africa cooperation (CGTN Africa 2018). Given that *CGTN* is a state-owned news outlet, it is logical that much emphasis is placed on legitimizing and commending the Chinese government's engagement with African countries through the FOCAC.

This is the third main point: as a whole, the discussion is arguably excessively positive about Chinese engagement in Africa. Neither of the experts expresses any negative opinions of Chinese cooperation with Africa through the FOCAC. Instead, they frequently mention the term "Africa rising" to stress their positivity. Kagwanja introduces this term to draw a contrast between Africa's troubled past and its supposed bright future that is gradually realized through cooperating with China (CGTN Africa 2018). I would argue that this positivity can be explained by considering state-run Chinese media outlets' tendency to promote any initiative the Chinese government proposes. I discuss the implications of this in part 4.3.3.

#### *4.3.2 Video 2: SABC News*

As shown in table 4.3.2, which is again based on the different scenes throughout the video, video 2 also includes speeches and an interview with an expert. I first briefly compare the speeches in parts 3, 4 and 5 to the interviews with presidents in video 1. Then, I analyze the interview in part 6 and compare it to the discussion in video 1.

Part name	Duration
1. Opening	00:00 – 00:28
2. Introduction	00:28 – 00:49
3. South African president’s speech	00:49 – 02:43
4. Chinese president’s speech	02:43 – 03:08
5. Senegalese president’s speech	03:08 – 04:03
6. Interview with expert	04:03 – 11:22

*Table 4.3.2 Different parts of video 2*

### *The Speeches*

After the introduction, *SABC* shows coverage of the concluding session of the FOCAC summit with speeches by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Chinese President Xi Jinping, the two co-hosts of the summit, as well as Senegalese President Macky Sall, whose country is hosting the next FOCAC summit in 2021.

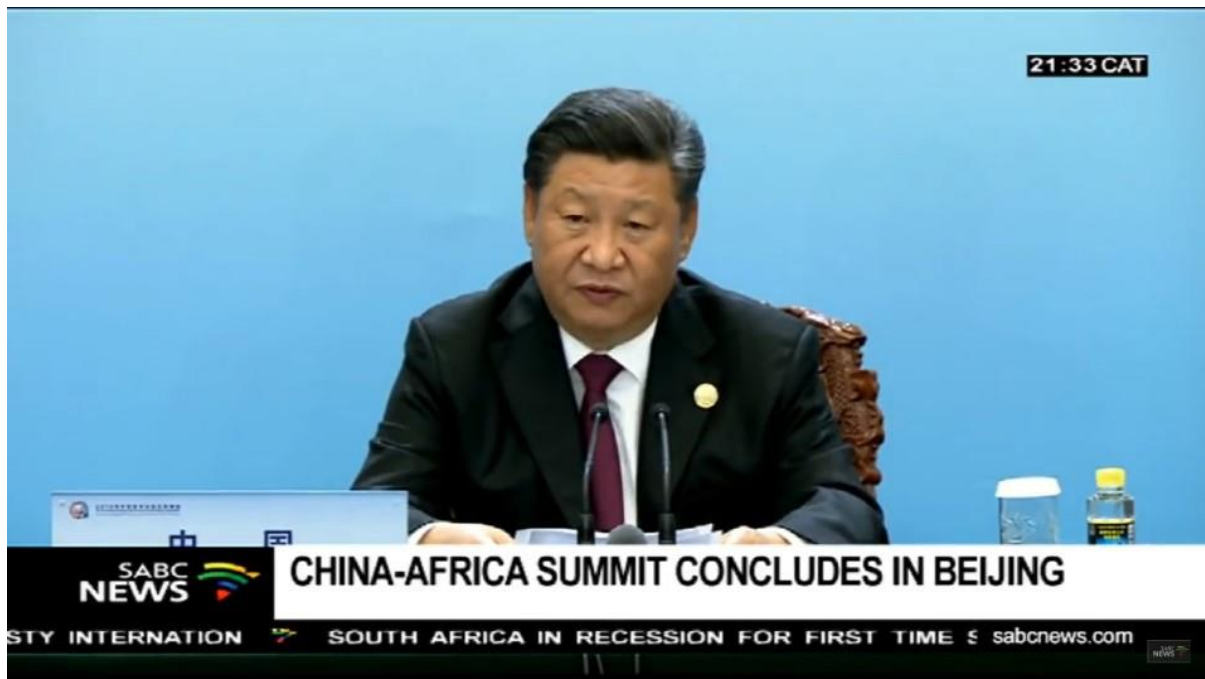


*Figure 4.23 President Ramaphosa during his speech*

In his speech, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa primarily praises the relations between China and Africa (SABC News 2018). He mentions the necessity for measures of cooperation that address Africa’s needs and produce tangible benefits, as well as the fact that the \$60 billion that President Xi promised has already been allocated to a wide range of projects (SABC News 2018).

Ramaphosa voices similar opinions to those of the presidents interviewed in Video 1. He is generally highly positive of Sino-African cooperation, emphasizing points that other presidents stress as well, such as infrastructure development, industrialization, and skills acquisition. (SABC News 2018). In addition, Ramaphosa states that he wants to extend the “good relations between our [African and Chinese] governments” to relations “between our citizens in all spheres of life” (SABC News 2018).

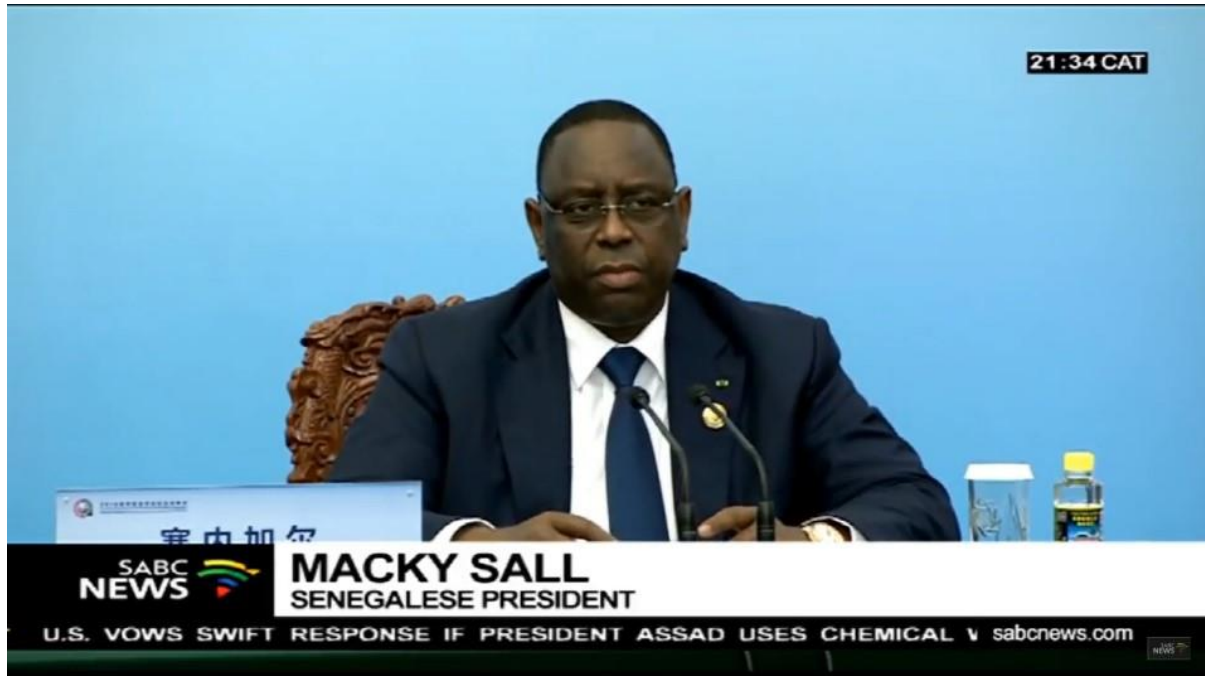
Finally, it is important to note the amount of time *SABC* chose to allot to Ramaphosa’s speech in its program. Ramaphosa’s part is four times longer than Xi’s fragment and twice as long as Sall’s part. I would argue that by emphasizing Ramaphosa’s speech over the other two, *SABC* conveys a message of (South) Africans as leaders of the summit, which is further exemplified by the fact that Sall’s screen time is also longer than Xi’s.



*Figure 4.24* President Xi during his speech

In terms of content, President Xi’s speech differs from Ramaphosa’s in several ways. Essentially, Xi emphasizes the contrast between China and other foreign actors in their degree of respect for Africa. In the fragment, he states that “all members of the international community need to respect the sovereignty of African countries, listen to Africa’s voice, take Africa’s stance seriously and deliver on the promises made to Africa” (SABC News 2018). By showing this part of Xi’s speech, *SABC* highlights the contrast between China and others in their degree of respect for Africa and its desires, thereby framing China as Africa’s partner and friend and other states as less trustworthy. In addition, it is worth mentioning that Xi

frames Africa as a unitary actor, as he uses a singular for Africa's *voice*, instead of the plural *voices*. However, this could also be an interpretation of the translator, as Mandarin Chinese does not have a separate form for plural words.



*Figure 4.25 President Sall during his speech*

In contrast, President Sall's speech shows a higher degree of similarity to Ramaphosa's. Sall stresses the "significant progress" that has been made in the past eighteen years of FOCAC cooperation, mentioning "increased mutual understanding" and "strengthened political and economic cooperation" (SABC News 2018). Sall is thoroughly positive of China-Africa relations, asserting that both parties will "enter a golden age" since their ties are supposedly based on sincere friendship, equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit (SABC News 2018).

Crucially, Sall reiterates the term "Sino-African friendship", as well as several terms from Xi Jinping's political thought: "equality", "mutual respect" and "mutual benefit". This is significant because it shows how the Senegalese president's discourse aligns with the Chinese government's discourse of cooperation, which is even more important because Senegal will host the next FOCAC summit.

### *The Interview*

The final and longest part of video 2 consists of an interview with Mr. Isaah Mhlanga, Executive Chief Economist at Forbes. I compare the interview to the discussion in video 1. Several things stand out. Firstly, whereas the presenter in video 1 refrains from asking

challenging or critical questions, the *SABC* presenter's questions do challenge the interviewee. For instance, the presenter asks multiple questions from the perspective of Africa, such as what Africa can gain from this summit, whether Africa has a collective plan to scale up against China and whether Africa exploits its trade with China enough (*SABC News* 2018).

This ties into the second point: video 2 focuses on the economic implications of the summit much more than video 1. Generally speaking, the type of guests that a program invites to a large extent determines what questions the presenter will ask. However, this also greatly influences the message that the news outlet wishes to convey. In other words, contrary to *CGTN*, *SABC* chooses to emphasize the economic gains of the FOCAC over its political consequences by interviewing an economics expert.

Thirdly, the presenter stresses the allegations of neocolonialism previously mentioned in part 4.2.2. In fact, he starts the program by saying “so many questions have been raised on whether China's interest in Africa is meant to recolonize the continent” (*SABC News* 2018). In the interview, he asks Mr. Mhlanga whether China's investment in and support to Africa is a form of neocolonialism, even though President Ramaphosa refuted these claims (*The Star* 2018b; *SABC News* 2018). Mhlanga responds that while China does have the power to dictate how funds are spent, Chinese investment is not a form of neocolonialism but a form of win-win benefit instead, since China helps alleviate poverty in Africa (*SABC News* 2018).

All in all, the interview in video 2 is arguably more neutral in its coverage of the FOCAC than the discussion in video 1. It is neither overly positive about China nor Africa, while also daring to ask critical questions and challenging the interviewee, who is not afraid to disagree with the presenter. Finally, the clearest difference between the discourses of video 1 and 2 is the emphasis on politics and trade respectively. This resembles the difference that I distinguished in the textual discourse analysis. In the following part, I elaborate on more similarities and differences between the textual and visual discourses.

### 4.3.3 *Textual vs. Visual discourse*

In general, the textual and visual discourses display a high degree of similarity. The textual discourse analysis has shown that, despite *Xinhua*'s extensive efforts to stress ideological aspects of the FOCAC including CCD, “friendly cooperation” and “win-win cooperation”, the African news outlets do not necessarily value these terms as much as they value financial gains. In other words, where *Xinhua*'s discourse uses the logic of Chinese political culture and Xi

Jinping political thought to establish its discourse, the African news outlets conversely apply the logic of comparative benefit, which creates two different discursive realities. The visual analysis shows similar patterns, with both the fragments as well as the discussion in the *CGTN* video emphasizing Chinese political terms far more than *SABC*'s video. Hence, the two sides only partly agree on what goals Sino-African cooperation should strive towards.

I would argue that this difference in logic and therefore in discourse is mainly caused by fundamental differences between the objectives that Chinese and African news outlets aim to accomplish. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Chinese state-run media use *xuanchuan* to tell China's story to the world, publicize Chinese government policies and perspectives, and promote Chinese culture abroad. This explains why *Xinhua* heavily emphasizes political terms in its discourse, and why the African discourses do not stress any political terms.

Furthermore, section 4.2.2 demonstrated that different African news outlets exclude or understate particular terms, such as allegations of debt traps and neocolonialism. Although the visual discourse analysis does display this trend in *CGTN*'s discourse as well, it is less pronounced in *SABC*'s discourse. This is because even though neocolonialism and debt are both mentioned in *SABC*'s discourse, they are discussed only briefly, whereas trade and investment are eventually emphasized more than any other discursive element, tying back to the logic of comparative advantage.

Now, although the visual discourse largely reiterates the textual discourse, there are several reasons why it still offers tremendous added value. Firstly, the visual discourse uses visual elements such as speeches by heads of state, interviews and discussions, as well as commercials to visualize the news outlets' respective discourses. Both *CGTN* and *SABC* use these elements to emphasize their message in ways that texts could never do. For instance, interviewing African presidents adds an important layer of legitimacy and authority on top of the textual discourse, as it allows the audience to personally watch figures of importance voice their opinions of the FOCAC and Sino-African cooperation. A second example of added value is the commercial showcasing Sino-African cooperation with many Chinese and African people together in images that attract the audience through their fast pace. Finally, by using a repertoire of visual tropes, e.g. the people hugging in figure 4.20, the videos reinforce the more complex discursive statements made in the media outlets' textual discourses.

In sum, through both analyses, I have shown that there are distinct Chinese and African discourses of the 2018 FOCAC summit, which are similar in their desire for cooperation, but

different in terms of their general strategy and emphasis. I discuss the implications of this further in the conclusion.

## 5 Conclusion

By analyzing how Chinese and African media outlets reported on the 2018 FOCAC summit, this thesis has sought to answer the question: What are the implications of Chinese and African news outlets' different discourses of the FOCAC for China's soft power in African countries?

I have explained that specific Chinese and African news outlets show more similarities than differences in both their textual and visual discourses. They generally regard the FOCAC and Sino-African cooperation positively, but they emphasize different discursive elements. Chinese news outlets use *xuanchuan* to stress the importance of political notions such as South-South cooperation, a “community of common destiny” and “win-win cooperation”, as well as other terms primarily derived from Xi Jinping political thought. *Xinhua* and *CGTN*, both state-owned media outlets, praise the Chinese government's engagement with Africa and either neglect, understate or refute Western claims of Chinese neocolonialism and allegations of debt traps.

African news outlets conversely emphasize the financial prospects of the FOCAC for their respective countries. They present Chinese aid as a more trustworthy alternative to Western financial aid. While there is a minority arguing that China presents a threat to Africa, both the many presidents in the articles and the televised interviews as well as the experts in the discussion and the Skype interview generally do not reiterate this view. In contrast, they argue that China is less threatening to Africa than the West, since the latter has in their eyes resorted to unilateralism whereas China advocates multilateralism. Based on the textual and visual discourses of the five African media outlets, I argue that the most decisive factor in how African media outlets frame the FOCAC is instead the financial gains provided by China, which African countries can use to industrialize and develop their own economies.

Despite the many similarities between the Chinese and African news outlets, the differences between their respective discourses have far-reaching consequences for Chinese soft power in Africa, especially the near-complete absence of Chinese soft power terminology in African news outlets' discourses of the FOCAC. In light of the way that the Chinese media outlets propagate Chinese soft power, I conclude that there is a considerable disconnection between them and their African counterparts, which could have negative implications for Chinese soft power in Africa as a whole. In other words, the clear disparity between the Chinese media's

positivism and the African news outlets' realism reveals two different paradigms that are irreconcilable, which results in tensions between the two discourses. This tension could, in turn, have severe consequences for Chinese soft-power endeavors in Africa and Sino-African cooperation as a whole..

It is thus important that scholars continue researching the role of the media and soft power with regard to Sino-African cooperation. Many questions remain unanswered, such as whether African audiences' views of Chinese soft power are influenced by the media they consume, or how other forms of Chinese soft power such as cultural exchanges between African and Chinese students could play a role in Chinese soft-power initiatives. Finally, while this thesis has conducted both textual and visual discourse analyses, other methods of analysis such as interviews and big data analysis should also be employed to create a broader framework of research into this relatively unexplored field.

To conclude, by analyzing the implications of media discourses on Chinese soft power through both qualitative and quantitative approaches, as well as both textual and visual methods, this thesis has added a new angle to existing research. Most notably, by adding a visual analysis, the thesis has uncovered how the media outlets use interviews and discussions with prominent Chinese and African figures to emphasize their message in ways that texts could never do. In so doing, the thesis adds an important layer of legitimacy and authority on top of the textual discourse, as it allows the audience to personally watch figures of importance voice their opinions of the FOCAC and Sino-African cooperation. The findings of this thesis have implications for Sino-African relations and Chinese soft power, which both arguably require a new strategy from the Chinese side to achieve more successful and sustainable cooperation in the future.



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