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China through the Lens of Nigerian Media

Olawuyi, Ebenezer Adebisi

Abstract

China–Africa relations have generated so much passionate discussion in policy and scholarly circles because the West, especially the United States, considers the relationship a new form of colonialism. Studies in China–Africa cooperation attempt to understand the underlying motive of the new “Scramble for Africa” by China. Beijing’s growing presence in Africa has been described using different labels such as “development partner,” “economic competitor,” and “colonizer.” The China–Africa narrative is ideologically nuanced in a manner that is complex to determine its implications on China’s role in Africa. Against the backdrop of the sustained Western media campaign of “shock and awe” about China–Africa relations, this study examines the contents of three newspapers, The Guardian, The Punch, and Vanguard based on their wide readership, credibility, authoritative, and opinion shapers on sundry national issues. The essence is to understand the nature of China’s engagements with Africa and how the Nigerian media report them. As reported in the selected Nigerian newspapers’ reportage of China–Africa relations, the media image of China is that of a “development partner” rather than an “exploiting predator.” Perhaps, this perception is subtly reinforced in the reportage based on Beijing’s foreign policy on Africa and its willingness to provide aid and concession loans.

Keywords: *China–Africa relations, newspapers, development partner, exploiting predator*

Introduction

UNLIKE OTHER BILATERAL RELATIONS, THE CHINA–AFRICA PARTNERSHIP has generated interests, apprehensions, and criticisms. The interpretation of this relationship, especially by the United States, is more perceived as Africa “jumping from the frying pan to fire.” The pessimism associated with the relationship is expectedly so because the China–Africa alliance is an exception to foreign policy engagements. The relationship is formatted in a manner that “though they may remain asymmetrical in economic content, they should remain

equal in terms of economic and political standing” (Mutual Respect and Equality, 2011: 12, cited in Umejei, 2013).

Unfortunately, the Sino-Afro pessimists’ description of China–Africa relations as the new scramble for Africa by China leaves in its wake “deindustrialization and consequently, poverty and underdevelopment” (Mlambo, Kishamba, and Simawu, 2016: 258). But Christopher Coons sees America’s apprehensions differently. According to him, “the United States was losing ground and ceding investment and trade opportunities in Africa to competitors (China)” (Mlambo *et al.* 2016: 258). Importantly, those who hold a contrary opinion about China’s presence in Africa argue that China’s economic presence in the continent offers substantial infrastructural funds “where traditional donors, particularly the west, allocate relatively little assistance” (Wang cited in Mlambo *et al.*, 2016: 258).

The hues and cries about Western reactions to the China–Africa partnership reflect a sympathizer “crying more than the bereaved.” Olorunfemi (2018) believes that the relationship between China and Africa is one in which “the parties involved do not enjoy the luxury of privacy as much as they might like to, with probing eyes and questions from all over. The eyes and response of the West would almost make one conclude that the Africa-China relationship is an illicit affair, one that is neither in the interest of Africa nor the world.” But truthfully, what oversight responsibility does the West have over Africa to determine her best interest. Is it not a case of the West being threatened that China is displacing her in the continent with its charm offensive diplomacy?

To deny that both parties in the China–Africa partnership merit their convictions smacks of *argumentum ex silentio*, which means “proof from silence.” Therefore, to understand and appreciate the new China–Africa partnership, examining this relationship from a historical context is essential. Perhaps, one can gain tremendous insights into the evolution of the relationship over the years. China and Africa began direct contact by sea route as early as in the 7th century—a simple arithmetic calculation would mean that Africa and China’s contact is about 1500 years old—since then, trade and culture exchanges between China and Africa have expanded.” Between the 14th and 15th centuries, Admiral Zheng, a Chinese navigator during the Ming dynasty, led fleets to the east coast of Africa four times and visited places where Somalia and Kenya are today. Zheng brought gifts and granted titles from the Ming Emperor to the indigenous rulers to establish tributary states (Umejei, 2013; Berhe & Hongwu, 2013). Other evidence suggests that China and Africa had much earlier diplomatic ties that date back to the Tang dynasty (600AD) and trade along the Silk Road (Lei & Yaping, 2018).

It is important to note that the Chinese envoys’ visit to the continent “broadened their knowledge about Africa and African people, and set up friendly ties with the African people.” However, a much more important feature of the relationship, which sharply contrasted with the European incursion to Africa, was that the “Chinese were not invaders, and they did not impose their ideas upon

others.” It is apparent that from inception, the principles that underlie China’s policy in Africa was defined essentially and exclusively by

sincerity, equality and mutual benefit, solidarity and common development—these are the principles guiding China–Africa exchanges and cooperation and the driving force to lasting China relations (Omoruyi, Chen, Zhang, Liu, Mai, Guo, Zhan, Diao & Magassouba, 2019: 13)

Although relations between Africa and China have existed for a long time, 2006 was regarded as China’s “Year of Africa” by the Chinese leadership. In that same year, China issued the first White Paper on its Africa Policy, and Beijing hosted the summit of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in November. The Chinese leadership reiterated that 2006 marked a “new strategic partnership” between China and Africa. This bilateral framework was laid at the Bandung Conference of 1955 when the Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, articulated what has become the pivot for China to have a “collective dialogue” with Africa. In his words:

The Chinese Delegation has come here to seek unity and not to quarrel, to seek common ground, and not to create divergences. There exists common ground among the Asian and African countries, the basis of which is that the overwhelming Asian and African countries and their peoples have suffered and are still suffering from the calamities of colonialism. All the Asian and African countries gained their independence from colonialist rule whether these countries are led by the communist or nationalists. We should seek to understand each other and respect each other, sympathise with, and support one another, and the five principles of peaceful coexistence may completely serve as a basis for us to establish relations of friendship and cooperation, and good neighborliness (*China Daily*, 2005 cited in by Umejei, 2013).

Since the first FOCAC Summit, China’s evolution in terms of its foreign policy towards Africa signalled “the public arrival of a new era in Africa’s relations with the outside world” (Alden, 2007: 2). President Xi reiterates that the China–Africa partnership is indicative that a “friend in need is a friend indeed” (348). The nature of this friendship is “devoted to building and developing a new form of a strategic partnership between China and Africa, centred on “equality and mutual trust in politics,” “economic cooperation and win-win,” and “cultural exchange and mutual appreciation” (Xu, 2008:45).

As a result, China’s investment in the African region far surpasses that of other leading world powers: What the Chinese did that no one else had done before was to have considered Africa as a market—a market for Chinese goods, institutions, and services—when the rest of world viewed Africa as an economic basketcase and a place for aid programs (Powers cited by Bailard, 2016). The bond of friendship between China and Africa appears to be waxing more potent

despite the perceived exploitative posturing of China that the West, especially the United States, alleges.

China's increased economic activity in Africa in recent years has already elicited much scholarly and journalistic attention. The debates about China's presence in Africa have taken by now familiar contours of asking whether China is a friend or foe, imperialist or an ally, and what these developments mean for the West (Alden, 2007). China's growing presence in Africa reveals that the country has been very active economically in many African nations. This fact is corroborated by Alden (2007: 8) when he notes that "nothing symbolized Africa's importance to the Chinese economy so succinctly as Angola becoming China's largest foreign supplier of oil, passing Saudi Arabia in 2006." China has continued to increase its presence in many African nations, including South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania, the Republic of Congo, Senegal, Swaziland, Malawi, and Lesotho (Umejei, cited in Chinafile, 2015).

Politically, China is also strengthening and deepening diplomatic ties with other African countries: state-owned companies investing heavily in agriculture, fisheries, and related production in Gabon, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania. Chinese construction firms, supported by the state apparatus and low-cost but effective Chinese labour, have outbid contractors from other parts of the world and won a substantial contract in the African construction sector. These companies have been building roads in Ethiopia, railway lines in Angola, Stadia in Mali and Djibouti, and government offices in Mozambique and Uganda. In Nigeria, China built the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) headquarters and the office of the Accountant General of the Federation.

Regardless of how it is perceived, China's expanding interests in Africa have opened vistas of socioeconomic benefits for the African people. This fact is reiterated by Alden (2007:4) when he notes that "...the rise of Chinese retail traders and low-cost imported goods meant that many Africans could afford new clothes, shoes, radios, and watches for the first time in their lives." Against this background, Alden states without equivocation that "Chinese involvement, far from being a curse, had been the catalysts for development and, with that, a new level of improved livelihood such as Africa had not known for decades."

Statement of the Problem

Chinese–African relations have generated passionate discussion both in policy and scholarly circles. The crux of the matters in the discourse primarily has to do with the underlying motive of China's penetration of the African continent. How can the bilateral relationship between China and Africa be interpreted differently, given the many perceptual frames that have been used to describe the relationship? The essence of this study is to understand the nature of China's engagements with Africa and how a few select Nigerian newspapers report them. It is crucial to establish this because China's relations with Africa have become a subject of speculation and controversy in recent years. Much of the debate on Sino-African

relations focus, particularly for the industrialized powers, the emergence of a competitor for the continent's vast natural resources (Naidu & Davies, 2006). Is China–Africa relation one of the development partnerships, economic predator, or colonizer? It is against this backdrop that this paper explored, through the analysis of media reportage on the China–Africa relationship to establish the nature of the relationship.

Research Questions

1. What are the issues of reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers coverage of China–Africa relations?
2. What is the quality of reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers coverage of China–Africa relations?
3. In her engagement with Africa, what image of China is portrayed in the selected Nigerian newspapers reportage of China–Africa relations?

Theoretical Framework: Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory is one of the fundamental theories in communication studies used to explain how the media predetermine essential issues to the public. It tries to set the tune of what should come first in public discourse. Hence, agenda-setting theory is used in this study to determine the issues of China–Africa relations coverage in selected Nigerian newspapers, with the primary purpose of understanding the themes that are given precedence in their reports.

Agenda setting theory, according to Bernard Cohen, cited in Baran and Davis (2003:311), is conceptualized thus:

[The] press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers *what to think about*. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors and publishers of the paper they read (emphasis added).

Another definition is by Norton Long, cited in Severin and Tankard, Jr. (2001:222). According to them, “the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with”(emphasis added). These definitions reveal a subtle yet powerful influence of the media as an instrument of social construction. As (re) presented by the media, social reality is seen as a subjective manipulation of reality created through mass media discourse and audience interaction. This further implies that the media, through constant replication of news coverage, select and emphasise the importance of specific issues in the

public's mind, based on predetermined criteria or value (Okigbo, 1990; Folarin, 1998; Dominick, 1999; Severin & Tankard, Jr., 2001; Baran & Davis, 2003). Agenda Setting is also referred to as the “power to “structure issues” (Lazarsfeld et al., cited in McQuail, 2005). Thus, Agenda Setting theory establishes a strong correlation between media reports and the public's ranking of issues in the public domain (Severin & Tankard, 2002; Baran & Davis, 2003).

The media, in the process of developing the agenda of things to be considered or acted upon, do so, not by explicitly stating that “this issue is important,” but by giving more space and time to the issue in question as well as by giving it more prominence, space and time (Miller, cited in Olawuyi, 2020). Agenda setting is achieved through any of the following the quantity or frequency of reporting; prominence given to the reports--through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics, or timing on radio and television; the degree of conflict generated in the reports; and cumulative media-specific effects over time (Folarin, 1998:68).

The relevance of agenda setting theory, therefore, to the study is to discover how the selected Nigerian newspapers indirectly influence the direction of China–Africa relations through their reportage of bilateral engagements and sociopolitical interaction between the two players.

Methodology

The study employed content analysis to examine three Nigerian newspapers with national circulation: *Guardian*, *Punch*, and *Vanguard* newspapers. The researcher selected these newspapers based on their wide readership, credibility, authority, and opinion moulding on sundry national issues. The time frame for the study was between May 2015 and December 2017, which was the period for the implementation of the 2015 Forum for China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) action plans on the industrialization of Africa. The period provided a best-test case to appraise China's post-FOCAC plan on the industrialization of Africa. The composite week sampling technique was employed in selecting four stories per week for the study, making 1446 editions for the study period. Relevant content categorical schemes were formulated to provide insights into the nature of the reportage of China–Africa relations by the selected Nigerian newspapers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the editions for each of the newspapers for the study period.

Table 1: Editions of newspapers content analyzed

Newspapers	2015	2016	2017	Total
<i>The Punch</i>	98	192	192	482
<i>The Guardian</i>	98	192	192	482
<i>The Vanguard</i>	98	192	192	482
Total	294	576	576	1446

The intercoder reliability coefficient formula by Holsti, cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003:15), was used to ascertain a degree of agreement between the coders. Therefore, the inter-coder reliability was calculated thus:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2(2915)}{3064 + 3064} = .89$$

M represents the number of coding decisions on which two coders agree, while N1 and N2 are the total numbers of coding decisions by the first and second coders.

Data Analysis

This section presents the results of the content analysis of the selected Nigerian newspapers reportage of China–Africa relations. The data generated were analyzed using a simple frequency count and simple percentage. Findings are presented in tabular forms.

Q1: What are the issues of reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers coverage of China–Africa relations?

This question aims to determine the nature of the selected newspapers’ issues gave saliency to in their reportage of the burgeoning bilateral relations between China and Africa. It is significant to underscore that the dominance of the issues in the coverage of this engagement would provide insight into Nigerian newspapers’ agenda setting in their narratives of the two regions.

Table 2: Dominant issues in newspapers’ reportage of China–Africa relations

	<i>Guardian</i>		<i>Vanguard</i>		<i>Punch</i>		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Industrialization and development	17	18.2	9	9.6	14	15.0	40	42.8
Business, economy and trade	17	18.2	10	10.7	12	12.9	39	41.8
Agriculture and food security	3	3.2			2	2.1	5	5.3
The environment	1	1.0	1	1.0	4	4.3	6	6.3
Culture, language and education	2	2.1			1	1.0	3	3.1
Subtotal	40		20		33		93	100.0

Table 2 shows that *The Guardian* newspaper reported the highest number of news stories on “Industrialization and Development” (18.2%). This is followed by *The Punch* newspaper with 15.0% stories, while *The Vanguard* had the least number of stories (9.6%). Moreover, findings on the table show that the three

newspapers devoted the following news hole to “Business, Economy and Trade: *Guardian* (18.2%), *Punch* (12.9%), and *Vanguard* (10.7%). Furthermore, the newspapers’ coverage of “Agriculture and Food Security” on the continent shows that *Guardian* and *Punch* had 3.2% and 2.1% stories, respectively. Another issue of concern in the China–Africa relations is the “Environment.” Hence, findings from the newspapers’ coverage of environmental issues affecting the bilateral relations show that *Punch* devoted 4.3% of its news hole to it.

In comparison, *Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers have 1.0% of stories each. The last issue of consideration in the newspapers’ coverage of China–Africa relations is “Culture, Language and Education.” Findings from the analysis revealed that *Guardian* and *Punch* newspapers both reported on “Migration from China to Africa and from Africa to China (2.1%), while *Guardian* newspapers exclusively reported on “Chinese language in African schools and universities (1.0%)”

Table 3: Dominant issues in China–Africa relations according to reportorial context

	Central Africa No. (%)	East Africa No. (%)	West Africa No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Industrialization and development	0	3 (2.8)	37 (35.5)	40 (38.4)
Business, economy and trade	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)	37 (35.5)	39 (37.5)
Agric and food security	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	05 (5.7)	05 (4.8)
The environment	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	06 (9.7)	06 (5.7)
Culture, language, education	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	03 (2.8)	03 (2.8)
Total	01 (0.9)	04 (3.7)	88 (84.6)	93 (100.0)

Table 3 shows that 35% of the news stories focused on industrialization and development in West Africa, while 37.5% were on business, the economy, and trade in West Africa. Other subjects covered by the newspaper include agriculture and food security (5.7%), environment (9.6%), culture, language and education (5.7%). However, the following subjects were reported about China–Africa cooperation in East Africa: industrialization and development in East Africa (2.8%), business, the economy, trade (0.9%). Central Africa had 0.9% of the subject on business, the economy, and trade.

The table further reveals that 92.5% of the three newspapers news coverage of China–Africa relations is on West Africa compared to 3.7% in East Africa and 0.9% in Central Africa. Hence, it can be deduced from the data results that the selected newspapers gave more prominence to subjects regarding business,

the economy, and trade in West Africa than other themes. Evidently, from the findings discussed above, the reportage on China–Africa relations focused on the West Africa subregion compared to other regions. This finding may not be too surprised when proximity is considered one of the criteria for newsworthiness. It is important to note that the media prioritize as news value those events led by “relevant sources” or those occurred within their geographical area of diffusion” (Lopez & Guevara, 2009:31).

Q2: What is the quality of reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers coverage of China–Africa relations?

The primary objective of this question is to determine the quality of reportage the selected newspapers accorded the coverage of the China–Africa relations based on the following content analytical categories: nature of publication, tone of coverage, the position of news, news sources, and headline types.

Table 4: Nature of publication

	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
News report	31 (33.3)	16 (17.2)	23 (25.0)	70 (76.0)
Features	2 (2.2)	2 (2.2)	2 (2.2)	6 (7.0)
Opinions	4 (4.3)	2 (2.2)	5 (5.4)	11 (12.0)
Editorials	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)
Letters to the editor	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	1(1.1)
News analysis/ commentary	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)
Interviews	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(1.1)
Total	40 (43.1)	20 (22.0)	33 (36.0)	93 (100.0)

Table 4 presents data on the nature of publications the newspapers deployed in their coverage of China–Africa news. Findings show that 76.0% of the stories on China–Africa relations were reported as news, while 7.0% of the coverage were opinion articles. Other types of stories on the China–Africa relations in the selected newspapers are Features (7.0%), Editorials (2.2%), News Analysis/ Commentaries (2.2%), Letters-to-the-Editor (1.1%), and Interviews (1.1%).

Table 5: Tone of news stories on China–Africa relations

	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
Positive	25 (27.0)	15 (16.1)	25 (27.0)	65 (70.1)
Negative	7 (8.0)	4 (4.3)	2 (2.2)	13 (15.0)
Neutral	8 (9.0)	4 (4.3)	3 (3.2)	15 (17.0)
Total	40 (43.0)	20 (25.0)	33 (32.0)	93 (100.0)

Table 5 presents data on the tone the selected newspapers employed in framing news stories in their reportage of China–Africa relations. Findings reveal that 70.1% of the reports are positive, 15.0% of the news are negative, while 17.0% are neutral. The apparent deduction is that majority of the news stories on China–Africa relations are positively slanted. The positive slant foregrounds the perception of a win-win relationship in the China–Africa bilateral interaction.

Table 6: Position of news reportage on China–Africa relations

	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
Front page	1(1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1(1.1)
Back page	1(1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	3 (3.3)
Editorial page	2 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	1(1.1)	3 (3.3)
Opinion page	5 (5.4)	2 (2.2)	3 (3.2)	10 (11.0)
Foreign/African news	15 (16.1)	5 (5.4)	7 (8.0)	27 (30.0)
Inside cover	4 (4.3)	1(1.1)	2 (2.2)	7 (8.0)
Business news	15 (16.1)	5 (5.4)	7 (8.0)	27 (30.0)
Other news	8 (9.0)	3 (3.2)	4 (4.3)	15 (16.1)
Total	40 (43.0)	20 (25.0)	33 (32.0)	93 (100.0)

Summary of data presented in Table 6 on the position the newspapers placed reportage on the China–Africa stories was as follows: “Foreign/African News” (30.0%), Business News (30.0%), Opinion Page (11.0%), Inside Cover (8.0%), Back Page (3.3%), Editorial Page (3.3%), and FrontPage (1.1%). The majority of the news story on China–Africa relations are reported in the Foreign and/or African news column.

Table 7: News sources in China–Africa relations

	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
Own/special correspondent	30 (32.2)	14 (15.0)	29 (31.1)	70 (78.3)
Western news agencies (e.g. AFP, Reuters, UPI, and AP)	8 (9.0)	3 (3.2)	3 (3.2)	14 (15.4)
News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)	2 (2.2)	1 (1.1)	1(1.1)	4 (4.4)
Xinhua News Agency	2 (2.2)	0	1 (1.1)	3 (3.3)
Internet	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)
Unidentified	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)
Total	40 (43.0)	20 (25.0)	33 (32.0)	93 (100.0)

Table 7 reveals that in-house reporters cover most of the stories reported by the three selected Nigerian newspapers. A breakdown of the data shows the following sources of news on China–Africa relations: Own/Special Correspondent (78.3%), Western news Agencies (AFP, Reuters, UPI, and AP) (15.4%), News agency of Nigeria (4.4%), Xinhua News Agency (3.3%), and Internet (1.1%).

Table 8: Types of headline in the news report of China–Africa relations

	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
Disparity	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Labelling	1(1.1)	1(1.1)	1(1.1)	3 (3.3)
Sensationalism	4 (4.3)	2 (2.2)	2 (2.2)	8 (9.0)
Coherence	35 (38.0)	17 (18.3)	30 (32.2)	82 (89.0)
Total	40 (43.0)	20 (25.0)	33 (32.0)	93 (100.0)

Table 8 reveals that most of the stories analyzed in the coverage of China–Africa relations have their headlines to be coherent with the story’s content (89.0%). Other headline types are “Sensationalism” (9.0%) and “Labelling” (3.3%).

Q3: In its engagement with Africa, what image of China is portrayed in the selected Nigerian newspapers reportage of China–Africa relations?

The premise for asking this question is to determine the media image of China in its engagement with Africa as reported in the selected Nigerian newspapers for the study. Answers to this research question are vital in determining what the real intention of China is in Africa. While some see the China–Africa relations as offering immense possibilities for Africa’s industrial and economic growth, another school of thought perceives the relationship as a new form of colonialism.

Table 9: Image of China in the selected Nigerian newspapers

	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	<i>Punch</i>	Total
Exploiting predator	8 (9.0)	3 (3.2)	4 (4.3)	15 (17.0)
Development partner	30 (32.2)	16 (17.2)	28 (30.1)	74 (80.0)
Others	2 (2.2)	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	4 (4.4)
Total	40 (43.0)	20 (25.0)	33 (32.0)	93 (100.0)

Table 9 presents data on the media image of China as reported in the selected newspapers. Findings show that 80.0% of the coverage represented China as Africa’s Development Partner, while 17.0% of the news reports narrativized China’s relationship with Africa as an exploiting predator. It is apparent that the

majority of the news reports on China–Africa relations constructed the image of China as that of a “Development Partner.”

Discussion of Findings

Q 1: What are the issues of reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers coverage of China–Africa relations?

The three newspapers gave coverage to sundry issues in their coverage of China–Africa relations. The most dominant issue in the coverage of the bilateral ties is the industrialisation and development of Africa. An example of a news story on this subject is entitled “China’s curious engagements in Africa” in *The Guardian* of Oct. 24 2017. An excerpt from the news story reads thus:

The offer by the People’s Republic of China to build the 3,050 megawatts Mambila hydropower plant at a minimal initial monetary commitment to Nigeria is raising some curious discussion points again about China’s constructive engagements in Africa and indeed Nigeria that led Africa to declare boldly to the West on 11 January 1976 that, “Africa has come of age.”

Besides reporting on the Chinese government’s support for Nigeria’s industrialization and development, the newspaper also challenges Nigeria’s government to learn from the socioeconomic growth of China. It reads in part:

Nigeria has much to learn from a People’s Republic of China that came into existence only 68 years ago—just a decade earlier than Nigeria as a self-governing state. Besides its thousands of years of history and sophisticated culture, China has gained from a strong, focused, and uncompromisingly patriotic leadership that, in the face of foreign interference and opposition, forged a collective will to survive, thrive, and hold its own in the community of nations, the harnessing of its immense human and natural resources to feed itself, industrialize, and become lately, the second-largest economy in the world. It is essential to say that China has an extremely low tolerance for that value-corroding, socially destructive cankerworm called corruption.

These stories reiterate the commitment of the Chinese government to support the industrial and development growth of Africa, which was in fulfilment of the promises made by the country to Africa at the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summit. The five critical goals that the summit set out to achieve are the promotion of the traditional China–Africa friendship, guiding the future development direction of China–Africa relations, transforming and upgrading China–Africa economic and trade cooperation, encouraging more coordinative and balanced China–Africa cooperation, and promoting South–South cooperation and development (Zhang, 2018: 14).

Another issue that the newspapers accorded much prominence is “Business, Economy, and Trade” between China and Africa. This is not too surprising

because China is the world's second largest economy after the United States. A news report that shows the trade relations between China and Africa is reported in *The Punch* of July 14 2017 entitled "Nigeria, China moves to improve \$15bn trade relations" reveals that:

The Federal Government and the government of China are developing strategies to improve trade between both countries, which stood at about \$15bn at the end of 2016. The President of China Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria, Mr. Ye Shuijin, disclosed this during the unveiling of the chamber's building in Abuja on Thursday. He said the unveiling of the building would help to strengthen trade relations between both countries, adding that the plan was to increase the level of trade in the next five years. Shuijin stated that the chamber was doubling its efforts to increase the participation of Chinese investors in Nigeria, noting that about 155 Chinese companies had been registered with the chamber and were currently operating in the country in critical sectors of the economy.

Another report from *The Guardian* with the title: "NAFDAC arrests Chinese, syndicate for alleged smuggling of controlled substance" on 14 July 2016, reports as follows:

The National Agency For Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) has arrested the Managing Director of Six-Six Manufacturing Global Services Ltd, Mr Zhao Shou Chum, a Chinese, and his clearing agent, Mr Christian Ohia of Actus Fidel Nigeria Ltd for allegedly smuggling containers of controlled substances, Urea Formaldehyde Resin powder out of the seaports.

The Acting Director-General of the agency, Mrs. Yetunde Oni, who disclosed during a media briefing in Lagos yesterday, said those arrested have given investigators helpful information and assisted NAFDAC to unravel their supply chain.

The NAFDAC boss, who reiterated her administration's resolve to work assiduously as a team to ensure more efficient service delivery in safeguarding the health of the nation, said vigilant NAFDAC operatives at the seaport intercepted and wrote a stop/seizure notice on the 2 x 20ft containers of Urea Formaldehyde Resin purported to be sodium sulphate, imported by Six Six Manufacturing Global Services Ltd without the requisite NAFDAC Chemical Import Permit for controlled substances.

Across the continent, some Chinese nationals are involved in trafficking and illicit trades, including smuggling of a controlled substance, illegal mining, poaching, and wildlife. Former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described the Chinese involvement in illegal wildlife trade as a "global challenge that spans continents and crosses oceans" (Lawson & Vines, 2014: viii). The government, in combatting

wildlife trafficking in Africa, introduced ivory trading in China “to show the firm determination and resolve of the Chinese government on wildlife protection, we have decided to put a comprehensive ban on all ivory products trade including those that are illegally sourced.” Also, African countries were urged “to be harsh when dealing with wildlife criminals” (Lin, cited in Xinhua, 2018). The response of the Chinese government was a clear demonstration of its commitment to advance China–Africa solidarity and cooperation.

The last issue of consideration in the newspapers’ coverage of China–Africa relations is “Culture, Language and Education.” Findings from the analysis revealed that *Guardian* and *Punch* both reported on “Migration from China to Africa and from Africa to China (2.1%), while *The Guardian* newspapers exclusively reported on “Chinese language in African schools and universities (1.0%)” with news story entitled: “Chinese Bridge: Enhancing proficiency in the Oriental Language.” According to the report:

The Confucius Institute, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos, held the 2017 edition of the Chinese Bridge competition last week. Chinese Bridge is an international Chinese proficiency language competition sponsored by the institute, which has its headquarters in Hanban. It is renowned for its culture and educational exchange programmes worldwide.

The competition, which is held annually, aims at arousing the enthusiasm of students in various countries learning Chinese and strengthening the world’s understanding of the Chinese language and culture. This year’s edition of the Chinese Bridge had 21 participating schools, four primary schools, 14 secondary schools, and three universities. They were Confucius Institute, University of Lagos, Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, and Afe Babalola University, Ekiti State (*The Guardian*, 14 June 2016).

Scholars have established the importance of language in forging and deepening social intercourse among people of disparate sociocultural backgrounds. The place of language in the broader context of China–Africa cooperation where the language barrier, if not frontally addressed through a systematic and sustainable approach, could undermine the possibility of achieving the vision of the founding fathers of FOCAC. Against this background, the Johannesburg Declaration of FOCAC promotes “mutual learning and seeking harmonious progress through mutual efforts.” Hence, it encourages “exchanges in culture and art, education... to deepen the understanding and friendship between the peoples of China and Africa.” Through The Confucius Institute, one of such exchanges was established “to promote Chinese language and culture, support local Chinese teaching internationally, and facilitate cultural exchanges.”

Placing in perspectives the coverage of the China–Africa relations by the selected newspapers (*Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Punch*) gave adequate coverage to the broader issues of “industrialization and development” in the China–Africa

cooperation. The priority given to the industrialization and development of Africa can be attributed to the commitment of the Chinese government at the FOCAC summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2015. The Declaration notes that China and Africa should “Promote mutual learning and seek harmonious progress through mutual efforts” by sharing “experience for development, deepen cooperation in various fields such as development assistance, medical care and public health, education, poverty eradication, science and technology and knowledge sharing, and ecological and environmental protection.” Also, it recognizes the crucial role of “developing technology and innovation in advancing the economic growth of Africa in areas such as the mining and extractive industry, pharmaceuticals, information technology, and chemicals and petrochemicals, both in the area of exploration and extraction of natural resources and in their processing; and lastly strengthen people-to-people and cultural exchanges and cooperation ... and, in particular, enhance exchanges in culture and art, education, sports, tourism, press and media, and between academia, think tanks, the youth, women, trade unions and persons with disabilities, with a view to deepening the understanding and friendship between the peoples of China and Africa” (FOCAC, 2015).

China’s involvement in the socioeconomic transformation of Africa, according to Oshodi (2012: 7), is “Chinese *Africana*”—an initiative “which covers the extent to which actual and potential capacities of China could bring about a different development trajectory to Africa’s socioeconomic plight.” The Chinese firms, taking advantage of the “burgeoning Sino-African trade relations, have been acquiring or in some sectors dominating businesses across the continent, which include: coal and gold in South Africa, copper in Zambia, computer hardware in Nigeria, the tobacco industry in Zimbabwe, mobile phone business in Kenya, hotel in Botswana, oil and gas deals in Sudan, Gabon, Nigeria, Angola, Egypt, etc. (Oshodi, 2012).

Q2: What is the quality of reportage in the selected Nigerian newspapers coverage of China–Africa relations?

The quality of a news reportage is determined by how much prominence the media give to a news item. It also means the “structure issues” of news to show the importance of the media attached to an event’s coverage. To determine the depth of reportage, the coverage of China–Africa relations was measured based on the nature of publication, tone of coverage, news sources, and headline type.

Findings on the nature of publication deployed by *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, and *Vanguard*, in the coverage of China–Africa relations is the news reports. The dominance of news among different genres underscores its importance in the newspaper’s reportage of China–Africa cooperation. Watson, cited in Olawuyi (2020), reiterates the importance of news thus: “more than any other media format, the news claims to represent reality, the way things are, and in that representation, there is the underpinning assumption that some of the things

represented are the way they should be.” Against this background, therefore, it is believed that through news reports, the newspapers construct social issues and events to convey a particularized perspective, beliefs and opinions about China’s relationship with Africa.

One of the ways in which the media persuade its audience is by disseminating news content with bias. For instance, news can be reported using tones such as positive, negative and neutral. Hence, tonality in media coverage of an issue significantly influences public opinion (Carvalho & Cooksey, cited in Matanji, 2019). Findings from the study revealed a majority of the news stories on the China–Africa relations were reported in positive tones. The positive valence in tonality indicated that the media focused more on aspects of the relationship that could further deepen the bilateral cooperation. Dolan (2019) notes that when media tonality is negative, people tend to experience “more distress, exhibit less perceptual sensitivity to threats, and an increased startle reactivity.” On the contrary, the positively-valenced news story can influence the attitude and perception towards China. In other words, readers of the selected Nigerian newspapers are likely to perceive the bilateral relations between China and Africa as one which offers tremendous opportunities for the industrialization and development of the continent, which is at variance with the perception of the West that “Africa is headed towards being colonized by China and that China is setting a debt trap and financially “weaponizing” capital in Africa” (Matanji, 2019: 36).

News sources influence journalistic decisions (Anderson, 2017). Consequently, the sources of news shapes how the audience perceives issues. For this reason, the study interrogated the sources the selected newspapers relied on upon in their coverage of the bilateral relations between China and Africa. Findings revealed that the selected newspapers relied heavily on news reports sourced by their correspondents. By this finding, it can be inferred that news reports on China–Africa relations were either written or sourced by the news media. Consequently, the reportage is an objective and accurate presentation of the issues in the China–Africa bilateral relationship.

The last criterion for measuring the quality of the news reportage in the newspapers’ coverage of the China–Africa relations is “Headline Type.” The headline is the most crucial part of a report. The primary function of a headline attracts the attention of the audience. Besides, it should “make the reader curious as to what the article is about, so that it *lures* the reader into opening the article” (Chen, Conroy, & Rubin, cited in Kuike, Schuth & Marx, 2017). The news items were analyzed based on four headline types: coherence, disparity, sensationalism, and labelling. Findings from the study showed that the majority of the news reports employed coherent headlines. This means that the words in the headline accurately represented what is in the story. However, Ecker, Lewandowsky and Chang (2014) argue that when headlines misinform the

audience, it constrains further information processing and biases readers towards a specific interpretation.

In all, the quality and quantity of coverage given to China–Africa relations by the selected Nigerian newspapers are impressive. The quality and depth of the news content are unconnected to the burgeoning relationship between China and Africa and the prospects inherent in the relationship.

Q3: In her engagement with Africa, what image of China is portrayed in the selected Nigerian newspapers reportage of China–Africa relations?

China's relations with Africa have become the subject of much speculation and controversy in recent years. Much of the debate has been about the fact that Sino-African associations focus, particularly on the industrialized powers, the emergence of a competitor for the continent's vast natural resources (Naidu and Davies 2006). It is pertinent to state that the increasing presence of China in Africa has generated diverse interests. The literature on China–Africa relations reflects two binary positions or perspectives. Oshodi (2012) refers to these broad positions as “Sino-optimism and Sino-pessimism.” The former views the relations as a partnership, opportunity, and South-South solidarity. The Sino-pessimists consider China–Africa relations as colonialism, neocolonialism, predatory capitalism, second scramble, or deindustrialization.

Also, Ayodele and Sotola (2014), in a policy review paper entitled “China in Africa; An Evaluation of Chinese Investment,” hinted at the controversies that continually trail the relationship between the two regions thus:

China's economic interest and investments in Africa have mainly been under scrutiny. While some are optimistic, some others are concern as to what is China's genuine interest. Many had argued that China's engagement in Africa replicated what the Europeans did decades ago when they exploited African resources. Therefore, China has a different persona which ranges from that of a new colonizer, an exploiter, or a development partner.

The bipolar views notwithstanding, some scholars such as Anshan (2007) and Naidu (2007) have vehemently argued against the perceived lack of redeeming value in China–Africa relations. Oshodi, paraphrasing Anshan (2007), maintained that China had consistently supported Africa's economic development even when it was most inconvenient to do between 1956 and 1978. He further reiterates that China's foreign policy thrust in Africa reflects equality, mutual benefit, and summit diplomacy. However, Le Pere, cited in Oshodi (2012: 9), notes that the “threat perception and phobia about China in Africa is essentially a product of Western-inspired hypocrisy and arrogance.

The media image of China is that of a historically committed partner to the development of Africa because they both belong to a “community of shared

experience.” Perhaps it is for this reason that Nwoke, cited by Oshodi (2012: 9), quoted a former president of Nigeria who says: “From our assessment, this 21st century is the century for China to lead the world. And when you are leading the world, we want to be close behind you. When you are going to the moon, we don’t want to be left behind.” Evidently, from the finding in the newspapers, China is portrayed as Africa’s “Development Partner.”

Conclusion

Africa has come to regard China as an alternative to the West for aid, support, economic growth, and development. This renewed engagement has engendered discussion and controversy over time. According to Alden (2007: 5), “as with all such tales, the truth is cobbled together with myth, making it all harder to discern (much less assess) the implications of China’s role in Africa.” The West sees Beijing’s role in Africa from different lenses, such as a “development partner,” an “economic competitor,” and a “colonizer.” Notwithstanding, “China’s growing public presence in Africa” regardless of the “sustained Western media campaign of “shock and awe” (Alden, 2007:5), the media image of China as re (presented) in the selected Nigerian newspapers reportage of China–Africa relations is that of “development partner” rather than an “exploiting predator.” This perception is, perhaps, subtly reinforced based on the “deliberate promotion of a foreign policy of “no political strings” which, when coupled with Beijing’s willingness to provide aid and concession loans, has proved to be tremendously appealing to African leaders” (Alden 2007:8).

However, through their reportage, the media should set an agenda on what Africa can learn from China’s intuitive economic growth and development. Policies and actions crucial in restructuring Africa’s development should be emphasized, primarily through initiatives like the FOCAC. It is unarguable that China is good for Africa’s story because the country “has the kind of economic record that democrats and dictators can both admire.” And it is even more gratifying to note that the Chinese government has constantly reiterated that “their expanded presence in Africa will be for mutual benefit is credible” (Brautigam, 2007).

More importantly, Africa, especially her leaders, can learn from China’s “strong, focused, and uncompromisingly patriotic leadership that, in the face of foreign interference and opposition, forged a collective will to survive, thrive, and hold its own in the community of nations.” China has been able to harness the “immense human and natural resources to feed itself, industrialize to become ...the second largest economy in the world.” It is important to say, too, that China has extremely low tolerance for that value-corroding, socially destructive cankerworm called corruption (*Guardian*, 2017)—Africa can learn from this!

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