



**China's Nonstate Actors and Public Diplomacy:
the Case of Pay-TV Company StarTimes**

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Abstract

China's economic rise in the 21st century has not been matched by necessary improvements in its international image. However, development assistance projects in Africa hold the potential to mould favourable perceptions of China among populations less influenced by Anglo-American media output. Over a thousand projects enacted through The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) protocols have used Chinese contractors to conduct development assistance initiatives, but case studies have been few. This research enriches theory at the intersection of public diplomacy and development assistance through a case study of nonstate actor StarTimes, China's pay-TV company with around 30 million subscribers. This represents the first major study of this contractor, which is forecast to account for the biggest growth in television viewership in coming years in Africa. Through technical infrastructure it expands rural access, while content production is adding rapidly to indigenous programming, thus showcasing China's digital divide problem-solving alternative to the Washington Consensus neoliberalism. As well as examining the StarTimes image, the research gives voice to African stakeholders whose views on China and its companies are less canvassed in Western public opinion polls.

The research used two forms of data collection: StarTimes news coverage over a five-year period and interviews with African TV subscribers and media professionals. Findings indicate that this 'nonstate' company adopts a hybrid actor identity. Projects manifest themselves through public-private-partnership (PPP)

arrangements, while image building news discourses forefront private business public relations and minimize China-supporting public diplomacy. In the minds of African publics however, the broadcaster and China are fully aligned, rendering 'state' versus 'nonstate' distinctions unsatisfactory. The StarTimes territory of Chinese track-two diplomacy finds favour, however, when pan-African development assistance objectives are prioritised, such as projects to narrow the digital divide and increase African content. Public diplomacy could be improved further through a third track: Chinese nonstate actor engagement with local stakeholders who exercise agency but are willing to facilitate China's image building activities.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
Table of Contents.....	5
Figures and Tables.....	8
Abbreviations.....	10
Chapter One: China’s contract with Africa - outsourced public diplomacy through development assistance.....	12
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	50
2.1 Introduction: nonstate actors from the company state to the party-state....	50
2.2 1600 to 1950: imperialism and nonstate actors.....	57
2.3 1950 to 2000: diplomatic expansion and nonstate actors.....	59
2.4 Nonstate actors and the diplomatic power shift: 2000 and beyond.....	67
2.5 Public diplomacy potential in development assistance and PPPs.....	81
2.6 News Media, PR and PD.....	90
2.7 Framing: News portrayals of Chinese companies and countries.....	91
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework & Methodology and Methods.....	97
3.1 Introduction.....	97
3.2 Theoretical framework.....	99
3.2 Methodology and methods.....	126
Chapter Four: The Access to Satellite TV 10,000 Villages Project.....	142

4.1 Introduction: multilateral diplomacy, state and nonstate actors - public diplomacy coordinating forces.....	142
4.2 Relationship One: China and Africa through FOACAC.....	146
4.3 Relationship Two: project contractor StarTimes and the PRC state.....	148
4.4 Relationship Three: StarTimes and Chinese state broadcaster CGTN.....	153
4.5 Findings.....	156
4.6 Conclusion.....	195
Chapter Five: The StarTimes PPP – key framing factors.....	202
5.1 Introduction.....	202
5.2 Findings.....	204
5.3 Conclusion.....	227
Chapter Six: The StarTimes PPP - indigenous programming and image making.....	229
6.1 Indigenous Programming.....	229
6.2 The image of StarTimes activities	245
6.3 Conclusion.....	261
Chapter Seven: The StarTimes PPP - Sport Sponsorship.....	265

7.1 Introduction.....	265
7.2 Football Sponsorship.....	268
7.3 Findings.....	269
7.4 Conclusion.....	292
Chapter Eight: Conclusion.....	295
References List.....	317
Appendices.....	358

Figures and Tables

Figure 1: International Telecommunications Union (2017).....	33
Figure 2: The China Africa Research Initiative (2021a).....	36
Figure 3: the China Africa Research Initiative (2021b).....	37
Figure 4: An integrated process model of framing (De Vreese 2005).....	99
Figure 5: Entman’s Cascading Activation Model (2004).....	113
Figure 6: A four-dimension model of a country’s image (Ingenhoff and Chariatte (2020).....	141
Figure 7: Murray (2021).....	156
Figure 8: Opinions on StarTimes.....	158
Figure 9: Length of time watching StarTimes.....	159
Figure 10: Views on StarTimes Content.....	165
Figure 11: China-related habits.....	166
Figure 12: Image StarTimes gives China.....	172
 Tables	
Table 1: Content Analysis Frame Coding Information.....	134

Table 2: China frame.....	177
Table 3: Concord frame.....	185
Table 4: Components of frame.....	205
Table 5: Sentiment in stories.....	206
Table 6: Word frequency level.....	206
Table 7: Article Tone.....	207
Table 8: Innovation frame.....	208
Table 9: Development assistance areas.....	213
Table 10: Article Type.....	214
Table 11: The image of StarTimes activities.....	247
Table 12: the Image of China.....	249
Table 13: The image of Africa’s attitude towards China.....	253
Table 14: Who is quoted.....	254
Table 15: The image of China’s attitude towards Africa.....	259
Table 16: Topics linked to football sponsorship.....	272

Abbreviations

ABH *Africa's Business Heroes*

ASEAN The Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BOT Build Operate and Transfer

BRI Belt and Road Initiative

BRICS Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CIDCA China International Development Cooperation Agency

CAI Comprehensive Agreement on Investment

CCP Chinese Communist Party

CEO Chief Executive Officer

CFO Chief Financial Officer

CGTN China Global Television Network

DAC Development Assistance Committee

DSO Digital Switch Over

EXIM The Export-Import Bank of China

FDI Foreign Direct Investment

FOCAC Forum On China Africa Cooperation

G20 Group of Twenty

GDP Gross Domestic Product

ICT Information and Communications Technology

IMF International Monetary Fund

ITU International Telecommunication Union

MEP Member of the European Parliament

MOFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MOF Ministry of Finance

MOFCOM The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China

NGO Non-Government Organization

ODA Official Development Assistance

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OOF Other Official Flows

PPP Public-Private-Partnership

PRC People's Republic of China

QSD Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

SAIS-CARI School of Advanced International Studies, China Africa Research Initiative

SCIO The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China

SGR Standard Gauge Railway

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

USCC US-China Economic and Security Review Commission

WSIS World Summit on the Information Society

ZNBC Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation

Chapter One: China's contract with Africa - outsourced public diplomacy through development assistance

On December 1, 2018, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires sat across each other at the dinner table, ate steak and called a truce on the US-China trade war. Meanwhile at Vancouver International Airport, Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou was being placed in handcuffs at the request of the US, accused of Iran sanctions-busting violations. Such synchronicity deserves to live in infamy in the 21st century history of US-China relations. Of special significance was that a Chinese nonstate actor was centre stage in this head-on collision between the PRC and the West. The ankle monitor worn by Meng in the two years following that December was a visible reminder the geopolitical standoff between China and the English-speaking West: a Chinese technological giant with global ambitions reined in, viewed within China as an attempt at containment by a US-led international apparatus determined to keep the country in check (Bryan-Low et al 2019).

This episode carried echoes of the negative side to diplomacy from centuries past - duplicitous and Machiavellian (Leira 2016, Black 2010). A difference now is that this is territory of public diplomacy. Debate over this clash has unfolded in the media, with interpretations constructed by news outlets representing the full spectrum of agendas, contending to mould public perceptions. In the mission to shape the attitudes of publics, public diplomacy has three core objectives: to support a country's national interests; to create a favourable image; and to explain a country's culture, behaviour and policies to the world (Hartig 2016, Byrne 2012,

Gonesh and Melissen 2005). However, while diplomacy can further a country's economic interests abroad, the converse is also true: a deterioration in diplomacy can contribute to a nation's enterprises becoming unwelcome in foreign countries. Huawei - perhaps China's highest profile nonstate company - offers a glimpse into the immense public diplomacy challenges China faces, and how nonstate actor and state connections can signify the climate of geopolitical competition. And the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) means that other PRC contractors are similarly likely to become high-profile carriers of China's development policies throughout Asia and Africa.

China's nonstate-state relations, their framing in the media and public perceptions form the key features of this research, to understand the role of the nonstate actor as a participant in public diplomacy and therefore the fulfilment of China's national interests. The case study of this research is pay-TV company StarTimes. Seemingly more independent compared to CGTN and other state brands, it might possibly draw less suspicion. StarTimes commercial operations involve building links with western TV broadcasters, which draws attention away from Party-state alliances. China's media public diplomacy role is to help "shape China's external image...counter the hegemonic dominance of Western media and similarly to improve China's international capabilities to make its voice better heard" (Hartig 2016: 71). As this chapter shows, there are multiple ways, direct and indirect, to have the desired impact. The aim here is to add understanding into whether nonstate development assistance programmes, the mix of aid and commerce, can

influence public diplomacy and in particular, furtherance of the national interest.

To explore issues through a case study, three questions were chosen:

1. What is the image of the 10,000 Villages Project and how does it impact the image of China?
2. What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African media eco-systems and how does it impact the image of China?
3. What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African soccer TV content and how does it impact the image of China?

Public diplomacy: a contentious battleground

This research charts public diplomacy from the position of China's strategies, and the role of nonstate actors in defining the country's image. Both in China and the West, the core function of public diplomacy is supporting the national interest, but the way public diplomacy is discussed is revealingly different. Western literature discusses public diplomacy in neutral tones, perhaps influenced by the conceptual origins of the term. Coined by US diplomat Edmund Gullion in 1965, public diplomacy is an unthreatening concept designed to give the appearance – if not the reality – of a distinction from the practice of 'propaganda', which is framed (inappropriately) as a crude instrument preferred by authoritarian regimes. Cull claimed Gullion sought to avoid the term 'propaganda' because its "negative connotations – shades of Dr Goebbels – placed it beyond the pale" (2010: 11). Public diplomacy is by contrast defined in agreeable phrases by Western theorists; Gregory (2011) calls public diplomacy "an instrument used by

states to understand cultures, attitudes and behaviour; to build and manage relationships; and to influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values” (p353). Elsewhere, it is defined in language brimming with benevolence, as enhancing “trust and understanding as well as dispelling suspicion and distrust” (Hartig 2016: 61).

However, when Xi Jinping at a 2013 conference on Propaganda and Ideology stressed the need to “tell China’s story well” (Caixin 2015), the distinction between propaganda and public diplomacy was unclear. Public diplomacy involves communication through media, and China has massively expanded its media operations in the past ten years (Lim and Bergin 2018). “Wherever the readers are, wherever the viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend their tentacles,” Xi declared in 2018 (Cook 2020:1). Evidence suggests public diplomacy not only overlaps with propaganda, but that the benign framing masks the harsher realities of international relations – military conflict. While the US engaged foreign publics through bombs in the Vietnam War, through CIA operations to undermine elections in South America and during invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, public diplomacy as a theory continued to be defined in comforting terms. Leira (2016) reminds that “concepts are not simply tags for fixed phenomena, but in and of themselves tools or weapons in political struggle” (p29), and the Western concept validated a benign version of public diplomacy which served to put a positive spin on US norms and values.

China has started fewer conflicts in the past 60 years yet is framed as a bigger threat worldwide. This demonstrates to the Party-state the harshly effective nature of international discourse power to manipulate beliefs and perceptions. In both the media and in conceptual terms, China has been counting its public diplomacy losses in the West. The UK revoked the license of state broadcaster CGTN in February 2021 for several months and the channel is labelled as a propaganda organ rather than a news outlet in the US. Confucius Institutes have been shuttered. In addition, headlines regarding COVID-19, Xinjiang and Hong Kong are unremittingly unfavourable. In literature, while the ideology of increased dialogue and collaboration as espoused by 'new' public diplomacy (Zaharna 2013) in response to intensified global communications solidifies a favourable slant on Western conceptual norms, China's public diplomacy is cast as less responsive to changing times, rigidly state-centric (Ayhan 2018), and its nonstate actors state proxies (D'Hooghe 2014).

But in Asia and Africa, image building opportunities are still available. These are the lands formerly exploited through centuries of colonization by the same western powers now espousing democracy and freedom. These less-developed regions still await fulfilment of the post-WW2 expectations of economic progress promised by Washington Consensus principles. As China presents its alternative to Washington and deepens its influence across Asia and Africa through the BRI, robust and persuasive strategies of public engagement are more necessary than ever. Currently the US 'debt-trap diplomacy' discourse tussles with China's 'win-

win' development mantra to define PRC economic diplomacy (Brautigam 2020, Zhang 2020) but there is no winner yet. And as the case of Huawei showed, nonstate actors are central to the image building activities and will help determine outcomes of great power plays in the coming decades. As yet, the case studies of Chinese nonstate actors involved in China's aid and BRI projects are few. This research, with a case study of a company operating in many countries, aims to enrich understanding of the Chinese nonstate actor relation to the state, and the impact on public diplomacy.

Huawei: nonstate actor public diplomacy woes

This research is particularly concerned with development assistance as a method of public diplomacy. As with the US aid to post-war Europe with the Marshall Plan, China has used foreign aid in Africa and Asia to extend its international power, and nonstate actors are crucial to the outsourcing of diplomacy through its development strategy. Their role helps explain how Huawei became so powerful. In the decade up to 2019, with the help of China's state-backed finance, the telecommunications giant reportedly built 70% of all 4G networks across Africa (Olander 2019, Madrid-Morales 2021). This enormous progress is indicative of characteristics of PRC nonstate-state relations: blurred distinctions mean that while Huawei is classed as nonstate, its CEO Ren Zhengfei has military associations (Li 2009, Tao and Wu 2014) and the company is believed to have benefited from tens of billions of dollars in state financial assistance (Yap 2019).

Huawei in Africa highlights advantages and disadvantages of state-nonstate company interactions. Development assistance policies helped it fulfil China's first diplomacy priority: protecting China's financial interests. However, the nebulous ties to the state led to problems with the second aspect of public diplomacy: positive image management. China has spent billions on a vastly expanded media outreach (Shambaugh 2015) to project the country as peaceful, trustworthy and cooperative (D'Hooghe 2005, Wang 2011). However, this image has been greeted with suspicion, for instance leading to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), made up of the US, Japan, Australia and India, to counterbalance perceived "Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific" and to be "a force for promoting democracy in the region" (O'Neil and West 2020:27). Brown (2020:323) claims that the challenge China faces is a "world that often knows little about it but also has strong, antipathetic opinions about its political system." This impacts Chinese internationalizing companies, which, linked to BRI, have been framed by Washington as a tool for China's economic leverage, to undermine the international rules-based order (Brautigam 2020). Huawei's nonstate actor status was questioned in 2012 by a US House Intelligence Committee report which accused the company of a lack of transparency regarding military and CCP links (Kaska et al 2019). This led up to the 2018 escalation and ominous predictions regarding Huawei's global operations and China's relations with both Canada and the US (Oxford Analytica 2018).

The predictions were if anything, understated: in 2019, the United States blocked Huawei from using Google's Android operating system, a measure followed up in 2020 by a worldwide ban on the use of US-company machinery and software in Huawei products (Swanson 2020). A decision to strip Huawei from the UK 5G network by 2027 followed (Sabbagh 2020). And then came public diplomacy failure number three: the inability to tell China's story well. There was a public relations fightback in the form of full-page adverts in the Washington Post and Wall Street Journal pleading Huawei's case, but PR attempts to influence what journalists wrote about the company fell flat (Green-Riley 2019); defensive, face-saving articles in Chinese state media were also unpersuasive (Kuo 2020, Chen 2020). Canada subsequently began free-trade discussions with Indonesia and other multilateral talks with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and joined more military exercises in the region (Snyder 2021). COVID-19 brought even greater hostility, with unfavourable views of China reaching over 70% in many advanced economy countries (Silver et al 2020).

A pattern has subsequently emerged that puts nonstate actors at the centre of China's diplomatic disintegration. Huawei became merely one negative example of how diplomacy and nonstate businesses impact each other. India banned dozens of Chinese apps such as Tik Tok and Alibaba in the wake of border clashes and claims of security concerns (Pham 2020). Criticisms of China's Xinjiang policy in Europe and China's subsequent retaliation by placing sanctions on Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) led to the shelving of the proposed the EU-China

Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), which would have repercussions for companies in both the EU and China (McGee 2021). Chinese investment in the state of Victoria in Australia linked to the BRI has been blocked, while exports of Australian wine to China are estimated to have fallen 96% in 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020 (Gardner 2021). New Zealand attempted maintain balance by refusing to condemn China over Xinjiang's treatment of the Uyghur population; there have been calls to continue dialogue rather than pursue isolation, legal remedies or sanctions (Ross-Smith and O'Brien 2021). However, viewing Australia-China relations as a warning sign, New Zealand's foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta cautioned exporters to diversify their customer profile in the event of a turn for the worse in New Zealand relations with the PRC, which represents nearly 30% of the country's exports (McClure 2021).

Also not to be neglected is the domestic sphere of nonstate-state relations. A country's identity is first defined internally, and within China, the business community has been made aware that a nonstate actor has no autonomous existence as defined in Western theory (Ayhan 2018). Following a crackdown on e-commerce giant Alibaba in 2020, its founder Jack Ma largely disappeared from view. The planned \$37 billion initial public offering of Alibaba's affiliate Ant Group was cancelled after a speech by Ma in October 2020 in Shanghai that was critical of China's financial regulators. Another high-profile businessman seen as a threat to the party-state was thrown in jail: Hong Kong tycoon Jimmy Lai was forced to shut Apple Daily after prison sentences for "attending and organizing illegal

assemblies in August 2019” in the wake of democracy crackdowns in Hong Kong (Cui and Ma 2021). Censorship and control are the methods through which the Party-state keeps nonstate actors from challenging CCP authority.

All these examples are illustrative of the interdependency of state and nonstate actors: when relations fracture, business nosedives, both inside and outside China. But the reverse could also be true: businesses could be the positive face of a country, and help foster diplomatic ties. Thus, nonstate-state relations, their image in the media, and citizen perceptions of these relations, could all be positive dimensions of public diplomacy. While Huawei has gained most attention, still much is unknown regarding lesser profile Chinese companies which are also the building blocks of its heightening influence. As they quietly make inroads across Asia and Africa as part of the BRI or FOCAC agreements, far away from the attention of Western media, nonstate companies serve to provide empirical richness to understanding of their relationship with China’s public diplomacy methods.

Nonstate-state relations: the Going Out policy

Perhaps a feature of the closeness of nonstate-state relations is the difficulty in extrapolating the contribution the nonstate sector has made to the Chinese economy this century. The most overarching policy to further China’s economic interests overseas during the past 20 years has been the Going Out directive, enshrined in the 10th Five Year Plan (2001–5), to encourage Chinese enterprises

to internationalize their operations (Wang 2016), but this included both the state and nonstate sectors. In the wake of Going Out, China became the world's largest exporter in 2009 (Lai and Lu 2012) and Africa's biggest trading partner the same year (Lakatos et al 2016). By 2010, China had overtaken Japan as the world's second largest economy and outward FDI stood at 68.81 billion, climbing to 196.15 billion in 2016, before falling back to 132.94 billion in 2020 (Textor 2021). This is an indication of Going Out achievements, but the exact proportion of the trade and investment attributable to nonstate actors is unclear.

A similar difficulty exists in accounting for the nonstate contribution to the BRI dimension of Going Out. Announced in 2013, it seeks to improve China's connectivity with Asia, Africa and beyond through infrastructure projects designed to spur economic development and integration (China Power Team 2020a). As a result of Going Out and BRI, there are thousands of contracts under implementation by Chinese companies in dozens of countries (Calabrese and Tang 2020): the Chinese contractor market share in Africa occupied by 250 of the world's largest international contractors was 61.9 percent in 2019, a jump from 10 percent in 2002 (Zhang 2021). Most research focus into these developments has been on state-owned enterprises involved in the Going Out policy. For instance, the China Global Investment Tracker points to contracts worth \$61.6 billion signed by China's state-owned rail companies abroad between 2013 and 2019 in capacity building exercises (China Power Team 2020b).

While it is difficult to quantify the nonstate role in China's economic rise, an examination of the expanding state-nonstate actor links is possible. Therefore, this research is in particular concerned with state-enablement of companies to internationalize according to the 1999 Going Out policy incentivization, and subsequent image outcomes for the country and the nonstate company. Although largely state-driven, in 2017 at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Xi Jinping endorsed the combination of both government and private financing (Feldman 2019). A mechanism for this combination is the public-private-partnership (PPP), which involves private sector involvement in infrastructure financing and operation of public assets (Roehrich et al 2014). Reliance on PPPs has increased tremendously this century (Roehrich et al 2014); the African Development Bank views them as a solution to financing shortfalls for infrastructure (AFDB 2020), and they are used by the Japan International Cooperation Agency for projects in developing countries (Koica ODA 2011, Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.).

Inside China, increasing use of PPPs "began in 'hard' infrastructure industries, such as roads and water works, and later became an experimental approach for 'soft' infrastructure areas, such as education, medical services, environment governance, or public diplomacy" seen as bringing private actor benefits of flexibility and service delivery that complements the state sector (Li et al 2019: 295), thus providing a mechanism for nonstate-state interactions. However, the PPP therefore is another mechanism through which the distinctions between the

state and the nonstate entities are vague and potentially controversial. Both nonstate and state-owned companies use PPPs overseas: From 2000 to 2014, China loaned African governments and its state-owned enterprises \$US86 billion, with over half of the finance coming from China Exim Bank (Alden 2017). An example is the Chinese PPP behind Kenya's Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), which was funded through the Exim Bank of China. Questions were raised regarding the bid for the contract being awarded to a Chinese state-owned company and the economic viability of the project (Olotch 2007). State and nonstate companies are likely to be conflated in the minds of publics when financing and relations to foreign governments seem similar.

In addition, from the nonstate actor point of view, it remains unclear how much flexibility and autonomy they wield within the hierarchical Chinese public diplomacy system (Ayhan 2018). Literature has paid considerable attention to the Western nonstate actor in the expanded post WW2 machinery of diplomacy (Wiseman 2010, Barston 2014, Cooper 2013) but attention granted to China's equivalent has rendered them proxies under government jurisdiction (Diamond and Schell 2018, Cook 2020, Aukia 2021), and in the specific case of companies, according to public diplomacy expert Han Fanming, they require state approval (D'Hooghe 2014). Official validation of their use has been noted by scholars. Zhao Kejin pointed out the increased emphasis on people-to-people diplomacy (2015) and Wang Yiwei urged for "the collaboration of Chinese domestic non-state actors with international civil society around shared values" (2012:459). New case

studies may show how some companies are able to make a difference. Ongoing examination of the nonstate relation to the state in multiple contexts is necessary for greater understanding of points of nonstate-state relationship convergence and divergence, construction in the media, and the perception of publics of these connections.

The international system and development assistance: norm-conformance and norm-shaping

The contexts within which China's nonstate business actors have been situated have increased due to the success in internationalizing its economy. This means nonstate actors put into practice China's policies to shape its engagement with the Washington led international rules-based system, the championing of free markets and fewer restrictions of the movement of capital and goods (Zhao 2018). This is a system with which China has an ambivalent relationship. There are conflicting ideas regarding how a Chinese nonstate actor negotiates the ambiguities; with few case studies, the realities are unclear. After China's 2001 ascension to the WTO, it was assumed that the internationalization process would draw China closer to the Washington-led international rules-based system. Bill Clinton, speaking to the National Geographic Society in 1998 said this:

By integrating China into the community of nations and the global economy, helping its leadership understand that greater freedom serves China's interests, and standing up for our principles, we can most effectively serve the cause of democracy and human rights within China. Over time, the more we bring China into the world, the more the world will bring freedom to China. China's remarkable economic growth is making China more and more dependent on other nations for investment, for markets, for energy, for ideas.

However, the relationship is complex, involving in both norm-conformance and norm-shaping (Benabdallah 2019). The foreign aid landscape is a case in point. China has been choosing the times to align with US-led norms and also diverge from them to protect China's interests. With regards to norm compliance, foreign aid has helped China to cultivate an image as a responsible partner in development. For example, China adopted many aspects of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aligning China's White Paper on International Development Cooperation in the New Era (2021) with several SDGs including infrastructure and economic growth (UNDP China 2021). China sees the adoption of many UN objectives as the basis for global cooperation and bilateral and multilateral partnerships (UNDP China 2021). More partnerships with institutions representing the established order represent increased opportunities to gain from their reputation and build the institutions into the PRC networks of influence.

However, China under Xi Jinping has also sought to become a norm-shaper (Zeng et al 2017, Van Staden et al 2021), a justification being to confront what have been regarded as deficiencies in the Washington Consensus. Based on the spread of market forces through organisations such as the IMF, the capitalized economic system is thought by many to have not fully served the development needs of African countries (Hamelink 2015). Hodzi (2020:889) points out that “the aggregate GDP of Sub-Saharan Africa in 2018 was US\$1.7 trillion—at par with the GDP of Canada, slightly higher than South Korea's (US\$1.6 trillion) and less than Brazil's (US\$1.8 trillion).” Foreign aid donors such as OECD countries and Bretton

Woods institutions aligning with the Washington Consensus have sometimes made aid disbursement contingent upon deregulation and privatization of sectors such as water, telecoms, transport and energy (Hall et al 2005, Shah 2017), even when privatization could not be equated with improved efficiency (Ramiarison 2010). Lack of economic progress has justified China influencing the global world order, the pursuit of a development assistance path which seeks progress not made over the last 50 years according to Western norms. Polls in 2016 by Afrobarometer showed nearly a third of Africans preferred the Chinese model of state-led development (Afrobarometer 2016).

Norm compliance and norm shaping reveal the multiple strategies deployed to protect the Party-state as China's global connections intensify. Increased diplomatic multilateralism over the 21st century means that new bodies have been created which provide an alternative to the Washington Consensus. High profile examples are ASEAN and BRICS, while another arrival is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which is guided by a BRI-related transnational policy network, including an international advisory panel, to steer BRI investment governance (Feldman 2019). FOCAC, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation established in 2000, has been another diplomatic body which has aided the acceptance of Going Out and BRI, fusing the development agendas of China and Africa in ways that China can put its alternative vision of economic diplomacy into practice. Within China, the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) was created in 2018, to coordinate relevant government departments and

improve diplomacy and delivery around BRI by enhanced integration of foreign aid and foreign policy agendas (Regilme and Hodzi 2021). However, reports suggest that fragmentation of the aid structure is unchanged; for instance, CIDCA has not built links with China's NGOs to work on aid projects (Zhang and Ji 2020).

However, contractors are given a role carrying out foreign assistance. In FOCAC, guided by input from Chinese government departments including the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF), three yearly action plans directly specify that Chinese companies are welcomed to conduct development assistance on the African continent, and entities such as Huawei have been beneficiaries (Wang et al 2020). Companies are a key reason FOCAC is credited with advancing trade between China and Africa, increasing 10-fold in 20 years to reach \$208.7 billion by 2019, and spurring Chinese foreign direct investment in Africa, reaching \$49.1 billion - a 100-fold increase over two decades (China Daily 2021). Chinese companies were responsible for over 1100 projects up to 2020 (China Daily 2021), under PPP and BOT (Build Operate and Transfer) agreements (Alden 2017), but the companies are not distinguished on official websites according to state and nonstate standing. For instance, Zhang (2020) acknowledges that China's contracting industry intersection with foreign aid has turned the companies into major multinational conglomerates and conceptualizes this as the "aid-contracting nexus", but says these companies are understudied despite holding influence in foreign relations.

What *is* known is that both nonstate and state entities benefit from a foreign aid definition that diverges considerably from the Western version. The College of William and Mary's AidData Project (Dreher et al 2021) values China's total ODA (Official Development Assistance) and OOF (Other Official Flows) at \$2.6 billion in 2000 and \$37.3 billion in 2014. These figures are in contrast to US ODA and OOF overseas commitments, which rose from \$13.4 billion in 2000 to \$29.4 billion in 2014. A key reason for the difference is the broader definition of Chinese aid, including tied aid, loans and export credits, which are outside the OECD definition of ODA (Regilme and Hodzi 2021).

The difference in the foreign aid definition is linked to the storytelling of China's image building. Pu (2019) refers to this as China dual identity: on the one hand, it projects itself as a developing country externally, justifying the 'win-win' development cooperation remit of FOCAC compared to the aid transfer structure of assistance adopted by OECD nations. The 'win-win', developing world solidarity narrative underpins FOCAC action plans: China provides financial support in return for Chinese contractors carrying out infrastructure agreements. On the other hand, according to Pu, China projects itself as a great power to its domestic audience, deserving of global respect and influence, which justifies the legitimacy of the CCP (ibid 2019).

Another dimension to China's image building narrative is propagandizing the PRC rise to become the world's second largest economy, which adds credibility to its

development model. The discourse, widely disseminated by CCP diplomats and politicians, is couched in terms of poverty reduction success being a miracle that holds the answers to UN poverty elimination goals by 2030 (Wintour 2021). The narrative of transitioning from aid recipient status to raising millions of citizens out of poverty (Cheng 2019) means that China positions itself as a developing country leader (Purushothaman 2021), if not a model to rigidly implement. This explains the drive to encourage other countries to learn from China, through training and research visits dubbed 'professionalisation' in areas ranging from science to journalism, to provide the ideological and practical guidance to facilitate the embedment of China-orientated norms and practices around the world (Benabdallah 2019:102). This also plays into influence building and China familiarization aspects of public diplomacy. Thus far, it does not seem that nonstate actors have a distinct role separate from the state in this training, which mostly takes place in state organisations in China, such as universities and the China-Africa Press Center (China Public Diplomacy Association 2019).

However, the state-nonstate relationship in the 'professionalization' process seems to fit the concept of track one (state) and track two (nonstate) diplomacy. Track two diplomacy was a framework devised by Karin Bäckstrand in 2008 to analyse PPP collaborations between state and nonstate actors involved in transnational climate partnerships. Kerr and Taylor (2013) explored the framework with more case studies, and Li et al (2019) refer to it with regards to nonstate public diplomacy in China. However, the framework seems yet to be

applied to the FOCAC context and therefore public diplomacy outcomes are unknown. Not only is it necessary to know about the state (PRC) and nonstate (StarTimes) relationship, it also remains to be more fully considered how the target of diplomacy – African publics – fit this two track system: whether they are rendered passive recipients of narratives, or narrative shapers as part of a network-type public diplomacy (Zaharna 2016). It is an aim of this research to investigate this problem by asking the views of Africans. Pamment and Wilkins cautioned, “Discussion of diplomacy and pursuit of national interests often foreground geopolitics while underplaying how these activities empower and disempower societies and individuals to shape their own development.” (2018:2).

ICT and the digital divide: China’s assistance in Africa

Foreign aid linked to China’s development narrative is a way to improve public perceptions and showcase the country as doing good (Goldsmith and Wood 2014). One key area of development assistance support has been for the African ICT sector, to help narrow the digital divide. According to the Information Society Report of the International Telecommunications Union (2017, cited by Henry 2019), the digital divide problem in Africa remains considerable, with digital penetration low:

Digital Divide: Africa

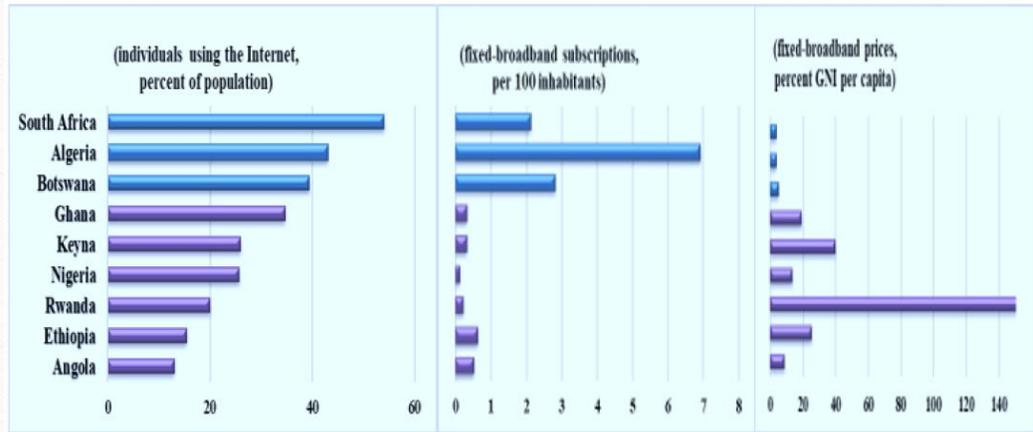


Figure 1: International Telecommunications Union (2017)

In June 2018, only 11% of internet users were on the African continent, while the ITU put the percentage of African households with internet access at 10.7%, far short of the 34% household average across developing countries (Watat and Jonathan 2020). Henry (2019) accounts for the digital divide in terms of a lack of electricity, network coverage deficiencies, and affordability problems, but these issues are long-term, rooted in failings in international agencies such as UNESCO and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to deal with developing world ICT access disparities in the second half of the 20th century (Hamelink 2015). Agencies link solving ICT problems to meeting essential goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Henry 2019, African Union 2020), including reducing social inequalities (van Dijk 2020). There has been no shortage of official policy objectives, pledges and initiatives this century (ITU 2003, African Union

2020, OECD 2021), but protracted social, political and institutional and economic wrangles have been part of the difficulties (Fuchs and Horak 2008, Ojo 2016).

The digital divide problem covers many types of exclusions linked to access to technology and the digital skills required to use it (van Dijk 2020). A wider issue is of media and communication development constraints that were not solved by the neoliberal approach. Deregulation and marketization of broadcasting in Africa were aligned with the democratization process in the 1990s, but policies driven by neoliberal orthodoxies resulted in television provision for city elites rather than the general population (Paterson 1998, Mano 2016, Duncan 2017). In many countries, television penetration remained low into the second decade of the 21st century (Digital switchover in Africa 2015). For example in Rwanda, according to Arthur Asimwe, Director General of the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency, only 20 per cent of citizens owned a TV set by 2017 (Rwanda gets RWF 6 bln Star Times production studio grant, 2017). Insufficient resources, training and investment remain key limitations (BBC World Service Trust 2006). That said, television penetration has improved over the last few years and is predicted to increase markedly. One figure puts the number of pay TV subscribers at 30.7 million in 2019, but forecasts that will jump to 47.26 million by 2025, a rise of 54% (Murray 2020). Interestingly, the same report claims TV revenues will only climb by 31%, due to subscribers paying less. This indicates increased competition by lower cost operators seeking to reach households with more modest incomes, a stated aim of StarTimes, China's pay TV operator in the continent (Forrester 2015), which is

the case study for this research. Such an aim embodies the Chinese target of diverging from the strictly market forces, Washington Consensus approach, and aligns China and the company as supportive of less privileged Africans, once again aiding image credentials.

ICT shortcomings have in recent years presented an opportunity for China to implement an alternative development approach through FOCAC, still guided by inclusion of private actors (such as Chinese contractors), but providing the scaffolding of long-term state financial support. This is another avenue through which foreign aid projects can be used to “shape the domestic politics of recipient countries so as to accommodate the donor government’s policy preferences, and enhance the social reputation and legitimacy of the donor state in the international system” (Regilme and Hodzi 2021: 115). Protecting China’s national interests when engaged in ICT development in Africa means the involvement of state capital in the form of banks such as Exim Bank and China Development Bank and private companies, that together support China’s diplomatic, political and economic objectives (Wang et al 2020). State capital is said to differ from global capital in the sense that the latter seeks short-term profitability (Lee 2018).

Figures from the China Africa Research Initiative database (see below) reveal that most ICT development loans for Africa came from The Export-Import Bank of China (Exim Bank), amounting to \$12.4 billion (the fourth largest sector), between

2000 and 2019. The largest amount came in 2016, perhaps to fulfil the pledges made in the 2015 South Africa FOCAC meeting.



Figure 2: the China Africa Research Initiative (2021a)

A snapshot of the SAIS-CARI loan database from 2015-2019 gives a revealing insight into the range and depth of Chinese involvement in African ICT development (see below). Areas include network transmission, fibre optics, digital migration, broadband, smart city and safe city projects. While most loans came from Exim, StarTimes Group is named as the lender for the StarTimes portion of the first and second stages of Zambia's digital migration project in 2017. Also, while the beneficiary country, project and funding details are given, the contractor name is not, a reminder that the Chinese contractor has been given less attention in the literature. Although they must engage with local stakeholders and implement norms, how their relationship to the China state is constructed and perceptions in African contexts is a distinct gap in knowledge regarding the

implications for China’s national image. Chinese companies are foot soldiers for China’s version of international development, but their footprints are not well scrutinized.

YEAR	\$ USD (M)	COUNTRY	LENDER	SECTOR	PURPOSE
2018	180	Egypt	Huawei Techn...	ICT	Rollout of 4G network and transmission system
2019	199	Ghana	Eximbank	ICT	Integrated National Security Communications Enhancement Network
2019	168	Kenya	Eximbank	ICT	Konza Data Center and Smart City Facilities
2016	99	Kenya	Eximbank	ICT	NOFBI Phase II Expansion Project
2016	23	Malawi	Eximbank	ICT	National Fiber Backbone
2018	164	Mali	Eximbank	ICT	Mali Digital 2020 (Mali Numerique 2020)
2018	25	Mauritius	Eximbank	ICT	Safe City Project
2017	156	Mozambique	Eximbank	ICT	Digital Migration
2018	334	Nigeria	Eximbank	ICT	National ICT Infrastructure Backbone Phase II Project
2017	161	Republic of C...	Eximbank	ICT	National Telecom Phase III
2017	162	Republic of C...	Eximbank	ICT	Digital Television Migration
2015	82	Senegal	Eximbank	ICT	National Broadband

Figure 3: the China Africa Research Initiative (2021b)

Given this background, Chinese pay television company StarTimes is a suitable contractor to examine many of these issues. As a nonstate actor sitting at the intersection of public diplomacy and development assistance, linked to both technical and media sectors, it is a useful prism through which to understand the connection and disconnection between private and state elements, and resulting public perceptions.

The case study: nonstate TV company StarTimes

Established in 1988 by Pang Xinxing in China by an engineer with a background in the propaganda and education department of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)

(Madrid-Morales 2021), StarTimes went through several name changes and configurations as a technology company before following the Going Out policy and venturing into Africa, finally becoming StarTimes Media (Rwanda) in 2007 (Zhang 2014). There are many dimensions to StarTimes which make it an ideal vehicle for China's public diplomacy, not least that it is forecast to become a major player in pay television in coming years (Murray 2020). While most companies are involved with physical infrastructure, StarTimes spans physical and technical infrastructure with satellites and transmission signalling projects as well as media content creation and broadcasting spheres. As yet however it has been subject to scant attention outside Africa. The highest profile it received was in 2018, concerning TopStar, the StarTimes partnership with the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) which not only was a US\$273 million debt to Exim Bank, but also granted StarTimes 60% control for 25 years (Cotterill and Pilling 2018). Allegations of debt-trap diplomacy and opaque lending practices were later responded to in the Financial Times not by StarTimes directly, but curiously, the Chinese ambassador to the UK, signifying the high-level problematic image the story created as well as the interrelation between diplomacy and development. The article revealed how a nonstate actor becomes embroiled in wider civil society anxieties over Africa's debt to China, as it included criticisms of the resources backed loan model which was linked to colony-era practices.

Thus, this research investigates the financial, political and media image building aspects which connect this company to the state. Its emergence as an

international media brand is a focus, particularly its hybrid development assistance and private profit-making objectives.

The StarTimes nonstate-state connection

StarTimes is ideal as an example of nonstate actor and state interdependencies. It operated on a private basis in African countries until 2015, when it became fully aligned with FOCAC, given contracts on a public-private-partnership (PPP) basis (ChinAfrica 2015). An example of its close connection to the state is the visit to StarTimes headquarters by 18 African leaders during the 2018 Beijing FOCAC summit, lauded in the state press, which also made mention of StarTimes projects (Liangyu 2018). This shows the close coordination between traditional diplomacy, state media and nonstate actors. Similarly, FOCAC aims for state-nonstate partnerships. Action plans for development enshrined in 2015 and 2018 FOCAC documents pointedly proclaim that Chinese companies like StarTimes are welcomed to Africa to carry out development assistance projects: in practice this means that Chinese finance for projects is contingent upon them being carried out by Chinese companies.

In truth, all three parties – China, StarTimes and African countries – need each other to compensate for disadvantages. Massive state media expansion in Nairobi after 2012 by Chinese state-run operations such as CGTN Africa, Xinhua, China Daily were designed to support the Going Out policy and China's international image (Shambaugh 2013) but the impact on audiences, journalistic norms and

local media has been minimal (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2018); image preconceptions undermine reception towards international broadcasters such as CGTN (Morales 2021). The more flexible, sport and entertainment driven approach of StarTimes presents another avenue through which to engage publics. From the StarTimes side, it faced certain business difficulties. StarTimes subsidiary Pan African Network Group (PANG) had lost a broadcast signal distributor contract in Kenya after legal challenges from other broadcasters suspicious of the bidding process (Telecommunications Management Group 2017). State validation through FOCAC provides funding on a PPP basis that secures its long-term future, while African state broadcasters in countries including Ghana and Zambia also benefit from loans to update media systems and digital migration; StarTimes reportedly has been involved in the latter at some stage in two dozen countries (Madrid-Morales 2021).

However, these dependencies mean that StarTimes and its relation to the state is open to considerable interpretation. On the positive side, the 2015 pivot towards a development assistance provider gave a favourable image: the Access to Satellite TV 10,000 Villages Project, designed to bridge the digital divide gap, had its pilot project in Kenya's Saina Village in Kajiado in 2016 (Xinhua 2016). This defined the company's role in China's contracting out of public diplomacy to the nonstate sector. But negative media headlines illustrate economic and ideological resistance to the Chinese presence in African media. On the economic front, newspaper headlines regarding StarTimes in Zambia, Kenya and elsewhere signal

unease at Chinese involvement in space previously occupied by indigenous operators. Perception problems have been linked to relations with private African TV companies. There is a danger for China's image if a Chinese company is seen to get favourable treatment due to access to Chinese loans, thus squeezing out local capacity (Zhang 2021). The Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) criticized the Ghanaian government for granting a tax waiver to StarTimes to carry out the country's arm of the 10,000 Villages Project, which involved provision of US \$3 million in 'free' equipment for 300 villages (Balancing Act 2018b). With regards to ideology, China's contracts for signal transmission projects have also raised fears in Zambia and Kenya that power in StarTimes hands would enable the company to switch off signals to companies that fall out of favour with governments either in Africa or China (Deutsche Welle 2019). Nigeria's ban on Twitter following Twitter's deletion of a tweet by President Muhammadu Buhari has been seen as a validation of China's highly regulated internet (Olander 2021), raising fears that China is a model for authoritarianism on the African continent (Foundation for Investigative Journalism 2021).

Even when business is run according to commercial logic, a potential problem is that, like Huawei, state capital ties underlying a PPP mechanism may engender the perception that China's interests ultimately come first. According to Thorley (2019), "Huawei run much of their own ordinary affairs in familiar and banal ways but are commandeered as Party tools at critical periods or for longer term aims. The result is a latent network where power does not need to be constantly and

forcefully exerted. Rather, such organisations can lead themselves, albeit within the perceived confines of party-state diktat, often with a degree of agency but steered in part or whole by the CCP when the CCP deems it necessary.” Evidence of this appeared during 2020 when StarTimes for the first time veered into news broadcasting with a daily COVID-19 Update show (Huaxia 2020, Xinhuanet 2020), including pandemic avoidance advice and interviews with Africans praising China’s pandemic control methods. This was clearly an effort to support the Party-state during a time of public diplomacy crisis. This puts StarTimes into the role of hybrid actor, at once a private concern while also helping the CCP advance agendas (Aukia 2021).

A question is whether perceptions of overt state influence contradict the desire for a ‘pan-African’ company image (Gagliardone 2019) or align with hybrid characteristics. Another dimension to its image is that as well as belonging to the Party-state network of influence, StarTimes is producing public relations which fits the business image it seeks. This manifests itself particularly in soccer, with Manchester United TV joining the Bundesliga and La Liga on StarTimes channels, making StarTimes the gatekeeper to fans in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (Willis 2021). While the Party-state connection raises suspicions, these partnerships with European clubs are likely to add popularity and facilitate public diplomacy success. StarTimes therefore has to consider whether these two aspects to its image – a pan-African brand or a tool for the Party-state – can be reconciled.

In all its areas of partnership across Africa, StarTimes has needed to show resilience to build networks and integrate with media ecosystems. Some problems encountered have been outside the company's control. In Ghana, sponsorship of the Ghanaian Premier League has been through many stages of turmoil which have impacted the image of the company in front of fans and sports journalists, despite the difficulties being rooted in domestic upheavals. In Nigeria, StarTimes has required tenacity to see through the digital migration woes, a digital switch over process still ongoing at the time of writing in 2021. On the upside, Nigeria is predicted to increase its pay TV subscribers to 10 million by 2025 (Murray 2020). StarTimes is likely to be a big beneficiary, given its involvement with indigenous content production there. However, migration has been strewn with setbacks. One problem has been the financial constraints faced by Digiteam, the Nigerian Digital Switch Over which in 2021 blamed the government for not releasing funding for the transition a delay dating back to 2012 (Broadcast Media Africa 2021a). However, the Nigerian regulator countered by claiming the switchover will be completed in 2022 (Broadcast Media Africa 2021b). The acting Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Prof. Armstrong Idachaba claimed that changed digital migration dates were normal, and even happened in the UK and USA. Changes were needed to deal with access and affordability issues as well as a declining economic context. One of the financial problems had been the sourcing of decoders. The depreciation of the naira currency meant that the cost of set-top box had risen from the original \$20 (N3500) per box to N9000

(Broadcast Media Africa 2021c), completely exceeding the budget. However, the migration continued throughout different regions and the relationship with StarTimes continued, in partnership with Nigerian DSO signal carrier Integrated Television Services (ITS). More within StarTimes control has been content on its channels. The popularity of the content, evidenced by its growing subscriber base (Murray 2021), is in line with China's soft power ambitions to engage publics through Chinese culture (Rawnsley 2021). On the one hand, the cultivation of African programming has been a priority, as evidenced by partnerships with Nollywood production companies (Broadcasting Media Africa 2020), which helps build connections with African content producers. A StarTimes strategy for Kenya's Rembo TV is to monetize exclusive local content on various platforms (Abuya 2021), which also assists with the StarTimes collaboration with African creative talent. On the other hand, StarTimes has dubbed and imported considerable Chinese content and put it on channels such as ST Kung Fu and ST Sino Drama, or African channels including ST Yoruba and ST Swahili. But views differ regarding the cultural impact: this trend has not been without opposition, with Nigerian film producers complaining that Chinese films being dubbed into Yoruba serves to displace local culture (The Nation 2016), but elsewhere, PRC news outlets quote Africans praising the cultural proximity of Chinese content to African values (Yang 2021, CGTN Africa 2021) and Jedlowski (2021: 1) declares "Kung fu films made in Hong Kong and Taiwan are one of the most influential film references for male youth audiences around

Africa.” Once again, China’s motivations for the cultural export divide opinions. Rather than seeing it as cultural diplomacy to spread mutual understanding, Rawnsley views the soft power move as a support of national interests (2020).

China’ defensiveness is due to the constant uphill pursuit for discourse power in a world order in which, although China’s power is growing, its ability to disseminate narratives remains weak. Xi Jinping and Xinhua have described the news media landscape in warlike terms, as a battlefield upon which great propaganda struggles are necessary to avoid marginalization (Batke and Ohlberg 2020). The competition for hegemonic power between China and US-led order has been defined by the countries aligned to the latter in terms of authoritarianism versus democracy by the latter in a globalizing, economically integrated world (Cook 2020, 2021). StarTimes is an example of the battleground for media influence; development assistance is a tool and a strategy to gain ground as the country faces criticism. Paterson et al reminds that

“Foreign aid has been substantially directed at disseminating a model of journalism practice and education that is aligned with the interests of (wealthy, industrialised, Northern) donor nations. At its core, this is a journalism that judges the world against an American benchmark, politically, economically, culturally, and ideologically” (2018: 3).

Nonstate actors would perhaps like to be seen as neutral but are part of struggles over whose narrative carries the most weight in developing countries. The Economist in 2018, in the wake of Xi Jinping lifting term limits on his presidency, lamented that the West had expected a post-WTO China, integrated into Western economic systems, would adopt western values of democracy and human rights,

but this hope had proved wrong. Zondi describes this type of narrative as indicative of “the scepticism of the mainstream literature about China generally and its role in Africa in particular. The Western powers’ conception of power was and continues to be underpinned by the logic of domination and control, disdain and degradation of others” (2020: 59). But others believe it is right to be sceptical. Nyirongo (2020), discussing the shift in news discourse in Malawi-China relations, accounts for the decrease in hostility towards China in the Malawi press after 2008 by noting Chinese inducements such as exchange visits and pressure from government forces to put a positive spin on Malawi-China relations.

2018 witnessed a change in tack by China in its English language discourse approach: while Africa got the carrot with continued development assistance, the western world got the stick. Gone was the ‘Peaceful Rise’ rhetoric and in came Wolf Warrior diplomacy, a strident, combative tone in foreign relations, in response to Xi Jinping’s speeches calling on soldiers and journalists to display a greater fighting spirit (Zhu 2020). The more combative attempts to counter what Chinese citizens believe to be biased and racist hegemonic discourses aimed at undermining China’s national interests found favour with domestic audiences. But a more combatant diplomacy has resulted in a widening gap between self-perceptions within China and perceptions of the nation outside of China.

In the ‘Wolf Warrior’ era of diplomacy, the reputation of China continued to decline in the international arena. Unfavourable opinions of China in the 2020 Pew

Research Poll reached “historic heights” in many countries (Silver et al 2020). For four years, China’s reputation in Ipsos-Anholt 2020 Nation Brand Index had held steady in 23rd place, but in a 2020 poll during the COVID-19 pandemic, China had dropped 12 positions to 35th place, with decreased approval across multiple categories including Governance, People, Tourism, and Immigration-Investment (McGrath 2020). The 2021 Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index, which judged countries in terms of their international appeal and reputation using views of 75,000 respondents from 102 countries and the opinions of 778 soft power experts, saw China drop from fifth to eighth place. However, the attitude towards China in African countries remained relatively high according to Afrobarometer (Selormey 2020). Approximately 60% of respondents in a 2019-2020 poll believed the China influence on the continent was very or somewhat positive (Madrid-Morales 2021). This suggests that development assistance projects have mostly been met with approval.

China, as with other countries, attempts to tell its story through influencing opinion shapers - a practice that goes back to the CCP hosting of US journalist Edgar Snow during the civil war. This is to add legitimacy to messaging – or more sceptically, disguise CCP tracks. The messaging needs the support of media professionals, the type of whom are respondents in this research. Those who disseminate the pro-China messages are referred to as ‘borrowed boats’ (Cook 2020), carrying the PRC discourses to wider audiences, for instance in editorials and social media. This complements a trend within China, where the outsourcing

of public opinion control to commercial organisations is a growing industry (Batke and Ohlberg 2020). Perhaps similarly, internationally based nonstate players like StarTimes could be perceived as - ostensibly - one step removed from the state but still connected to message management.

Chapter outline

The literature review chapter outlines the pivotal points in diplomacy's evolution since the end of WW2. This is to contextualize the Chinese nonstate actor at the intersection of development assistance and public diplomacy, the "aid-contracting nexus" (Zhang 2020:17), an area less explored in literature. The chapter raises questions regarding the nature of public diplomacy as China makes its presence felt through FOCAC and BRI, particularly the implications of the PPP model. A rationale is given for the choice of StarTimes as a case within which to study the convergence and divergence of state and nonstate interests.

In the chapter devoted to the theoretical and analytical framework and research methods, an interdisciplinary framework is proposed to explain the link between the image of a company and its home country. Connections are made between theories and concepts spanning international relations, business studies, communication science and psychology. The methodology and methods sections explain how elements of the framework were operationalized. It is explained that a communication management approach is suitable to encompass how the relationship between the nonstate actor and the state is communicated through

news stories. The concept of framing was used to analyze news stories. In addition, communication management refers to how the relationship between the nonstate actor and the state is perceived by African respondents. This chapter also justifies approaching Africa as a continent rather than individual countries, using identical questions for media professionals. This was not to homogenize African perspectives but to focus on StarTimes and FOCAC policies and issues decided at a multilateral level, which did not alter from country to country.

The three findings chapters cover the three research questions. The first focuses on the rural Kenya context of the Access to Satellite TV 10,000 Villages Project, with interviews with subscriber beneficiaries of the television provision. The subsequent two chapters approaches StarTimes in two ways: through its media construction and perceptions of city-based media professionals. This allows for examination of the gap between media framing and citizen reception in various countries. The third of the three findings chapters has a particular focus on StarTimes projects, to explore how different aspects of the PPP priorities were constructed in the news coverage and perceived by media experts.

The concluding chapter has four main parts. Firstly, the research topic is summarized, followed by a discussion of research strengths and limitations. This will include the theoretical framework operationalization, generalizability of results, reliability and validity. Thirdly, recommendations for further research are suggested. Fourth, the contribution to theory is elaborated upon. While it is

acknowledged that while multiple areas of this topic can be improved upon, this research makes a useful starting point to understanding an under-researched Chinese nonstate actor in an under-examined context of public diplomacy literature. The research contributes to theory enrichment, through a case study that deepens links between communication science, business and international relations, relevant to an area where diplomacy will continue to evolve due to BRI and FOACAC.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction: nonstate actors from the company-state to the Party-state

The nonstate company impact on diplomacy has been significant over the centuries, as a key player in geopolitical power dynamics. During European colonialism of Asia and Africa, the company-state was a feature of a public-private hybrid influence in diplomacy (Sharman and Phillips 2020). The East India Company and the Royal Niger Company are examples of a complex power relationship between enterprises and their home nations, with the country eventually taking colonial authority from a company's control. Then after the second world war, the Western nonstate company relationship with de-colonising publics was rebranded. Less a tool of subjugation, they became symbols of a benign international order: Coca-Cola and Disney were nation branding images of free markets and democracy, bestowing the Washington Consensus with an appealing allure. Fast-forward to the 21st century, and diplomatic multilateralism allows the China party-state to present the developing world with its alternative form of nonstate company, aligned to its Belt and Road Initiative: Huawei, Tencent and Alibaba signify the promise of technology-driven advancement to publics in Asia and Africa. Thus, from the company-state to the party-state, nonstate company actors have been at the forefront of diplomacy: defending a nation's interests abroad, facilitating foreign policy objectives and projecting a country image to both internal and external populations. But as with past centuries, there are problems. China is searching for its own paradigm of

international relations theory which serves to bolster its national identity, fulfils the aspiration for a higher global status, and legitimize the one party-state system (Noesselt 2015). A question is whether China's nonstate actor companies can be the attractive embodiment of those goals, the same way that Disney and McDonalds were the face for the US. Certainly the nonstate way, represented by CGTN and Confucius Institutes, have not won over the Western populace. But also, problematic images of Alibaba and Huawei with its leaders under investigation at home and abroad, suggest that the search for China public diplomacy that coordinates successfully with nonstate forces must continue.

This review starts with an overview of how literature has theorized the relationship between diplomacy and a nonstate actor. This leads to the central issue of this research: the connection between a nonstate actor and a nation's public diplomacy efforts. Hocking speaks of the nonstate-state relationship spectrum as being on a "cooperation-conflict continuum" (Hocking 1999:35), which sums up how the association is prone to complications due to the ebb and flow of merged or diverged interests. Of particular concern is the conceptual development of two trends which emerged as part of the post-WW2 expansion of diplomatic systems. One trend is the concept of public diplomacy. With defending national interests through military conflict less deployed as the tool of engagement with foreign populations, public diplomacy rose in importance as an instrument of image building and persuasion.

The second trend is the increased reliance on nonstate actors in the international diplomatic system, which has facilitated the diversifying and intensifying exercise of diplomacy. 21st century multilateralism created space for alternatives to the Washington Consensus of economic development, in particular the opportunity for China to become a foreign assistance leader in the developing world. The question is the role played by Chinese nonstate contractors involved in foreign aid as actors in moulding China's international image: do political and business priorities clash (Wang et al 2020)? Thus, this review examines the nonstate relation to the state in terms of the international system, public diplomacy, nation branding soft power, media framing and social psychology. These overlapping concepts provide insights into when the interests of the state converge with the concerns of private entities, and the presentation of the state-nonstate relationship in the media.

This research is influenced by the fact that studies on nonstate actors and public diplomacy have been dominated by western theorizing. The literature is indicative of international relations domination by a Global North worldview. The conceptualizations are embedded with certain assumptions which have marginalized differing contexts. However, this review sees the People's Republic of China as increasingly challenging certain theoretical positions which form the norms of Western thinking in international relations (Benabdallah 2019, Ho 2021). Following its economic rise in the 21st century, China seeks to influence long-standing global institutions such as the UN and has created new ones defined in

its own image, including the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Due to the priority to maintain the power and legitimacy of the Communist party-state and the propagation of Chinese exceptionalism (Zhang 2013, Ho 2021), conceptual divergences from western international relations have been constructed. Chinese scholarship on public diplomacy and nonstate actors therefore reflect international relations scholarship Chinese characteristics (Ho 2014 and 2021, Noesselt 2015, Zhang 2013). The last 20 years has been a period of turning theory into policy and policy into the implementation of strategies to engage publics in Africa that influence China's image. However, more case studies of the results, which pay attention to the connection between nonstate actors and China's public diplomacy, are needed. They serve as puzzle pieces gradually building a picture regarding the impact of China in Africa, and therefore the power balance in global governance.

This review looks at how diplomacy has been defined over time, illustrating that rigid boundaries between nonstate and state actors have never been the norm. The review secondly looks at the construction of public diplomacy in the Cold War period and how it served as a major instrument in the rebooting of diplomacy in the decolonisation stage to win over Asian and African publics to the Washington Consensus and the rules-based international order. It is argued that public diplomacy, the targeting of publics for messaging, was an attempt by the West to wipe the slate clean of the centuries of wrongdoings in which diplomacy was fully implicated. Public diplomacy was a tool to sell a version of economic development

that contrasted with that of the Soviet Union, based on market liberalism and democratisation.

The review points out that in the decades up to the end of the 20th century, the rhetoric of development assistance from expanded diplomatic institutions did not match the expectations of developing countries. While the Cold War against the Soviet Union was 'won' in the 1990s and democratisation was also spreading across Africa, economic development did not seem to reach the majority. Multilateralism became the trend, with new bodies such as BRICS and FOCAC to prioritize the needs of diverse regions more closely (Abdenur 2014, Jakóbowski 2018). This trend provided space in the 21st century for China to image build through an alternative version of development to the developing world and become a leading player in economic diplomacy linked to overseas assistance (Pu 2019, Giles and Tan-Mullins 2018). And projects of development assistance, such as infrastructure, would be largely implemented by Chinese contractors, including those from the nonstate sector.

This research then, is focused on the intersection of public diplomacy and development assistance. This is a growing area of interest (Pamment 2018), but focus on the Chinese nonstate contribution to media development has been inadequate. This research therefore pays attention to the media and communications aspect of development assistance, using empirical realities of a case study to examine PRC nonstate-state relations in public diplomacy. For

example, it moves beyond the literature focused solely on state tools such as CGTN to explore the interplay between CGTN and the case study, nonstate broadcaster StarTimes. To understand whether StarTimes is a vehicle for China's image building narratives in the media, the research identifies how China is constructed in StarTimes news stories. Further, the research examines perceptions of StarTimes relations to China, filling a gap in research based on African perspectives. The aim is to contribute to understanding how the PRC state and nonstate actors converge – and diverge - in Africa, to enrich insights into how PRC diplomacy continues to evolve.

Nonstate actors and diplomacy: public-private hierarchies and hybrids

Defining nonstate actor participation in diplomacy brings under discussion their role in representing a country. Whether government powers alone wield influence, or whether nonstate individuals or organisations can influence diplomacy policies is a key issue (Ayhan 2018). Diplomacy's meaning is therefore a site of ontological and epistemological contestation (Lee and Hocking 2010), which has had repercussions for how the literature defined diplomacy in the past and covers contemporaneous complexities in a multipolar world.

According to Kerr and Wiseman (2013), diplomacy is generally viewed in three ways: as controlled by state accredited diplomats, as interconnected within a broader 'national diplomatic system' (NDS) or - particularly this century - as far less controlled by sovereign states. In the first category, diplomatic status is fully

conferred by a state that maintains total charge. For example, Ancient Greek, Persian, Indian and Chinese diplomatic protocol involved treaty negotiation and gift exchanges through official representatives of a sovereign entities (Cooper et al 2013). Cohen (2013) makes a reference to written records of diplomacy from 2500 BC that document city-state relationship maintenance with other city-states, by sovereigns using emissaries. The Oxford English Dictionary positions diplomacy as a solely state matter, defining it as “The management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys” (Cooper et al 2013: 1). As far as Cohen (1999: 14) is concerned, state actors remain central: “It is the representatives of states who negotiate and manage the network of accords which permit the flow of goods and individuals across sovereign jurisdictions. Diplomatic relations are not made redundant by globalization; they are a condition of it.”

However, diplomacy’s origin story far from implies that diplomacy has always been solely the function of a state. The Church of Rome involvement in mediating and arbitrating in disputes between states in medieval Europe is a case in point (Cohen 2013). While treaties that drove commerce between states in ancient times were negotiated at sovereign level, the line between private interests and court representation was blurred, when merchants were often royal agents, with “the palace functioning as a regular business enterprise, financing trade, manufacturing goods, even speculating in precious metals and currency” (Cohen 1999:6). Phillips and Sharman describe medieval Europe as using “patchwork

sovereignty arrangements” in which “rulers routinely shared power with a host of other actors, from the Church to universities, urban municipalities, and merchant guilds” and rulers “delegated responsibilities for coordinating long-distance trade and conquest to non-state actors” (2020:22). In contrast to the Oxford dictionary definition, to think of diplomacy as “a practice that produces, secures and transforms systems and world orders” (Constantinou and Sharp 2016: 20) is helpful for discussions regarding nonstate actors in the present day. Acknowledging nonstate-state relationship complexity and framing diplomatic activity according to the word ‘practice’ is a useful focus which illustrates that diplomacy is an ongoing process that shapes and is shaped by domestic and international events.

2.2 1600 to 1950: imperialism and nonstate actors

The period 1600 to 1950, spanning European imperialist rule in Africa and Asia, offers more examples of the nonstate-state interdependencies. Rulers sought to extend power overseas, but were financially limited, leading to the ‘company-state’ principle from the 16th century onwards. Pioneered by agents of Elizabeth I’s England along with the Dutch Republic, the company-state configuration stands in sharp contrast with contemporary Western literature equating ‘nonstate’ companies with ‘autonomy from government’ (Hocking 1999). The company-state in fact operated through officially conferred sovereign rights on private entities.

The English East India Company on the West Coast of Sumatra held “commercial, legal, political and diplomatic monopoly over the entire area beyond the Cape of Good Hope” between 17th and 18th centuries (Veevers 2013: 690). According to Sharman and Phillips (2020:18), “The English Royal African Company and the Dutch West India Company were crucial facilitators of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Both established networks of forts in West Africa, and entered into diplomatic and commercial relations with local rulers to win access to slaves.” That is an example of how nonstate traders entwined with state diplomacy defined British, Belgium, Portuguese and French empire building in Africa and Asia in 18th and 19th centuries. The East India Company’s opium trading was instrumental in Hong Kong becoming a colony of the British crown in 1842, but the EIC rule over India was terminated by the British state in 1858. Another case in point exemplifying the trade-to-empire evolution is personified by Cecil Rhodes, who transitioned from diamond mining to political leadership in 19th century southern Africa. The English East India Company and Cecil Rhodes’s De Beers laid the ground for Britain’s imperial conquests in Asia and Africa (Mulligan 2018, McDonnell et al 1999), thus revealing the consistent overlap between private commercial interests and the pursuit of international political hegemony.

The company-state was a hybrid that was “neither purely private entities, nor mere proxies for their home states” which “rapidly proved their worth as engines of colonial trade and conquest, inspiring widespread emulation from other European powers” (Sharman and Phillips 2020:2). Similar to present day Huawei,

the company-state illustrates that nonstate and state rigid dichotomies are inappropriate means to conceptualize power relations in diplomatic practice. All these examples justify viewing a country's interdependency with its nonstate actors in the present day as a continuation of past patterns rather than, as Western theory often implies, a nonstate actor being almost 'naturally' independent from the state.

2.3 1950 to 2000: diplomatic expansion and nonstate actors

The company-state examples reveal that private company operations became intertwined with home nation policies: as well as representing their own interests, they were vessels of the values and norms of a country. In the post-WW2 era, the nonstate actor diplomatic mandate was re-set, Western literature conceptualized nonstate actors such as NGOs and multinational companies as autonomous (Hocking 1999, La Porte 2012) within the overhaul and expansion of the international system which granted them a greater role (Barston 2013). The next section considers the reasons why diplomacy was subject to a reboot, and the role of nonstate actors and public diplomacy in the evolution. This provides the context for understanding the limitations of diplomacy conceptualizations and the rationale for the 21st century rise in multilateralism to address those concerns.

Diplomacy literature since the second world war has favoured a particular view of nonstate actors as exercising autonomy from the state, but in reality, as they expanded their influence in diplomatic institutions and trade, nonstate actors

have mainly served to keep the maintenance of power in Western nation control, in particular the United States. Maintenance of western hegemony and in turn defence of the national interests of Western countries are contingent upon keeping public support in the post-WW2 systems of governance. Literature has helped in shaping public opinions that the West is best. The normalisation of Western values from the 1950s to the end of the century was bolstered by public diplomacy, promoting northern hemisphere national interests through image building and influence cultivation.

Public diplomacy and the international order

This review considers the purposes of public diplomacy and reasons for conceptual developments over the decades, from its Western Cold War origins to the present-day Chinese scholarship. The public diplomacy concept was part of a post-war diplomacy theoretical re-set, needed to represent an expanded diplomatic system based on inclusion of decolonised nations and democratisation. The rebrand confronted two aspects of diplomacy's legacy: undesirable associations and Eurocentricism that had justified subjugation of Asia and Africa for centuries. A question is whether that legacy was ever fully eradicated, or is indicative of Western-dominated norms of public diplomacy scholarship today.

Diplomacy before the 20th century carried negative connotations (Leira 2016, Black 2010) as it was associated with engagement with war (Gregory 2011). The writings of Sun Tzu and 16th century Italian diplomat Niccolo Machiavelli attest to

the importance of deception as an art of diplomacy. Underscoring duplicity that a diplomat was associated with, an ambassador was, according to Sir Henry Wootton, “a man of virtue sent abroad to lie for his country” (Kerr and Wiseman 2013:3). Later, Joseph Stalin believed that “A diplomat’s word must have no relations to actions. Words are one thing, actions another. Good words are a mask for the concealment of bad deeds. Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water and wooden iron” (Dallin 1944:71, cited by Kerr and Wiseman 2013:4). According to Cohen (1999), Persian statecraft was also defined by conquering other states rather than the diplomatic negotiation style that was recognizable from the 20th century onwards. A reminder of diplomacy’s dark roots enables viewing of present-day diplomacy, framed in a much more positive light, with needed objectivity and scepticism.

From 1950 onwards, diplomacy became defined by a proliferation of global networks negotiated bilateral and multilateral economic treaties. The WTO, the EU, the G20 and ASEAN, to name just a few occupy the territory of redrawn post-WW2 political and economic allegiances. Diplomacy is based on institutions of global governance linked to peacekeeping, technology, culture, development, the environment and trade policies that involves worldwide collaboration (Barston 2013). But Cohen (1999:14) reminds that

For long though, modern diplomacy was neither fully inclusive nor polycultural, combining parochial and imperial elements. Emerging in the West it was underpinned by a belief in the superiority of European, Christian culture, considering other races to be

inferior. Vast regions of the world, great civilizations in their own right, were excluded from the diplomatic game.

Non-European diplomatic systems were destroyed. The East Asian diplomatic character expired with the displacement of the Chinese tributary system by western 'gunboat' diplomacy (Zhao 2013). In the Opium War of 1840-42, China was given no choice but to follow the Westphalian concept of sovereign states, yet at the same time lose parts of its own sovereignty. Forced to sign 'unequal treaties', European countries – and later Japanese – gained jurisdiction over Chinese territory. Western hegemonic status and rule-setting legitimacy became normalised. Okoth-Opondo refers to the diplomatic subjugation inflicted as the "violence of non-recognition" (2016:40) indicative of "the entanglements between Eurocentricism, diplomacy and colonialism" (2016:41).

Assisting Eurocentricism was intellectual scholarship. Edward Said (1978) identified agents of knowledge production that gave rise to a version of Orientalism which constructed Asia in contrast to European superiority. Scholarly works from artistic, literary, religious and ethnographic fields helped validate not only the marginalisation but also the dominance and subjugation of Asian lands to European authority (Roddan 2016).

It cannot be denied that diplomacy changed for the better after 1950. The expanded diplomatic system and democratisation principle presented a great basis for the inclusion of decolonising countries after WW2. According to Cohen 1999: "The crowning achievement of modern diplomacy was to accommodate the

quantum shift, in a single generation, from an international system of about fifty, mostly Western, states to a universal association of 185 members” (p14). The construction of public diplomacy was intrinsic to promoting the new wave. However, public diplomacy can be interpreted in contrasting ways: as a neutral or positive development, or a milder continuation of past inclinations.

Literature mostly encourages a neutral or benign explanation of public diplomacy. According to Huijgh (2016), public diplomacy “appears to coincide with the evolution of 20th century participatory democracy” (p438), “part of ongoing democratization of international policymaking and conduct” (p439). Public diplomacy is described as how a nation engages and communicates with the populations of other countries, with the aim of promoting an image that bolsters soft power and national interests (Hartig 2016, D’Hooghe 2014), usually through global media (Gilboa 2000). According to Hamelink, “Whereas conventional diplomacy concentrates on exchanges between governments, the main purpose of public diplomacy is to influence the perceptions and attitudes of people in foreign countries” (2015:162). Cull (2008) says it revolves around five key elements: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting. An example of listening would be the monitoring of social media (Di Martino 2020), advocacy refers to dialogues across networks to promote policies (White and Radic 2014). Cultural and exchange diplomacy increase understanding between culture and people-to-people interactions, while international broadcasting would include media channels such as Voice of America

and the BBC World Service. Diplomacy is also used to improve a country's status and explain its intentions to foreign publics (Wang 2013). The political strategy is to target overseas populations with information that creates a favourable image, to in turn diminish hostility from foreign governments (Gilboa 2008).

Literature therefore often presents public diplomacy as a force for relationship wellbeing. According to Gregory, public diplomacy is engagement and communication through dialogues and other activities that emphasize "mutual interests and mutual respect" (Gregory 2011:351). However, other scholars caution not to lose sight of self-serving objectives. Melissen points out that the emphasis is not altruism, but defence of national interests (2005). The aims are the same as diplomacy, for instance, promoting trade, but with the aim of political communication with a wider range of actors, including civil society, to win foreign public favour (McNair 2011).

With regards to the newly included members of the diplomatic system, a different reading of public diplomacy is possible. The self-serving nature of public diplomacy means that the 'public', erased from the traditional diplomacy concept, was made visible on condition of serving the needs of the West in the ideological battle against communism after WW2. For centuries, the populations Africa and Asia were expected to be silenced servants of colonial subjugation. Diplomacy was based on "colonial governance through the non-recognition of indigenous diplomatic agents, denigration of gods and reneging on treaties" (Okoth-Opondo

2016:45). But in the 1960s the Western diplomatic system invented the 'public' that it needed to speak to directly. The public had to exist to validate a worldview that served the US-led international rules-based system. It was necessary this public be made manifest for the West to align de-colonised states with the values of democratisation and liberal markets. While West had 'public diplomacy', the Soviet Union had 'propaganda' during the Cold War and Vietnam War, with the former concept given superior branding to the latter.

A problem is that the construction, for all its benign branding, seems premised on an assumption that publics did not exist or were not important before the US made them visible. Foregrounding the word 'public' seemed to imply that hitherto the 1950s, the public was disassociated from the consequences of traditional diplomacy, as if government-to-government interactions did not directly transform publics culturally, economically and politically. But those publics have always been messaged by foreign governments: an alternative reading would be that slavery, colonisation and other forms of subjugation of non-Western populations were all forms of diplomatic engagement with publics. The overthrow of colonial rule were examples of interaction and dialogue by foreign publics 50 years before western theorists invented the concept of 'new' public diplomacy along the same lines. Seen negatively, the concept of public diplomacy is a tool of erasure of not just pre-1950 diplomacy, but also pre-1950 publics. Logic dictates that if these publics existed after 1950, they also existed before it. If publics were

important after 1950, an anti-colonialist perspective would be that they were also important before it.

It could be argued therefore that public diplomacy served as a tool to extend “the long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism” (Okoth-Opondo 2016:41). Most public diplomacy is part of Western academic hegemony that has helped validate and normalize positions which marginalised research and conceptual developments linked to other parts of the world. Gilboa (2008) concedes that “public diplomacy suffers from several major weaknesses. Most studies deal with the U.S. experiences during the cold war. Limited, too, is research on public diplomacy programs and activities of countries other than the United States and of new international actors such as NGOs, civil society groups, and individuals” (p56). As Okoth-Opondo argues, it is wise to avoid having “a moralized idea of diplomacy.” He thought the problem was that modern diplomacy was connected to “colonial worlds and colonial spectres that continue to haunt the diplomatic present” (2016:42). Another African commentator concurs that public diplomacy privileges the West: Udo-Udo Jacob asserts that “It is highly unlikely that public diplomacy immersed in neoliberal allegiance can bring meaningful change to those living on hegemonic frontiers” (2021:191).

Writing in 1999, Cohen believed that “The acid test is whether global diplomacy can transcend its ethnocentric origins. Old culture-bound habits and convictions do hinder development of the new global diplomacy” (p14). The test results are

in: multilateralism contributed towards a shift in the power balance. But a question is whether forms of public diplomacy from non-Western countries can follow approaches which address the legacy of Eurocentric domination, both for self-serving purposes but also to add empowerment to publics of Asia and Africa still seeking a larger voice to influence the direction of global diplomacy.

2.4 Nonstate actors and the diplomatic power shift: 2000 and beyond

Public diplomacy was one major development in the post-WW2 diplomatic system that orientated power towards the Washington Consensus. The rise in inclusion of nonstate actors was briefly previously, but here is discussed further. These nonstate actors became hallmarks of global institutions and disseminated the norms that facilitated the US domination the international diplomatic system. This section looks at the strengths and limitations of the post-WW2 diplomacy configuration: outlining the 50-year period up to 2000 is necessary to understand the context of the diplomatic power shift that has been underway in the 21st century. The nonstate relation to the state according to Western theory is outlined, providing the context for exploring the impact on economic diplomacy, particularly development assistance. That leads to addressing the question of whether the Washington led international system, and the role of nonstate actors within it, has delivered expected levels of economic development in developing countries. The post 21st century shift away from Washington to diplomatic multilateralism, and increased interest in the so-called China development model

(Shinn 2019) defined as “the hybrid mixture of plan and market under one-party rule,” (Noesselt 2015:433), indicates not.

An expanded diplomatic system

A step forward in the expanded diplomatic system after the second world war was that the Westphalian principle of state sovereignty was extended to newly decolonized nations in Asia and Africa, as the UN promoted norms of democracy and self-government (Zhao 2018). The dissolution of the great empires also led to more emphasis on negotiation skills and conflict mediation practices (Leira 2016).

Further, the scope of diplomacy broadened and relied on non-state actors to a far greater scale than ever before. Non-state actors represent the private sector or transnational civil society (Wiseman 2010) and include NGOs, international organisations, private companies, and representatives of culture and academia. International civil society non-state actors participate in making connections between a country’s internal and international issues. “The expansion of the machinery for the conduct of external diplomacy” (Hocking 1999:26) extended the diplomatic remit to cover a far wider range of issues than previous centuries, such as the environment, international trade and finance, human rights, health, development and telecommunication systems (Barston 2013).

Nonstate relation to the state - western views

In the international system, the relationship between a state and nonstate actors has been defined in different but overlapping ways. Western theory posits that nonstate actors maintain autonomy from the home state, which allows them to prioritise their own interests when necessary (Hocking 1999). For instance, Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office calls itself 'A force for good in the world' (2020), but it is unlikely that many UK NGOs working autonomously would want its image or messaging to cohere with the Conservative government.

Ayhan (2018) defines the relationship according to different perspectives, such as state-centric, non-statist, non-traditional, society-centric and accommodative, a taxonomy that encompasses boundaries as well as relationships. An example of a state-centric diplomacy strategy is that of China and its use of state tools like Confucius Institutes and broadcaster CGTN, which will be discussed later. A further way of viewing the nonstate-state relationship was mentioned earlier in this chapter - to conceive the proximity between the two on a "cooperation-conflict continuum" spectrum (Hocking 1999:35). In non-democratic countries, the assumption is that the proximity would be much closer. For instance, in Russia, many private enterprises adopt methods to keep strong connections to the state, to maintain their viability (Szakonyi 2018). That would represent the cooperation end. But at other end of the spectrum could be business related nonstate actors who would rather have an independent image or prefer to fully localize, to appeal

to the values of societies where it has commercial interests. In some situations, tensions may rise between the home state and the priorities of the nonstate company.

Also mentioned previously is a “national diplomatic system” (NDS) which comprises state and non-state actors using policy networks as their spheres of influence (Kerr and Wiseman 2013). This is similar to a highly influential conceptualization of state and nonstate relations from Zaharna (2008, 2014) who believes present day diplomacy is a network of connections, a collaboration of state and nonstate actors. Pamment (2016) is another advocate of networks: he believes that multi-stakeholder networks should prioritize inclusivity, thus creating a more diffuse diplomacy. The term ‘network’ also crops up in the ‘catalytic diplomacy’ definition (Hocking 1999), used to explain how official and unofficial, state and non-state forces work together. In his theory, a government retains its dominant position and maintains its identity and focus on objectives, but it cooperates widely, with a network of states, private corporations and transnational organizations. This perhaps can partly help explain multilateral alliances such as BRICS, ASEAN and FOCAC, where countries represent their nation state interests and maintain their central diplomatic control, creating channels for negotiation and cooperation on a number of issues. In the same territory is polyilateral diplomacy (Wiseman 2010), which extends bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to include transnational nonstate actors.

Most of these concepts of the nonstate relation to the state refer to Western concepts, and the heavy focus on networks suggest a flattening out of hierarchies. Less attention has been given to the type of state-centric system of diplomacy which is both hierarchical and its relation to non-state actors. This could be described as another type of network, one drawn upon by the state at times of great need. This would fit the China party-state mould (Russel and Berger 2020). State capitalism allows companies to operate independently for the most part, as long as the state is not challenged. Huawei is an example of a company that follows this principle, but Alibaba's Jack Ma 2020 downfall serves as a salutary symbol of what can go awry when nonstate allegiance is not followed.

More about Chinese theories will follow in a later section. However, before that, having covered this background of theory regarding the nonstate relation to the state from the western point of view, economic diplomacy is considered. In particular, the international system handling of development assistance is looked at. The Washington Consensus promised economic progress according to liberal markets and increased democracy would deliver for developing countries, but by the end of the 20th century, many were seeking answers from elsewhere.

Economic diplomacy and development assistance

Economic engagement across borders has always been a core feature of diplomacy. Economic diplomacy involves international negotiation and decision-making to enhance and protect economic interests through aid, trade and

investment policies (Woolcock 2012). It entails “the use of political means as leverage in international negotiations, and economic leverage to increase the political stability of the nation” (Okano-Heijmans 2011: 29– 30, cited by Zhang X 2016). It requires reaching foreign policy objectives through economic strategies (Lu 2004, cited by Zhang X 2016).

Post WW2 economic diplomacy came to be conducted through diverse government and business actors in a complex network of stakeholders in diplomacy. The governance of economic rules for organizations such as the IMF and WTO have been steered by a liberal international order championing free markets and fewer restrictions of the movement of capital and goods (Zhao 2018).

Part of economic diplomacy is development assistance, otherwise termed foreign aid. Literature makes a clear connection between post WW2 dominance by the United States and foreign aid. While before the war the old empires may have been involved with aid deliverance to their colonies, after the war it was linked to the Marshall Plan, to support the re-building of European economies and also the establishment of international bodies such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank. The US has used these historical roots to dominate the course of economic development since the 1950s, partly through those international institutions.

Foreign aid includes transferring commodities, services and financial resources from a beneficiary country or international entity such as NGOs, the World Bank or IMF to a recipient country (Williams 2020). Purposes include economic

stimulation, for instance through infrastructure, support for agriculture, education and health systems, deliverance of new technology, or humanitarian relief (Radelet 2006).

Aid reflects shifts in global power. Most donor countries are members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), led by the United States. However, Japan was briefly the leading donor in the 1990s, reflecting its economic status, and more emerging economies such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Korea and Brazil have also become donors (Woods 2008). Previous aid recipient China is now the leading non-DAC donor, in particular providing billions in economic oriented assistance in the form of loans, credits and debt forgiveness with trade and investment agreements (Woods 2008), making it broader in scope than Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) (Regilme and Hodzi 2021). The provision of services in the form of development projects, trade and investment all offer opportunities for nonstate actors to become involved in development assistance.

Countries give foreign aid for a combination of reasons, such as security enhancement, to gain international support for political positions, raise language and cultural knowledge and foster economic partnerships (Williams 2020, Woods 2008). But equally important are political and strategic motivations, driven by historical connections such as colonial ties or encouragement of policies in line with domestic imperatives (Alesina and Dollar 2020, Wang et al 2020). Foreign aid priorities reflect of domestic political dispositions. Aid from the United States and

other Western countries has been channelled towards improving elections, justice systems, human rights, and combatting drug trafficking (Williams 2020). A PRC conditionality is recognition of the one China policy.

US domination of the international system allowed it to make aid contingent on certain factors that supported the Washington Consensus: IMF conditions included steps towards market-led economies, lowered trade barriers and privatization, making aid an instrument to spread capitalism. However, by the end of the 20th century, this approach had failed to deliver significant economic development in Africa (Williams 2020).

Problems with the Washington Consensus

The downside for de-colonised countries was that 'inclusion' into the diplomatic system after WW2 in practice meant submission to a rules-based international economic governance that was skewed towards the standpoints of the West (Zhao 2018). The values of former empire countries continued to be diffused in post-WW2 diplomacy (Blaut 1993), despite its greater inclusivity of nations. This is partly because financial and diplomatic advantages - such as colonialism linked trade expansion - had provided a 300-year head start. For example, company-state power the Royal Niger Company and Unilever were interconnected during colonial Nigeria.

In the post WW2 world, developing countries attempting to narrow the economic gap with the developed world welcomed Western corporations (Hamelink 2015) and American business corporations were therefore significant nonstate beneficiaries of the US-led international rules-based system. From the point of view of companies, closeness to their home country government was beneficial because “business needs Uncle Sam’s help, particularly in a world where governments are awarding big contracts abroad” (Garten 1997:68 cited by Wang 2006:46).

In theory, bodies such as the WTO, OECD and EU promote trading partnerships that involve a search for commonalities and mutual interests between parties (Zaharna 2008, Melissen 2005, Leonard 2002), but in reality, the world order they uphold have not solved problems of many developing nations (Zhao 2018). Zhao Yiwei (2019), posed the question, “If market rules are so effective, why do 1.1 billion people in the world lack electricity?” One area that exemplifies the economic development gap is the global divide in access to communication resources. ICT access is widely considered to be essential for poverty reduction, but in Africa, communications infrastructure progress has been slow (Watat and Jonathan 2020). Still only a small percentage of people in some African nations have internet access; the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) puts the figure at 14% of the population (Broadcast Media Africa 2021). The lack of progress on bridging the north-south divide despite attention from numerous UN bodies since 1948 has led to scepticism. Diplomatic wrangles over decades

have centred on several issues, such as technology transfer and assistance, and one-sided exports from the north to the south creating cultural sovereignty and dependence issues (Hamelink 2015). In addition, there is the difficulty that even within countries, the access gap is hard to bridge. By contrast, Western corporations benefited from the market approach to ICT development. Among the Western nonstate actor beneficiaries of the dependency of the south on the north are media organisations. The domination of Anglo-America-French news outlets such as Reuters, Associated Press and AP France was termed media imperialism (Boyd-Barrett 1977, cited by Flew 2018). Democracy brought greater broadcasting choice following democratisation in Africa in the 1990s, but satellite pay television catered to elite metropolitan based populations who wanted international channels with foreign sport, movies and news, not for the poor (Paterson 1998, Teer-Tomaselli 2015, BBC World Service Trust 2006).

As with public diplomacy, domestic economic policy determines international policy such as bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, which define the parameters within which companies operate. Examples include the EU, ASEAN and the new free trade zone in the Asia Pacific region (Heijmans, Jamrisko and Baschuk, 2020). Foreign aid follows a similar pattern of a connection between a home state and its nonstate actors overseas. A large proportion of development assistance programmes involve private businesses under contract, indicative of the trend to involve more nonstate actors in diplomacy as discussed earlier. These private entities must converge profit and development objectives. Recognition

that foreign aid is a business which very often benefits the country giving aid more than the country requiring assistance is widespread. For instance, the combining of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of International Development was based on advice mostly sought from British NGOs, not foreign diplomats or aid organisations (Worley 2020).

Dissatisfaction with the international order

Frustration at the lack of progress has meant that developing countries have increasingly looked beyond the West for solutions to economic development. Despite being the sole surviving superpower and having its values underpin international economic governance, a geopolitical power shift has diminished US international dominance, and its diplomacy success has wilted (Leonard 2002, Boduszynski 2016). Diplomatic multilateralism has been used to explain how Western hegemony has been challenged with emerging nation blocs such as BRICS, ASEAN and the African Union. The 2008 financial crisis and the economic rise of China to become the world's second largest economy helped hasten change. China has its economic development ambitions in the shape of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) which only partly aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Flockhart, "The acceptance of Western power and institutions by non-Western states or colonies was apparently only skin deep as a necessary price to have paid for decolonization" (2016:22). Therefore, countries are pursuing their

objectives, with emerging powers adopting strategies and instruments orientated towards their individual economic development priorities.

However, academic literature has yet to fully accommodate the dissatisfaction with the US-led world order, as it still presents theories through a largely Western prism. Literature on aid is dominated by a focus on OECD countries rather than BRICS nations (Wang et al 2020). In the article 'De-centring the white gaze of development', Pailey (2020: 729) claims, "non-white development actors such as China have emerged as enticing alternatives." Through new institutions such as the FOAC, China has proposed its alternative model of economic advancement for the developing countries. However, scant academic attention has been given to the central role of nonstate actors in the delivery of China's economic alternatives. While governments decide economic development policies, nonstate actors deserve greater attention in literature as they carry out projects and contribute to a complex site for experimentation with networks and collaborations (Zaharna 2008).

China's public diplomacy and development: a model for Africa?

China has been seeking its own, de-Americanised public diplomacy path (Wang 2013), with increasing emphasis on international communication (Zhang 2021)

The rationale for China's focus on public diplomacy has strong defensive elements: its perceived need to defend national interests seems particularly strong.

Coverage of Xinjiang and Covid-19 are just the most recent reasons China sees

itself as a victim of Western scepticism and demonisation (Zhang 2021, O'Hanlon 2021). Public diplomacy is aimed at supporting the Going Out policy; the economic rise of the last twenty years is seen as under threat if perceptions of China do not improve (Yu W. 2012, cited by Hartig 2016). Portrayal of China's economic engagement with Africa, summarised by phrases such as 'debt-trap diplomacy' and 'neo-colonialism' (Brautigam 2020, Rolland 2021) have undermined the image of the development agenda with Chinese characteristics. The objective of Chinese public diplomacy is to respond – to talk back – and tell a China story that dispels these discourses. Talking back includes the promotion of narratives that promote great power status (Zhang 2021).

China's public diplomacy is state-driven: a Division of Public Diplomacy, later the Office of Public Diplomacy, was created within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2004 (Rawnsley 2012, D'Hooghe 2014). It plans and coordinates public diplomacy media events including interviews, speeches and other interactions with foreign publics. Another state tool is CGTN programming, to present the approved version of China's business, culture and politics around the world. Problems however, include cultivating credibility when officialdom is guiding the outreach (Ding 2011, Rawnsley 2012). The Xi Jinping lead 'Chinese Dream' attempt at positive framing of China failed to catch the imagination in the West (Wu et al 2021).

Particularly problematic has been coverage of Confucius Institutes, joint ventures with overseas education institutions, which have been dogged by suspicion that they are propaganda vehicles (Li et al 2021). Severe criticism has led to the closure of many institutes in Western countries. However, their format as a collaboration with foreign organisations could be viewed as China style network (Zaharna 2014), which not only facilitated trade between China and countries with CIs (Li et al 2021) but also fostered an interdependency between foreign institutions and the China state. Although in the West the media construction of the state-nonstate relationship in the media has been largely negative, a question is whether a nonstate Chinese company is able to develop foreign relations which receive positive framing in the press.

Certainly, nonstate actors in China's public diplomacy has been an increasing trend (d'Hooghe 2014), due to the belief that the nation-state by itself cannot carry the weight of the responsibility (Wang 2006). Wang Yiwei (2012) pointed to internal constraints and saw the use of nonstate actors as a way for China to fulfil its public diplomacy potential. Tang Xiaosong believed nonstate activities could garner more positive responses, while Zhang Honglei said nonstate involvement diluted the political overtones of messages (Hartig 2016). Another tactic has been to use foreign media and PR firms. Certainly, foreign lobbyists have been subsequently used for Chinese companies for public relations purposes, including Huawei (Oprysko 2021). Getting foreigners to speak for China is linked to the 'borrowed boats' theory of Cook (2018) of using others to carry a message. Other message

carriers would be Chinese companies, who have been encouraged to improve their CSR efforts (Tang and Li). But in addition, China has to show sensitivity to other cultures to avoid controversies that undermine public diplomacy. Wu Yu-Shan contends that China is “required to find ways to engage with local values, language and culture” (2021:201) to win over African publics.

2.5 Public diplomacy potential in development assistance and PPPs

The trend towards multilateralism has increased the attention given to China’s development assistance programmes. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) action plans provide the context through which Chinese contractors enter an African country, legitimizing the presence of the state and nonstate nonstate contractors in an overseas environment. Chinese contractors abroad are engaged by the state to work on projects linked to policies that are worth billions of dollars in investment (Tang and Calabrese 2020). Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is likely to influence how BRI is viewed in Africa. As a result, the projects of BRI and FOCAC hold substantial public diplomacy potential, as populations see the development outcomes. Such outcomes can yield insights that would enrich development studies and diplomacy conceptual intersectionality. These projects fall into the territory of public diplomacy that Alexander terms “implicit communications such as development assistance [and] foreign aid” (2014:71), which, according to Pamment (2016), includes both the communication of the project as well as the project itself. He reminds that “Public diplomacy and international development emerged from a shared geopolitical

and conceptual context” (2016:8). Aid is essential for the relationship cultivation aspect of diplomacy – to influence policy in recipient countries in ways favourable to donor nations, and to raise the reputation and status of the donor in the international system (Regilme and Hodzi 2021), essential in a multipolar world. Examples would be Britain, where development assistance is part of the remit of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), which also partly funds the BBC World Service.

China’s foreign aid agenda over the last 10 years has positioned it in the battleground for country image cultivation through international development. From 2000 to 2014, ICT commitments in the form of loans, aid, media assistance and donations by Chinese firms and state organs amounted to US\$4.8 billion for around 100 projects (AidData 2017, cited by Dani Madrid-Morales 2021). Although state-run, the loan element removes China’s aid development model from a state-versus-market dichotomy theoretical explanation (Tang 2021); it has been a site of ongoing experimentation (Cheng 2019). So many potential case studies which represent the experiments make this fertile ground for theory enrichment but FOCAC action plans have been largely overlooked, for instance in favour of the quantitative approach followed by AidData and CARI, the China-Africa Research Initiative.

There is a gap regarding the contribution made by China’s nonstate development assistance contractors. China’s aid regime remains largely state driven (Regilme

and Hodzi 2021), but the nonstate involvement suggests flexibility and desire for complementary relations (Madrid-Morales 2021b), for instance with those contracted by the government according to public-private-partnership arrangements. PPPs are described as “a long-term contract between a private party and a government agency, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility” (World Bank Institute, 2012:11, cited by Roehrich et al (2014:110). There has been research into the connection between public diplomacy, PPPs and development assistance for initiatives involving the US (Hudson-Dean 2013, US Department of State 2009) and Japan (Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.). Giving PPPs as an example, Ingenhoff and Marschlich (2019) claim, “By collaborating with social and governmental actors in the host country, companies can manage their relationships with stakeholders, which also helps to enhance the international PR of corporations” (p360). Further, World Bank funded PPPs for development have gained attention; for instance, the Digital Malawi Project aim is to increase the 17% of people with internet access by digitising public-private sectors using US\$72.4 million in credit from the Bank’s International Development Association (Broadcast Media Africa 2021b).

However, not enough case study focus has been given to the China-Africa nonstate context. Considerable attention has been generated by the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) in Kenya which was a PPP involving a state Chinese firm due to the closed bid status (Olotch 2007), but nonstate actors involved with projects

have received less scrutiny. Having been increasingly relied upon by mainland China (Alden 2017, Li et al 2019), PPPs are central to FOCAC action plans (Gu and Carey 2019), as they are considered a suitable investment and finance model for China-Africa projects (Jayaram and Kassiri 2017, Zeng and Shu 2018). In contrast to the World Bank Institute, Li et al (2019) classes PPPs as a collaborative network, formed of “institutionalised cooperative relationships between public actors (governments and intergovernmental organisations) and private actors (corporate and civil society actors) beyond the nation-state for governance purposes” (2019:295). But if it is a network, the PPP is still hierarchical and state-driven: in terms of FOCAC, the PPP finance is from Exim Bank but also commercial loans from China Development Bank, following the profit motive. This means that the contractor must balance public and private considerations, always remembering the ultimate paymasters.

That said, the ‘public’ dimension of development assistance, involving loans from state sources, means that there is potentially added sensitivity needed with image building by the country and company. Research points to the need not only for increased community information on the PPP arrangements but also greater interaction between citizens and the private side of the PPP to raise confidence the projects prioritize their interests and are sustainable (Boyer 2019). Research has largely focused on assessing the advantages and disadvantages of PPP contracts, rather than studying the views of citizens Guo and Ho (2019). Because FOCAC is based on ‘win-win’ financing rather than grants as in western style

foreign aid, African countries must pay back debts to China. This has exposed China to image building peril from new outlets that echo anxieties of taxpayers. China has been cast as a new colonial power in Africa, with development assistance criticised as debt-trap diplomacy (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011) and BRI being a tool to “entrap countries into China’s orbit with debt diplomacy” (Reuters 2020).

The above shows that development studies and public diplomacy are ways of examining the nonstate relation to the state to improve the image of a country. However, the nonstate-state relation has been approached conceptually in a number of ways. Further related concepts of image building, nation branding and soft power cultivation, discussed briefly below, reveal striking similarities in the benefits and problems state-nonstate interactions.

With regards to image building in general, Leonard et al. (2002) believe that ‘the image and reputation of a country are public goods which can create either an enabling or a disabling environment for individual transactions’ (p9), and thus, meeting objectives is at stake (Manheim 1994). A national image is “the cognitive representation that a person holds of a given country, what a person believes to be true about a nation and its people” (Kunczik 1997:6, cited by Batchelor and Zhang 2017:4). Huang and Leung (2005) refer to national image building as “a national stereotype, a generalized, abstracted profile of a nation or its people” (p.304). National images can be influential in “opening up or closing down

opportunities in foreign policy, trade, investment and other types of global interaction” (Batchelor and Zhang 2017:4). In parts of Africa with less access to western media due to the digital divide, it is possible that a stereotype of China has yet to be formed. Thus, China’s involvement with communications infrastructure – both the technology and the content – presents an opportunity to undermine negative discourses and present preferred ones. FOCAC provides the bilateral legitimacy but nonstate actor contractors carry out the work, providing benefits for both state and nonstate forces.

As to nation branding activities, they are designed to increase a country’s competitive standing by improving the image and reputation of a country (Fan 2006, van Ham 2008). In nation branding therefore, a link between the state and the nonstate is apparent: among a country’s attributes are its famous companies. The image of Germany is inextricably linked to Volkswagen, and similarly, Sweden with Ikea, and China with Huawei. Research has examined how corporate reputation and country image impact one another (Buhmann, 2017; Tang and Li, 2011). The reputation of a brand and that of a country can become intertwined. Reputation evaluations of a country could include economic performance, culture, population and products as well as direct experience through tourism (Passow et al 2005; Anholt 2007). Due to products, judgments of a country’s reputation can therefore be influenced by its brand outputs (Yang et al 2008). This relation between the state and nonstate can be advantageous; private companies sometimes participate in branding exercises to build a country’s reputation (White

and Kolesnicov 2015). An example would be pop group BTS as promotional figures for a Korean Tourist Board advert (Gu et al 2020).

However, while some brands welcome the connection between the company and the home country, from the opposite standpoint, a brand might make considerable attempts to distance itself from its home country. A good reason could be the home country's image. In China's case, nation branding polls outside Africa have proven wholly negative, with ranking sinking in recent years (McGrath 2020), once again pointing to a need for an improved public outreach programme.

Or it could be the case that the company seek detachment because there is business sense in adapting to local conditions. American companies between 1880 and 1980 underwent 'Europeanisation' to integrate into new environments (Maielli 2010), changing management styles and finding a balance between regional and global strategies. Companies sometimes downplay foreign origins of the brand. Masa Sugano, a representative of JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) in Africa, claims, "Japanese companies are no longer obviously Japanese – we have globalized and localized, and much of the executives and brands are now African" (2020). This approach helps the company avoid being viewed as a tool of cultural imperialism and aligns with decolonization and de-Westernization processes. Hybridized local-global products or fully indigenous content satisfy consumers who aspire not to see the original country image but their own culture represented in a brand. However, creating a disassociation can

be more difficult for brands that originate in authoritarian regimes, where nonstate actor proximity to the state could be tighter. Thus, in certain cases, the political communication concept of public diplomacy is more suitable for scrutiny of this relationship dynamic.

Nonstate-state relations can also be considered through the concept of soft power, which refers to a country's ability to attract others without coercion or payment (Nye, 2004). Among the generators of soft power are global brands in the entertainment industry, such as Hollywood films and the British music industry (McClory 2019). However, measuring soft power is complex due to the vagueness of the concept. Operationalization challenges include measurement criteria (Davis and Ji 2017, Kahraman 2017). Secondly, unlike public diplomacy which is purposeful communication with publics (Rawnsley 2012), successful soft power in global media is usually not government directed; the credibility of media organisations that attempt to favourably highlight a country's agenda in international media can be called into question (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2018). Suspicions may arise if an outlet is considered to be nothing more than a "propaganda style information work" (Barston 2013:26), if public diplomacy is based on "the blurring of the lines" between public relations and journalism" (Cheng et al 2016:746). Another potentially problematic area is if, when appealing to the values of the target audience, a nation's brand can become an idealized concoction of an 'imagined community' (Dinnie, 2008). In some countries, the

image promoted may be overtly westernized to attract tourists and investment (Kaneva and Popescu, 2011).

Soft power has been another key area of importance for China in the last two decades, but like with nation branding, China's soft power ranking has been suffering (McClory 2019). Not helping is that Government directed efforts at country image building have raised suspicions with nations holding opposing political standpoints, causing more public diplomacy hindrances. CGTN America has been forced to register as a foreign agent in the United States (O'Keeffe and Viswanatha 2019) and CGTN lost its license entirely in the UK due to the perceived lack of independence of content, running contrary to British media laws (Hern 2021). Cheng et al identified a "limited transfer of issue salience between the Chinese news agency and the US news outlets" (2016:744), revealing the gap in news values. Madrid-Morales (2021a) found that African news organisations were far less likely to source material from Chinese agencies than those of the West. These cases highlight how media laws reflect political systems of a country. Yarchi et al (2013) concludes that political values and policy proximity can influence how a news story is covered, meaning that hostility can increase when a political ideology is considered particularly foreign or alien (Hartig 2016, D'Hooghe 2014). Concerns are therefore raised regarding non-democratic country state influence over media enterprises in democracies to control images (Diamond and Schell 2018).

2.6 News Media, PR and PD

News media output will play a role in shaping national images, which is territory of public diplomacy and public relations. While there are shared techniques and tools of communication for engaging audiences (Payne 2009, Signitzer and Coombs 1992, L'Etang 2009:490), if a nonstate actor is primarily concerned with business, it will promote itself using public relations first and foremost. However, even for their own public profile on the global stage, there are deficiencies in the approaches of Chinese companies. Chen et al (2020) discovered that "The top Chinese firms, despite their high market value, are yet to establish a soft influence internationally. The global media engagements of Chinese companies are largely driven, passively, by special events and crises." If the companies cannot raise their own image, there are questions as to whether they could also do so for China.

This passivity has consequences; others will do the defining for Chinese firms and China instead. Fang and Chimenson (2017) found that the negative image of China impacted the image of Geely's acquisition of Volvo cars, which suggests that the image of the country at least partly dictates the image of the company (Wang 2006), at least in initial perceptions. Even if a company is not officially used for public diplomacy, there seems no escaping country and company image interdependencies in the media. A Forbes article from 2015 bemoans the shelter given by the Chinese state to Alibaba: "In almost every single line of its various businesses, Alibaba is by and large protected by the government from foreign

competitors. A large portion of Alibaba's revenues on its various auction sites continue to be various Chinese government entities doing business with other Chinese government entities" (Somaney 2015). Time and again, nonstate-state relation is perceived negatively in Western media.

When there is a state mandated development project, state protection may be even more the case, because this puts the publicity work in the realm of economic development. However, companies are wary about being close to the state. Su and Flew 2020 use the BRI reliance on Chinese technology companies Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent as an example. They speak of "the tensions and potential contradictions arising from the reliance of the Chinese state on the BAT to build digital infrastructure, while the BAT seek to minimize direct state regulation for their data-driven business models" (p.67). Wang et al (2020:1501) claims that "The motivations behind the business sector's involvement in aid projects do not always align with the state's foreign policy, which creates challenges for state coordination and its image building overseas." This justifies attention being directed at more of these projects and their image cultivation outcomes.

2.7 Framing: News portrayals of Chinese companies and countries

Literature mentioned above suggests that there are times that the image of China in the news intersects with the image of its internationalizing companies. Recent high-profile cases also attest to this phenomenon: the coverage of Huawei and Alibaba in Western media were intrinsically connected to the relations that these

nonstate actors had with the party-state. As a result, the way that China and its companies are framed in the media will have a significant influence on public diplomacy.

A key target of Chinese public diplomacy is telling China's story well (Hartig 2016), and whether a story is framed the way that serves China's image building agenda. A news frame is "a central organizing idea or story" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, cited by De Vreese 2005:53) while framing is "the way a news story is packaged, organized, and narrated" (Nahed 2015: 251). Similarly, Hertog and McLeod explain that "When a topic is 'framed' its context is determined; its major tenets prescribed, individuals, groups, and organizations are assigned the roles of protagonist, antagonist, or spectator" (2001:146). Thus, the framing process involves information selection and omission (Pan and Kosicki 1993), which can assist with countering negative images and promoting positive narratives. The communicating text can be used "to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and / or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993:52).

Framing is of critical importance to political communication, namely the maintenance and accumulation of political power using public diplomacy instruments such as media communications. The frame signifies "the imprint of power" because "it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (Entman (1993: 55). Similarly, Carragee and Roefs remind that

“journalistic framing of issues and events does not develop in a political vacuum; it is shaped by the frames sponsored by multiple social actors, including politicians, organizations, and social movements” (2004:216). In diplomatic competition between countries, frame contests emerge in news stories, with politicians becoming the source of frames (Hertog and McLeod 2001). Political communication is used to highlight and obscure dimensions of reality, to influence audiences (Entman 1993). The problem that China has faced has been with negative framing. Previously mentioned has been the China threat theory. An example of the economic would be headlines that Alibaba’s e-commerce market will wipe out African business traders, thus undermining the Jack Ma philanthropy image (French 2019, Wu 2020). Quite often these constructions are viewed as symptomatic of the discourse power of Western media giants. But with the fortunes of BRI at stake, and with China involved with media development in African countries, understanding country and company discourse intersections takes on heightened urgency if ways are to be found to increase positive narratives.

This research will identify themes and narratives which frame relationships between a nonstate actor and its partners. For positive public diplomacy outcomes, the news must be a supportive alignment between the company and China. For instance, StarTimes runs Belt and Road video competitions in collaboration with “the China Public Diplomacy Association, the News Center of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State

Council (SASAC) of China and Global Times” (Xinhua 2021). Identifying the frames of reference can occur through recognizing frame typologies located in narratives. These are found by looking for “common threads in raw material” of news stories “to identify the unifying or core frame” (Ryan et al, 2001:177). Some news frames can be generic, i.e., relevant to a wide variety of news topics. One generic frame typology defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) has five categories: ‘conflict’, ‘human interest’, ‘attribution of responsibility’, ‘morality’ and ‘economic consequences’ (cited by De Vreese 2005:56). These frames can highlight conflicts, the human-interest angle or actors in a story, focus on economic outcomes or emphasize a moral message. For example, with the latter ‘moral’ category, “Certain kinds of relationships are privileged by the frame – presenting them as likely and appropriate, whereas others are portrayed as inappropriate, illegitimate or impossible” (Hertog and McLeod 2001:139). Generic frames in Entman’s 1993 model also can help pinpoint “how individuals or groups structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of obtaining them” (Hertog and McLeod 2001: 146). By contrast, in De Vreese’s frame building model (2005), there are also issue specific frames, which pertain to particular events or topics.

What also needs to be established, however, is whether media constructions actually have a big impact on public perceptions. This brings in the concept of social psychology, related to public attitudes and the cultivation of emotions towards a country. The concern for this research is public perception of the relationship between a country and a company, to understand in what ways the

image of one influences the image of the other. Country image analysis in social psychology centres on issues of personal cognition, emotion, and behavior (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). This could refer to the emotional and affective dimensions of the domestic public or those of other nations.

Nation branding and national identity are interconnected because before a country can be promoted to external publics, internal clarity defining a country's fundamental characteristics and values is necessary. National identity serves to construct contrasts between a country and the outside world, and includes awareness of a country's self-image or identity (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The need for national identity construction to precede external nation branding is particularly important for countries in a period of transition, for instance politically or economically, or if a country has a poor international image. Branding initiatives can assist with the re-framing of identities for domestic publics (Kaneva and Popescu 2011) before they are exported to foreign populations.

Social psychology research into external relations includes subjectivities that shape feelings and beliefs towards another nation, and comparisons between nations. Beller and Leerssen use the term 'hetero-images' to describe how a nation may be viewed by outsiders and 'auto-images' to refer to how a nation sees itself (2007, cited by Batchelor and Zhang 2017). Media coverage of a country not only influences perceptions of others, but can influence domestic perceptions, including those of policy makers (Zhang 2010). Generating good perceptions

overlap with the soft power emphasis on the need to attract. Social psychology may also influence how a PPP nonstate actor is perceived when operating in a foreign country. These firms may be perceived as following home country interests first and foremost rather than the needs of the country it operates in (Ojo 2017). In the case of China, suspicions may arise that its nonstate actors are involved in corruption or surveillance on behalf of the home state (Diamond and Schell 2018), leading to threat perceptions, mentioned previously (Yang and Liu 2012, D’Hooghe 2014).

Through different concepts, this review has revealed that the relationship between a private enterprise and its home state has always a complex power dynamic. With greater competition for geopolitical status than ever before, a question is whether their interrelations can be exploited for public diplomacy benefits. It has covered China’s pursuit of public diplomacy, which has entailed greater emphasis on the party-state’s relationship with its nonstate actors. The next chapter will discuss the concepts related specifically to the research case study and relevant theories. A connection is made between the theoretical framework, analysis process and research methods.

Chapter Three: Theoretical framework and Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

China's development assistance projects involve both governments and companies. A key question for this research is how these state and nonstate roles, projects and relationships are communicated to publics for image building purposes. Another question is how those three areas are perceived. This chapter posits that framing is the most suitable communication science concept through which to examine communications to publics and public perceptions of those three areas.

The 2005 framing model of De Vreese is built upon for this research. Its 'frame building' side relates to framing in news coverage, so is relevant for discussion of StarTimes news articles. Its 'frame setting' side accommodates framing effects - how public perceptions are formed. Empirical data, discussed in the methods section of this chapter, therefore includes perceptions of media professionals who are influenced by the media development assistance projects. African attitudes and behaviour towards China and StarTimes are revealed through interviewee answers. Therefore, company and country images can be explored through their mental frames.

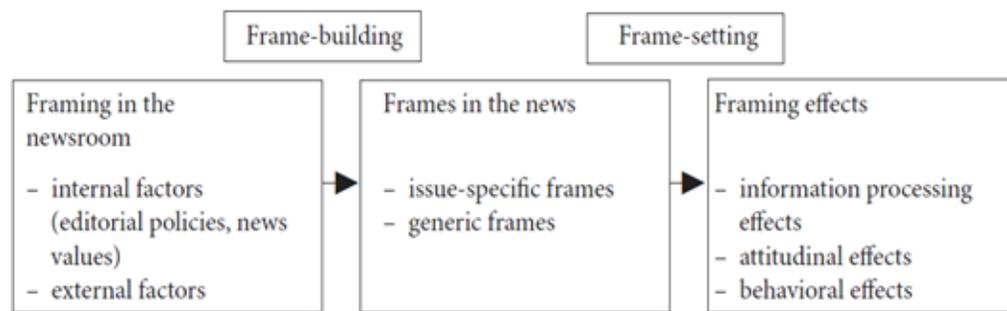


Figure 4: An integrated process model of framing (De Vreese 2005)

The chapter outline is as follows. Firstly, communication science and framing theory are introduced, with a rationale given for why framing is important for China's image building. Then there is a look at the factors which may influence framing in journalism. De Vreese (2005) speaks of internal and external factors that influence newsroom practices and output, so factors are explored to analyse how they may orientate framing of the development assistance projects and their stakeholders. Nation branding and public diplomacy concepts are used to explain priorities and practices which influence development assistance depictions, and how the portrayal contributes to image building. Social psychology is used to explain public perceptions.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the methodological issues of framing in this research. Data collection, based on news report and semi-structured interview samples, is discussed. Then there is a framing rationale: a qualitative approach with quantitative elements. Following that, the operationalization of research is outlined – generic and issue specific frames in the framing typology

and framing device analytical tools. These include headings, quotes and word choices. The last part of De Vreese's model is the framing effects section. Framing effects will be analyzed through the semi-structured interviews, with perceptions identified through respondent quotes.

3.2 Theoretical framework

In communication science studies, image management is said to partly rely on successful use of media technologies and platforms by diplomats in the global competition of ideas (Powers 2013). In communication science, country images generated through the mass media are the focus. Communication science recognizes the need to use the media to cultivate country images that promote a country's reputation, products and companies by "telling compelling stories to target audiences abroad, as well as at home" (Powers 2013:222). Cull 2008 had international broadcasting as a feature of public diplomacy through which storytelling could take place, but his research focused on state-run efforts. China has state-run CGTN, but the nonstate-state related question for this research is whether StarTimes can add a much needed, more persuasive nonstate dimension to country public diplomacy efforts. The focus on news media data collection and public perceptions of StarTimes content represent the empirical part of this research.

Concepts linked to communication science which relate to this study can be narrowed down to global media, content analysis, media effects and

communication management. Communications theories address the impact of globalization. Global forces have “created a greater interdependence of global business and international politics” because the vast sums spent by companies to communicate with customers “helps define the reputation and image of their home country, whether or not that role is intentional” (White and Kolesnicov 2015: 327). Intensified, diversified and speedier links between parts of the world mean that diplomacy has needed to adapt its responsiveness, thereby creating opportunities for more flexible nonstate forces. While in the West this development is catered for through a ‘new’ public diplomacy emphasis on dialogue (Melissen 2005), the party-state approach to the media has been an attempt to find new methods of control: narrative regulation through censorship, paid for editorial space in foreign media, and increased reliance on nonstate, non-Chinese supportive voices to carry the PRC message. A question for this research is the ways in which entertainment is also deployed as a strategy for message deliverance. Jack Ma’s voyage into reality TV via a StarTimes, discussed later in this chapter, suggests that the broadcaster is a space for experiments in popularizing China through indirect means.

This brings up whether public diplomacy needs to have an intentional purpose. When intentional, media campaigns promote culturally constructed images that narrate a national identity. China invested vast resources into intentional attempts at using communication channels for a country’s national identity promotion include state financed news and broadcasting (Cull 2008, Gilboa 2000).

In Africa in tandem with the Going Out policy was the expanded editorial presence of China Daily regional headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, along with CGTN. China has sought to use these organs to influence international discourse by inserting its own narratives through massive expansion of media sources (Marsh 2018). Chinese commentators speak of China engaging in public opinion warfare to bolster China's international image (Liu G. 2005; Zhu J. 2005; Lao C. 2011, cited by d'Hooghe 2014). By challenging what is perceived as Western media hegemony, China's voice could be heard.

But StarTimes perhaps would fit with the unintentional, indirect impact on image building. But when media images are unintentional, they can still have an impact. This is because "People do not actively seek, but rather passively take in, information about other countries, and they may not differentiate whether their perceptions about a country come from official government sources or from other sources of communication, including corporate communication" (White and Kolesnicov 2015: 325). Certainly, diverse methods to influence publics are needed. Zhao Kejin (2012), cautions that western media could never be relied upon due to racism, anti-communism and the emphasis on democratic values. The lack of international discourse power was highlighted by a finding of a China Institute of International Studies report that found that Western multinationals comprised 95% of the media markets (D'Hooghe 2014). In recent years, however, Chinese companies have made enormous inroads into Hollywood (Diamond and Schell 2018): attempts to explain the China influence on film-making have faced

roadblocks of late (Siegel and Brzeski 2021). But while such Sino-Hollywood ties have perhaps stymied any films that depict China in a negative way, China's image in the West is still on a downward trajectory (Silver et al 2020).

In addition, attempts by Chinese media to win over international audiences have been mixed (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2018, Nassanga and Makara 2016). The problem remained that the purpose of these organizations was to be a mouthpiece for China, thus undermining the image of independence as propagated by western international broadcasters. Zhang Dianjun (2012) and Wu Zelin (2012) are among the scholars calling for Chinese media with less overt officialdom to increase credibility and perceived objectivity (cited by D'Hooghe 2014).

Framing theory

The communication science concept of framing can be used to explore depictions of China in news coverage of a Chinese nonstate actor. If the portrayals are favourable, this would represent image building and public diplomacy success. Framing theory first emerged in 1974 in the work of Erving Goffman, who defined frames as a "'schemata of interpretation' that allow people "'to locate, perceive, identify and label' occurrences or events" (Goffman 1974:21). The concept was further enhanced by Entman (1993) who used framing to analyse journalism practices. Thus, framing is referred to "constructing and processing news discourse" (Pan and Kosicki 1993: 57), organizing news content through including

and excluding information. This excluding and including process can determine public perceptions: “Media framing can have a subtle but powerful effect on the audience” (Tankard 2001: 97).

As a result, framing is a useful aid to political communication, including the tone of discourse. “Frames are parts of political arguments [...] ways of defining issues, endogenous to the political and social world” (De Vreese 2005:53). This is a reason why the StarTimes framing in the media could be of vital importance to public diplomacy. If Western media cannot be relied upon, China needs new outlets among nonstate media which are both aligned with China’s requirements, can promote the country through nonstate channels, through frames that represent PRC dominant ideology (Hawk and Dabney 2014). At the same time, the nonstate actor needs credibility in the eyes of foreign publics, so another question for this research is whether StarTimes can escape the perception of being a propaganda outlet. Its nonstate position and entertainment channels could be a form of soft power, as it also helps the state by providing access to the CGTN platform. In this research, attention is paid to how the StarTimes relation to the PRC is constructed in news narratives. For instance, narratives could be aimed at constructing approval of PPP development assistance and bilateral agreements to increase the legitimacy of the development mission.

De Vreese’s 2005 model is used to explain a topic framed in the news. Framing is described as “a dynamic process that involves frame-building (how frames

emerge) and frame-setting (the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions)” (2005:51). The frame building stage refers to internal and external factors in journalism that may shape news frames. In this research, political and public relations factors would influence news text construction. The frame setting stage accounts for mental frames of publics.

In this research, the topic is the framing of Chinese contractors in aid deliverance and business development. Chinese style development assistance mixing aid and commerce contributes towards an image building strategy to foster relations with other countries. The identity of a company is often linked to the identity of a nation (Wang 2006) and a country-of-origin influences consumer buying decisions (Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009). Further, according to Buhmann and Ingenhoff (2015), company and country identity can be analysed according to similar factors because they are both organizational entities. For example, both countries and companies must have brand appeal: the products of a country are its cultural, political and economic factors, and their image and reputation need a basis in trust and public satisfaction (van Ham 2008). The framing would show how the company is linked to the home country in news output.

Nation branding and public diplomacy: conceptual overlaps

Nation branding and public diplomacy priorities and practices might influence development assistance news depictions, and those depictions contribute to image building. Development assistance can be conceptualized as an image

building tool in both nation branding and public diplomacy terms. As branding often involves political authorities, it overlaps with the public diplomacy notion of country image building. However, nation branding belongs to business studies theories, while public diplomacy is an international relations theory. This difference may have an impact if the company pursues more business-related coverage rather than politically orientated public diplomacy news stories. The next sections look at the overlaps in the two theories and also where there is a divergence, which may be an external factor influencing frame building journalism outcomes (De Vreese 2005).

Nation branding

Nation branding is a business concept that refers to highly targeted messaging through the media for national or regional branding, with communication management usually handled by PR agencies. The orientation is viewing a country as a brand identity, similar to the way a company builds its brand. Research into perceptions of a nation along brand lines often takes the form of polls, such as the Nation Brand Index (McGrath 2020), The Soft Power 30 (McClory 2019), and Pew Research (Silver et al 2019). Polling from Africa limited in these surveys, a gap filled by the Afrobarometer poll (Selormey 2020), in which perceptions of China are more favourable. However, as with the other polls, the broad stroke, quantitative nature means there is space for more qualitative approaches to exploring the brand image of a nation.

Countries use their overseas assistance practices to project the country's image (Williams 2020). In this research, China could be viewed as being engaged with nation branding because it departs from the western idea of foreign aid by having grants, interest-free loans and concessional loans account for large sections of Chinese development assistance (Brautigam 2011). This means China's nonstate actors are involved in business development along commercial lines, including StarTimes. StarTimes, with its role in communications infrastructure, can also be seen as indicative of the move away from the extractive 'Angola model' of foreign assistance with its emphasis on mining and energy industries to the ICT sector (Wang 2020). The case study relates to the business studies concept in two ways: television content can be deployed for nation branding, while the company is also concerned with its commercially orientated image making, such as branding for PR business development. This would include whether the company is seen as linked mostly to China or to Africa. StarTimes makes claims to wanting to be seen as a pan-African brand' (Gagliardone 2019), but research into Huawei in Nigeria and Kenya suggests that overseas assistance does not include considerable telecommunications technology transfer due to limitations imposed by the company and country policies (Tugendhat 2020). Therefore, the news construction of relations between StarTimes African and Chinese staff, along with Africans and China in general, are aspects of this research.

Public relations and public diplomacy: overlaps and differences

There are conceptual overlaps between nation branding and public diplomacy as both refer to forms of strategic political communication. Van Ham situates place branding within international politics (2008) while Kunczik (2003) believed that the differences between adverts, PR and propaganda for image building was a mere “semantics game” (p400). For political scientists, one of the interesting questions is whether place branding also entices people to “buy” the “products” of brand states, that is, their foreign policies” (2008:128). In the case of contractors involved in China’s development assistance projects, it is in the interests of both the company and the country to use PR and public diplomacy tools to control messaging, which would be what De Vreese refers to as an ‘external factor’ influencing journalism.

Public relations and public diplomacy use similar strategies, techniques and tools to engage audiences (Payne 2009, Signitzer and Coombs 1992). L’Entang (2009: 490) asserts that “Public relations is part of the practice of diplomacy responsible for international communications and media relations [...] that aims to enhance personal relationships between representatives of the host and target countries.” Nation branding can help explain certain image building choices StarTimes makes.

Another overlap is nation branding with previously mentioned corporate diplomacy. Business involvement in diplomatic initiatives is sometimes defined as corporate diplomacy (White 2013) and usually uses nation branding oriented

techniques of marketing, public relations and adverts to enhance images, including corporate social responsibility (CSR). The aim could be to enhance the country-of-origin reputation or make the company appear more powerful and legitimate (Ordeix-Rigo and Duarte 2009). But the word 'corporate' sits uncomfortably with the terms 'foreign aid' or 'development assistance', concepts more aligned with political policies. Hence, corporate diplomacy is relevant for this framework if the company appears to move in this direction rather construct than a more overtly political image.

Business and development assistance project hybridity complicate the identity and obligation to the state, and this may come through in news framing if there is an emphasis on different topics. StarTimes is a nonstate actor primarily concerned with business and public relations for its own needs, while public diplomacy is a mostly state concern. Country image initiatives are still mostly state-led, even if nation branding experts are hired to assist. Signitzer and Coombs 1992:138 caution, "While public relations theory may be well suited to explain and to predict the communication behaviour of 'ordinary' organizations in both the profit and non-profit fields, public diplomacy theories, for now, are better suited to the understanding of the relationship between a nation-state and its foreign publics." Therefore, public relations usually pertain to communication practices at company level, while public diplomacy relates to government-to-public communication patterns. The above shows that similar to public diplomacy, political communication in branding is full of opportunities for mutual state-

nonstate support: public relations for a company can help public diplomacy for a country. But the relationship can also be an ambivalent dynamic, liable to tensions due to contrasting objectives (Gagliardone 2020, Segal 2017). An aim of this research, therefore, is to highlight the contexts in which the interests of StarTimes public relations and China's public diplomacy converge and diverge.

International relations: public diplomacy

If public diplomacy is prioritized in framing, the country image building will be within the remit of international relations, particularly political characteristics and political conduct (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). The external factor which might influence journalism might be China wanting to use news for image building to deal with a China image problem, such as the China threat narrative which has prevailed since the late 1990s (Tang and Li 2011). In 2007, Zhao Qizheng, Director of the Foreign Affairs Committee and former director of the State Council Information Office said China's image building required that the country accurately present itself to the world proactively through public diplomacy, through both listening and talking back (Rawnsley 2012), the latter of which could take place through news coverage. An example would be China's presentation of itself as a peace-loving developing nation targeted by aggressive enemy foreign forces Hartig (2016) and its development of Confucius Institutes to counteract negativity.

This research seeks to see whether StarTimes coverage includes China in Africa portrayed as development partner and leader (Pu 2018), a projection facilitated by the three-yearly Forum on China-Africa Cooperation mechanism. By creating FOCAC in 2000 as a channel for China's overseas aid, China contributed towards proving an alternative development model to that dominated by the United States. This model might be mentioned in StarTimes coverage because FOCAC related foreign aid programs specify the roles of China's contractors, of which StarTimes is one. Therefore, public diplomacy narratives for China's country image representation might include terms such as 'pragmatic cooperation' and 'equality and mutual benefit' (Tang and Li 2011). China considers its foreign aid as a form of South-South cooperation and as "mutual help between developing countries" (D'Hooghe 2014), an example being the StarTimes implemented Access to Satellite TV for 10,000 African Villages Project, paid for through the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (CIDCA 2020). On the one hand framing could show that China's development assistance framework is influenced by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but on the other, coverage might focus on media development projects funded by grants, concessional loans and low interest loans (UNDP China 2021), such as digital migration, new channel creation and sport sponsorship.

China's public diplomacy: nonstate actors

The above shows that framing of the economic relations behind the nonstate role in the development assistance policy is important. Previous research has looked

at China's state-owned enterprises and Chinese banks in infrastructure projects (Mohan and Tan-Mullins 2018), and broadly whether Chinese state capital in Africa is different to global private capital (Lee 2018). Lee (2018) thought that both Chinese state and nonstate companies were profit driven but less motivated by short term objectives compared to firms from other countries, but sole attention on non-state companies has been less. Pertinent to framing is the presentation of the state-nonstate relationship with regards to foreign aid. When nonstate actor contractors are hired by the state to carry out overseas aid projects, the partnership context leads to potential links between the images of a government and a company, for better or worse public perceptions.

China's public diplomacy is state-centred (Ayhan 2018) but needs nonstate input such as news content which favourably frames state aims. Research indicates that has been a huge increase in the use of nonstate actors in public diplomacy, and a close proximity to the state is in addition mandated on the grounds of Chinese security laws (Uchill 2019, Yu 2018). Nonstate engagement in China's public diplomacy has brought benefits of increasing flexibility with which engagements can be conducted. As D'Hooghe (2014) puts it, nonstate input helps diversify China's image, increases the connection with international ideas and provide insights for the government which improves Sino-foreign understanding. Nonstate involvement potentially provides opportunities for flexibility in how public diplomacy storytelling and image building are handled. In Entman's 2004

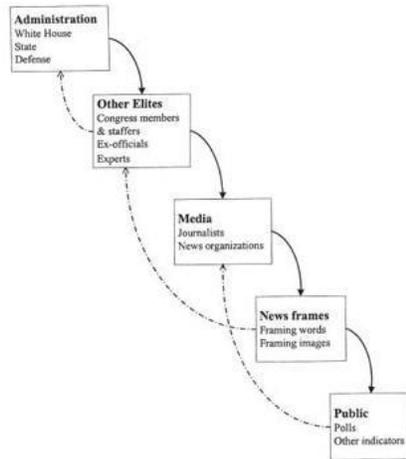


Figure 5: Entman's Cascading Activation Model (2004)

Cascading Activation Model, a frame starts from a state actor and is passed onto elites, followed by the press. In this theory, a nonstate actor such as a company contracted by the government could be considered an 'elite' that serves as an external influence on journalism. Another conceptualization of state-nonstate relationship has been 'track one and track two' diplomacy (Li et al 2019): a hybrid where the state actor and nonstate actor complement the image building and relationship cultivation actions of each other. Li et al (2019) used this concept to explain the relationship of independent think tanks to China's public diplomacy system. This track one, track two concept is useful from the point of view of nonstate companies, as their interests and the interests of the state have a basic overlap. The review made clear that public diplomacy was needed to improve the environment for Chinese companies overseas by upgrading the image of China (Hartig 2016).

The StarTimes dependency on the party-state through development assistance ties it to country's diplomacy objectives, including its news image. As Tang and Li (2011) explain, as well as receiving priority in the bidding process for development contracts and concessional or low-interest loans, companies are given introductions to African politicians and business leaders, which gives contractors elite status. In the case of StarTimes, five heads of state visited StarTimes in Beijing in 2018 during FOCAC (Liangyu 2018), bestowing it legitimacy. Its situation is therefore similar to that of Huawei, albeit on a smaller scale. Segal (2017) points out that Huawei started a training school in Abuja, Nigeria in 2005, but by five years later, along with ZTE, it was serving the communication needs of 300 African million users in 50 countries. This development was assisted by \$30 billion from China Development Bank and loans to African nations contingent upon the acquisition of Huawei products (Tang and Li 2011).

Another sign of the nonstate-state interdependency is that the Chinese government has attempted to influence how the nation's companies handle public diplomacy as they 'go out', through publications on corporate culture construction (D'Hooghe 2014, Ojo 2017). News might be framed in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), respecting local laws, providing public welfare, improving public relations management with overseas media interactions and information dissemination has all been encouraged. However, in this research, due to the case study link to development assistance contracts, the term contractor diplomacy is preferred, this is to be discussed in later in this chapter.

As well as noting the benefits, this research seeks to explore how company close proximity to the state can also hold disadvantages. In contrast to the autonomy afforded western nonstate actors, state capitalism explains how Chinese companies are supported and trusted to conduct their business as long as operations do not conflict with the state. Schrader believes that the CCP gathers information from companies according to a spectrum of how much cooperation they provide, “ranging from entities under its direct control to intermediaries subject to coercive pressure” (2020:8). According to Russel (2020), a strong relationship to the state increases the likelihood that the nonstate actor will have a dual purpose – one its own, and one on behalf of the state. As FOAC contracts are outsourced to nonstate actors, so is an aspect of the public diplomacy remit, it could be argued.

The downfall of Alibaba highlights how private company and government motivations can diverge, thus undermining public diplomacy. Jack Ma’s case illustrated how domestic controversies linked to Ant Group led to the scaling back of his diplomacy agenda in Africa. The China party-state depends not only on nonstate actors staying in line, but also the *media presentation* that companies are under state control. November 2019 was the month when StarTimes began the Ghana broadcast of *Africa’s Business Heroes* (ABH), a television competition initiated by billionaire Jack Ma, co-owner of e-commerce monolith Alibaba, who was also a judge on the show. ABH served a number of purposes. As a product of the Jack Ma Foundation philanthropy, it showcased a soft side of Chinese nonstate

diplomacy in Africa (McMorrow and Pilling 2021). In addition, it cultivated influence on the continent, creating connections with the younger generation of African business entrepreneurs and indirectly aligning them with China's business norms (Velluet 2020). As a show judge and a former teacher, Ma was smooth at giving lectures. And on October 24 2020 at a Shanghai Bund summit, he kept to his habit of airing his insights, when he delivered a speech in the presence of august communist party dignitaries. In attendance was former security leader and Xi Jinping close associate Wang Qishan, China's central bank governor Yi Gang, and a ministry of finance vice-minister Zou Jiayi. But his reprimands regarding the "pawnshop mentality" of China's financial regulatory system was not well received: the US\$37 billion IPO flotation of Ant Financial Services Group, the Alipay mobile payment platform-linked to Alibaba, was blocked and Alibaba's practices came under investigation by China's state market supervision administration. In the words of the People's Daily, this was in order to investigate monopolistic and anti-competition activities; such safeguards were "requirements for improving the socialist market economy system and promoting high-quality development" (Neate 2021). Ma disappeared from view for months. Advised not to leave China, he missed the finale of his TV show and was erased from its publicity materials.

Jack Ma's downward spiral serves as a salutary tale of the perils for nonstate actor relations to the state. It is this type of divergence between elites and the state which would manifest itself as a diverge in media messaging in company and country coverage. There had been a strong state-nonstate convergence: Ma was

aligned with government policy on cyber security goals to protect the party-state regime and influence the norms of cyberspace governance. He served part of a multistakeholder advisory committee to advise the Cyber Administration of China and promote overseas the state sovereignty principles of Internet governance (Segal 2017). A benefit is that this type of nonstate-state collaboration means government support for companies (Yu 2018). Ma was a high-profile face of the Going Out policy of Chinese companies accessing new markets. The television show was viewed by some as a way to identify products for export to China using the Electronic World Trade platform (eWTP), which has been associated with the Digital Silk Road (Velluet 2020).

But Ma went on to become a symbol of tension between nonstate and state forces when he overlooked the first rule: unquestioning compliance with state authority. According to Sun and Hai (2020) “At the core of the asymmetric alliance is the Party’s ultimate objective of political survival—when private firms contribute to the objective, they can be tolerated or even supported; when they hamper the objective, they need to be disciplined.” Ma was driven by commercial interests over political concerns. Thus, while Ma was at the forefront of mask diplomacy which bolstered China’s image in 2020 (Verma 2020), Segal (2017) cautions that “Private firms are focused on profits, and even state-owned enterprises are highly motivated by economic incentives that may run counter to Beijing’s goals” (p12). Therefore, inherent within the nonstate business relation to the state are potential divergences which may impact on the image of China and the company,

and therefore hold repercussions for public diplomacy. Through his “pawnshop mentality” criticism, Ma was diverging from state narratives, undermining official PRC discourses. He was therefore weakening Chinese public diplomacy efforts to tell China’s story well.

However, others believe that the idea that Beijing micro-manages the internationalized companies is not feasible (Lee 2018). The framing of StarTimes can shed light on which scenario prevails in the company’s operations. Some researchers caution against the assumption that nonstate companies toe the government line simply because they are Chinese. Gagliardone (2020) points out that, far from being an authoritarian practice, technology companies from the West such as Google and Facebook have also been implicated in surveillance operations run by governments. He asserts that “the strategies followed by Huawei, Alibaba or Tencent may be very different from – and in some cases even contradict – those pursued by the Chinese government” (2020:3).

Public-Private-Partnerships: a fresh Chinese public diplomacy frontier

An area of financial arrangements which in journalism might illustrate company and country connections is public-private-partnerships (PPPs), an increasingly used state-nonstate relationship dimension. The literature review discussed how PPPs are used for development purposes in Africa by the United States and Japan, as well as China. FOCAC agreements specify that aid provision is contingent upon China’s ICT company involvement in contracts on a PPP basis. PPPs are

“institutionalized cooperative relationships between public actors (governments and intergovernmental organisations) and private actors (corporate and civil society actors) beyond the nation-state for governance purposes” (Li et al 2019:295). Looked at from the perspective of fulfilment of development goals, they have been praised for being a solution to infrastructure finance problems in developing countries (Alden 2017), helped in part by concessional finance deals from multilateral development institutions including the African Development Bank and New Development Bank, and technical advice from the World Bank (Sun et al 2017). In media studies, PPPs are linked to concepts of ‘infrastructure’ and ‘distribution’ to disseminate information through technology advances (Hesmondhalgh 2021). In the case of StarTimes, by 2014 it was supported by US\$ 223 million from Exim Bank and US\$ 220 million from China Development Bank (Wang and Yang 2014), which is more commercially orientated (Mohan and Tan-Mullins 2018).

Framing will reveal if the company is constructed as a contractor or a corporation in the news media. If ‘contractor’ or ‘PPP’ are key words, this emphasizes the foreign aid fulfilment obligations of a company, because a PPP in many cases is fulfilling an overseas development assistance contract. This relationship defines it as closer to the state. However, StarTimes might simply be framed as a corporation that is privately owned with its separate commercial activities, and its press may be influenced by public relations separate from government mentions. This is because the company has its own priorities which diverge from state

concerns (Gagliardone 2020). For this reason, the company may seek to downplay the overseas development side and be seen as a corporation.

The extent to which country and company images converge and diverge in journalism would be revealing here. Contractors engaged in PPPs represent their home countries; they are contractually obligated to serve not just themselves but their home nation. Research by Carvalho and Amakasu (2015) comparing China and Japan's aid projects in Portuguese speaking Africa found that development assistance, including PPPs, reflected the political and economic priorities of home countries. Therefore, contractors operate under a wider economic diplomacy remit. Economic diplomacy is "the use of political means as leverage in international negotiations, and the use of economic leverage to increase the political stability of the nation" (Maaiké Okano-Heijmans 2011: 29– 30, cited by Zhang X 2016). It involves reaching foreign policy objectives through economic strategies (Lu 2004, cited by Zhang X 2016). Included in economic development are international development assistance projects, which "should be interpreted as attempts at implicit communications by the source, designed to bring about desired behaviours from intended audiences" (Alexander 2014: 70).

Thus, this might be an important external factor influencing journalism on StarTimes, as conceptualized in the De Vreese model. The 'private' PPP contractor is nonstate, but it is not independent if it is hired by a government (or governments). Studies point to the US use of PPPs to reap public diplomacy

rewards (US Department of State 2003, Hudson-Dean 2013). Funding for projects that come from a state, for instance in the form of bank loans, also draws private business closer to the state, and therefore a country's identity, and official image cultivation. PPPs are used when the state favours partnerships with private contractors to share fiscal responsibility for projects (Noguchi 2016). However, if the PPP is initiated by governments in non-democratic countries, sharing does not necessarily mean shared power in a network-centric, relational theory of public diplomacy sense (Zaharna 2007), as hierarchies still exist. That said, the nonstate company would share nation branding responsibilities, with projects becoming a channel for outsourced public diplomacy.

Whether nation branding or public diplomacy influence news articles, journalistic portrayals of projects will be influenced by frame sponsorship. This term refers to how frames are sponsored by actors in the media – in this case StarTimes, (Carragee and Roefs 2004). The power of the actor can reflect social power and how news stories are constructed, for instance, the extent to which press releases are used in the creation of news articles. Even though StarTimes is nonstate, it is a Chinese company in receipt of state funding and is therefore sensitive to the coverage it receives and is influenced by PRC state-controlled media methods. This may manifest itself in control over news output and relations with journalists. An internal factor shaping stories may be newsroom resources; if they are low, this could also determine the level of dependence on public relations type product from StarTimes. Such reliance would also influence whose voices are heard in the

news - hence also the focus in the research on who is quoted in articles and therefore able to exercise power through texts (Entman 1993). Attention given to PR and frame sponsorship to promote views according to desired frames are examined for the impact on public relations and public diplomacy.

Frame setting: media affects

The second part of De Vreese's model is concerned with frame-setting – information processing, attitudes and behaviour towards an object, situation or event. The research focus is on country image framing based on beliefs and feelings. Cognitive frames of publics influence how objects, situations and events are interpreted (Jasperson et al. 1998). With regards to country image building, Ingenhoff and Chariatte (2020) divide public perceptions into a cognitive side (what people think they know) and judgments (how they feel about what they know - affective aspects). Therefore, cognition refers to what people *think* are the political and economic attributes a country's national identity, while the affective dimension is concerned with how publics *feel* about those attributes. Cognitive and affective aspects are connected in that how people think about a country or company influences how they feel about it. Public diplomacy involves image management to cultivate emotions and behaviours towards a country (Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). Emotions of publics towards other nations shape perceptions and hold consequences for how a country is treated (Batchelor and Zhang 2017).

The media affects area of De Vreese's model is represented in the research through the views of African interviewees. This includes how they perceive StarTimes and China, as well as the associations between the company and the home country (Ingenhoff et al 2018). In narratives that emerge through interviews, emotional responses to both can be derived, and therefore the public diplomacy aspect is explored.

There are a number of problems China needs to address with regards to public perceptions. Rawnsley (2012) pointed out that audience views of international media are influenced by credibility perceptions, which have undermined China's ability to communicate persuasive discourses. Branding targeting domestic populations are essential for a national identity formation and are formed around notions of history, culture and politics to foster social cohesion (White and Kolesnicov 2015). However, there can be a gap between how a country views itself and how it is perceived. For instance, while the image of China through *Wolf Warrior 2* played well domestically, internationally, the country perception is linked to Confucius Institutes and CGTN as vehicles for propaganda.

Another problem is whether StarTimes is perceived as acting independently or in consort with China's state forces to attract foreign audiences. Framing is important because perception – if not always a reality - of proximity to the party-state brings tensions outside China. The perception of financial connections linked to development assistance money from Chinese state banks can undermine

images in the minds of Africans. Financial support brings StarTimes in comparison to and in competition with indigenous companies with regards to contracts for digital migration, signal distribution licenses and content development (Motsaathebe and Chiumbu 2021). If FOCAC-related development assistance funding is viewed as putting local firms at a disadvantage in competition with the Chinese contractor (Telecommunications Management Group 2017, Zhang 2021), or if the funding is in the form of loans which represent debt to China, this can negatively impact the image of both the country and the company. Coverage of the SGR in Kenya attests to this difficulty.

International development and public diplomacy intertwine (Pamment 2016). Private contractors hired according to PPP arrangements face perception implications due to relations with governments. If StarTimes is perceived to have relinquished its autonomy to the PRC state this could affect its credibility, as some might consign a contractor to government proxy status (D'Hooghe 2014). According to Tang and Li (2011), Chinese companies comply with governmental policies, including cohering their CSR with PRC objectives. This compliance might influence how Africans view China's development assistance approach. For instance, a private contractor could be seen as interchangeable with state-run contractors from the same country that are also involved in development assistance. Perceptions might influence how PPP projects are portrayed with regards to issues over risk, procurement and financing (Cui et al 2018, African Development Bank 2020), or control over projects (Boyer 2019). The proximity to

government may be different between state and nonstate contractors, but that distinction might not be visible to publics. That would be less of a problem if a contractor involved in a development assistance project is viewed as improving efficiency and building local capacity, thus helping a country's foreign policies (Noguchi 2016). However, if there are suspicions and sensitivities surrounding ethics in PPP company and foreign government contractual relations (Olotch 2007), it could undermine foreign policy. Project financial and political arrangements may increase media scrutiny. Further, unlike media development as conceptualized by Pamment (2018), the StarTimes development mission in Africa is not linked to increasing democratic engagement. China's concept of human rights could also negatively influence perceptions. Interviews would illuminate whether or not the company is perceived a vehicle for the party-state agenda, and whether that is a good or bad thing.

A separate issue with frame setting is that is hard to measure public perceptions with accuracy. Studies indicate that evaluation of public diplomacy to perceive public sentiment is fraught with difficulty due to the lack of conceptual agreement regarding the contours of public diplomacy (Banks, 2020). There is also a lack of consensus due to the complexity of proving results, especially when perceptions are subjective (Yu 2016). However, interviews with publics and content analysis of media texts remain among the staple methods of collecting and analyzing perceptions for public diplomacy evaluation, providing insights into factors

considered attractive in a country and relevant towards image cultivation among overseas publics. Therefore, both are used methods are used in this study.

The previous sections have given the rationale for why framing is used as an analysis tool in the research. Operationalization of framing is discussed as part of the methodology and methods section of this chapter. Firstly, data collection details are given, based on news report and semi-structured interview samples. Then the framing analysis process is introduced.

3.2 Methodology and methods

News articles: population and sample

The news story sample of StarTimes was used as data on three areas over three chapters: firstly, the 10,000 Villages project; secondly, StarTimes involvement in different aspects of indigenous broadcasting; and thirdly, international sport and entertainment media development. Whether China was mentioned in the stories was a crucial factor, to consider any contribution to public diplomacy telling of China's story through this nonstate actor.

Content analysis of Chinese media in Africa has grown and diversified in the past decade. Studies sometimes focus on content from media in a specific African country, such as Nigeria (Umejei 2017), or output from a particular organization, such as CCTV (Marsh 2016). Another approach has been to analyse the image of China in African media content in an African region (Wekesa 2013). However, less attention has been given to the news coverage of a nonstate actor and its role in the building of China's image. In the case of this research, the population of interest comprises all news stories on StarTimes on three websites, with no limitation on the country. This allows for a broad overview of news output themes, thereby generating a sufficient number of stories which a case study on one country could not provide. However, the full extent of the population was unknown and unknowable (Lacy et al 2015). It was unknown because certain stories can appear one day and disappear on another, making the population

unstable. Probability sampling was not possible. This instability was one reason Google Search was not used to sample the population.

It was decided that convenience sampling would be the best option. Sampling is defined by Riffe et al as “a census in which the population is defined by availability” (2014: 75). The sample was all StarTimes stories from 2015 to 2019 from three news aggregate websites. While convenient, the downside to this approach is the lack of generalizability of the results: it could not be claimed that this sample represented the entire population. However, the content from the sites provided a clear indication of the image of the company, the topics in its coverage and the agents behind the building of its image.

To retrieve a sufficient number of stories over the five-year, 2015-2019 period, StarTimes was the only key word used, producing 283 stories. The drawback was that this lack of specificity meant that most of the time, the stories did not have the three StarTimes projects mentioned in the research questions as a primary focus. But this was a necessary trade off, considering the generalizability limitations. A large enough sample enables an exploratory phase (quantitative content analysis) to generally analyse of the coverage of StarTimes, then aspects that pertain to the three projects would be a later interpretative textual analysis phase.

StarTimes stories for this research came from three search engines. These sites are dedicated to broadcasting industry developments around the world, adding to

their trustworthiness and validity (Elo et al 2014). The sites were also purposefully chosen due to their stable search engine tools: stories were easy to consistently retrieve, aiding reliability. Including a Chinese news site and an African news site was considered, but the ones seen either would add to selection bias, did not have search engines or in the case of Xinhuanet, story extraction was unreliable. In addition, the chosen news aggregate sites did not include irrelevant materials such as match reports from teams that StarTimes sponsors, so that also was a consideration. Further, the sites were diverse in their emphasis and target readership, as indicated in the introduction to the sites is given below.

NexTV Africa (<https://nextvafrica.com/>) represented 155 news stories in the sample, 55%. NexTV news describes itself as “one of the leading specialised media in the TV industry” with a global readership of operators and providers. NexTV Africa’s website is published by Dataxis (www.dataxis.com), whose business area covers market research and conferences related to TV and Telecom industries in over 200 countries.

Balancing Act (<https://www.balancingact-africa.com/about/who-we-are>) represented 113 news stories, 40%. Balancing Act focuses on African technology, media and telecoms sectors. It conducts market research, consultancies, feasibility studies and conferences targeting industry managers and investors. Out of the three sites, it was the site with the most authoritative voice based on original news.

Public Media Alliance (<https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/about-us/>) news aggregate sites represents 15 stories in the research, comprising 5%. A UK based, not-for-profit company, its members are 102 TV and radio organisations in public service broadcasting, spanning 54 countries worldwide. Its stories come from PMA's "weekly roundup of news linked to public service media around the world". It claims to "curate and aggregate research and commentary from media academics and practitioners around the world as public broadcasting evolves into public media".

These introductions show that the websites have a similarity in that they cover the TV industry, but target different audiences. NexTV targets content producers, Balancing Act content producers and business investors, while PMA caters to the not-for-profit sectors. The sites all cover StarTimes in a way that reflect differing conditions of production and ideas regarding what is important to the readerships. While there is an overlap in the type of news output, there is sufficient diversity to give a representative depiction of the range of coverage that StarTimes receives.

Interviewee samples

The interviews were to gather public perceptions regarding three areas of StarTimes projects mentioned above for the news sample, thus providing a point of comparison and contrast between the media frame building and frame setting, as per De Vreese's model. For the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, interviews are

with StarTimes subscribers: 47 individuals and three respondents representing two schools and one clinic in Kenyan rural areas, with interviewees chosen through convenience sampling. In addition, city-based media professionals chosen through purposive sampling (see Appendix 2) gave their impression of the project. More information regarding interviewees is given in the 10,000 Villages Project findings chapter.

The second and third findings chapters, on projects linked to indigenous media development and sport related activities, use interviews with the same media professionals. In all three findings chapters, interviewees have a vested interest in StarTimes, so their inclusion involved “selecting data cases (participants) on the basis that they will be able to provide information rich data” (Patton 2002:230, cited by Braun and Clarke 2013:56). This aligns with the key informant interviewee approach, used to collect insights from “locals who have the ability to explain and ‘translate’ social phenomena, cultural values, and behaviours” (O’Neill and Godin 2020:1). The key informant interview data sample was used by Lefkowitz (2017) who canvassed views of African staff at CCTV. Nassanga and Makara (2016) conducted key informant interviews with journalists, editors and government information officers to research perceptions of China in Ugandan media. Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018) held focus groups with South African and Kenyan media and communication students to explore the reception of Chinese media in Africa. This research adds a new dimension by focusing on an under-

researched Chinese broadcaster and informants whose views thus far have received little attention.

In this research, the African media professionals interviewed span film making, public relations, journalism and media studies scholarship in Kenya, Ghana, Beijing and Zambia, with many having some connection to StarTimes. For instance, StarTimes created an app for a film festival in Kenya, and interviewees include Kenyan film makers who had to use the app. In Ghana, interviewees are involved in sports journalism, which brings them into contact with StarTimes as it sponsors the Ghanaian national football league. The interviewees also include an employee of StarTimes, a Kenyan journalist who wrote about the company, and a Ghanaian media studies university scholar. Media professionals from a range of countries were chosen because the news content was also from a diversity of countries. While the countries differ, the StarTimes approach is similar with regards to its type of activities. The interviews took place between December 2019 and January 2020. Details are given in the appendix.

Each findings chapter contains both news framing and interviewee results. Results from news framing indicate how StarTimes uses press releases to engage with stakeholders and general populations to strategically communicate its activities. Any mentions of China reveal how the company's proximity to the state is framed by the news and publics: do company and country images converge or diverge? The mentions give insights into public diplomacy outcomes connected to China's

wider strategic economic engagement aims, such as whether constructions and perceptions are favourable. China's ideal would be for interviewee perceptions to align with news constructions because media professionals form a key constituency of the public to be won over. Respondent narratives can uncover the reputation of the company and the country, and therefore hold implications for extending influence. Conclusions can be ultimately drawn regarding the outsourcing of public diplomacy - the utility of an economic development resource in the form of a PPP company for the meeting of public diplomacy objectives. The next section discusses framing operationalization: the methodology rationale and framing devices.

Framing methodology

This research uses a mostly inductive, qualitative approach for frame analysis, with deductive, quantitative elements. Firstly, a deductive, quantitative approach is followed in that dominant frames that are defined in advance. This is necessary for a focus on the research questions. The frame criteria, which will be discussed in a forthcoming section, is designed specifically to determine the absence or presence of a particular news story emphasis on StarTimes projects.

In the framing typology, both generic and specific frames are used in the operationalization. Generic frames can encompass general themes linked to diverse topics (Entman 1993), while issue specific frames pertain to particular

events or topics (De Vreese 2005). These frames used are discussed below, followed by a table detailing how they were operationalized.

The starting point is Entman’s 1993 generic frame that focuses on basic news components: a problem, its cause, a moral evaluation and its treatment. Semetko and Valkenburg’s attribution of responsibility frame also focused on problems and solutions as well as the responsible government, individual or group (2000). A third generic frame was economic consequences. Neuman, Just and Crigler referred to this as “the preoccupation with profit and loss” (1992: 74) while Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) defined the frame as presenting an issue according to its economic impact. This research incorporates both. Another generic frame by Neuman, Just and Crigler used in this research is the conflict frame. This is associated with highlighting contests of views between actors, defining relations in terms of winning and losing (Neuman, Just and Crigler 1992). Also included is the morality frame, which refers to the inclusion of quotes and stances on social values. Finally on the generic frame front, Semetko and Valkenburg’s human interest frame is used. This highlights the emotional angle in a story (2000).

Table 1: Content Analysis Frame Coding Information

Components of frames (Entman, 1993)	Yes (1)	No (0)
Is there a problem definition?		
Is there a causal interpretation?		
Is there a moral evaluation?		
Is there a treatment recommendation?		

Attribution of responsibility Frame: (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000)	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story suggest that someone has the ability to alleviate the problem?		
Does the story suggest solutions to the problem?		
Does the story suggest that an individual/country is responsible for the problem?		
Human interest Frame (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000)	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?		
Does the story employ adjectives to influence emotions?		
Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?		
Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?		
Conflict Frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups or countries?		
Does one party-individuals-groups or country blame another?		
Does the story refer to two or more sides of the problem or issue?		
Does the story refer to winners and losers?		
Concord Frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)

Does the story reflect agreement between parties-individuals-groups or countries?		
Does one party-individuals-groups or country praise another?		
Does the story refer to two or more aspects of an agreement on an issue?		
Does the story refer to win-win outcomes?		
Morality frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story contain any moral message?		
Does the story make reference to improvement of life as a result of an event / action?		
Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?		
Economic consequence frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Is there a mention of financial loses or gains now?		
Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?		
Is there a reference to economic consequences or pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?		
Is there a mention of potential financial loses or gains in the future?		
China frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Is the word 'China' or 'Chinese' mentioned?		
Is China-Africa relations mentioned?		
Is anyone Chinese quoted?		
Does an African mention the word China or Chinese?		
Innovation frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Are new partners mentioned?		
Is the responsible individual / country mentioned?		
Is a new project or partnership mentioned?		

As to issue specific frames, one is used to balance the conflict frame. A concord frame was necessary to account for two factors: the less confrontational style of Chinese journalism in the presentation of issues, and the influence of PR in the reportage of events. De Vreese talks about “generic news frames that are structural and inherent to the conventions of journalism” (2005:55). However, De Vreese is referring to Western news writing conventions, which are not followed in China. In addition, there is an innovation frame. This was added to better capture media framing of PPP projects, to see if there was a public diplomacy element (Pamment 2016) or if it was strictly public relations for the company.

Further, a specific China frame is included in order to explore how the country is constructed, to see the absence, presence and nature of mentions in the context of nonstate actor news content. Yang and Liu (2012) showed how the China threat theory had steered the framing of China in the media since the 1990s. Discourses were shaped by three themes: China as a military threat, an economic enemy or a political adversary. The framing of Confucius Institutes as an ideological hazard would be an example of the latter. Having a specific China frame would enable analysis of whether the China threat theory emerged in this sample. In addition, it would be seen if the PRC state narratives such as ‘Peaceful Rise’ the ‘Chinese Dream’ or ‘A Community of Shared Future for Mankind’ (Zhang 2019) were included. Thus far, they have failed to take hold in international media agendas but coverage of a nonstate actor might represent another channel for the

messaging. The frame would also accommodate discourses on China-Africa relations in StarTimes coverage.

Operationalization of the frames

These generic and specific frames were then subject to multiple-item questions to measure their presence or absence in news stories. As can be seen in the table below, all items were coded with yes (1) or no (0) for the 283 news articles. The presence of a frame was calculated by adding the scores of the items and dividing the score by the number of relevant items to get the average. If the average score was less than 50%, then the frame was considered not present, if the score was 50% or above, the frame was considered present. To give an example, a score of 50% or above on the China scale would mean that the majority of stories about StarTimes emphasized the role of China.

The qualitative approach: framing devices operationalization

As said above, the presence or absence of frames used a quantitative, qualitative approach. After that, qualitative analysis was used to gain a more subtle, interpretative understanding of the texts (Wood 2004, Kelle, Prein and Bird 1995, Du Plooy 1997). The deeper understanding perhaps could highlight reasons for a frame absence or presence. Van Gorp (2007: 72-73) believes that qualitative exploration can reveal framing effects in smaller data samples (Linström and Marais 2012:27), and this is feasible given that there are only 283 news stories.

Interpretative textual analysis was used to delve below the surface meaning of texts, to scrutinise in greater detail what is discovered at the quantitative analysis stage. It is used in this research for “examining meaning within texts and relationships between these meanings and the wider processes of newspaper production and consumption” (Richardson 2007:20). In this research context, it also helps mitigate against the newspaper production issue of PR influencing framing. It is further employed to discuss the type of people given media access to speak and spread their influence, for example for public diplomacy purposes. As pointed out in the frame sponsorship reference earlier, political actors sometimes use their cultural and economic resources to dominate media messaging (Carragee and Roefs 2004). Also importantly in terms of the research focus, interpretative textual analysis is used to illuminate the convergence or divergence of country and company images, and thereby the contribution of the nonstate actor to state communication efforts (Manheim 1994). For this qualitative stage, framing devices were analysed.

Framing device analysis

While the unit of analysis was a news story at the quantitative stage, at the qualitative stage the unit is smaller, in framing devices such as headings, quote selection and word choices. Devices are also in the forms of narratives themes and rhetoric (Pan and Kosiki 1993), metaphors and anecdotes (Ojo 2017). With regards to quotes as a device, the choice of who is quoted can add authority or

marginalize opinions (Pan and Kosiki 1993). Devices also include headings, subheadings and source selection (Tankard (in Reese et al. 2003: 101).

The framing devices allowed for many investigations linked to the research question focus of the depiction of StarTimes projects. Devices reveal affective attributes in story construction, such as whether the tone in narratives was negative, neutral, or positive (Sheafer 2007; Takeshita 2006). For instance, the with regards to the economic consequences frame, framing devices reveal whether the sample contained negative tendencies such as debt-trap diplomacy tropes, similar to that featured in a story in the Financial Times regarding StarTimes in Zambia (Cotterill and Pilling 2018). With regards to the concord frame, the framing device of word choices showed whether the sample contained the same FOCAC related frames of friendship, peace, solidarity and sovereignty in official media as uncovered by Wakesa (2014).

The second part of De Vreese's model was frame setting – the perceptions of publics. Framing effects will be analyzed through the semi-structured interviews, with perceptions identified through respondent quotes. With regards to this research, the questions used for exploring interviewee perceptions (see appendices) are influenced by the categories in the country image model by Ingenhoff and Chariatte 2020. As mentioned previously, this model is to analyse public attitudes through cognition (what people think) and affectations (how

people feel about what they think). De Vreese terms this “individuals’ prior knowledge and predispositions” (2005:51).

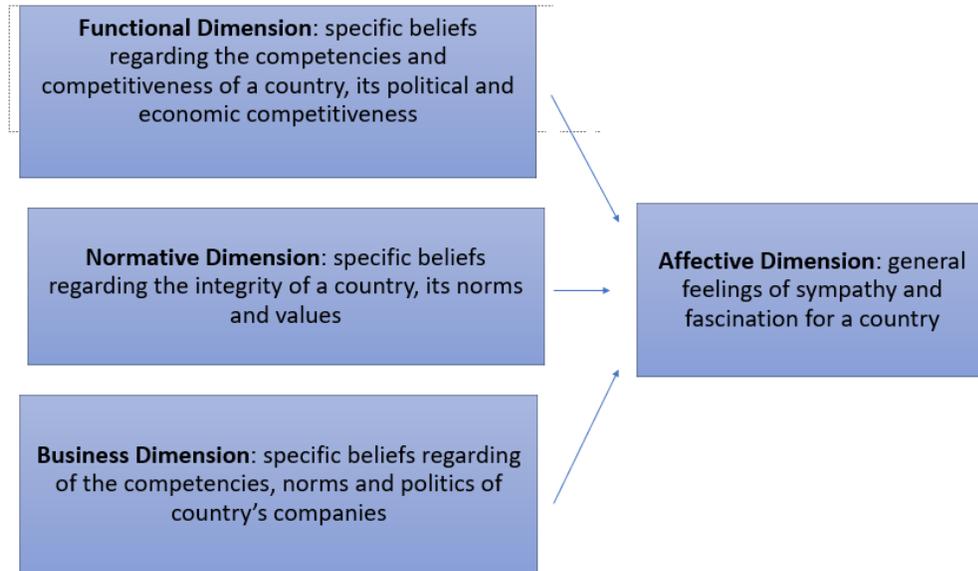


Figure 6: a four-dimension model of a country’s image (Ingenhoff and Chariatte (2020)

Functional, normative and business dimensions in the model are relevant to both company and country image building. For instance, the functional dimension includes the public beliefs towards political and economic dimensions of public-private-partnerships (PPPs). Also, while business is partly catered to according to ‘economic competitiveness’ of a country, the business dimension reflects commerce in a more specific way.

The affective dimension to the model reflects how people feel about China and StarTimes, providing insights into the reputation aspect of their images. Knipp (citing Fombrun, 2007) links the image of a company to the “experiences and emotions of stakeholders (good or bad, weak or strong)”, which in turn “creates

reputation” (2009: 21). The public feedback towards the communicated images creates the global reputation of a country (Rusciano et al., 1997, cited by Buhmann and Ingenhoff 2015). Questions related to these areas therefore capture image formation and perception aspects of public diplomacy, and analysis could reveal which dimensions increase China’s ability to attract (Nye 2004).

Frame setting based on analysis of public perceptions allows for triangulation: comparing the construction of StarTimes in news reports with the views of interviewees. A big gap between the two would suggest a shortcoming in public diplomacy, with PR-influenced framing in news mismatching with the real-world attitudes of African stakeholders. The research will reveal whether African stakeholders are willing to speak in defense of China. This is an aim of Chinese public diplomacy: Li Anshan (2007) suggests that public perceptions would be better influenced by Africans praising China.

Chapter Four: Access to Satellite TV 10,000 Villages Project

4.1 Introduction: multilateral diplomacy, state and nonstate actors - public diplomacy coordinating forces

This chapter focuses on the 10,000 Villages Project, which represents the non-loan side of the StarTimes public-private-partnership. The research question is as follows: *What is the image of the 10,000 Villages Project and how does it impact the image of China?* It firstly gives the development assistance context for the project, in particular the digital divide. Then, three relationship alignments are discussed to put the project into context. The first relationship is China-Africa ties at state level through FOCAC. This pertains to the political and economic factors determining Sino-Africa relations, in particular how Africa's digital deficit – which the project hopes to alleviate - reaps dividends for the PRC Going Out and BRI objectives. The second is the relationship between StarTimes - the company conducting the project - and the PRC state. The third is the connection between StarTimes as a pay television broadcaster and Chinese state broadcaster CGTN.

The chapter raises questions about these relationship alignments. It is clear that an aim is to cultivate acceptance of CCP geopolitical aims through economic, political and cultural means, by moulding coherence at FOCAC, nonstate actor and African consumer levels. But the extent to which this coordination is coercive or cooperative remains an ongoing debate (Diamond and Schell 2018, Cook, Hanson et al 2020).

Then the project is explored in the empirical data: firstly, interviews with Africans to gain public perceptions in a Kenyan village, then news coverage framing, and interviews among African media professionals. These angles illuminate public diplomacy from three dimensions. Firstly, the comments of rural based subscribers reveal opinions of 10,000 Villages Project beneficiaries. Secondly, news framing shows how the project is constructed via news stories, and whether StarTimes coverage contributes to the image building of China. Thirdly, interviews with city-based media professionals in different countries shows another perspective.

This research fills a gap in the canvassing of African views on China. Most surveys bypass asking the opinions of Africans: the 2020 Pew Research Poll did not include African countries in its 14-nation poll on views of China (Silver et al 2020). Similarly, the 2019 Soft Power 30 sampled 12,500 people, but only 500 came from Sub-Saharan Africa compared to thousands from other regions (McClory 2019). Also in the Ipsos-Anholt 2020 Nation Brand Index, China's ranking plummeted 12 positions, from 23 to 35 in one year (McGrath 2020), but information does not clarify how many of the 20,019 polled were African nationals. This quite possibly has an influence on poll results (Kahraman 2017). An exception to the rule is Afrobarometer, which focuses solely on Africans' assessments. Between 2019 and 2020, respondents from 18 African countries were asked which country had the best model of development to follow. Of those polled 32% said the US, while 23%

chose China, in second place (Selormey 2020), which signals that approval of China is far higher on the African continent than elsewhere.

Aside from commercial reports, in addition there has been some academic enquiry into African perceptions of the China image. This has focused on African press coverage (Wekesa 2013), and the image of Chinese media in individual countries (Wasserman and Madrid-Morales 2018, Diakon and Röschenthaler 2017, Nassanga and Makara 2016, Umejei 2017). However, most attention has focused on Chinese state media. StarTimes can shed light on African perceptions of state-nonstate relations, such as the PPP financial structure and the impact on content, including facilitation of state media CGTN due to its transmission on a StarTimes platform (Zhu and Keane 2020:217) and increased indigenous programming.

Development assistance context for the project, in particular the digital divide

After 70 years of an international order prescribed by US market-based economic norms, African rural regions still lack infrastructure financing and development to fully participate in the digital world (African Union 2020, Duncan 2015, Hamelink 2015). The term 'digital divide' concerns the ICT resources gap, which can be between developed and developing countries or reflect inequalities *within* countries (Hamelink 2015). A lack of infrastructure such as electricity can cause limited network coverage, while affordability issues are symptoms of a divide linked to wider economic growth constraints (Henry 2019). The 10,000 Villages Project attempts to close the divide linked to deficiencies in television access

outside metropolitan areas in Africa - an example of media and technology inequalities within countries.

The introduction and literature review discussed how this presents an opportunity for China to tie support for African ICT development aspirations to its geopolitical, economic and image building interests (Russel and Berger 2020). If this assistance helps resolve Africa's digital divide, a great deal of public diplomacy would be generated because this has been a protracted problem which post-WW2 diplomatic institutions have failed to solve. This is China's opportunity to demonstrate that Western-centric development strategies towards the digital divide are not needed.

This chapter scrutinizes a PRC contribution towards filling rural African's technological void with satellite infrastructure development assistance: the 10,000 Villages Access to Satellite TV Project (henceforth shortened to the 10,000 Villages Project). Operationalization of this plan to provide satellite infrastructure to rural regions of Africa synchronizes the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and Chinese nonstate actor pay TV company StarTimes with PRC geopolitical strategy. This chapter is based on a case study to increase television access throughout Africa, a project to eventually to be rolled out across 20 countries (Kakpo 2021). As such it is indicative of multilateral, state-nonstate and television content coordination, and therefore provides limited but partly generalizable insights into how China extends its international sphere of influence

using diplomacy and development to move public perceptions. Three relationship alignments are discussed to put the project into context.

4.2 Relationship One: China and Africa through FOCAC

The first relationship is China-Africa ties at state level. The starting point for the 10,000 Villages Project is not African need but China's diplomatic agenda, to improve the nation's international economic and political image and identity. Since accession to the WTO in 2001, among key policies that have defined the PRC political and economic identity are 'Going Out' and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Both have set the direction for the internationalization of Chinese businesses (Gu and Shen 2019), in response to domestic economic growth limitations, increased direct foreign investment (FDI) and the coupling of development cooperation and with exports (Wang 2016).

The policy determining the creation of this project can be found in the 2015 FOCAC Johannesburg Action Plan under the heading of 'Press and Media', defined as a joint agreement between Africa and China. The action plan on the official FOCAC website (2018) categorizes it as strategic communication of China's multilateral relations identity. Specifically, it narrates China's international development assistance and legitimizes the role of nonstate actors as contractors.

Thus, contractors conducting projects can be instruments of public diplomacy, and the Chinese approach to economic development. Public diplomacy is necessary to

promote the image of China's policies that affect Africans. These policies include BRI and FOCAC related multilateral agreements that are key to economic diplomacy, which China claims is not designed to overturn the Washington Consensus neoliberal rules-based order (Wu 2020) and mostly aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. However, the economic diplomacy does pursue alternative paths (Zhao 2018, Alden 2017), and the public face of the difference is made manifest through over a thousand of projects in Africa, and the contractors that carry them out.

The money for the project comes from the state-run South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, which aims "to support South-South cooperation and assist developing countries in implementing their agendas at the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015" (CIDCA 2018). The fund not only aligns China's aid with UN Sustainable Development Goals, but it is also tied to BRI initiatives. Development assistance through FOCAC could be viewed as a way to integrate Africa within China's sphere of international influence, to outsource reputation repair caused by human rights controversies at home. Due to the non-loan aspect of the project, thus the potential for generating goodwill, the public diplomacy possibilities of this part of the public-private-partnership are higher than the subsequent two chapters.

A question however, is whether China's goodwill is a message constructed in news narratives and validated in the African perceptions of the country and company.

4.3 Relationship Two: project contractor StarTimes and the PRC state

The second relationship, a state and nonstate alignment, explains how the contract for nonstate actor StarTimes to implement the FOCAC public-private-partnership (PPP) 10,000 Villages Project brings it in closer proximity to the Party-state. StarTimes is not mentioned specifically in the FOCAC action plan, but the plan emphasizes the PPP contractor status. China's aid concept sets the terms and conditions for the FOCAC approach, but the next stage is for contractors to put China's 'international development cooperation' into practice.

FOCAC therefore co-opts nonstate Chinese enterprises into foreign policy agendas. The StarTimes contract to implement a satellite infrastructure project according to public private partnerships (PPPs) serves to illustrate state relationships with private companies. The partnership could be seen as indicative of track two diplomacy. Bäckstrand (2008) characterizes track two diplomacy as private actors co-opted to support state interests which also align with business priorities. The StarTimes FOCAC aligned contract to help solve the digital divide which has hampered television access in rural regions highlights the realm of opportunities and constraints that define China's economic diplomacy policies.

PPP example: 10,000 Villages Project

The 10,000 Villages Project in this chapter is the focus for closer scrutiny of the PPP arrangement for nonstate actor StarTimes. It provides satellite infrastructure

in rural Kenya to narrow an urban-rural television access divide, and according to AidData figures (Custer et al, 2021), the project is not classed as a debt. This defines the infrastructure aspect as being in the realm of foreign aid, showcasing the China difference to the Washington Consensus and providing a public diplomacy opportunity by improving China's image. African democratisation trends in the 1990s led to broadcasting liberalization and marketization but not television inclusion, with rural regions considered too economically marginalized and unviable for pay television markets (Paterson 1998, Teer-Tomaselli 2015).

One issue has been access to electricity in Kenya. According to the World Bank 61% of Kenyans in rural areas had electricity access in 2019, but the figure was 84% in urban areas in 2018 (Statista 2021). StarTimes in 2017 tried to overcome this problem through a partnership with a UK company Azuri Technologies, to provide a solar TV package for off-grid customers in Kenya. The package included lights, a USB phone charging point, a TV and access to 40 channels, all for a deposit and daily fee (Azuri Group 2017).

Affordability of set-top boxes and digital infrastructure funding outside urban areas remained problems in the digital migration process (Telecommunications Management Group, 2017). In 2017, TV industry expert Pascal Orhan from Dataxis stated that digital terrestrial TV transition implementation was being hampered in Africa by financial shortfalls. Therefore, the project serves a great need. While legal disputes pushed the StarTimes connected PANG out of a digital transition

contract (Telecommunications Management Group, 2017), Kenya is just one of 25 countries it is now assisting with satellite infrastructure. The deal with Azuri ended, with packages including televisions, decoders, satellite dishes with solar power systems and direct to home (DTH) access units (Hua Xia 2018) manufactured by StarTimes itself. With equipment recipients chosen by village chiefs (Schultz 2020), this ensured the alignment of policy from multilateral agreements down to national and local levels, enabling the influence penetration of Beijing into the grassroots of Africa communities. The role of the nonstate contractor actor therefore is crucial in using expertise to carry China's geopolitical interests wherever projects are implemented. While this is not a debt to the Kenyan government, at the same time, the private arm of the PPP benefited through the manufacture and sale of name brand technology products (StarTimes ON, n.d.). The next section looks at rationale behind maintaining a close proximity to the Party-state from the StarTimes vantage point.

StarTimes

StarTimes exemplifies the 21st trajectory of interconnections between state and nonstate forces in China. With regards to embodying China's political and economic identity, the company coheres with the Going Out policy. Early configurations of StarTimes were as an audio-visual communication technology enterprise working on domestic national and provincial assignments before

undertaking its first project in Zimbabwe in 2002 (Zhang Y 2016), in line with the Going Out directives.

Even though it is a private enterprise, StarTimes also reflected China's image and reputation problems in Africa and beyond. From 2011 to 2014, StarTimes underwent law wrangles in Kenya. It won then lost a digital migration contract under an organisation called PANG (Pan African Network Group), due to legal challenges from African broadcasters suspicious about the tendering process and the possibility of a Chinese company being used to censor on behalf of the Kenyan government (Telecommunications Management Group 2017). It was assumed that PANG was a trojan horse for non-democratic norms of the PRC-state. The StarTimes validation by the Party-state was clear when it was selected for the FOCAC-related contract in 2015 (ChinAfrica 2015), using the public-private partnership approach when undertaking a 10,000 Villages Project pilot in Kajiado County.

The PPP alignment has subsumed many of StarTimes activities under government mandates. It is part of China-Africa multilateral relations; FOCAC involves the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (IDE-Jetro, n.d.) and autonomy from the state in a western sense does not exist, which could add credence to the framing of Chinese companies abroad as state proxies (D'Hooghe 2014). By default, despite the private ownership status, the StarTimes brand is inextricably linked to government

agendas, despite aspirations to evolve into a pan African network (Gagliardone 2019). Glocalisation may sometimes run counter to aligning with Beijing objectives.

In addition, the profit-oriented 'private' dimension to the company, run along conventional pay television lines, will take a long time to pay off. Development is conceptualized as the "delivery of resources" (Kaplan 1999: 5-7, cited by Hamelink 2015: 145) with the aim being the "integration of recipients into a global marketplace" (Hamelink, *ibid*); the populations are not constructed as citizens but as consumers. There are assumptions that bridging the digital divide will improve economic development, but research shows that access to technology is not a magic bullet (van Dijk 2020). For instance, the short-term impact of electrical grid availability in many parts of rural Africa in recent years have produced only minimal improvements in employment, and income levels remain too low for full economic viability of electrification infrastructure (Toman and Peters 2017).

StarTimes exemplifies potential gains and losses through following policy. An advantage of being chosen by the PRC Party-state to implement PPP contracts for African governments has been lowered financial risk for expansion in Africa (Olander 2021). Public works FOCAC contracts provide considerable prospects for business development due to digital migration contracts and new channel creation opportunities. It can also benefit from name brand television sets (StarTimes TV, n.d.) and solar panel system production to cope with electricity

supply breakdowns (Vanguard Nigeria 2020). As a company, it is illustrative of how the 'public' and 'private' overlap. That state hand enables the company to build the infrastructure to reach and expand a subscriber base. Research suggests StarTimes will increase its subscriber base by millions in coming years (Murray 2021).

Relationship Three: StarTimes and Chinese state broadcaster CGTN

The third relationship is at a media content level, namely StarTimes and CGTN: a nonstate and state interplay for China's image building, through programming consumed by satellite TV enfranchised villagers. The nonstate-state connection would be reflected not just in the project, but also how StarTimes and the Chinese government are intertwined in coverage.

There is a second dimension to the StarTimes link to the state. As well as building the infrastructure for television access, on the 'private' side of the PPP, it is responsible for some of the channel content. It serves paying subscribers offerings such as Disney, the BBC and CNN, but as a distributor for China's for freely available government controlled CGTN, it serves a dual purpose (Russel 2020), illustrative of track one and track two diplomacy, between state and nonstate forces (Li 2019, Kerr and Taylor 2013).

StarTimes is an intriguing and revealing example of official and unofficial channels for Beijing influence. While officially nonstate, at multilateral and state level it is

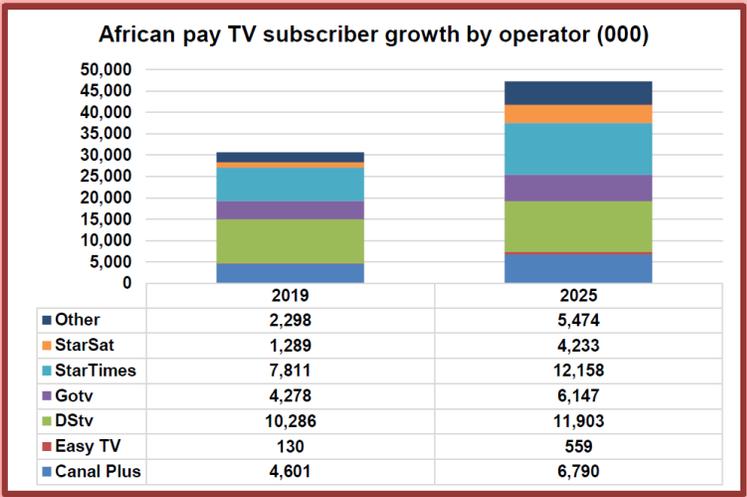
tied to government directives. FOAC is the traditional diplomatic mechanism for Sino-African economic development relations. However, it is the companies implementing projects that are the boots on the ground in African cities and villages. That means contractors like StarTimes represent not just themselves but outsourcing of image building for China, facilitating Beijing's public diplomacy through constructing narratives and perceptions, project by project.

As a public diplomacy facilitator it is useful. Broadcasting is a public diplomacy tool, part of a mediated communication strategy (Cull 2008). Media content for public diplomacy must carefully construct a country's domestic identity, and build the country external image or nation brand that generates soft power, enhances the country's reputation and creates a welcome environment for business (Zhao 2015). Public diplomacy refers to *deliberate* acts of communication for strategic purposes (Rawnsley 2015), to highlight domestic political characteristics, objectives and identity (White and Kolesnicov 2015, Herrmann et al., 1997; Oskamp, 1965) which complicates how company operations should be viewed.

In official public diplomacy terms, the nonstate position of StarTimes content renders it separate. But in reality, the operation contributes to public diplomacy in two ways: infrastructure and content. PPPs have become part of the political and economic identity for China's infrastructure projects (Li et al 2019), and therefore the project represents China's image in thousands of rural territories in Africa, due to new satellite infrastructure that has brought access to television.

Image cultivation through infrastructure has certainly been the case elsewhere in Kenya, with China’s PPP-related SGR project in Kenya becoming a symbol of China’s values in media coverage (Mureithi 2020).

With regards to programming, officially StarTimes is disconnected from state directed content such as that of CGTN, Xinhua, China Daily and China Radio International. However, it distributes CGTN as a free channel, illustrating the blurred lines between the state and nonstate realms which viewers may not be cognizant of. Chinese television accessed due to the project enables the identity of the country to be transmitted beyond borders in compliance with state-directed narratives. Straddling technical and media, state and nonstate dimensions puts StarTimes in a special position of influence. According to Digital TV Research (2020), it will experience a significant growth spurt in coming years. Combined with StarSat, it will easily overtake DStv by 2025:



Source: Digital TV Research

Figure 7: Murray (2021)

As a result, gauging the perspectives of StarTimes viewers can provide insights into how the project and the content are perceived. Such feedback is a useful window on the collaboration between the state and nonstate actors are achieving the results that China is aiming for.

4.5 Findings

10,000 Villages Project in Kenya: Villager Perceptions

This chapter uses empirical data to capture the connection between StarTimes and China's public diplomacy efforts through interviews and news framing. The first section is concerned with interviewees in a rural area. The sample is 50 subscribers in a territory called Ainamoi, Kericho County - 47 individuals and 3 institutions, chosen through convenience sampling, according to the accessibility of respondents to the journalist (Braun and Clarke 2013). This project was set in motion after the 2016 10,000 Villages Project launch in Kajiado County, also in Kenya. The project roll out was also around the same time as the digital migration switchover. TV access broadened and Ainamoi villagers could watch an increased number of digital terrestrial and satellite channels with improved reception at relatively low cost.

Because the project has been underway in Kenya since 2016, the research first reflected whether the PPP system was considered a way to manage development efficiently. Justification for the increased reliance on PPP in international

development has been the benefits of improved efficiency and service delivery (Aitken 2014, Noguchi 2016). Success would indicate that policy at multilateral level could be transformed into national, regional and village level project deliverance. Respondents were asked for their opinion of StarTimes and responses were favourable in most cases. Some people gave two reasons, which were overwhelmingly positive. The comments related to both the content (e.g. improved choice) and the practices of the company (e.g. prices and signal quality).

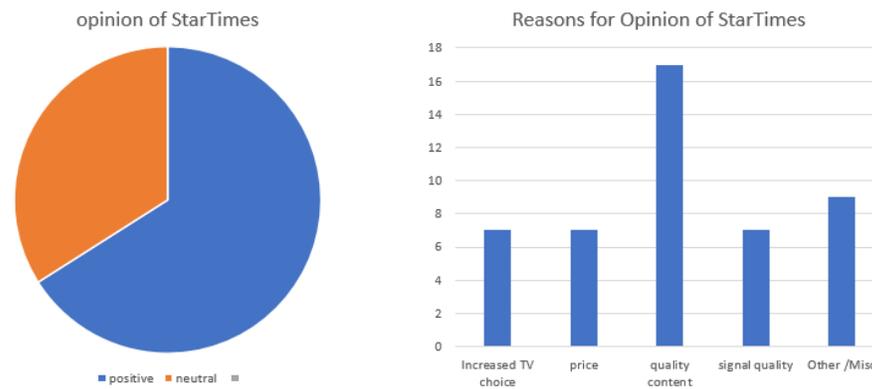


Figure 8: Opinions on StarTimes

To gain another angle on project outcomes, television viewing habits before and after the project were analysed, revealing the StarTimes subscriber profile. The company first entered Kericho County in 2013 solely as a private entity (StarTimes 2013), but the PPP arrangement reoriented the company's relationship with the county. Residents were asked how long they had been watching StarTimes and responses revealed that although StarTimes first became available in Kericho in 2013, most respondent StarTimes subscriptions started later, from 2015. This

suggests that the majority of subscribers began watching around the time of the successful 2016 pilot for the 10,000 Villages Project in Saina village in Kajiado County, southwest Kenya (Xinhua 2016). Although correlation cannot be proved, subscription increases could have been due to StarTimes activity after the initial pilot project as well as the digital transition.

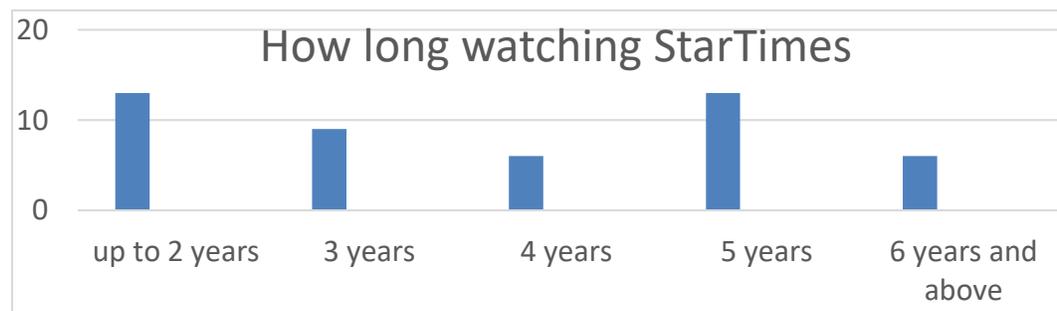


Figure 9: Length of time watching StarTimes

The biggest category was the 13 residents who had watched for up to two years. According to two schools (Institution 1 and 2), they had no television before the 10,000 Villages Project, but the hospital (Institution 3) did have one. While StarTimes must have had a profile in 2013, the project facilitation of new television uptake is likely to have expanded image building, both on behalf of the company and country. This then, is a direct link between infrastructure development and China's reputation. It also confirms, as theory suggested (Wang 2006), that company and country identity often converge.

Viewing habits: Africa first

An important question is the impact that digital migration and the 10,000 Villages Project are having on the image of China. This section considers whether viewing habits, widened access, reception upgrades and increased channels have helped public diplomacy efforts. Fears have been expressed that Chinese channels and digital migration contracts handed StarTimes too much control (Telecommunications Management Group 2017, Wekesa 2013, Deutsche Welle 2019). This is an old area of concern: a complaint by Non-Aligned Countries was that the ICT divide would result in a dependency status, with Western television threatening cultural sovereignty (Hamelink 2015).

The Kericho County findings were that most respondents first and foremost choose African television in English and local languages such as Swahili. Citizen, NTV, KBC, K24, KTN were among the Kenyan channels mentioned. Most people reported watching television at home and claimed they accessed analogue TV before StarTimes and digital migration, after which they continued to mostly view African channels. The African channels most often mentioned were FTA operators, with no mention of the StarTimes African premium channel Rembo TV, launched in 2019 (CGTN Africa 2019).

A likely reason behind the loyalty to African channels is the financial factor, with residents opting for free bundles. Concern over subscription costs is linked to wider Sino-African economic relations. The welcome news for China is that it is

considered a benefactor through the project, which is a public diplomacy advantage. One resident said that the satellite dishes were provided for free, which was confirmed by another respondent, from the clinic, who praised China as “a good country” because StarTimes “gave out some of the satellites free to the villages and some of the government institutions. So we appreciate what they have done.” This was a China state narrative that the project gave equipment away for “free” (CIDCA 2018, Mu 2019).

Public diplomacy was aided by the absence of negative connotations of China found elsewhere. There were no concerns linked to project financial risk, power relation misgivings or procurement suspicions which undermined the image of Kenya’s China-funded SGR project (Olotch 2007). Terms such as ‘new colonialism’ (Sautman and Yan 2009, Lumumba-Kasongo 2011) and ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ (Brautigam 2020) have been the controversial framings regarding China’s involvement in Africa, holding the potential to undermine the environment for Chinese interests. In Afrobarometer research (Selormey 2020), 74% of Kenyans polled knew about Chinese loans, the highest percentage of all African countries canvassed, indicating strong concern. At village level, these negative constructions of relations were not expressed.

But while the public diplomacy remit of the PPP is fulfilled, the paid for content remains elusive for most villagers, despite StarTimes frequently using the word ‘affordable’ in its marketing to distinguish itself from other pay television

operators (Tsika 2018, Ekwujuru 2020). Resident 32 explained, “Not many people who were given the decoders are able to pay the monthly subscription of 200KES (US\$2). They should improve by adding more stations that are free like CGTN which is an alternative to KBC. They could also add more that have football, athletics, basketball and so on.”

This project showcases the difference of China’s development assistance compared to the Washington approach, because access is widened, so public diplomacy rewards will be reaped. China has understood that a fully market-oriented approach would be unviable at this time. However, this presents difficulties for StarTimes, which must repay Exim Bank loans. If new premium channels such as Rembo are considered unaffordable, there will be constraints on how far the private side of PPP can make inroads in rural areas. On the plus side, in the survey, two respondents describe the company as “affordable”, the word “cheap” was used twice and “fair” once. But this was out of 50 interviewees, so affordability will likely remain an issue. One favourable comment was that “They don’t take away all the channels when you haven’t paid the subscription.” But that is not helpful to the ‘private’ business side concerned with profit generation. Digital TV Research forecasts that StarTimes will witness the biggest growth in pay TV subscriptions out of all companies, from 10.11 million in 2020 to 16.86 million by 2026 (Murray 2021), but Exim Bank loan debts might mean StarTimes faces pressure to resist lowering TV package pricing structures.

This all means the outlook for Chinese TV viewership is mixed. Preference for African content suggests a public diplomacy and public relations necessity for StarTimes to converge with the tastes of indigenous populations by establishing more local channels, to continue glocalisation and the cultivation of a pan-African image, but this costs money that viewers cannot afford.

However, limited finances of rural residents also present an opportunity for China's main public diplomacy vehicle, CGTN, to gain a captive audience for its strategic communication to improve China's reputation. The current lack of impact of premium subscription channel Rembo TV due to low incomes means that the PRC state is currently capitalizing most on image cultivation, also at the expense of CNN and the BBC on more expensive packages – the BBC was mentioned only once by a resident. African rural areas are therefore a useful frontier for the spreading of news according to Chinese state framing. More responses related to Chinese content viewing are explored more below.

The China image: StarTimes channels winning hearts and minds

Television facilitates the imaginary construction of other cultures (Tomlinson 1999), and to construct preferred images and control narratives, Chinese state media in Africa after 2011 expanded massively (Marsh 2018, Zhang 2014). This was in response to the belief that there were image distortions due to Anglo-American domination of global media outlets (Paterson 2001). Such suspicions meant CGTN was classified as a propaganda vehicle in the US

(O’Keeffe and Viswanatha 2019). China has invested billions into building its media resources (Shambaugh 2015), and critical to improved soft power is the export of cultural industries to new territories. Of interest here therefore is the reception towards the programmes in rural Africa, still a largely untapped market. According to Keane (2016), reception towards exports is an indication of cultural power, of whether China can “use culture and creativity to redesign and rebrand its global image (p447). Residents were asked what they thought of StarTimes content overall. The basic package, called Nyota, comprises 17 channels include CGTN output as well as channels such as Sino Drama and Kung Fu, so this question includes impressions of state-run output. The feedback was reasonably strong, with most residents classing content as either ‘not bad’ or ‘good’. ‘Not bad’ was taken to mean basically satisfactory, while ‘good’ is classed as wholly positive.

When residents were specifically asked whether they watched China-related content, 77% said they did, suggesting significant inroads for cultural diplomacy. Only 11 people (23%) claimed they did not, citing a lack of time or interest, language barriers and show scheduling. Residents provided diverse reasons for watching Chinese content, which can be divided into a few categories. Sometimes residents gave more than one reason.

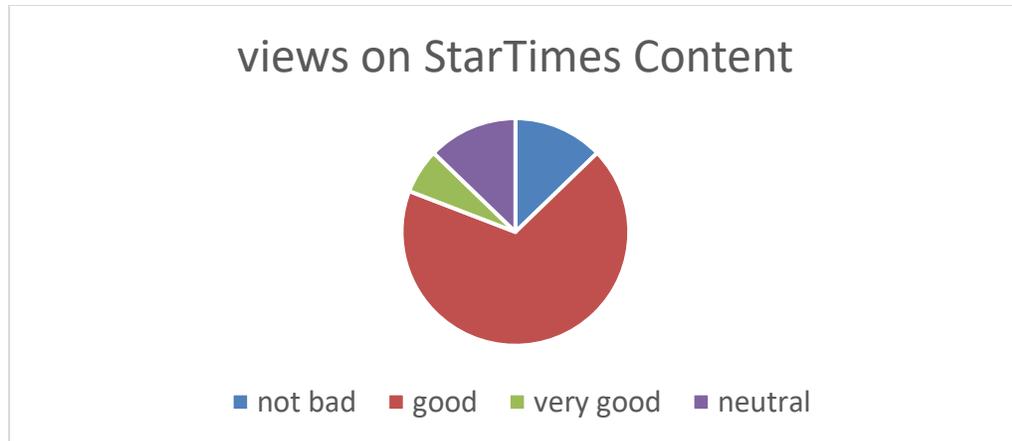


Figure 10: Views on StarTimes Content

Entertainment

Public diplomacy overlaps with cultural diplomacy, and both are instruments for the generation of soft power. Soft power creation is contingent on the attractiveness of a country’s culture, and international television is an important facilitator (Flew 2016). It appears that public diplomacy is helping China’s soft power cultivation, because the biggest reason for watching Chinese shows was entertainment. While Chinese content in the West has failed to gain traction, audiences in Africa are being won over. Results indicate that – possibly influenced by free content - a space has been carved out in which Chinese televisual commodities can win audiences. Acceptance in African rural territory shows an improvement with the past, where it has been mostly overseas Chinese watching PRC exports, due to the lack of influential international brands (Li W 2016) or uniformity of content failing to win audiences (Li H 2016). Speaking of the entertainment shows, resident 21 says: “I enjoy and find them really funny,

especially when with my family”. It was noticeable that Kung Fu in particular seems to be a popular cultural diplomacy tool among viewers. Unprompted, this channel was mentioned by 22% of respondents. For instance, Resident 26 commented favourably, “They don’t fight using guns, only martial arts using arms” while Resident 45 said, “Kung Fu movies give me some experience and guide so that I can defend myself.” This finding coheres with reports of the popularity of Kung Fu among Mozambique subscribers (Schluntz 2020). It also affirms the appeal of the genre in other parts of Africa (Jedlowski 2021). The popularity of Chinese entertainment shows (twice referred to as ‘Ching Chong’) therefore represents a win for public diplomacy and a rare victory for Chinese soft power, as people are consuming images that they deem attractive.

China-related viewing habits

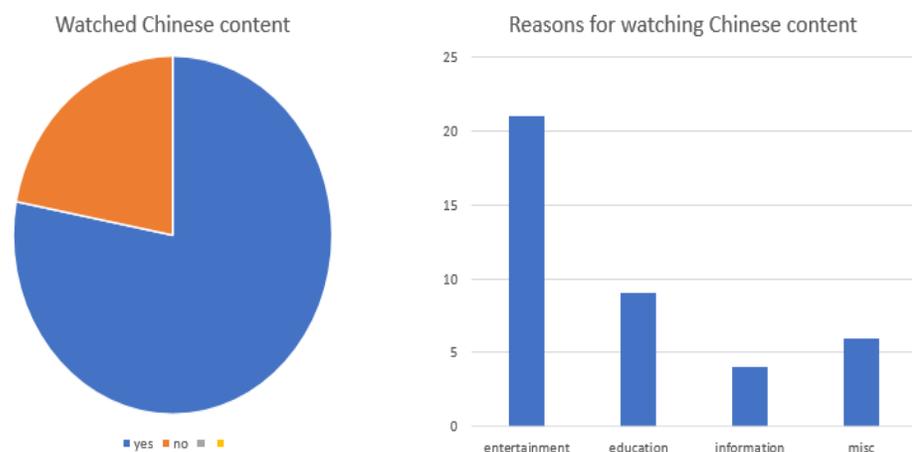


Figure 11: China-related habits

Educative / Informative

An important rationale for closing the digital divide was to improve access to information outside of cities. Chinese channels such as CGTN have benefited from narrowing the digital divide, because the second biggest category for why people tuned into Chinese material was content considered educative or useful for information (Saliu 2019, CIDCA 2020). A common response was that programmes widened horizons, “brought a lot of ideas to Africa” (Resident 27). Another enthused, “Before StarTimes came, we could only watch one channel but after, channels have gotten so many. So it’s a company that really helps people” (Resident 18); “What I like about the Chinese stations, [is] they show issues of development in their country which if applied in our country, can be also very helpful to us” (Resident 32); “It teaches about culture and how people live in other parts of the world” (Resident 46). “I am familiar with Africans and so want to learn how the Chinese live” (Resident 19). “They educate on how to keep cattle, sheep and goats” (Resident 1).

There are signs that StarTimes is also responsive to people’s choices. The popularity of content for rural people seems to have been noticed, as 2020 saw the arrival in Nigeria of a StarTimes and government backed agriculture business reality TV show (Legit 2020). Three respondents asked for an increase in educative programmes. A sign that StarTimes attempted to fulfil wishes during the COVID-19 crisis was the enlarged programming specifically for the Kenyan education

system (Odhiambo 2020). Only one person sounded a note of scepticism and seemed to deem some content as propaganda, preferring Kenyan materials. Resident 32 claimed: “KBC is okay. There is CGTN which is also okay but almost three quarters of CGTN programmes talk the Chinese agenda. Half of the programmes should deal with issues of the world and perhaps Kenya in particular.” Fears have been raised over Chinese media propaganda purposes (Hartig 2019, Hu et al 2018, Diamond and Schell 2018) but this was an isolated comment.

However, China is seeking to increase the public diplomacy obligations of StarTimes by putting what was once CGTN-type programming onto the pay-TV channels usually dedicated to entertainment. In October 2021, it was announced that the Sino Drama channel would have a new programme called China-Africa Express, designed to “report on China-Africa economic and trade exchanges, enhancing the communication between the people of China and Africa, and also promoting the mutual learning of civilizations between the two sides.” (StarTimes 2021) This is very similar to the content on the daily CGTN Africa news broadcast. The strategy seems to be to reach those reluctant to watch CGTN content.

In fact, popularity of shows would be even more the case if there was better language accessibility. Five residents mentioned translations as a factor in choosing to watch Chinese content, with Residents 9 and 31 reminding that

translation into African languages plays a role in the popularity and understanding of the entertainment on the Swahili channel. Viewers asked for more translations for Chinese shows, with the wish for more to be translated into Swahili or English. This is likely to happen, due to convenience: dubbing is possible due to StarTimes production facilities in Nairobi where CGTN is also based.

Filling the image void

There is little evidence that post 2011 state media expansion was reaping desired results before StarTimes came under contract in 2015. Now, with StarTimes as a suitable conduit for messaging that boosts reputation, it appears CGTN is helping shape imaginations of present-day China in specifically rural territories of Africa, to tell China's story (Thussu et al 2018). Views from residents suggested that StarTimes and CGTN were filling spaces that Western media had not yet gained dominance over, despite British colonialism. With regards to activating their schemata, many people say they had little or mental image about China beforehand, so had not consumed western discourses hostile to China. This research places subscribers into the category of citizens "lacking strong ideological or partisan predispositions" (Entman 2010:392). When respondents were also asked if they had learned about China through the content, most replied 'yes' (34). For the minority that said 'no' (13), some believe their knowledge of the country is still poor, rather than they were learning from elsewhere. According to Resident 44, "When I used to hear about China, it was a country I had never seen, but when

StarTimes came, it showed us that China is a country that is good.” And it appeared that audiences could culturally relate to Chinese lifestyles: “Their way of life, food, tradition, culture depicts the similarities between the African culture and the Chinese culture” (Resident 47). This suggests some cultural proximity may be adding to popularity of shows (Straubhaar 2003, Xing et al 2016).

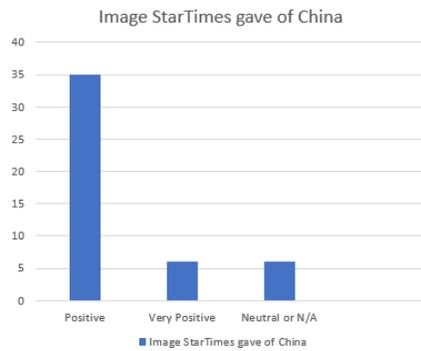
The development narrative

StarTimes holds a media for development function; it is an effective transmitter of an imaginary geography of China and a modernization narrative that viewers seemed keen for Kenya to emulate. Most respondents found the values and priorities communicated in shows helpful and relevant to their lives was in development. For instance, the strategic communication sold residents an attractive vision of modernity – economic growth through industrialization and urbanization. Issues of development are of great importance; media has an important role to play in disseminating ideas for development strategies (Scott 2014). The past has shown that with agricultural development, concepts and processes from elsewhere do not always translate (Melkote and Steeves 2015), but Kenyan viewers of Chinese shows seem to find them instructive.

Praise for China’s development was mentioned in 20% of interviews, with the specific word ‘developed’ mentioned in most of those interviews, while ‘technology’ and ‘infrastructure’ were mentioned a further 10% of times. A downside is that many respondents also used StarTimes content to compare

Kenya with China, almost always unfavourably: “These are people that have their development high up unlike Kenya” (Resident 2); “It’s a good country with good buildings unlike here in Kenya” (Resident 5); “Their development is more than that of Kenya” (Resident 9); “If you try to compare with a country like Kenya, then you will see that it is a highly developed country and that they are people who are moving forward” (Resident 18). Therefore, the self-image of Africans is negatively impacted by the auto-image projected through StarTimes texts and its hetero-image of China (Beller and Leerssen 2007).

As a resolution to the perceived deficiencies of Kenya, some touted China as a model to follow: “People are doing well there, and we can adopt from them” (Resident 13); “You can learn things that are very positive, healthy and useful to the society” (Resident 27); “I feel like going to step in that country [...] I love it. Their technology is what I feel like also bringing here also” (Resident 21). This suggests that the StarTimes mediated image building for China is contributing to the construction of a Beijing Consensus, an economic growth model suitable for developing countries. Sitting alongside the economic image is the admiration expressed for Chinese entertainment, thus enabling soft power: “The movies I used to watch were not as good as these from China that are shot in nice places” (Resident 4); “I see that it [China] has developed, even when we see through their movies” (Resident 8).



- ‘Developed’ used in 20% of responses
- Technology and infrastructure a further 10% of times
- “People are doing well there, and we can adopt from them” (Resident 13)
- “You can learn things that are very positive, healthy and useful to the society” (Resident 27)

Figure 12: Image StarTimes gives China

Key framings therefore positioned China as a ‘development leader’ due to perceptions regarding China’s evolution as depicted through buildings and technology. There is also the ‘development educator’, a sort of ‘how to’ development guide, represented by for instance, farming shows. Television is constructing a theme of ‘economic empowerment’, through discourses that set agendas, educate and persuade populations. As China is at the heart of the images for Africans to identify with, it could be viewed as a tool for hegemony. According to Althusser (1971), “Hegemonic processes socialize people to have imaginary relations with aspects of reality” (cited by Melkote and Steevers 2015:12).

To probe how residents linked China and StarTimes together, residents were asked whether the nonstate actor had changed their image of the country. This was to explore the outcomes of state and nonstate, track one and track two public diplomacy (Li 2019). Results show that StarTimes has helped change the image of China significantly – 90% expressed an altered viewpoint. Some conveyed views in general terms that they knew very little about China before, but exposure

through StarTimes content had widened their horizons: “Before I saw it on TV I didn’t even know [the country] but I saw that they are good people who teach us many things” (Resident 1); “I used to just hear of China, but when I watched on StarTimes, I saw the real thing what is happening in China” (Resident 7); “We didn’t even know about China, and now we know them” (Resident 14); “At first we were in darkness and after it arrived I could see and learn that China is a country that is opened up and many things [have] taken place” (Resident 18); “I hadn’t seen China as real but after I saw in the media, I saw its visibility is good. And I also knew that China is leading in trade, the people are well trained in business” (Resident 22).

In addition, there were people who had some knowledge of China, but StarTimes access changed their views: “We used to think this is a communist country that does not give freedom to their people, but it happens these people are free in their country, they are working hard in their country, so it is almost an open society anyway there, according to what I am seeing here on CGTN” (Resident 32); “I used to think it was a country that hasn’t developed but now I see that it is a country that is developed” (Resident 35); “I used to think it was a bit down but now, over the years it has soared upwards” (Resident 39). As a result of the altered perspective, more learning from China is welcomed: “I feel we ourselves should improve our lives and live like the Chinese” (Resident 2); “We get experience from them; apply in our farm sometimes and even in our homes. China should continue

offering us good services in our StarTimes channels” (Resident 13); “We should emulate the way the Chinese are working in business” (Resident 22).

If these results are an indication, StarTimes has reached audiences that the Party-state alone had not reached before digital migration and the 10,000 Villages Project. And now they have access, viewers do not distinguish between CGTN and StarTimes and see no reason to, in complete contrast to how a nonstate actor’s autonomy is sacrosanct for credibility purposes in the West. The public and the private in the PPP provide the infrastructure and content architecture to construct Chinese and African relationships at bilateral, national and regional level. Three sets of interests are served – those of China, Africa and the nonstate actor – but all are ultimately facilitate the progress of the Party-state. African consumers have received wider access to a greater variety of television through the 10,000 Villages Project and StarTimes has reaped public relations advantages which is necessary to leverage into greater profitability in the decade to come.

These narratives overall indicate that StarTimes version of China is having a significantly positive impact. Thus, the PRC use of StarTimes for PPP purposes allows China to spread controlled media which bolsters its image. The dissemination tool of a private television entity represents the contracting out of public diplomacy content of an informative, entertaining and educative orientation.

Results reinforce previous comments about the construction of an imaginary version of China, and indicates that a PPP, through media, facilitates dissemination of images in compliance with the China state discourses. Judging by the favourability in responses for the 10,000 Villages Project, consistent with results elsewhere, it appears that rural Africa has represented virgin territory for image building initiatives through television. As a result, not only was there little scepticisms about China, there was considerable admiration due to StarTimes content. The outsourcing public diplomacy method, operationalized in collaboration with state apparatuses, is therefore a potential highly effective strategy to adopt elsewhere.

Content analysis: StarTimes News coverage framing

Attention now turns to how the 10,000 Villages Project was framed in the 283-story news sample. Of interest is whether and how media framing highlights company and country connections. The absence or presence of economic frames, and qualitative exploration of narratives in the news, can reveal how these links are portrayed. This includes how the company wants to highlight or downplay government links. For instance, an absence of the China frames might indicate a reluctance to be seen as related to the Party-state. It would reflect potential tensions between state and nonstate activities.

6.2 The 10,000 Villages Project

The generic and issue specific frames used to analyze the news reports were set out in the methodology and methods section. In this chapter, three frames are discussed: the China frame, the 'Concord' frame and the Economic frame. After the overall sample results are given, qualitative content analysis is used to examine framing of the 10,000 Villages Project in particular. After overall findings of these frames, some notable elements in the frame structures are discussed and triangulated with data from semi-structured interviews. This is to reach a qualitative interpretation of results linked to the 10,000 Villages Project.

Each frame was operationalized using a set of statements based on the questions given in the methodology and methods section, to determine the frame's presence or absence. The frame would be considered to be present if it appeared in at least 50% stories. This would be considered a strong frame. If it is a strong frame, it is used repeatedly, so readers remember it (Hart, C. (2017)). The elements are represented by four statements, which were answered 'yes' or 'no'.

The 'China' frame

Firstly, the 'China' frame category was examined. Its presence or absence was analysed according to these four elements in a story: whether a Chinese person was quoted, whether Africans discussed China, whether China or the Chinese were mentioned, or whether China-Africa relations were the story focus.

In the frame structure, the presence of every element was weak.

Table 2: China frame

China Frame	% Yes	No. of stories	% No	No. of stories
Is the word 'China' or 'Chinese' mentioned?	27	76	73	207
Is China-Africa relations mentioned?	18	52	82	231
Is anyone Chinese quoted?	22	62	78	221
Does an African mention the word China or Chinese?	13	36	87	247

China was quoted in only 22% of stories. Africans discussed China in only 36 out of 283 stories, representing 13%. China was mentioned in 76 stories, approximately 27% of the sample. China-Africa relations was the focus of 52 stories, accounting for only 18%. These findings indicate that in the news coverage, there was an absence of a China frame. Readers were not being encouraged to interpret StarTimes activities with China in mind. Despite its vast ambition and ground-breaking importance, and the central role of StarTimes in its delivery, there was a paucity of stories on the 10,000 Villages Project. This suggests framing by omission, perhaps to avoid a convergence of company and country image building. As Entman (1993:54) reminds, "Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include." On the positive side, this suggests that 'China threat' framings found in previous research have not been transferred to StarTimes coverage. But this also illustrates that StarTimes does not focus on public diplomacy. That said, a closer look below at the 10,000 Villages Projects

mentions and a link made to the village results provides a fuller picture of a public diplomacy presence.

Quotes: narrators of the StarTimes story

As previously argued, public diplomacy involves telling China's story well (Hartig 2016). Storytelling would involve controlling whose views are amplified in news coverage of the country. This also links back to framing – whose voices are minimized and maximized. The topic here concerns the narrators of the StarTimes image in news coverage. Knowing who narrators are reveals whether the project image is constructed by state or nonstate narrators, and whether public diplomacy is a priority. In the total sample of stories, after StarTimes staff quotes, those mostly likely to be quoted in 10,000 Villages Project stories are government officials. With regards to the self-narration of StarTimes, top echelons in the company are quoted regularly. In Zambia, where StarTimes is called TopStar as part of its joint venture with the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation, TopStar CEO Leo Liao is quoted praising the project, as well as the CEO in Kenya Zhang Junqi.

Of particular interest is inclusion of statements of high rank Chinese officials, as their status shows the significance put on the project outcomes. This is an interesting contrast to the fact that there are so few StarTimes stories – it is important on a government level, but StarTimes appears to want a distance from this association. Narratives reveal the image building priorities from the PRC

side. CCP publicity department vice chairman Sun Zhijun in 2016 declared the purposes of the project as being to “build a new bridge that will connect Kenya and China in many aspects”, to raise “cultural and spiritual awareness” and in addition, to “expose Chinese culture to Kenyan people” (Chunikiah 2016b). Thus, tellingly, the project’s early aim clearly held a soft power motivation. Satellite communications were to connect rural dwellers with content favourable to China. Evidence in the first findings chapter suggested that the aim of winning publics over with this strategy was achieved. This shows that the news messaging by StarTimes and Party-state forces dominate control; narratives are not dominated by Western voices, which would change the framing.

African government officials mentioned include a Nigerian minister of information and culture, a permanent secretary in Zambia’s ministry of information and broadcasting, and a Ugandan minister of ICT. However, there is a lack of Africans discussing China, which this shows newspaper reports are not being used to promote Chinese TV. This scarcity of African news quotes on China contrasts with African interviewee findings - respondents had a lot to say about China and its image on TV. This shows that while the news framing downplays the connection to the PRC, the company image is closely linked with the country image in public minds, which means public diplomacy is influenced.

Also, taking the interviews with villagers into account, the influence of CGTN is hidden by the absence in the news framing. The interviews established a link

between the presence of StarTimes and the accessibility of CGTN content: people are watching the free-of-charge CGTN content and free-to-air African channels, but they are not the premium content channels being promoted in the news coverage. So the China views may not be mentioned in the coverage due to this priority of the private side of the PPP. More predominant are narratives such as 'exclusive rights', usually for sport programmes.

While all 14 interviewees mentioned China, not all discussed this particular project. Its profile perhaps is influenced by its rural context – the city-based media professionals may have less knowledge about the topic. The only negative story in the sample regarding the project came from Ghana. Under the heading "Local firms will get tax waiver for similar 'StarTimes' 300 villages project" a government minister defended tax breaks given to establish the project, following Ghana Independent Broadcaster Association grumbles that 'foreigners' were getting special treatment (Balancing Act Africa 2018a). This story highlighted an image and reputation problem both from the context of StarTimes and China. The 'foreign' status applied to both, and indicated indigenization barriers. This suggests that the StarTimes aim to have a pan-African image would be hampered by problems integrating into media systems dominated by rivals who associate its image with China. However, the heading and the framing of the story meant that its voice was almost marginalized: the story angle attempted to defuse the anti-foreigner narrative. And the official Ghanaian government response defending its policies added weight against the GIMA position.

It can be seen then that influence over narratives is achieved through assemblage of many high-ranking state and nonstate narrators, in alignment to positively frame the project. There is coordination between political and business forces, and similar to with interviews with villagers, there is praise from village residents themselves. In Nigeria a rural chief describes StarTimes as bringing “everlasting joy” to the village (Ramjan 2017). In the previously mentioned 2019 *Zambian Balancing Act* article, a primary school head praised the initiative for “helping pupils from rural areas keep abreast with pupils from urban areas.” In Uganda, a beneficiary of the project was quoted as saying to Xinhua that the project “will enable him to know more about other parts of the world” (Olupot 2018), thus validating the mission to provide access to Chinese and other content. The African villager quotes in alignment with the favourable comments of Chinese and African elites provide a coherence to the framing, thus extending the dissemination of PRC discourses on economic development cooperation – telling China’s story well.

Mentions of China or China-Africa relations

While mentions of China and China-Africa relations were few in the sample, where they were present, they did appear in stories linked to government activities, such as 10,000 Villages Project. The high-level significance of the project continued to be pushed by those with senior rank through 2018 and 2019. This plays into the idea that the project was symbolic of China’s poverty alleviation success. In 2018,

at a FOCAC meeting in Beijing, Group President of StarTimes Pang Xingxing was referring to the project as a “mission” to provide “uninterrupted access to satellite television” to his audience of African government ministers, among whom he was seeking new candidate countries for the project (Darmalingum 2018b). By 2019 the Zambian government was hailing it “an incredible success that has achieved the intended results” (Balancing Act Africa 2019). The project was framed as “allowing people in rural areas to be part of the day-to-day social and economic development of Zambia” and as “helping reduce the levels of illiteracy and poverty”. This messaging chimes with views from the village respondents part of this chapter, where two schools were full of praise for the television access, and most residents watched to gain information and education.

Both convergence and divergence between company and country aims are present in the news coverage. With regards to convergence, although the 10,000 Villages Project makes up only a small percentage of stories, StarTimes is the key to the image construction for this project and therefore China’s media development cooperation agenda. The presence of these stories at times creates a strong public relations and public diplomacy convergence. The dominance of quotes from officialdom indicates high level forces have the power to steer news discourses regarding the project, overlapping public diplomacy with StarTimes public relations. Public relations are an attempt to control messaging through frame sponsorship (Carragee and Roefs 2004). Frame sponsorship is the “framing of issues and events sponsored by multiple social

actors, including politicians, organizations, and social movements” (Carragee and Roefs 2004:216). These stories regarding the 10,000 Villages Project largely had a press release origin, used to influence perceptions towards activities (Schultz et al 2012), for instance to increase legitimacy. According to Hertog and McLeod, Entman’s frames can help identify “how individuals or groups structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of obtaining them” (2001:146). The stories show how public diplomacy, economic diplomacy and public relations work can work in unison.

However, the small number of Village Project stories perhaps indicates a divergence - that the private enterprise rather than the public infrastructure aspect of the PPP arrangement is the company priority. This could be due to both the desire to integrate into the African media system with a pan-African brand and the preference to distance itself from the image of China. But according to Wang (2006), separating the image of a company from a country is difficult. Evidence for this comes from another section of data: semi-structured interviews with media professionals.

The interview quote below here shows the reluctance of StarTimes to be perceived as having a close connection to China. This employee of StarTimes in Kenya (Marketing Manager 2019) is one of five giving perceptions of 10,000 Villages Project for this research. The marketing manager ambivalence towards the project is rooted in his belief that it does not exist to acquire more

subscribers. Rather, he paints the move is altruistic; similar to the news framing angle, he depicts it as a public diplomacy move. “In Kenya, it’s in partnership with government,” he explains. “Even the implementation, where the villages are, the selection, their installation, the government has been part and parcel of that. Because of that, the project is seen more as...it’s more like the Chinese government, through StarTimes.” The marketing manager was drawing a distinction between the public and private parts of the PPP, with the private being his concern. This points to a limitation on how far public relations can be used as a resource for public diplomacy. Literature has claimed that public diplomacy and public relations can complement each other (Signitzer and Coombs 1992, L’Etang 2009), but StarTimes’s concern to mask its connection to a government-to-government led development programme undermines the utility of this far-reaching venture for strategic communication purposes.

Concord Frame

In the following chapter, the results of the Conflict frame will be discussed. In this chapter, the Concord frame findings need exploration. Concord was chosen due to ‘friendship’ as a framing device used in reportage of FOCAC meetings (Wekesa 2014). Discourses of friendship and people-to-people exchanges are examples of ‘metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images’ used in framing (Gamson and Modgiliani 1987, quoted in Pan and Kosicki 1993:56). The frame elements to be identified were as follows: (1) the story reflects agreement

between parties-individuals-groups or countries (2) One party-individuals-groups or country praises another (3) the story refers to two or more aspects of an agreement on an issue (4) the story refer to win-win outcomes.

Table 3: Concord frame

Concord Frame	% Yes	No. of stories	% No	No. of stories
Does the story reflect agreement between parties-individuals-groups or countries?	66	187	34	96
Does one party-individuals-groups or country praise another?	31	88	69	195
Does the story refer to two or more aspects of an agreement on an issue?	65	183	35	100
Does the story refer to win-win outcomes?	66	188	34	95

In three out of four elements, the majority answer was yes, so a strong frame existed. With regards to agreements between parties, this could be identified in 183 stories, 65%. This usually related to the signing of deals between StarTimes and content suppliers, to be discussed more in subsequent chapters. For agreement on an issue, the figure was 66%. Praise was only given in 31% of stories, but the frame remains strong because in 66% of articles (188), there was a ‘win-win’ focus to the narrative.

This represents mostly a public relations success for StarTimes, because the majority of articles covered business relations. However, the aid-related 10,000 Villages Project also reflected the strong frame, as the project was a result of

agreements on country levels. Narratives around the project were indicative of China's ability to promote the story of its development assistance engagement with African communities, albeit with certain factors of the PPP obscured, which will be discussed later.

Embedded within 10,000 Villages Project stories are the political characteristics China's aid assistance principles, a narrative of shared interests with Global South populations rather than narrow self-interest. This is along the lines of the CCP 'community with shared future' doctrine (Huaxia 2020b). China has become particularly aware of the need for careful messaging of its motivations in Africa due to the prevalence of discourses such as debt-trap diplomacy and new colonialism (Brautigam 2020, DeBoom 2020).

In StarTimes coverage, China's motivations for the project are framed to be driven by friendship. A Chinese ambassador to Nigeria speaks of infrastructure projects fostering friendship between China and Nigeria (The Poise Nigeria 2019). A Chinese embassy official dubbed it "a milestone of cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and Zambia" (Darmalingum 2018a). Yet another Chinese official claimed that "projects that will better the lot of Nigerians and Africans at large, assuring the friendship between China and Nigeria via infrastructural projects" (Rafter 2019). And because of the StarTimes role, this shows an overlap of public relations and public diplomacy (Signitzer and Coombs 1992, L'Etang 2009), a convergence of company and country priorities.

However, at times the Concord frame was undermined. In Ghana, while friendship is the China enabled narrative, a counter framing aligned to the China threat theory (Hartig 2018) is raised by the Ghana Independent Broadcaster Association (GIBA). The story “Local firms will get tax waiver for similar ‘StarTimes’ 300 villages project” criticized the government for “furthering Chinese interests through the tax waiver” (Balancing Act 2018c). This headline not only conflates StarTimes with the Chinese government, it also raises the specter of China as a new colonial power undermining sovereignty (Mead 2018). However, while this illustrates that the company is observed as a proxy for PRC power, the fault is also framed as being with the Ghanaian government more than China, suggesting Ghanaian accountability.

Narratives around China’s motivations are mixed among African media professional interviewees. For a frame to be truly strong, it must be accepted by publics, and this ‘Concord’ type construction of relations in news coverage has met with varied perceptions - an inevitability as the company grapples with proximity to the PRC party state perception issues while glocalizing across Africa. The StarTimes Marketing Manager (2019) aligns with a win-win element of the news coverage by viewing the project as beneficial all round - for China, Kenya and StarTimes. “It is positive for the Chinese government, so if the government in Kenya realizes the Chinese government cares enough for Kenyan people to use a Chinese company to extend free services to the community, then it helps with

goodwill either way, both with the government and to the company StarTimes. Then we are in good books because we are implementers of the Chinese project.”

However, echoing the GIBA complaint, China’s motivations have other respondents concerned. Media Scholar B 2019 narrated the initiative in squarely China threat terms. “The 10,000 Villages Satellite Project is just meant to drive the Chinese agenda across Africa,” she believes. She continues thus:

“This will in turn further the Chinese regime and soft power in Africa. The project was launched by the Chinese President himself while in South Africa, and [he] awarded the tender to StarTimes to connect these villages. People, without noticing what damage this will bring, are happy to view international channels and when the Chinese do whatever they want to in Africa later, people will have a soft spot for them.”

This suggests that the reputation battle for China is ongoing with regards to media professionals. This was more evidence that StarTimes and the ‘Chinese regime’ are viewed as one and the same, and that it was potentially undermining for StarTimes. The gap between the news image construction and interviewee narratives are a reminder that reality carries more weight than strategic messaging. The lack of coherence in news and media professional interviewee narrations points to uncomfortable real-world perceptions which no amount of public diplomacy or public relations can resolve. While StarTimes Marketing Manager 2019 was positive, he showed unwillingness to be directly associated with work another part of his own company is implementing due to the government connections. If company employees are ambivalent about the 10,000

Villages Project, this exposes a context where public relations and public diplomacy diverges.

Economic Consequences frame

For the Economic Consequences frame, the elements in a story to be identified were the following: (1) mention of financial losses or gains now (2) mention of the costs/degree of expense involved (3) reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action (4) mention of potential financial losses or gains in the future.

The Economic Consequences frame was found to be weak in the sample. With reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action, this was mentioned in 39% of stories (110). The exact same figures were also for costs and expenses. There was only a slight difference for the financial losses or gains now – 37% (105 stories). Future loss or gain was mentioned in only 39% of stories. This could be for a variety of reasons, which are discussed below.

Economic consequences: PPPs and development assistance

A possible reason for the weak economic consequences frame is that funding for infrastructure projects is a sensitive and complex issue in China-Africa relations. StarTimes news reports reveal that certain factors are chosen to be either highlighted or omitted regarding PPP structures. Caution could be due to the fact that there has been a pervasive narrative in English-language media that Chinese

loans will trap African countries with debt (Brautigam 2020) and lead to a new form of colonialism (el-Shafei and Metawe 2021). Sometimes there are reports of what happens when PPP contracts fail: for example, in Namibia, a council's failure to pay a Chinese contractor that installed pre-paid meters led to the residents having their water shut off (Kooper 2021).

Therefore, there has been an effort to downplay the disadvantages of economic diplomacy. This can be seen in the coverage of the 10,000 Villages Project in Nigeria. Television sets, 21 channels and broadcast satellite systems are described as being "free of charge" to villagers (Rafter 2019). This 'free of charge' narrative supports the 'public' side of the PPP by driving the 'friendship' frame, in opposition to the 'debt-trap' discourse. Coverage might lead people to believe that the freebie is open-ended. Chinese state support underwrites costs in the sense that the 10,000 Villages Project is under-written by the South-South Cooperation Fund and initially subscription is free in the village within which it is established (NTV Uganda 2018). That validates some of the coverage of the project which would aid public diplomacy aims. One Kenyan story states "120 households in village of Saina, in the county of Kajiado, will have access to the StarTimes digital television service, free of charge" (Chunikiah 2016b). Similarly, "The Chinese government is giving us equipment to the tune of about \$3 million for the expansion of satellite TV to 300 communities in Ghana for free" Ghana's Communications Minister, Ursula Owusu-Ekufu is quoted as saying (Balancing Act 2018).

However, the reality of a Chinese PPP arrangement for development assistance is more complex. China's policy of assistance is mostly in the guise of 'cooperation' rather than western style free money 'aid'. 10,000 Villages Project news stories in Kenya and Ghana obfuscate certain critical factors regarding *overall* costs of allowing StarTimes a role in media development. After the first month, the free subscription bundle of channels expires (Schluntz 2020), and households must choose whether to subscribe to the paid for channels as well as keeping the free-to-air (FTA) offerings.

This is where the 'private' side of the PPP takes over, contingent on loans. Policy dictates that in order for StarTimes to enter a contract with a country, the African government is obligated take out a loan with Exim Bank. Loans from Exim Bank form the backdrop to most StarTimes initiatives in Kenya and therefore, it is the African taxpayer who must refund the loan (Onjala 2018). Subscriptions are to pay off these Exim Bank loans and if the 25-year length of the Zambia partnership with StarTimes TopStar is a measure (Deutsche Welle 2019), this will potentially take decades. Therefore, expectations that African rural citizens will become consumers of StarTimes premium TV channels need management.

Journalist E from Kenya 2019 narrates the financial issue by looking at both sides. He states:

Actually, there can be positives. One is they are allowing people in impoverished villages to access television, people who didn't know television before. But the danger is that most of these people being reached do not understand what is going on. They don't understand the danger, they only consume what is being

fed to them. They do not question. The middle class who use a lot of social media are the ones talking about the Chinese loan.

This quote highlights two things. Firstly, there is an awareness of the digital divide conundrum, and empathy for rural dwellers. However, the quote also draws attention to the difference between the city and village thinking, with more urban residents aware of the financial obligations towards China. Thus, once again, the Kenyan StarTimes Marketing Manager (2019) is the bridge between all sides. He emphasized that the poor are the financial beneficiaries: “the very nature of this project is that it’s for the poor people, the less privileged, so we don’t expect them to watch it today and tomorrow they are buying because they don’t have money, that’s why we are taking them satellite TV under this project.” The manager therefore has spun Kenyan debt to China into a feelgood story about assistance for the impoverished. It appears that public diplomacy is contingent upon less the news constructions but more on the human resources of glocalization and indigenization that have a vested interest in StarTimes succeeding. These borrowed boats (Cook 2020), straddling Chinese and African worlds, are essential for China’s image cultivation.

Village stories shaping concord and economic consequences framing

For public diplomacy generation, the framing of support from the public is vital. Therefore it is also worth looking at how Villages Project beneficiaries are framed in the sample; narratives around village dwellers reveal how they are constructed, along with the connection between them and China’s international development

cooperation. In the first part of this chapter views among village interviewees revealed strong satisfaction with the project and considerable consumption of programming that served to define China's image in a positive way. Therefore, it is interesting to examine how this is portrayed in the media.

The first noticeable element is that stories focus on shaping narratives around granting assistance and what will be received from StarTimes, with villagers and the village itself of secondary importance. This is a reminder that the PPP project was not conceived out of democratic negotiations with villagers given agency. Therefore, the villagers are constructed as passive recipients, with the western style 'new public diplomacy' style of interaction mostly absent. In Nigeria, StarTimes is described as bringing the project to "an underdeveloped rustic community" (Ramjan 2017), which promotes the notion of Chinese economic diplomacy as a much-needed saviour. This dimension bolsters the public diplomacy strategy.

Further stories provide exact data regarding the number of households receiving satellite dishes, set top boxes, television sets and decoders. Notable, however, is the fact that many of the donations do not in fact go to people's individual homes. This suggests the targeting of local elites or institutions which can reach villagers who still lack access at home, which are both methods to influence public opinion. One story states that "2,400 public institutions will be connected through a satellite projector TV system and 32-inch TV sets" (Balancing Act Africa

2018c). Similarly, in a Zambia related story, it is claimed that “Approximately 500 schools, villages and other community centers in Zambia have received television sets through the Chinese-funded satellite project” (Balancing Act Africa, 2019).

This signals China’s approach to development that is an alternative to neoliberal economics. Granting access in a way that provides a place to watch television outside home-based subscription – fulfilling the ‘public’ in PPP – is a clear departure from the market-orientated, privatized model of pay television. The break from western norms is also symbolic of the separation from the Washington Consensus, which brought deregulation but not widespread affordable television to Africa from the 1990s onwards (as mentioned in previous chapters). This China development contrast, prioritizing those without high disposable incomes, may promote China’s public diplomacy. This seems premised on de-coupling the idea of progress and technological advancement from the spread of democracy.

This focus on the rural village beneficiaries may distract from the costs faced by those who did not benefit from the villages project. The villages seem to be the fortunate test case for Chinese diplomacy engagement, designed to yield future goodwill dividends. This seems to be the view of the Kenyan StarTimes marketing manager 2019 who sees the long-term strategy behind the project:

“I wouldn’t say it’s a product that is designed to get us numbers on the subscriber base. It’s a product to sensitize the communities, to domesticize digital TV technologies, and to show that StarTimes has brought it from the level of expensive, it is impossible for me to have it, to that [level] even the people in the remote areas can actually have it because of the pricing and the packaging of StarTimes. So, if we are seen that way, then the brand StarTimes is seen as

one that cares more for the local person, we win them over that way. We can never judge our success in the market based on the project. The main reason is to show the day to day person, the common man, the poor guy, that this technology is for you, you can actually have it” (2016).

His words therefore help to crystallize the Chinese state capitalist model of development. The Washington consensus is not completely abandoned, but the PPP vehicle provides intermediary steps to scaffold the cultivation of consumer habits according to market economy principles. Villager perceptions must first be oriented to expect television. News stories are therefore being used to pave the way for eventual villager subscriptions.

In addition, by linking development assistance to the arrival in villages of high technology, a narrative of modernity is propagated in stories. Thus, China is associated with technological advancement in three ways: through the satellite infrastructure, through CGTN content and via news stories of technology donation. Another positive outcome to China’s involvement in narrowing the digital divide, according to press in Nigeria, is that the project would “democratize access to information and entertainment” (SCIO 2019). This framing complements the earlier finding in this chapter that rural residents mostly watched television to access entertainment and information. In Zambia, the project merits included enabling communities to “stay informed about what was happening in the country” and “reduce the levels of illiteracy and poverty” (Balancing Act Africa 2019b). The illiteracy aspect aligns with praise for StarTimes from school authorities which received TV access packages.

The influence of PR

News coverage for the 10 Villages Project overall was overtly positive, heavily influenced by publicity materials rather than original reporting. Thus, the contracted out public diplomacy by this nonstate actor was heavily weighted towards PR-type news and a track two diplomacy agenda was fulfilled.

However, neither public relations nor public diplomacy was suitable to influence interviewees who held highly sceptical views. A lack of transparency over economic diplomacy action plans exposed the limitations of strategic messaging methods. Comments by interviewees revealed legitimate financial and political concerns, which could be representative of a trust deficit with certain populations. In addition, while there is a genuinely important initiative underway with the satellite access provision, the low number of stories suggest sometimes a StarTimes detachment from the activity. This could also be related to a reluctance to being seen as a proxy for China.

4.6 Conclusion

The 10,000 Villages Project is a China-Africa initiative to bridge an urban-rural television digital divide in Africa. This Chinese-led economic diplomacy imprint stamped across African heartlands holds potentially long-term repercussions for image and reputation building and therefore is in support of the Chinese

government's international interests. The initiative represents coordinated efforts at FOCAC, nonstate actor and CGTN levels.

At the FOCAC multilateral level, the PPP development programmes are enabling China to capitalize on Africa's digital deficits. The nonstate actor – contracted by the governments of Africa and China – puts policy into practice by producing the satellite infrastructure to enable rural areas to receive television via a dish. The question for this research was how the 10,000 Villages Project, an emblem of FOCAC policy, was perceived by Africans and constructed in StarTimes media coverage. The answer to this would reveal how this development assistance project influences China's public diplomacy by improving the image of China among Africans.

The research results show that the project has been warmly received in villages. After lack of access to TV for decades, villagers are grateful to be prioritized. If the images were designed to "make China palatable" and to "help China win friends and allies" (D'Hooghe 2014:3), this task seems to have succeeded with rural residents. The role of China has raised goodwill on three levels. On the state level, this development cooperation is connected to China's country reputation repair, and may help foster closer relations which lead to African nation's lining up to support China when it is criticized over human rights issues (Olander 2019, Putz 2020). On a China nonstate-state level, there are also advantages for StarTimes. The proximity to government probably added legitimacy and validity in the eyes

of the population. The content was highly popular, called informative and entertaining. StarTimes seems to have a good reputation as a company and therefore benefited from positive PR in terms of name recognition and reputation. PPP seems to provide the mechanism through which a Chinese nonstate actor has the financial resources to innovate and show flexibility and efficiency. With regards to CGTN and StarTimes relationship level, improved access to CGTN has helped with Beijing's messaging of its own path to development, which meets with approval of respondents. These company and country interdependencies means the state and nonstate perceptions in the eyes of subscribers do not exist – they are one and the same.

With media coverage however, a different pattern emerged. There was only a small percentage of stories on the 10,000 Villages Project, despite the enormous size of the venture. While both African and Chinese political officials are mentioned, including at local level, there was no strong China frame. The low profile suggests a StarTimes reluctance for there to be a convergence in the images of the company and country.

Similar to the minor media coverage illustrating ambivalence to government ties, there were mixed results in the interviews with city media professionals. There was a desire from the StarTimes spokesperson to keep a distance from the project due to government connections. While the nonstate actor is intrinsic to the implementation of PPP contracts and development cooperation increases China

awareness, state relations may make some nonstate actors uncomfortable in the international arena because public diplomacy is not the direct aim of companies. StarTimes is concerned to be viewed as a pan-African brand, rather than a contractor held in private, foreign hands and linked to an autocratic state. In the coming two chapters devoted to the profit-orientated StarTimes projects, stories are dominated by public relations-led news briefings on business development matters. This indicates that StarTimes prefers project fulfilment that has public relations rather than public diplomacy outcomes. The PPP arrangement tying the company to the government in this chapter's project could mask a reluctance for there to be too much integration between the state and a nonstate actor.

Aside from the StarTimes spokesperson, other media professionals demonstrated a keen awareness of the role of China in the project, but came to very different conclusions to village residents. Far from being supportive and grateful, several are openly hostile due to suspicions regarding China's motivations. Media and technology concentration in Chinese control is a trend which some – particularly rival companies - may hold misgivings about, especially if such power is weaponized for geopolitical ends (Russel and Berger 2020).

But while StarTimes wants to be seen as autonomous, it needs state support, so the hybrid nature of the PPP is likely to remain. Turning the village residents into customers will not happen overnight: interviews with villagers revealed that respondents were watching FTA African channels and free CGTN rather than

premium priced bouquets such as Kenyan channel Rembo. The economic consequences frame in news reports was weak, and where it existed, coverage of money issues in the press focused on 'free' equipment given to villagers, thus downplaying financial constraints. Thus, the PPP structure provides some financial security for the company. Long-term patience could be required for the partnership to reap profit dividends through indigenous content.

More will be said in coming chapters focused on the profit-orientated projects of StarTimes regarding how the financial side of the PPP is framed in news coverage and the perception of loans among media professionals. However, briefly here it should be noted that StarTimes coverage shows sensitivity to limited budgets. The StarTimes contract with the state broadcaster in Zambia called TopStar is 25 years long (Public Media Alliance 2017), and a similar length deal may be necessary in Kenya to give sufficient time to recoup expenditure on broadcasting development such as refurbishment of studios. This is therefore an argument in defence of the support system granted by coordination and cooperation between multilateral, state and nonstate parties. PPP is indicative of how mutual interests of several parties can be served with the alignment of objectives between stakeholders.

Theoretical implications

China's approach of multilateral, state and nonstate coordination presents clear repercussions for public diplomacy theory. PPPs fit with Pamment's idea of a development project as public diplomacy (2015). The evidence in this chapter

partly comes from the wholehearted public support from village project beneficiaries. The presence of a Concord frame in media reports suggests that mostly the coverage has been mostly benign. But the difference with Cull's concept of public diplomacy using broadcasting (2008) is that in the PPP model, broadcasting for public diplomacy is facilitated by the private sector, fitting the track two diplomacy theory. Cull's concept catered for state-run CGTN, but not private entity StarTimes, through which public diplomacy is outsourced for efficiency. However, ultimately, the state is still in control, with power running from the state down to the contractor, then to the citizen. This means villagers do not play a role in a dialogue with state forces or co-create public diplomacy. This conceptualization of public diplomacy, although involving nonstate actors, is still state-centric (Ayhan 2018) and integrated with a top-down approach towards development.

The PPP dimension perhaps inserts more flexibility, and diplomacy theory needs to account for it. But it still runs counter to the 'new' public diplomacy thesis and decolonialising development. It is not interactive public diplomacy, e.g. the network communication approach as favoured by Zaharna (2007, 2014) in which audiences participate. This version of public diplomacy linked to PPP contracts still plays into the China versus the West dichotomy with regards to the role of a nonstate actor and concepts of public diplomacy. The coordination seems designed to create spheres of dependency by nonstate actors within which public diplomacy, such as an improved image of China, will be produced. In this case, the

PPP run by StarTimes has been a great success. However, in other cases, a nonstate actor must consider if coordinating with the state serves its identity as an autonomous organization. In addition, a company undertaking PPP contracts needs a strategy to handle the public diplomacy expectations that come with using taxpayer funds for development assistance. The hybrid nature of the company results in a chameleon, shape-shifting nature which means that it can be responsive rather than solely state-determined public diplomacy, a development the Party-state has long needed, but the extent of the independence is questionable.

The next chapter continues to examine the intertwining of fortunes of the China state and this nonstate company with another project area. This new angle, highlighting a profit-orientated area of StarTimes business illustrates how within a PPP, the distinction between 'state' and 'nonstate' is blurred. In addition, the news coverage and interviews will show the ways the nonstate is subject to opportunities and constraints in its relationship to the state. These factors have consequences for the nonstate contribution to public diplomacy, for instance, the times in which the public diplomacy remit strengthens or diminishes.

Chapter Five: The StarTimes PPP – key framing factors

5.1 Introduction

The previous findings chapter focused on the 10,000 Villages Project and explored nonstate company StarTimes as part of aid project outsourcing and image dissemination. China could signal its status as being in solidarity with the Global South, projecting an image of a leading developing nation (Pu 2019). By looking at China's development assistance, the role of StarTimes and the response of Africans, the former chapter could partly explore this question: *What is the image of the 10,000 Villages Project and how does it impact the image of China?* The focus was more closely linked to the public / government rather than private / business side of the PPP, as assisting television provision through satellite infrastructure was to serve rural communities in Kenya impacted by the digital divide.

That chapter illuminated how nonstate actor involvement in PPP contracts brought it into closer proximity to the state. The 10,000 Villages Project contracting out to a private enterprise meant nonstate, indirect involvement in public engagement through development assistance. In the process of filling a digital divide gap, a hybrid was coherence and coordination between state and nonstate resources and tools. In addition, coordination between China's state broadcaster and StarTimes was evident in the fact that CGTN output was widely consumed by rural residents. StarTimes and CGTN worked in tandem, thereby improving public diplomacy outcomes through content.

This was despite attempts to limit mention of China in StarTimes news coverage, to avoid convergence of company and country images. While public diplomacy remained state-led, as a contractor StarTimes became a face and instrument of Beijing's development assistance. Both the reputation of StarTimes and China were subsequently influenced in positive ways.

The question for this chapter is how the state-nonstate dynamic manifests itself in a different context, the profit-oriented side of the PPP, and how such involvement is interpreted in news and by Africans. For this chapter, the focus is development cooperation of FOCAC action plans in private, business dimensions of the PPP with regards to African media content and technological assistance linked to digital migration. Similar to the previous chapter, an aim is to see once again whether news coverage for company strategic messaging also includes the framing of China. The extent to which company and country images are positive or negative, and are seen as separate or connected, are topics to be explored.

This area is examined through another look at the framing of topics in the 283-article sample, as introduced in the previous chapter, this time with a focus on business ventures linked to participation in African media ecosystems. Also as before, the sample is subjected to closer, qualitative scrutiny to uncover narratives related to African media and the role played by StarTimes and China as part of PPP arrangements. In addition, interviews with media professionals from several African countries are drawn upon to gather perceptions, which allows for

comparison and contrast with semi-structured interviews. This chapter is a response to the second research question, *What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African media eco-systems and how does it impact the image of China?* Implications for public diplomacy and country image building will be drawn from this examination of news coverage and interviews.

The news coverage findings are presented to first discuss the presence or absence of frames. Then closer qualitative scrutiny is given, focused on news topics relevant to a particular frame. The same broad topics are covered in interviews with media professionals, but within the topics there may be a focus on different issues.

Findings

Table 4: Components of frame

Components of frames (Entman, 1993)	% Yes	N. of stories	% No	N. of stories
Is there a problem definition?	13%	37	87%	246
Is there a causal interpretation?	12%	33	87%	247
Is there a moral evaluation?	7%	19	93%	264
Is there a treatment recommendation?	12%	33	88%	250

According to Entman (1993), frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. However, as can be seen from the high ‘no’ answer percentage, these frame components were largely absent in the news texts in this sample. This perhaps suggests that the news style of western news media is not followed by a Chinese company. For example, stories are not

necessarily based on a problem, as is usually the case in western journalism hard news, so there is unlikely to be a ‘problem definition’ or a particular actor in a story usually framed as ‘wrong’ or ‘right’, providing a moral evaluation. The less confrontational approach means that StarTimes reflects the focus on the positive, hence the heavy weighting towards an upbeat sentiment in stories:

Table 5: Sentiment in stories

Sentiment	No. of stories	%
Positive	256	90
Negative	27	10

This is also confirmed by the word frequency query results, which show the overwhelming positive nature of the content, as can be seen below:

Table 6: Word frequency level

Frequency Level	Word
Over 100 times	entertainment (178), free (172), service (153), best (109) enjoy (107) available (91), added (92), offer (83), provide (73)
Between 50 and 99 times	development (94) quality (83), exclusive (80), like (80), leading (62)
Between 20-49 times	affordable (46), help (37), exciting (36), popular (32), classic (30), support (30), opportunities (29), unique (28), excited (26), good (25), enable (24), win (24), expansion (23), accessible (21), great (21), hope (20)
11-19 times	love (19), success (19), improve (18), interesting (16), successful (16), winning (16), competitive (15), exclusively (15), convenience (14), appeal (13), delighted (13), enjoying (13), rich (13), strong (13), successfully (13), upgrade (13), engaging (12), friendship (12), modern (12), entertaining (11), favourite (11), favorite (11), proud (11), special (11).

Only one word in the top 200 used could be described as negative: challenges (used 14 times). This preference for positive words is possibly linked to the preponderance in the sample of journalism generated through the re-writing of StarTimes press releases.

The absence of this frame, and the omitted focus on problems, can also be confirmed by the tone of articles about StarTimes, which was overwhelmingly positive at 86%. This is likely to have an impact on image building. Public perceptions can be influenced by the narrative tone of media reports (Lunenberg et al, 2016), and further, the news tone can influence public opinions of political issues (Jacobs and Meeusen 2020). However, whether a positive, negative or neutral tone of stories in this particular case study had an impact on perceptions of the company and China is an area this research sought to investigate through comparing news constructions with African perceptions.

First, the narrative tone in the news stories is elaborated upon. It was overwhelmingly positive (see below), based largely on agreements between parties, usually linked to new contracts.

Table 7: Article Tone

Article Tone	Values	No. of stories	%
	Negative	13	5
	Neutral	14	5
	Pos and Neg	12	4
	Positive	244	86

Innovation frame

The new commercial liaisons will be discussed further in this chapter with a look at the 'Concord' frame. But here the 'Innovation' frame is introduced, to reflect upon the image of the business side to the PPP. As elaborated upon in the theoretical framework, this is an issue specific frame, chosen to highlight the emphasis on private enterprise in the FOCAC action plan – the 'win-win' aspect of development assistance partnerships. The Innovation frame figures were as follows:

Table 8: Innovation frame

Innovation Frame	% Yes	No. of stories	% No	No. of stories
Does the story provide an example of new partnerships?	85%	240	15%	43
Does the story focus on an individual/country is responsible for the innovation?	96%	273	4%	10
Does the story suggest people's behaviour would change due to the innovation?	8%	22	92%	261
Does the story suggest a life improvement due to the innovation?	12%	34	88%	249

This frame was strong, given the emphasis on actors and actions centred on new partnerships in two elements of the frame. Pay television channel relations in stories were described as cooperative, with the overriding upbeat narrative being that StarTimes is constantly adding content that subscribers would enjoy. For instance, in the story 'AMC and StarTimes Introduces TV Series Asunder'

(Chunikiah 2017a) both the content provider African Movie Channel (AMC) and StarTimes offer mutually supportive quotes. AMC Managing Director at Yinka Mayungbo comments that viewers will find the show “exciting, educative and engaging” while StarTimes Head of Public Relations Israel Bolaji proclaims, “With the launch of *Asunder*, entertainment on AMC and StarTimes will go some notch higher and glue viewers to their seats for pleasurable hours.” The domination of this type of tone and innovation through fresh content speaks to the level of influence StarTimes and its content providers have been able to exercise over the tone of the news output.

However, a more complex picture regarding innovative commercial ties emerges with the negative narratives in a minority of stories (5%). While small in number, these reports fall outside PR under StarTimes strategic messaging control and pertain to broader issues of the company’s African track record as a PPP implementing projects. As a result, these stories are more far reaching in their public diplomacy implications. Although the aforementioned story regarding AMC suggests that StarTimes conducts fruitful relations with pay-TV content providers, a narrative of rivalry between StarTimes and African media organisations is evident with regards to relations with Free-to-Air (FTA) stations. FTA broadcasters represent a key stakeholder group in African television who can impact StarTimes public relations as well as China’s public diplomacy and country image reputation building. Tensions have arisen linked to digital migration in Kenya due to rival media organisations (Telecommunications Management Group 2017, Wekesa

2013). One negative story from Ghana centred on StarTimes losing a digitalisation contract to an African company:

It didn't carry out the contract and missed the deadline. StarTimes took the Government to Court for not honoring the original contract and the issue was that China's Exim Bank would not pay out the loan because the contract was awarded to a Ghanaian company (Southwood 2019).

These findings reveal that while the company is able to innovate, StarTimes engagement problems exist. But the small focus on these problems - narrow, business orientated discourses presenting an overall positive picture of the company - also indicates a desire to steer clear of issues linked to the China nation-state agenda. Mentions of Chinese banks are few. The problem is that StarTimes public relations mask the complex reality of links with African media systems and development assistance in practice.

StarTimes and other contractors are the foot soldiers of change – the implementors of the transition from FOCAC policy to 'win-win cooperation' in practice. They are the grassroots face of economic diplomacy. The profit-gearred side of the StarTimes PPP benefits from policies such as digital migration contracts agreed through FOCAC, so cannot entirely detach its image from China and the repercussions of opposition and resentment by some native stakeholders. As Wang puts it, "Negative climates of public opinion about a certain country casts a shadow on the companies and brands of that country, as they compete against local companies" (2006:45). For instance, FTAs became accustomed to the norm where they would cater to the audience majority while pay television catered to

the minority - the elites who could afford international sport and entertainment. But then along came StarTimes backed by superior political, technological and financial resources to create new channels and programmes which aimed to compete with the same audiences as FTAs, disrupting the status quo.

Development Assistance

StarTimes innovation is linked to its development assistance role. The fact that negative stories are a tiny minority illustrates that StarTimes has succeeded in news coverage to put its case forward strongly as a good Samaritan in African broadcasting development assistance. As well as positive tone news coverage which portrays StarTimes as an innovative company, stories align directly with the FOCAC premise of China providing assistance to deal with African media development problems. These assistance areas not only signal the Chinese method of aid deliverance, but also can lead to public diplomacy outcomes. According to Pamment, “the act of giving aid can in itself be considered a form of public diplomacy” (2016: 9). Development assistance is in alignment with China’s image building as the Global South leader but also is portrayed “in moral language” for domestic public diplomacy purposes, as Chinese publics are “skeptical of providing resources to other countries while China itself is still developing” (Glaser 2021).

The 10,000 Villages Project chapter said that the China frame was weak, but aspects of it were still important in revealing political power in China-Africa

relations. As a consequence of development assistance, there is mention of the annual Digital TV Development seminar, held in Beijing. The seminar involved a meeting hosted in China to introduce African media and communication officials to StarTimes. Because ambassadors and Chinese and African government representatives are the facilitators of action, this could be viewed as sponsorship by political actors (Carragee and Roefs 2004). The mention of the seminar draws attention to the StarTimes alignment to state policies, revealing the nonstate actor role in their implementation.

Also among these occasional stories is news related to education and civil society, and these seem linked to public diplomacy efforts. It was notable that StarTimes group president Pang Xinxing was quoted with regards to the employment impact that StarTimes would have ('StarTimes to provide more job opportunities and empower African young people' Ghana Web 2017). Engagement in development assistance is linked to improving economies (Guillén and Suárez 2005), which would also help China's image. Therefore, job creation is a crucial area touted by StarTimes Kenya CEO David Zhang (Balancing Act 2018c).

Similarly, StarTimes Vice President Guo Ziqi was quoted in another civil society related story ('StarTimes rolls out app to increase HIV /Aids awareness in Kenya', Darmalingum 2018c). Normally public relations managers are quoted, so these exceptions are significant, especially as they are public diplomacy orientated. It appears that when a story involves high level public diplomacy matters, it is

considered of special importance enough for high profile leaders to provide quotes. However, education and civil society related texts represented only 3% of stories, due to the ‘private’ aspect of the PPP emphasized more in texts.

From the point of view of China’s companies, dealing with such development issues helps them to articulate a company image – rather than a country image - of development assistance. The list of topics in the table below indicates the StarTimes news coverage. StarTimes image is highly related to the provision of assistance in media, technological and economic areas. For instance, in media content, accounting for half of stories there is broadcasting rights for sports programming and subscription drive marketing. With regards to ‘Economic aid’, this had the third highest number of stories, at 17%. This category was largely dedicated to stories linked to the fulfilment of the StarTimes pledge to make pay television affordable to middle-income Africans (Tsika 2018, Ekwujuru 2020), thus different from other pay TV companies that catered only to urban elites.

Table 9: Development assistance areas

Development assistance areas	Values	No.	%
	Economic aid	57	17
	Educational	8	2
	Media content	172	51
	Other	5	1
	Technological	96	28

However, while the ‘Media Content’ category is dominated by broadcasting rights-type news, it also includes stories on indigenous programming development, which could yield public diplomacy outcomes. This is discussed in more detail in a later section on the importance of television in African languages. It fits with China’s cultural diplomacy approach, which espouses appreciation, support and sharing cultural roots (Ibrahim 2021). It also counters the argument against the importation of Chinese dramas, which some believe undermines homegrown output (The Nation 2016).

Article Type: the positive messaging battleground

The positive tone and focus on key development assistance cooperation projects is dependent on StarTimes public relations output. Findings reveal that the image forged by StarTimes is heavily reliant on news that is linked to press release documents issued by marketing and public relations departments – 61% from its own sources, and 19% from partners. PR that has been turned into a news story from either StarTimes or one of its partners accounted for 80% of coverage.

Table 10: Article Type

Article Type	Values	No.	%
	News and comment	54	17
	other	7	3
	StarTimes content provider PR-related news	59	19
	StarTimes related PR related news	190	61

This shows how StarTimes has depended heavily on controlled messaging to influence newspaper articles. On the one hand, this is one of the 'external' factors mentioned by De Vreese, in that this is an influence on journalism from outside forces. On the other hand, the dependency by newsrooms on public relations is an 'internal' factor, perhaps linked to editorial resources. In this research, it has enabled the company to avoid negative connotations which dominate other Chinese companies in Africa. There is a clear example of the notion that "Different media formats, types or genres set different limits for what can be articulated, by whom, through which format or context" (Hansen and Machin 2013:99). The lower profile compared to Huawei means StarTimes has succeeded in a type of self-presentation (Batchelor and Zhang 2017), contributing to the ability to generate stories which promote favourable agendas (McCombs 2004).

PR approaches can assist public diplomacy (Lee and Jun 2013), when they have similar goals, such as issues management and enhancing relations with stakeholders (L'Etang 2009) and therefore complement each other. However, findings support the view of Signitzer and Coombs (2002) that PR and PD are not interchangeable. The results suggest that public relations in news media is suitable for storytelling, but influencing public perceptions is a more difficult stage in carrying out public diplomacy related tasks linked to FOCAC action plans. StarTimes related narrow PR was not responsive to the FTA dominated context, and thus reputation risks are possible. And when public relations and public

diplomacy do become intertwined, this can undermine the image of both the company and the country.

Economic Consequences frame

In the previous chapter, economic consequences was found not to be a strong frame – discussion of financial relations of the PPP are minimized or omitted. However, because of debt-trap diplomacy discourses elsewhere in African and western press, and concerns expressed by city-based interviewees in this research, this remains a major area of concern. This finding exposes a major gap between news constructions and perceptions which is having a strong negative influence on public diplomacy among media professionals, who are a key stakeholder group.

StarTimes has always cast itself as ‘affordable’ pay TV in its narrative constructions (Balancing Act Africa, 2015). Finance related StarTimes stories linked to profit making dimensions of the PPP are concerned with reduced subscription rates and slashed prices for set top boxes and pay-as-you-go subscription in Nigeria, all to reduce the financial burden in the digital migration process.

But while there is public diplomacy value in presenting StarTimes as affordable, the messaging is sometimes misleading. There is a lack of emphasis in stories on the fact that this development assistance PPP is not western style foreign aid. StarTimes in stories sometimes neglects to mention that the free access to

channels as part of the 10,000 Villages Project lasts only a month, and the expansion of programming is paid for by Exim Bank loans that require repayment. The headlines such as ‘StarTimes invests \$220 million in Nigeria’ (Forrester 2019), framed as free money, do not tell the full story. The launch of new channels in Ghana and Kenya also were marketed along similar lines. But stories do not emphasize that local language Adepa TV in Ghana and Rembo TV in Kenya are reliant on loans. Solving Africa’s digital divide problem and starting new channels is *equally* about supporting a Chinese contractor: if there was no ‘win-win’ model of development cooperation, no loans from Chinese banks would be forthcoming.

Through interviews, the idea of ‘aid’ is unpacked, with the narrative of free money discarded, and suspicions regarding China’s motives are brought to the fore.

Journalist E 2019 describes the provision of StarTimes TV to viewers this way:

like someone feeling sick, and they are being treated. They don’t know the impact of the medicine they are being given. It is going to have a long-term side effect. They are feeling happy that the pain has gone. I blame the Kenyan government, because they are allowing this to happen. They should take precautions, save their people. At the end of the day, it’s the people who are going to suffer, the people who are going to pay back the loan.

Journalist E 2019 also contradicts the ‘free’ digital migration depiction: “Many people cannot afford to own television sets. If they own, there’s a challenge because in 2018 or thereabouts, Ghana moved from analogue to digital television, it means that you must pay towards TV.”

Thus, there are three competing narratives around economic consequences.

‘Development assistance’ as structured by China according to a so-called ‘win-win’

basis in FOAC agreements, is often portrayed as free-of-charge 'foreign aid' as delivered by western countries. Secondly there are 'loans' in the minds of Africans, and thirdly in Anglo-American media, the 'debt-trap diplomacy' discourse looms (Brautigam 2020, Taylor 2020, Carmody 2020). While 'debt-trap diplomacy' did not appear in the newspaper coverage in this research, this latter narrative is clearly close to the 'loans' discourse of interviewees. By contrast, village interviewees for the 10,000 Villages Project chapter are clearly influenced by China's 'development assistance' terminology, which signifies the gap between rural and urban perceptions. It is clear that the public relations attempts at image building faces problems in cities, where public diplomacy messages regarding China-Africa relations are treated with suspicion. This is related to greater access to Anglo-American media and in Kenya, concern about the China built rail service SGR, a transport link which has been beset with debt problems (Taylor 2020). There is a danger that the wider issue of loans from China may have a negative impact on the image of StarTimes if it is associated with PRC financing.

Economic concerns as well as poor perceptions of China have increased concerns regarding the power of StarTimes among native African media companies. Media Scholar A 2019 gives the background to the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) demands that StarTimes not be handed the contract for digital migration: "Local players in the TV industry raised a red flag against StarTimes joining the Ghanaian media market. In a market that is financially handicapped already, the presence of StarTimes is expected to worsen the plight of local

players.” Media Scholar B 2019, like Journalist E 2019, sees the soft power agenda behind the digital transition, but this is viewed negatively. “StarTimes gives the viewers a sense of being able to access international channels, especially those from China. People will then switch to view the channels, having StarTimes achieve their main target of sending a certain message to the viewers.” This, therefore, equates the StarTimes company image with the ‘China threat’ image which undermines public diplomacy. Cultivating influence with key stakeholders (Diamond and Schell 2018) is clearly hampered. The perception danger is that of a foreign, expensive (Chinese) interloper undermining indigenous and popular African television. StarTimes and by default China could be defined as the outsider force, a (new colonizer) disruption to the status quo, enabled by weak and corrupt national governments. If ‘China threat’, ‘debt-trap diplomacy’ ‘new colonial power’ discourses punctuate media reports which attack China’s initiatives, this undermines attempts at improving soft power (D’Hooghe 2014).

Concord frame

The findings above put the ‘Concord’ frame in sharp perspective. As said in the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, this was a strong frame. In this chapter, it is in sync with the positive tone and reliance on PR in news production. In addition, the Concord frame coheres with the notion that StarTimes and China through FOCAC are solving long-term problems of development assistance. The literature review and the chapter on the 10,000 Villages Project emphasized that television access

across Africa has always been limited, as colonial powers of Britain and France, as well as the Cold War foes the US and Russia, did little to extend television access across Africa. Although democracy and diversity of voices in broadcasting did increase in the 1990s (Mano 2016, Paterson 1998), in many countries, television penetration remains low (Digital switchover in Africa 2015). For example, according to the Rwanda Broadcasting Agency, only 20 per cent of citizens owns a TV set (Rwanda gets RWF 6 bln Star Times production studio grant, 2017). Insufficient resources, training and investment remain key limitations (BBC World Service Trust 2006). FOCAC agreements were based on StarTimes being welcomed in exchange for development assistance to change this pattern of media underdevelopment. The 2015 and 2018 FOCAC Action Plans narrated how China was to assist African countries in meeting the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) digital migration deadline, discussed in the 10,000 Villages Project chapter.

However, news construction is one thing, but perceptions are another. The lack of concord in some new relations is revealed in this story regarding a contractual issue – a closed bid being the problem – that came from Mozambique:

Right from the start, the StarTimes deal was mired in controversy. The anti-corruption NGO, the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP), warns that “without a public tender, there is no transparency”. Now, two years later, the original Startimes arrangement has been quietly pushed aside, and there will be a public tender (Balancing Act Africa, 2016a).

A failed PPP contract results in the second problem of poor press that impacts the reputation of both StarTimes and China, associating both with underhand

practices. And if a StarTimes project succeeds in the bidding process, that also can deliver negative headlines. If an African state has awarded StarTimes the project for digital migration, the company becomes involved with both its digital transmission infrastructure and new TV channels creation (Deutsche Welle 2019, Jalloh 2019), thus it wields substantial power over FTA companies.

In some countries including Kenya and Zambia, the power handed to StarTimes due to involvement in transmission signal distribution and channel creation created controversy (Deutsche Welle 2019, Telecommunications Management Group, 2017). The StarTimes relationship with the FTA channels in the sample, particular in stories linked to digitalisation, is cast as problematic in the Ghanaian, Kenyan, Zambian and Tanzanian press. In Ghana, opposition is from the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA). The following are example headlines implying StarTimes is a threat to Ghanaian sovereignty: 'Don't give away our broadcasting space to StarTimes – GIBA to Govt' (Adjei 2018) and "Don't hand digital migration contract to StarTimes – GIBA warns Govt' (Balancing Act Africa 2018b). In this aspect, the China threat theory has been transferred to StarTimes, showing a convergence of the company and the country in media constructions. StarTimes is still in the early stages of a pan-African indigenization process; it is still the outsider. Other FTA related negative stories include 'Tanzania mulling length of suspension for China's StarTimes Media' (Reuters 2018) and 'Kenyan broadcasters wage copyright war on GOTV, StarTimes' (Tirvengadam 2015) and 'FTA: Multichoice switched on in Zambia' (Balancing Act Africa 2018b). Literature

on African news coverage of China reveals one source of negativity are newspaper houses in Africa owned by media conglomerates with broadcasting connections which see StarTimes as a rival (Wekesa 2013). All reveal StarTimes problems implementing projects and building a good reputation. Interviews with media professionals, introduced below, not only provide the background to the tensions but also indicate why the negativity can have indirect repercussions for how China is perceived.

FTA channel operators had dominated the broadcasting infrastructure from post-colonial times. Under digital migration they had to be included in StarTimes bouquets (Eko 2019) and the 10,000 Villages Project respondents mentioned the FTA channels they watched. According to media professional interviewees, FTA television has long been popular across the African continent with the minority of the population who could afford access. For those with TV in Ghana and Kenya, FTA channels are preferred over pay television. Media Scholar A 2019 explains FTA TV importance to audiences. He mentioned Ghana Television (GTV), a state-owned FTA channel of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) that was established in 1965, which monopolised the airwaves for years. Other FTA stations he mentions are United Television, TV3, Joy News, and Metro TV. They are among the FTAs to emerge in the 1990s due to the airwaves liberalisation policy after the fall of the Soviet Union and technological advancements (Eko 2019). Media Scholar A 2019 surmises this way:

Considering the general economic atmosphere coupled with the low living standards of citizens, FTAs have over the years ensured affordability and access because viewers do not pay for TV viewing services. Moreover, an affordable 'one-time payment' for FTA Multi-TV decoders to access many stations enhanced pluralism and diversity of information.

Similarly in Kenya, StarTimes marketing manager 2019 acknowledged the importance of FTA channels.

Here, pay-TV does not compete among itself only, no. Here, pay-TV directly competes with free-to-air. The reason is, free-to-air may not have the foreign content you have, sport and all, but what free-to-air has is what the locals want. Free-to-air has local content and most of them have invested in producing that content, so a lot of Kenyans don't care about pay TV.

In theory, contributing to media and technological developments presents an excellent opportunity for StarTimes to score huge public diplomacy wins in Africa. However, as the newspaper articles indicate, the StarTimes involvement in the digital migration process disrupted the FTA model in African countries on many fronts. Digitalization and its benefits were meant to be explained to publics well in advance as part of the transition, but opposition was significant. The process meant extra expense for the signal, which was better quality than analogue but incurred a higher price and required a new set top box. Says Media Scholar B 2019:

When the country moved from the analogue to digital signal, companies like StarTimes took advantage to charge their customers to provide the signal, and even though this digital signal was better, TV became expensive. Free to air channels were the best for the country and the government should have just given the signal to the people without having to charge them, since many people are still not able to pay for the monthly subscriptions, since in most cases they have to choose between TV and basic household necessities.

It is clear that there are deep misgivings about the power wielded by StarTimes and by default China. However, as mentioned in the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, the China frame was weak because of the low frequency of country mentions. This once again points to news for company rather than country image building. That said, exceptions can be revealing. One story provides a contrast between how two content providers – both available via StarTimes - portray themselves in their press releases. Premium rate channel BBC Worldwide promotes itself as a world leading site of excellence in strictly market driven terms. By contrast, there is Beijing TV which paints its content in cultural exchange terms, to foster China-Africa relations. The news article ‘Beijing TV dramas movies broadcasting season for Africa opens in Zambia’ (Balancing Act Africa 2017a) includes quotes from diplomats and a discourse on friendship and cultural understanding. Thus, the Beijing TV orientation was towards public diplomacy and soft power accumulation. However, that story orientation was not typical of texts generally, in line with avoidance of conflating the StarTimes brand with nation branding. Only once was the Chinese Communist Party mentioned in a story: ‘StarTimes introduces digital TV project in Kenya’ (Chunikiah 2016b). Very unusually, a StarTimes representative is not even mentioned, as if to disassociate the company from the CCP.

However, with regards to interviewee perceptions, China is perceived as having a negative impact on the journalism shaping StarTimes, due to strong journalistic constraints. This partly links back to the earlier finding about the absence of the

'Components of frames' elements (Entman 1993) due to the different style of Chinese journalism. Journalist E 2019 found the editorial constraints problematic while doing a story on StarTimes in 2019:

Every time I tried contacting them, they kept saying they are not cleared to talk to the press. Most of the time you get the communications officer - you can't get to the experts. They are trying to control their image, so they don't want the other side to be told to the locals. I wanted to tell the other side of the story. Many people enjoy Chinese movies without knowing the agenda of China, what they want to do, put across, achieve.

And in the mind of Journalist E 2019, it is symptomatic of Kenya's alliance to China.

Regarding China-related issues, he explains:

If the journalist tries to come up with a story, the editor will look at it and say no no no, this is going to cause trouble. That exists because of the ownership of the media houses; some are owned by high-ranking individuals in the government. And because of political interests between the country and China, some of their stories will not see the light of day.

As a result, the company image is constructed with what are considered Chinese style practices, undermining attempts by StarTimes to be seen as independent. Press releases are associated with Chinese style journalism, as showcased by CGTN and China Daily, the major vehicles for public diplomacy. As part of the FOCAC action plans, China has embarked on large-scale training of African journalists for several years (Paterson et al 2018, Madrid-Morales and Wasserman 2018), partly with the hope of using them as 'borrowed boats' for regime messaging (Cook 2020).

While some respondents in the research view African co-option as a positive move, memories of authoritarian rule makes some respondents resistant to the

Chinese model of journalism being imported into Africa. Both media scholars, for instance, completely opposed Chinese style journalism. Media Scholar B 2019 said China was against the values of “good journalism based on truth and accuracy, balance, humanity, independence, impartiality and objectivity.” Meanwhile Media Scholar A 2019 proclaimed, “The socialist ideology of China and its record of grip on journalists is a major threat to the Ghanaian media.” He hopes that recollections of the socialist intentions of the first president of Ghana (Kwame Nkrumah) serves as a warning. After independence he turned to China and instituted a one-party state leading to suppression of the media at the time. “Ghana, though democratic now, has a history of somewhat socialist governance and if care is not taken, the chances that the ‘care takers of its airwaves’ [China] could gradually drag the country into its past is high,” he cautions. “As gatekeepers, StarTimes could be determining what should be aired and not aired.”

As can be seen, opinions are mixed and therefore so are the outcomes for public diplomacy. Regarding the power balance, Journalist A 2019 thinks StarTimes has the upper hand, with power stacked 70:30 in favour of the company, “Because [when] these journalists come back (from overseas training), they sell the story of StarTimes.” This suggests that StarTimes is similar to the China state in outsourcing public opinion shaping (Batke and Ohlberg 2020).

But interestingly, armed with awareness of how they can be deployed for messaging, some journalists are quite willing to be tools in public relations not just

for StarTimes, but for China in general, enabling public diplomacy. Journalist B 2019 is happy to be an ambassador for China, to visit the country and help with image management. He makes a connection between indigenous broadcasting, foreign trained Ghanaian StarTimes sports journalists and Chinese public diplomacy. “Broadcasts in the local language gives StarTimes the mileage that they want to promote China,” he believes. He adds this:

It must not only be limited to StarTimes, it must be expanded, so journalists have the opportunity to go to China, enjoy the environment, know how things are done over there, come back to Ghana and tell their story about China. I suggest that StarTimes collaborate with the Chinese government and take journalists from Ghana to do some courses, six months or four months or a year, to study the Chinese language and then come back and do commentary on other things in the Chinese language in the Ghanaian Premier League. I think it would be fascinating to see a Ghanaian speaking Chinese and running football commentary in Chinese. People would really love it. There are many Ghanaian players in China at the moment. It would be excellent if something like that is done. The barrier of communication is broken.

It is journalists like this correspondent who perhaps represent the future of narrative shaping for China and its nonstate actors. On the one hand StarTimes gives the impression that it can successfully influence discourses through press release dissemination, to frame the company in terms of pay television rather than a Chinese enterprise, marginalizing public diplomacy relevance. However, interviewee perceptions suggest that China and StarTimes both need African media assistance in reputation management. Pro-China camp media professionals are needed to balance out the anti-China voices who believe StarTimes media methods are indicative of an anti-democratic socialist agenda. An advantage for StarTimes and China is that there seem to be willing advocates of ‘constructive

journalism' (Le 2021). And journalist openness to be borrowed boats offers an opportunity for public relations in the private business sphere to contribute something Chinese style traditional public diplomacy cannot: cultivate "bottom-up solutions that engage stakeholders and the wider public" (L'Etang 2009: 490).

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the StarTimes involvement with profit-orientated aspects of African domestic broadcasting, from digital migration to content creation. It was found that the Innovation frame was strong due to the development of the projects. The Concord frame was also strong, due to the influence of public relations as an external factor and frame sponsorship. PR was also thought to be an internal factor, perhaps related to limited editorial resources. The China frame in news construction was weak due the StarTimes concentration on its business affairs, but from the perspective of African interviewees and African broadcasters such as FTA enterprises, the power wielded by China was a matter of concern.

Results show that public diplomacy potential of Chinese enterprises carrying out international development related aid projects according to PPP terms is complex. One part of the job of contracted companies such as StarTimes is to create an image of itself that gives a favourable impression of its work, and due to the FOCAC link, it is arguable that correspondingly, China should be reaping public diplomacy rewards. This represents track two diplomacy (Kerr and Taylor 2013). As well as outsourcing projects to the Chinese private sector, China is also

outsourcing the aspects of public diplomacy linked to influence cultivation by companies that embed themselves in new countries and contexts. In addition, the pro-China African interviewees were calling for more connection with China. They speak positively but realistically about StarTimes and that shows that influence cultivation can reap good rewards for public diplomacy as well as PR messaging. Pro-China media professionals are not just suitable for 'borrowed boat' activities (Cook 2020), they are essential. There is more discussion of this in the findings chapter seven, where African journalists linked to sport are already embedded in StarTimes public engagement.

The next chapter also focuses on the image of China's contribution to African media development. The emphasis is two areas: its role in indigenous programming, such as channel creation and African language output, and secondly, the image of StarTimes and China.

Chapter Six: The StarTimes PPP: indigenous programming and image making

6.1 Indigenous Programming

This chapter is the second part of the response to the second research question, *What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African media eco-systems and how does it impact the image of China?* Attention is given to StarTimes involvement in indigenous programming in both news constructions and perceptions of African media professionals, including StarTimes staff. Then the focus turns to the image of StarTimes and China, and how the relationship between the company and country is portrayed and perceived.

African language and identity: indigenous programming

For the private enterprise side of StarTimes to succeed, one area of cooperation that is considered extremely important is the development of African-oriented content. Within FOCAC's remit, acting as an instrument of increased African language television has been a big priority for StarTimes. Economic diplomacy defined by FOCAC action plans of 2015 and 2018 provided the initial narration of content production to be implemented by contractor. "The Chinese side encourages African countries to produce programmes" and a goal is "ensuring local human capacity building and employment" (2018). This aligns with Gardliardone and Geall's view that China's development assistance is being framed as the PRC enabling Africa to fulfil its potential (2014). The FOCAC goal meets both cultural and business priorities: capturing subscribers through

promotion of culturally-relevant content, which would in turn improve the African identity of the company. It would also counter critics of the StarTimes dubbing of Chinese shows into African languages such as Yoruba and Hausa (The Nation 2016).

Researchers have noted the detrimental legacy of colonialism on African language media and emphasize the importance of indigenous language content in keeping cultures alive (Salawu 2006, Onabajo 2005). The connection between defence of indigenous languages, democracy and media has also been made (Salawu and Chibita 2016). However, globalization and pay-TV have contributed to the unequal flow of television content from the West to Africa, with the glocalization of global TV formats such as Idol and availability other popular culture products due to satellite TV, which culturally influence African youth (Ndlela 2011, Okorie 2020). In Nigeria, preference for satellite TV has been shown due to higher quality and stimulating programmes (Nwabueze et al 2012).

The image of this StarTimes strategy - as presented through news and interview discourses - is the focus of this section. Firstly, findings linked to indigenous programming within the whole sample is provided, and after that, the topics are presented and discussed before a conclusion is reached.

The sample shows that StarTimes has been increasing indigenous language production and partnerships with producers. Articles linked to these developments are a reason for the strong Innovation frame. With 24 stories out

of 283 concerned with African indigenous broadcasting (9%), this project area has received the most news coverage attention out of the three in this research. However, the level of coverage is still small in comparison to content stories outside of indigenous broadcasting. Whether the content was StarTimes PR or content provider PR, promotion of non-African programming on StarTimes – usually sports and entertainment media providers - occupied most of the sample. It is very noticeable that African language content promotion has a lower profile, not yet part of the famous brands. There are very few African channels not produced by StarTimes mentioned in news stories, with notable exceptions being African Movie Channel and UNILAG, the University of Lagos station. One reason could be that African content is mostly the preserve of free-to-air (FTA) broadcasters, with whom StarTimes has had a difficult relationship. A previous section noted the resentment against the power bestowed on StarTimes due to the contracts. Mentions of FTA content rivals do not occupy a noticeable percentage of content in the news sample, despite the fact that digitalisation under StarTimes should have increased their channels.

The importance of indigenization

Promoting glocalized and indigenous content was a constant feature of the news coverage, which spoke to the evolution of the StarTimes identity. Strategic communication that constructs a pan-African brand correlates well with the notion of south-south assistance, and thus coordinates with the public diplomacy remit. Headlines in the sample speak to the necessity to address African content

desires: 'StarTimes to dub UEFA Europa league matches in Twi' (Darmalingum 2018a), 'StarTimes unveils Igbo channel, Isi Mbido' (Obi 2017) and 'StarTimes to emphasize on regional content to enhance viewership in Africa' (Darmalingum 2019) are among them. The support in addition aligns StarTimes with the decolonization process, by advancing African identities. According to Yun and Toth (2009), "relationship building must not be based on showcasing and proliferating one's own culture, values, and ideas, but rather on substantial and practical channels and linkages among people, which would promise the greatest mutual benefit and trust" (p.501).

However, like with cultivating relations in the football establishments, StarTimes has encountered challenges turning policy doctrine into media business operations. The growing pains to create a well-regarded African presence were clear from 2015 onwards. While negotiating to enter Botswana that year, it had enormous limitations due to "no news production in native languages of the African markets" but proclaimed high ambitions to "break MultiChoice's market dominance", and proceed with "intensified plans to translate drama programmes in local languages for respective African markets" (Tirvengadam 2015). At the core was sourcing shows that were "locally adaptable, renewable, repeatable and scalable" (Bainkong 2016). Regional StarTimes Marketing Manager Aldrine Nsubuga made priorities clear when he stated that "Local content is key to growth of a television station. Research has shown that for every

seven channels, four of the most-watched are home-grown networks” (Darmalingum 2019).

Interviewees meanwhile give a strong insight into the StarTimes relationship with African sourced or African language production. The respondents include four Kenyan film makers, three of whom were nominees in the Kalasha TV and Film Awards for which StarTimes (as part of its partnership with the Kenyan Film Commission) provided the app. Also interviewed were two previously mentioned StarTimes employees: a marketing manager in Kenya and a public relations manager in Beijing. Like the journalists, they are a key component of the localization and the integration of the StarTimes brand into Africa, and therefore play a role in strategic communication with wider publics. They were therefore able to shed light on the indigenization strategy.

According to the Beijing Public Relations Manager 2020, TV operators have as their staple premium international content, such as European football, telenovelas and US movies. This aligns with the finding that PR material promoting non-African content in this mould dominated news reports. However, he adds,

“Demand for indigenous programming is getting traction across Africa. Even if in most countries, [the] official language is French or English, in their daily life most people only speak local dialects. In many areas, people have limited understanding of French or English. And international operators barely provide international content in local languages.”

Similarly, interview comments from Zambia, Kenya and Ghana all stress the essential nature of African materials. Journalist B 2019 drew attention to the importance of sports coverage in an African language in the success of StarTimes and Journalist A 2019 also stressed, “There is a lot of work to be done in terms of Ghana orientated content.” In Kenya, Film Maker C 2019 insisted that “I will only watch more StarTimes shows if they include more Kenyan content. It's a high time they had a channel specific for Kenyan content, something that resembles M-net's Maisha Magic.”

Increasing production of African content as part of the FOCAC agreement shows a cultural sensitivity that could serve public diplomacy goals. According to Zaharna, “An awareness or mindfulness of culture can play a positive role in enhancing relations and communication between nations and people” (2012:9). It also makes good business sense. The StarTimes Kenyan marketing manager 2019 explained that “as much indigenous content as possible” is a priority to win audiences:

The Kenyan market is so, so, so patriotic and nationalistic. They really ride on national sentiment. A lot. It's the way people are here. It's so important that even in marketing - you try to make it look more Kenyan. Then, you will be accepted. Then, they will subscribe. The free to air channels here, both national and private, they are very strong on local content. That is why there are very many customers don't mind whether they have pay TV or not. They are satisfied with the local content provision they have on the local channels.

It appears therefore that StarTimes is seeking a balance between the global and the local, with the local requiring much more effort to establish. This is because it needs to produce content of a high enough quality to draw audiences away from

FTA channels. Establishment of new premium brands for this purpose is discussed below.

One aspect of indigenization has been capacity building through the creation of channels. Five African channels in Kenya were launched in response to research “aimed at identifying content that Kenyans can identify with” (Tirvengadam 2015c). In Kenya, Rembo TV arrived, targeting a female audience, with content in 60 per cent Kiswahili, 30 percent English and 10 percent vernacular languages (Rafter 2019b). In Nigeria StarTimes launched a lifestyle channel called Isi Mbido, designed to “provide rich entertainment for Igbos and Igbo-speaking people in and outside Nigeria” with content that “seeks to fully explore the depths of culture and traditions of Ndi Igbo” (Balancing Act Africa, 2017b). In Ghana meanwhile, StarTimes introduced Adepa TV to provide Ghanaian music, films and sport dubbed into the Twi language (Darmalingum 2018i). However, the popularity of these channels as yet is unclear. In the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, the interviewees were asked which channels they watched, and no respondent mentioned recently created Kenyan premium channel Rembo TV.

Another aspect of indigenization is StarTimes promotion of African channels that it partners with. This includes the University of Lagos, with the aim for UNILAG TV to “inject fresh ideas and energies that will take broadcasting to the next level in Nigeria” (Rafter 2019c). Also in Nigeria, the Hausa language channel Arewa24

went into partnership with StarTimes to provide a “premium, locally relevant entertainment and lifestyle channel” (Balancing Act 2018b).

However, as well as building new channels and hosting new partners, StarTimes in some countries has to be viewed as supporting indigenous channels that are its rivals. This is when StarTimes is involved in digital migration, such as Zambia. In a previous section, tensions regarding StarTimes in this area were discussed, but in the news coverage, the StarTimes involvement was touted as good for local stations. In Zambia, TopStar, the StarTimes joint venture with the state broadcaster ZNBC, proclaimed the “growth of its signal coverage for local TV stations” providing “the most extensive coverage that carries more than 20 indigenous Zambian TV stations over a network of approximately 64 transmitters across all ten provinces” (Balancing Act Africa, 2019b). With regards to strategic communication, StarTimes attempts to frame itself as a benefactor that is not using the digitalization process to wield power over local broadcasters.

In interviews, the necessity of local language stations is stressed. Journalist B 2019 explains, “There are some channels on StarTimes I watch, they speak Hausa, a Nigerian language. It’s important because it makes the people feel directly involved because their language is used in programmes. They feel that they are respected and honoured.” The significance is also emphasized by Zambian Journalist 2020 from the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation. While the impact of TopStar was praised in news coverage, the ZNBC respondent was less

than supportive. “The disadvantage with TopStar content with the rural communities is language, he explains. “TopStar content is entirely English except for ZNBC local language news and programming features for an hour or two each day.”

StarTimes development of relations with local language producers still seems at an early stage. It is up to the African side of the company to win indigenous content creators over from the FTA rivals. In Kenya, the StarTimes marketing manager 2019 is hoping that film makers contribute to StarTimes linked channels:

“We want to sit down, get producers together and say we want to buy your content, we believe in local content, it’s the way to go. We have millions of subscribers [and] we can do business with you. If your content is very good, if its good enough for TV, we can buy this content, put it on our platform and you make money. So, those linkages, those synergies are something we are looking at as an opportunity which they couldn’t have before.”

He also explained the background to female focused Rembo TV, established in Kenya by StarTimes in 2018. It is similar to Adepa TV in Ghana, which was discussed in the sports sponsorship section, in that local languages are prioritised.

“We want to build Rembo as a premium local channel,” the Kenya marketing manager explains, “which convinces people StarTimes actually means it when we say we want to develop the local industry. We already have local content but the more we have, the better. The better content we have, the more we promote Rembo TV.”

As can be seen, indigenous African language television is one area where both in news and interviews there is unified support for this StarTimes priority. Respondents for the first findings chapter suggest that some Chinese content which has been dubbed is popular, but African culture is of first precedence. This

means content acquisition orientated around partnerships, which brings attention to the topic of power relationships. This is one of the issues highlighted in the topic of partnerships.

New channels, more local content

New channels are being touted as media industry employment opportunities. This is due to a FOCAC action goal and the need for StarTimes to have an image as an instigator of job creation. Such an image would be a suitable public diplomacy angle justifying the Chinese orientation of development assistance. It would also counter criticism that Chinese migrants are being imported to Africa to do jobs that Africans could do (Park 2009, Sautman and Hairong 2007). The battle for African viewers and content is increasing; for instance, Netflix is increasing its investment in local production (Charisma 2020). Digital transition opened space for new channels for African creatives to fill. For example in Zambia, a 35% local content threshold was set for broadcasters after digital migration and to this end, Zambian ministry of information and broadcasting services secretary Godfrey Malama said, “I therefore, urge the youths to take advantage of this opportunity by producing local content to fill many channels which will be launched” (Tirvengadam 2015d). In Rwanda, digitalisation held the promise that “local filmmakers will be able to dab (sic) Kinyarwanda films and export them to markets like China, Nigeria and in the region” (Balancing Act Africa 2017c). In a similar vein, it was claimed that “China-based Pay-TV operator StarTimes is working with movie

distributors in China to export Nollywood content to the Chinese market” (Nwoye 2017).

Also in Nigeria, new native language channels were portrayed as providing new opportunities. The Igbo channel Isi Mbido expected “to entertain viewers with over 1,000 hours of fresh content in the next one year (Obi 2017), while “The demand for more Hausa language channels among our subscribers especially in the North rose significantly” the Arewa 24 marketing manager Qasim Elegbede is quoted as saying (Tunji 2018).

Adepa TV in Ghana was a new channel, but it relies on imported content, for instance promoting a six-episode show called ‘40 and Single’ “featuring top Hollywood actors and actresses with Ghana’s finest and veteran acts” (Darmalingum 2018j). However, elsewhere StarTimes touted its relationships with regional content producers. In Nigeria in 2018 the “Queen of Nollywood” reality TV programme aimed to “focus on drama and cultural entertainment in accordance to African culture and traditions” (Darmalingum 2018k). Also in Nigeria, film maker and director Oga Bello was said to have signed a “juicy” production deal “worth millions of naira” with StarTimes to “produce a 26-episode series in the Yoruba language” (Brand Spur 2018).

Furthermore in Kenya, StarTimes went into partnership with the Kenyan Film Commission for the Kalasha Film and TV festival, after aborting plans for its own online film festival called the Pan African Online Film Festival (Balancing Act Africa

2019c). The Kenya Film Commission (KFC) and the Communications Authority of Kenya in turn welcomed StarTimes for investing in the development of local content, saying the move would help “generate more job opportunities in the creative industry” (Rafter 2019b).

In interviews, respondents illuminated StarTimes engagement patterns with the creative end of African production as well as official bodies, thus establishing its sphere of influence. The StarTimes Kenya marketing manager 2019 gave more background regarding how, as well as creating programmes, a priority is sourcing homegrown materials. The news coverage section mentioned the Pan African Online Film Festival (PAOFF), which was abandoned, for reasons given below. StarTimes instead teamed up with the Kenyan Film Commission to provide the app for the 2019 Kalasha Film and TV Awards, which have been run for over 10 years. Promoting local culture is a good communication strategy, be it used for public relations or public diplomacy. The app showcased the contributions of the nominees, and as it was the only way through which votes for the awards could be processed, collected the data of millions of Africans. This brings up issues regarding partnership development and data exploitation for marketing purposes.

The marketing manager explains the team up with Kalasha in a way that reveals how StarTimes develops relationship structures and dynamics (Zaharna 2014). The explanation also gives insights into how track two diplomacy can operate, with the

nonstate developing links that foster cultural links with stakeholders which could later reap rewards on a country-to-country level:

“We had the idea of starting the same kind of awards of our own, PAOFF (Pan African Online Film Festival). But because we found an existing award which is very popular, a very big brand, [with a] very good reputation here, we didn’t see the need to duplicate, to start a parallel award. We wouldn’t compete well with an existing local award which is made and owned by Kenyans. So we discussed with them, we can just be a partner with the existing awards, ride along and support them? Our idea was to change the voting way - physical, manual voting. We said we have an app which is very good, you can get a lot more people involved, an entire country voting at the same time.”

The Kenyan Film Commission reported that around one million in Kenya downloaded the app, while internationally, the figure was 17 million in 45 countries. This shows how the contractor is fulfilling its FOCAC remit to provide development cooperation and assistance. That level of app downloading was also good news for StarTimes seeking marketing exposure:

“One of our strategies was to use these awards to give a bigger platform to promote the app because we are still trying to promote it in terms of building awareness and encouraging as many Kenyans as possible to use it. The Kalasha Awards were part of our strategy to continue promoting it.”

However, some were not happy. Film Maker C 2019 along with the other film maker respondents was not a StarTimes subscriber before the festival. He complained, “Most of the voters see the downloading process as expensive and time consuming, given that internet is not very cheap in Kenya. And last year the process was much easier. It has really slowed down the voting process.” Film Maker C 2019 is referring to a voting system that the marketing manager sees as a benefit. The marketing manager enthuses, “To vote, one needed to preview and review films. Even now voting has ended, anybody can still go on our app and

again view this content. In so doing, the producers of this content are gaining exposure.” But Film Maker B 2019 was also critical, thinking the sponsorship was not personally useful to him: “Media houses need to support us filmmakers during the process of the production or more, not just awards. I believe just reward without substantial support is like someone applauding you for cleaning outside the house while inside is dirty.”

This all suggests that some believe StarTimes benefited considerably from the partnership. The profit-motivated arm of the PPP collected considerable African subscriber data. The benefits could be reinforced by the fact that as part of the sponsorship, StarTimes retains ownership of all content of film makers. Again, the power balance between StarTimes and Africans could be a matter of dispute. However, the Kenyan marketing manager 2019 insists that this is a fair deal:

These producers don't have much money. They individually must promote their content. They need to have their own budget to do that, which they don't normally. And you don't make it in this industry if you're not famous, if you're not known.

He claims that one of the benefits is that StarTimes through the app and the near three million followers on social media gives film makers a bigger platform to market their content, which they otherwise would not have access to. From Film Maker B 2019's viewpoint, while he does not entirely agree with trading ownership, he understands why film makers would take the deal: “It might be a plus or negative to different people depending with their needs. We all don't sail in the same boat. Most don't have a choice of current economic situation.” But

Film Maker D 2019 was more positive about Kalasha: “By and large, it has encouraged my interest in online film production. This to me is a great leap towards quality content for the entire African online video industry.” Film Maker

A 2019 was also enthusiastic:

I didn't know about StarTimes app until the Kalasha Awards and this was the best way to learn about it, because I am a filmmaker with future plans to take my work international. It has been useful because now I know there is another platform that can showcase my work if I meet the standards.

Further, Kenyan Marketing Manager 2019 views this as a way not only for film makers to get exposure, but always to make sure StarTimes platforms benefit. “They're lost if they don't deal with pay television, because where are they going to put their content?” he asks. This reveals how the influence building for the contractor is in the hands of local staff acting as intermediaries, is a strategy for extending influence. They are necessary for the competition of StarTimes against genuine local brands such as FTA companies.

They just can't sell all their content to local free to air television. Free to air stations have a limited budget, are very selective, and they also produce their own content. You need StarTimes to buy that content. Once we buy that content and air it, then of course the producers make themselves more famous. People start seeking them out because they are producing very good content and people want to deal with them. So, for them it's a win-win.

One of the channels where content is likely to end up is female focused Rembo TV, established in Kenya by StarTimes in 2018 and mentioned in the news reports. It is similar to Adepa TV in Ghana, which was discussed in the sports sponsorship section, in that local languages are prioritised. “We want to build Rembo as a

premium local channel,” the Kenya marketing manager explains, “which convinces people StarTimes actually means it when we say we want to develop the local industry. We already have local content but the more we have, the better. The better content we have, the more we promote Rembo TV.” The success of Adepa and Rembo would mean Chinese owned broadcasting platforms increasing their power against both African competitors and US rivals. Africa is clearly the site of experimentation in transnational TV development for Chinese enterprises. Important however, is how this increased power is framed in the media. For public diplomacy purposes, Africans present the shows and are the publicists, but increasingly, more African agency will be expected behind the scenes. The Africa/China Independent Working Group of Scholars are among those concerned with examining how African agency can be encouraged (Nantulya 2021).

The development of indigenous content has focused mostly on the company side of StarTimes. This has been about implementation of strategies to build capacity through partnerships and ownership of content. Through the strategies, StarTimes is developing its mechanisms of power as a business through investment. Narrative congruency in news reports and interviews concurred when centred on the trend towards native language programming, but the interviews in particular indicated the sensitivities around African material.

It appears that the construction of an identity as an African brand is succeeding step by step, which is good for the image of StarTimes. However foreign content

in news reports still dominates over stories regarding what the company is doing to promote indigenous television. While foreign programming like football and drama is dubbed into local languages is popular, interviewee sentiment suggests that opportunities to forge an African brand identity are being missed.

Without African branding, narratives constructing StarTimes as ‘the other’ in comparison to FTA channels have more space. The strategy of using African spokespeople and producers must continue as the dominant image of the company, to embed the company into African media systems also helps with the identity and reputation. StarTimes is a Chinese contractor but indigenization necessitates that it sub-contracts the meaning-making of the brand to the Africans it employs or partners with. But of course, the unspoken aspect is that the African side of StarTimes public relations coordinates, not conflicts, with China’s interests. While it appears that proximity to China is remote in the development of the company due to the absence of mentions in this section, the reality of Chinese ownership of the platforms is never quite forgotten.

6.2 The image of StarTimes activities

As mentioned in the previous chapter, StarTimes attempts to separate its image from that of China. Therefore, it is worth examining the image of StarTimes in and of itself. Company activities are portrayed as positive in the vast majority of cases (86%). Once again, the positivity is due to activities – media content acquisition, technology and so forth - being the subject of press release-related stories which

dominate coverage, and define StarTimes in a favourable way. ‘StarTimes cuts down on combo decoder price in Nigeria’ with the decoder described as combining “both antenna and dish” with “channels on both at very affordable prices” (Ramjan 2017b). It builds on previous findings because StarTimes is depicted as the actor who is a problem solver tasked with providing assistance. Because the ‘private’ side of the PPP is emphasized and China was only rarely mentioned, public diplomacy outcomes are only a small by-product of this image.

Table 11: The image of StarTimes activities

The image of StarTimes activities	Values	No.	%
	Positive and negative	17	6
	negative	13	5
	neutral	11	4
	positive	243	86

Separating StarTimes from the country image is definitely an aim of the company. In an interview with a StarTimes spokesperson in Beijing (Beijing StarTimes Spokesperson 2020), China was dismissed as largely irrelevant and he was uncomfortable with company activities constantly being couched as a political move. He believes it is a ‘misconception’ to always link StarTimes to politics. “Everything is analyzed through a political lens, when StarTimes’ decisions are business decisions based on market dynamics,” he insists. “The traditional TV market, in Africa but everywhere in the world, is going through deep changes, and that makes the competition fierce between traditional pay-TV providers that are

going to face huge challenges ahead.” His separation of StarTimes from the country aligns with the approach taken in press releases.

Beijing StarTimes Spokesperson 2020 also believes that the company is subject to double standards. He complains this way:

“StarTimes is often and quickly reduced as a “state proxy for Beijing” serving Chinese government interests. On which basis? Because StarTimes broadcasts Chinese news channels? Because StarTimes manages to secure financing from Chinese bank for public projects? Because Chinese government support Chinese companies while they develop abroad? We can find similar behaviors when studying companies from other countries but they won’t be labeled as a “state proxy”, only a Chinese company will be.”

News coverage of StarTimes activities and the perceptions of this Beijing StarTimes staff member are in alignment, in that politics is downplayed and business decision making is given prominence. However, in 2020 StarTimes began running daily COVID-19 programmes in light of the pandemic, a public service endeavour which tethers the company to public diplomacy objectives (Huaxia 2020). This played to the hybrid, dual purpose imperatives of the company to support the state when it was considered necessary (Russel and Berger 2020). Time will tell the extent of the epidemic impact on the image of China but according to Journalist F 2020, the virus and the treatment of Africans in China had added to the negative attitudes in Kenya. “With now the racism happening it’s creating more rift,” he cautioned. This suggests that StarTimes COVID-19 related programming is an attempt to counteract damaging perceptions. The fact China is raised by a Kenyan journalist shows that however much StarTimes seeks

to distance itself from politicization, it never seems far from people’s minds when controversial events occur.

The Image of China

The China frame was discussed in the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, and was found to be a weak frame, with the emphasis in news coverage on the company. However, there are still important ways that StarTimes could impact China’s public diplomacy. For that reason, news coverage on China linked to African media warranted further scrutiny. The word ‘China’ had to be included in the story for it to be considered to have a bearing on the image of China. This would align with the view that public diplomacy and public relations can converge in approaches and objectives (Signitzer and Coombs 1992).

China was not cited in 82% of stories, aligning with the minimized China messaging. When the country was mentioned, the news aggregation shows the source to be usually China-run media, e.g. Xinhuanet.

Table 12: the Image of China

Image of China	Values	No.	%
	Positive and negative	3	1
	negative	6	2
	neutral	5	2
	Not mentioned	232	82
	positive	36	13

While StarTimes constructs its identity primarily in business ways separately from country relations, the StarTimes relationship with China takes centre stage in the minds of interviewees. For instance, Film Maker C 2019 says StarTimes is “marketing China” while Film Maker D 2019 acknowledges attempts to localize content but speaks of “the growing notion of Chinese ‘intrusion’ into the African market - a matter of great concern in Africa today.” Unlike western pay TV brands, StarTimes is viewed as a government tool. Claims Kenya’s Media Scholar B 2019, “From the content on StarTimes, you will notice that Beijing is trying to ensure that viewers view China as being a savior in most aspects that Africans would otherwise have seen as failing, and especially in infrastructure. They will try their best to have their good infrastructure shown on TV for the viewers to compare.” This is borne out by the perceptions of rural interviewees of China content mentioned in the RQ1 chapter.

Journalist C 2019 also equates StarTimes with China, and even conflates StarTimes with state-run CGTN Africa with regards to the level of control:

StarTimes is generally seen as an agent of China because there are very few Ghanaians in key positions, and China has to give approval for very basic requests, according to my information. I won’t want more involvement. The Chinese are already involved in key areas of our economy and I think that’s enough. We should empower ourselves to handle and deal with our own challenges.

Media Scholar A 2019 concurs with the self-reliance position:

Whereas politicians see China in a positive light because it has invested into the economy of Ghana, which they (the party in power) count as a foreign direct investment during their administration, Ghanaian media stakeholders see the China move as taking over Ghana and stifling local initiative.

This battle of perceptions is what Marketing Manager 2019 encounters regularly. “In the market, StarTimes is a Chinese company,” he admits. “We have that problem in Africa where everybody wants to mention Chinese companies, they tend to think everything is Chinese, Chinese coming to take over.” This, then is yet further evidence that despite attempts to downplay China in news discourses, the image of StarTimes is impacted by the country and vice versa.

However, according to Journalist A 2019, the producers and directors are Chinese, and he describes his relationship with them as “encounters”. Journalist B 2019 initially said he had no contact with Chinese staff at StarTimes, only the Ghanaians, but later corrects this:

I have worked with some of them, when there is pre-match analysis. They do their jobs perfectly with a lot of seriousness, so they give the impression to Ghanaians that they are very serious people when it comes to executing their jobs. They paint a very positive picture of China to Ghanaians especially taking into consideration how they do their jobs. Because the modern OB van needs special technical skills, it is operated by some of the Chinese guys. Most of the technical jobs are done by the Chinese. They understand the work better. They teach the Ghanaian guys to understand the system better.

Similar to Kenyan Marketing Manager 2019, this Ghanaian stressed that they play a different role: “The communication aspect, the media aspect, reaching out to the people is meant for the indigenous Ghanaian people, employees.” These comments give the impression that while both have roles to play in building the image of StarTimes, the Africans and Chinese have a distant relationship, with

Africans in influence building roles and StarTimes Chinese staff as technician minded contractors. However, while the positions are different, the aim remains the same: promotion of StarTimes business first and foremost – not public diplomacy network expansion along the lines as advocated by Zaharna (2014).

The image of Africa's attitude towards China: the Kung Fu colonizer?

Given the strong views of African interviewees, it is important to examine African constructions of China in StarTimes coverage. It can reveal efforts by agents to “structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them” (Hertog and McLeod 2001:146). In this case, there is the question of whether discourse is geared towards constructing Africans as supportive of China, which would be considered a public diplomacy win. As this involves perceptions of countries, public discourse is subject to politically driven “elite manipulation” of frames to contextualize roles of individuals and organizations (ibid: 147). For instance, these stories can reveal whether the African view of China constructs the country as a colonizer, development facilitator, exploiter or saviour, and who the ‘elites’ are in a position to influence these discourses.

Immediately noticeable in the findings is that African views of China is a topic barely discussed in StarTimes stories, missing 87% of the time.

Table 13: The image of Africa's attitude towards China

The image of Africa's attitude towards China	Values	No.	%
	negative	5	2
	neutral	2	1
	Not mentioned	244	87
	Positive and negative	9	3
	positive	21	7

Press release related articles from StarTimes and partners do not focus on the views of Africans regarding the Chinese state. Sometimes China was a topic of an article – it was mentioned in 63 stories. However, the views of ordinary African subscribers (rather than experts), specifically on China (rather than StarTimes) was not included in PR linked news in the sample.

This absence of African public voices is important because voices within the news sources are used to “define events and issues” (Hansen and Machin 2013:101). For instance, quotes reveal the frame sponsors and the nature of ‘frame contests’, through which actors compete through the media to highlight and obscure dimensions of reality and thereby influence audiences (Entman 1993).

However, the situation of African voices is more complicated when considering other actors involved in the construction of the company. StarTimes Vice President Guo Ziqi is quoted, but Chinese voices are few and far between compared to African StarTimes employees (as opposed to the African public). The Chinese never appear to be quoted outside of news coverage controlled by the company. Their words are most often linked to supporting the contract fulfilment

image. However, they are either more *senior* than the African employees or involved in technical matters. Example personnel are Division Chief Operating Officer Vincent Yu, Sports Director Shi Maochu and Chief Executive Officer Jack Liu. While Africans are more often quoted, these job titles reveal who is in control.

A company representative is the person most likely to be quoted, at 49%. The person is likely to be an African involved with branding, marketing or public relations, especially with programme promotions.

Table 14: Who is quoted

Who is quoted	Values	No.	%
	African gov rep	37	11
	Chinese official	11	3
	nobody	35	10
	other	37	11
	StarTimes business relation rep	59	17
	StarTimes rep	171	49

As well as African StarTimes representatives, other Africans include content provider spokespeople and representatives of official bodies and government agencies, such as the Kenya Film Commission (KFC) and the Communications Authority of Kenya. Negative voices are also very rare, with one exception being the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (Adjei 2018). This gives an indigenous feel, an African face to coverage, even though the public diplomacy is mostly for China’s benefit.

Thus, second most likely to be quoted is a Chinese StarTimes staff member: a little misleading, but a necessary construction. An example is StarTimes president Pang Xinxing, who prioritised the strategy of focusing on audiences and relevant content. In 2016 he advised that broadcasters needed to "find your audience first, create for them, build a digital community, and then move to new levels of creative engagement with that audience" (Balancing Act Africa, 2016b).

With regards to the small number of stories related to public diplomacy, they are more like to quote African government representatives. StarTimes follows the Chinese preference for using official sources: coverage of China "is based on press releases issued by Chinese government officials or Chinese enterprises seeking investment opportunities (Umejei 2017:177). The lack of emphasis on interactions with populations also lessens the public diplomacy element of the news coverage. This feels like an opportunity lost on both public relations and public diplomacy fronts.

Public diplomacy also is contingent upon influence building (Diamond and Schell 2018) and network collaboration (Zaharna 2014). Many of the interviewees fall into the category of people that should form part of a network of influence for the company. Interviewee responses cohered closely to the findings in the news coverage. The Kenyan StarTimes Manager 2019 said that any role involving facing the African public is conducted by Africans, which shows that the company is localizing.

This contrasts with perceptions of African media professionals towards China in the data. In the semi-structured interviews, those interested in StarTimes are also concerned about China's role on the continent; they are not seen as separate matters, despite the newspaper coverage findings.

Exposure to Chinese culture media is partly defining how StarTimes is perceived. It appears that the cultural products of public diplomacy have the potential to wield a persuasive impact. Journalist E 2019 reflected, "In rural Kenya where I grew up, I used to go to these video showing shops in small centres because there was no electricity then. You are using a car battery to power the television, and they were black and white, and we would watch Chinese movies." Similarly, the Beijing manager 2020 said this:

Chinese movies and especially Kung-fu movies have been broadcast early and regularly in several African countries, long before StarTimes entered the African market. In some markets, there is a "niche" for kung-fu movies and Chinese content in general. There are similarities between Chinese and African values (e.g. family) and challenges (e.g. quick changes in the society) that are reflected in some Chinese dramas so we believe they have potential in Africa.

The popularity of Kung-Fu concurs with the 10,000 Villages Project findings chapter and previous literature (Jedlowski 2021). However, while there is agreement regarding the popularity of some Chinese content, there are different views regarding the motivations behind its availability. Journalist E 2019 framed it as a danger. He reflected, "Last year I sat down and thought, this is a way of colonising our mind because the Chinese are showing us their culture so they can

buy us, back in the days before we even knew what their agenda was in Africa. They wanted to build some trust in us.”

Similarly, Media Scholar A 2019 from Ghana sees a soft power building motivation, with exposure to Chinese culture being a new strand of imperialism. “I see a foreign power (China) gradually taking over the airspace of a supposedly sovereign nation,” he said, adding this:

The concept of ‘soft power’ is at play and it is another means to gradually recolonise the continent. This move to[wards] China is somewhat rooted in the thinking that the West since independence have not demonstrated real commitments to aid Africa in its developmental agenda; but the question is how better is China?

It is clear that past experiences of colonialism to some extent preconfigure how China is presently perceived. Media Scholar A 2019 adds this:

To many Ghanaians, especially the elites, Ghana has not learnt from its past. To me, Ghana should know better, having played a leading role in the political emancipation of the entire continent. I see the activities of StarTimes as a direct foreign policy deployed by the government of China to have a foothold in Ghana and African continent.

There is a clear disparity between the narratives of Africans in the news coverage and that in interviews. Their near absence in the former must have repercussions for public diplomacy, because it suggests that they are not considered of importance for dialogue. The interviewees in contrast recognise that there is strong potential for public diplomacy outreach through culture, but some are wary of its power. Interviewee hostility towards China is also negative for StarTimes and public diplomacy outcomes. The chapter seven, focussed on sport and

international content development, includes interviews with influencers on China's behalf, but findings in this chapter indicate serious engagement shortcomings.

The image of China's attitude towards Africa: the 'real' agenda

How China's relations with African countries are constructed have been influenced by many factors over the years, ranging from state-controlled media output such as CGTN Africa to the large-scale immigration to Africa by the Chinese (French 2014, Schmitz 2020, Wu 2021). StarTimes represents a dimension of this phenomenon – the presence of Chinese companies on African soil. The importance of companies to the image of its host nation was discussed more broadly in the literature review and theoretical framework, for instance, the role of Huawei in CSR activities (Ojo 2017). This part of the findings contributes an empirically based understanding of narrations around China's engagement with the continent.

For these results, China had to be mentioned specifically in the story to be counted as relevant. However, relevant stories were few and far between. In line with other findings, China was not mentioned in the vast majority of StarTimes news, absent in 86% of cases. That said, when it was present, the inclusion was likely to be positive, representing 12% of stories.

Table 15: The image of China's attitude towards Africa

The image of China's attitude towards Africa	Values	No.	%
	negative	2	1
	neutral	1	0.4
	Not mentioned	242	86
	Positive and negative	4	1
	positive	34	12

Results revealed that usually, the story fitted a criterion. The following people would be mentioned and / or quoted: a top rank StarTimes leader, Chinese ambassadors, African government officials at state or local level, and possibly Xi Jinping. China-Africa relations would be a central topic. Favourable images of both parties and their relations to each other would be emphasized. One example text, 'StarTimes to launch digital TV project in Zambia' (Darmalingum 2018d) carried most of these public diplomacy hallmarks.

The absence in the coverage of China narratives in its relations with Africa is a type of strategic communication. However, when China is mentioned, it grants high level legitimacy to StarTimes activities. An interesting example is 'StarTimes to launch novelty projection television in Africa' (Balancing Act 2015b) – the year of the FOCAC meeting in Johannesburg, which carried a commitment for the projects StarTimes undertakes.

Filling in the gaps in news image construction, interviewees reflect at length on what they think are China's view on Africa. They explore perceptions regarding what they see as China motivations for entering African countries. They form the background as to why wariness prevails, which need to be taken into consideration for effective public diplomacy. Says Journalist E 2019:

In 2015, the Chinese president announced they are reaching 10,000 impoverished in Africa with affordable TV and they awarded the contract to StarTimes to roll that out. I believe that China has an agenda - there's something they want from Africa. You will find them in every sector these days. The other day in Kenya they were selling second-hand clothes. You will find that many countries are complaining about jobs that can be done by locals, that do not need expertise, having Chinese nationals flown from China to come and do them here at the expense of jobless youths. They should be doing those jobs.

Other respondents similarly frame the StarTimes appearance in terms of Chinese economic and cultural incursion. Public diplomacy is designed to make Chinese financial engagement palatable, but the media professionals see right through the pleasantries. Journalist C 2019 claims that "StarTimes gains from the sale of its decoders in Ghana which is primarily the business reason they are here. I also believe there is a programmed agenda to impose Chinese culture and art unto the African market and the best way is to leverage on the passion of the nation, football."

StarTimes is depicted in news in a narrow business sense, but also in interviews in terms of wider China-Africa ties and from the historical context of colonialism. Says Journalist E 2019:

I saw it was a new scramble for Africa. The eastern and the western countries, particularly the US, and European countries, Russia and China, are trying to scramble for Africa. But this time it's not the kind of colonialization we saw before, but they are using other methods. We are seeing how China is baiting Africa with loans and development projects. If African countries fail to pay back these loans, there are things that China is going to do. You saw in Zambia, they've taken the national broadcaster. In Sri Lanka, they took the port.

Thus, once again, the sensitivities of colonialism sometimes pull more weight than narratives of south-south cooperation as favoured by China policy output and FOCAC agreements.

However, not all respondents viewed the entry of StarTimes in negative ways. Some believe the company has adapted well to the African continent. According to Film Maker D 2019,

They have made a daring move to tap into the African market, despite the fact that internet connectivity remains a myth in some places. They have catered for the needs of the lower earning workforce often associated with less costly forms of entertainment such as a radio. With well over 140 channels to choose from, StarTimes had the ideal Kenyan family in mind. I believe their shows are audience-specific. They have a range of well-rounded programs from sports to local soaps and drama. Further, their bouquets are quite affordable; ranging from Classic 74.9 USD/month, Basic 5.99 USD/month to Nyota at 2.99 USD/month. Going by this, even ordinary citizens can afford to watch TV at the comfort of their homes.

Even though Economic Consequences was not a strong frame, the finance stories which did appear often focused on budgets, for instance with the word 'affordable' appearing many times. Similar to Film Maker D 2019, Journalist B 2019 also believes that StarTimes caters for African incomes. "I think it's cheaper. The reason is, you can spend that 1 cedis or 2 cedis to watch a match via the StarTimes app. You download the app and then you have access to watching if you are paying with mobile money." From the perspective of the StarTimes manager, flexible

payment options are crucial. He asserts, “StarTimes is the only pay television that is flexible enough not just to have monthly subscription, but we have weekly and daily subscription. That’s one of the key advantages we have.”

As well as having a financial and cultural influence, StarTimes uses technological methods to have an impact on its image. Film Maker D 2019 enthuses that StarTimes has “embraced the Video On Demand platform, taking advantage of the fast-rising digital era. The online video streaming service is also an impeccable idea.” The interviews all show that Africans are sharply aware of the factors behind China’s presence in Africa, but views are diverse on the extent to which the arrival is benign.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter continued the focus on the StarTimes involvement with profit-orientated aspects of African domestic broadcasting, but with a look at new dimensions: indigenous programming and the StarTimes image. Findings suggest that there was congruence in the messaging regarding the importance of indigenous programming development, which StarTimes was contributing to through new channels such as Rembo in Kenya and Adepa in Ghana.

With regards to image building, StarTimes has totally prioritised public relations, to provide itself with a consistent, narrow focus positive image in the news. There appears a reluctance for public diplomacy discourses that support China. Closer

sample examination presents a largely favourable public relations led news discourse but a lack of stories regarding the China link, perhaps a deliberate policy to maintain distance. This contrasts sharply with narratives of media professionals that aligned StarTimes with China, the only exception being the views of the StarTimes employees in the interviewee sample. Negative sentiment towards China was expressed by media professionals in the majority of cases. Therefore, unified messaging across interviews, public diplomacy and public relations is far off. This contrasts with the findings for the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, where interviewees, state and nonstate forces complemented each other.

For example, mention of China is minimized in news discourses, but China is of central importance for African natives, some of whom tend to be highly critical. StarTimes has succeeded in keeping stories on business subjects through news output reliance on press releases, as a rising star in the pay television market. Thus, it is only when China is mentioned that there is a reminder that StarTimes is linked to aid projects. However, African journalists, scholars and marketing managers know the economic and political context within which StarTimes operates. Their perspectives reveal the hard work needed to improve connectivity and trust with African media systems and populations. Huawei is illustrative of how the interplay between a country's government and business fundamentals can have image repercussions, so StarTimes will need a strategy where the company and country reinforce each other's good image to respond to real world sentiment.

As a result of StarTimes reluctance to engage beyond press releases, public diplomacy outcomes are highly limited. A vacuum exists where there should be strategy for public diplomacy and public relations coherence. The narrow range of news narratives barely include the words of non-elite, non-employee Africans, which is a failure of both communication traditions. This highlights the weakness of China's hierarchical public diplomacy nature (Ayhan 2018). China's public diplomacy is too ineffectual to counteract the anti-China narratives which speak to China being a threat, especially due to debt. The FOCAC rhetoric of south-south assistance barely has traction at all. The \$60 billion aid packages of 2015 and 2018 are still not seen in favourable terms, which is potentially damaging to China's internationalization objectives. This is also a threat to public relations. Thus, there is no escape from this need to improve engagement and image building through both communication methodologies.

The implications to be drawn from this chapter centre on how a Chinese nonstate contractor narrates its own image in relation to the home country image. Do the images converge or cooperate, or do they conflict? Are public relations and public diplomacy in alignment? It can be seen that despite attempts at using PR led news construction, it is difficult for a Chinese organisation to realistically and ethically construct a message of itself in which China is absent. Instead of downplaying the FOCAC link, a strategy could be to align with public diplomacy to foster an image of a PPP company with instrumental, functional operational credibility in the process of indigenization. For the indigenization part, engagement with general

publics as well as media professionals is essential, with those African professionals adopting the role of the pro-China mediators in the society. Through this strategy, positive public diplomacy byproducts are a likely outcome.

Chapter Seven: The StarTimes PPP - Sport Sponsorship

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter looked at private enterprise initiatives of StarTimes linked to African broadcasting development in content and technical spheres. That was to examine the ways in which these development assistance initiatives had facilitated China's public diplomacy in Africa. For this chapter, the focus is on StarTimes brand development through increased football content. This includes football sponsorship, through which StarTimes hopes to propel subscription uptake and become a serious rival to other pay-TV brands in Africa. Therefore, the research question is the following: *What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African soccer content and how does it impact the image of China?*

Firstly, a reminder of contextual issues is given. The development assistance policy background to the public private partnership (PPP) is once again emphasized, for two key reasons. One, this background is a reminder of the China-Africa foundation through FOCAC which legitimizes, politically and financially, the position of StarTimes as a contractor chosen by state forces to build the pay-TV brand and therefore carry out the initiatives discussed in this chapter. Two, this background reminds that the contractor therefore serves as a signifier of China's 'win-win' development assistance alternative to the Washington Consensus: the country as well as the company is doing image building. Third, this reminds that StarTimes initiatives are the embodiment of FOCAC policy transitioned into practice.

The image building of practices by the nonstate contractor is important. In this chapter therefore, the focus of enquiry therefore remains on the images of these initiatives in the news and, by contrast, African interviewee perceptions of them. A gap between image construction and perception is likely because “images are constructs that are carefully crafted to achieve a particular goal, rather than being things that are to be measured in terms of how ‘real’ or ‘true’ they are (Batchelor and Zhang 2017:7). Another important element is whether, in news constructions or the minds of interviewees, company and country images converge or diverge. A strong hybrid of public relations and public diplomacy suggests proactive nonstate actor involvement in country image building. The absence of country mentions indicates a divergence between company and country images. However, that divergence might also contrast with interviewee perceptions. The theoretical framework premise was that company coverage was mostly public relations for business-specific situations, while public diplomacy narratives would be more political and suited to country image building (Signitzer and Coombs 2002). But as the last two chapters illustrated, the difference between company and country, between public relations and public diplomacy, does not necessarily have a dividing line seen by the target audiences, such as the interviewees in this research.

As with the previous two chapters, views are from African media professionals who have either a direct or indirect interest in how StarTimes integrates into African media systems. This represents the ‘frame setting’ side of De Vreese’s

model. Views shed light on factors which influence how StarTimes and China are perceived. From the news and interview topics, implications can then be drawn regarding the relationship between the images of the nonstate actor and the country, the influence cultivation methods of Chinese companies abroad, and how they extend Chinese state power (Diamond and Schell 2018).

Project contexts: development assistance

As mentioned above, the contexts for these PPP initiatives are linked to the FOAC development assistance policy background, particularly the 2015 and 2018 action plans. This model of development creates dividends for Chinese private companies, as they provide solutions to “promote the building of an information society in Africa” (FOCAC 2018). More television channels as part of digital migration and bridging the digital divide can be considered part of assistance towards African information societies – assistance in alignment with China’s Going Out agenda. The FOCAC action plans do not specifically refer to sport sponsorship, but rather more broadly mention the objective of “industrial development” under ‘media’, which could be an umbrella term for cultivation of media industries such as sport broadcasting.

The private enterprise side of the PPP is foregrounded. This links with the Innovation and Economic Consequences frames mentioned in previous chapters. Neither China nor Africa see the solution as abandoning market forces based solutions, but both envisage a longer-term, state assisted path to closing digital

inequities and broadcasting development. The African Union prioritizes the private sector involvement in harnessing digital technologies poverty reduction solutions, and pledged to collaborate with international partners to implement a Digital Transformation Strategy, “leveraging private investment and PPPs in ICT interventions” (2020:52). China for its part also foregrounds private sector involvement – with its own companies implementing digital divide projects. In line with the ‘win-win’ cooperation remit, using Chinese loans, Chinese companies are contracted to provide the infrastructure. According to a FOCAC website (FOCAC 2018), Africa agrees to welcome “the involvement of Chinese enterprises in investment and cooperation in building and operating radio and TV transmission broadcasting networks” in order to “provide technology support and personnel training for the digitalization of radio and TV services in Africa.”

7.2 Football Sponsorship

This chapter has a strong focus on development assistance in sport. Research has looked at sport as a tool for diplomatic and image building purposes. Post-apartheid, the sport sector in South Africa deployed sport for nation building, racial reconciliation and democracy purposes (Smith 2016). Sport sponsorship therefore can be leveraged to expose a country’s political, social and cultural values to a wide audience, thus aiding public diplomacy (Dubinsky 2019). When British and Chinese leaders Xi Jinping and David Cameron visited the Manchester City Etihad Campus training ground in 2015, soccer was annexed for nation

branding purposes (Rofe 2016). Therefore, of interest is the quantity and characteristics of the StarTimes news coverage, particularly whether it serves narrow PR for business promotion purposes, or whether public diplomacy is included.

The assistance in developing African soccer in particular seems important. Njororai (2017) points to deficiencies in facilities, financial incentives, equipment, and technology-savvy professionals as factors holding back football development in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Therefore, the evolution of the StarTimes image as a soccer sponsor has been an intriguing one. Influence building is defined by relationship development with various soccer leagues in Africa, Asia and Europe; now that deals are signed with major franchises such as Manchester United, Bundesliga and La Liga, StarTimes is positioning itself as a gateway to Africa. Also, relationships with high profile national squads in Zambia, Ghana, Uganda and Senegal can indirectly feed into China's public diplomacy influence building (Diamond and Schell 2018). This may be important, given Xi Jinping's aspiration for China to become a football superpower (Buckley 2017).

7.3 Findings

Similar to the 10,000 Villages Project, coverage of football sponsorship was limited. Out of 283 stories in the sample, there were 57 linked to sport. And within the 57 stories, only 11 were linked to football team sponsorship, compared to 48 for broadcasting rights. This suggests that PR for the business was more important

than public diplomacy linked to China, which fits with the strong Innovation frame. The news orientation reflects the reality that acquisition of sports rights is the lifeblood of a pay television company, is essential for the private enterprise dimension of the PPP and also the identity of the company brand.

As mentioned in the last chapter, public relations as a strategic communication tool dominates. This means that on most occasions, the PPP was linked to profit-orientated projects, where public relations was prioritized over public diplomacy. In the whole news sample, material connected to PR from StarTimes represented 61% of news stories, which could account for a strong Concord frame, as mentioned in the previous chapter. 'PR' refers mainly to press release linked content, issued by StarTimes and associate content providers. Public relations influenced stories dominated the coverage at 80% (combining StarTimes content provider PR and StarTimes PR), and therefore largely determines the discourses around StarTimes. 'StarTimes content provider PR-related news' refers to when the story was not about StarTimes per se, but only mentioned StarTimes as its content carrier. All this suggests a divergence between public relations and public diplomacy, with the former dominating, providing limited scope for country image building. However, with regards to interviewees, the line between company and country is blurred, as will be seen in discussion of specific topics.

There is a similarity regarding the topics discussed both in news stories and in interviews, but the interviews with five journalists and Media Scholar A 2019 from

Ghana provide more context and depth to issues. The similarity allows for comparison between news construction and interviewee perceptions, the latter revealing whether there is a StarTimes public diplomacy contribution.

Table 16: Topics linked to football sponsorship

Themes	
News Stories	Interviewees
Image narrators	Image narrators
Contract negotiations	Contract negotiations
Financial aspect	Financial aspect
Bundesliga	Bundesliga
languages	languages
GFA scandal	GFA scandal
Link to China	Link to China
Contract issues	Contract issues

Image narrators – partnerships and mutual interests

Senior figures from StarTimes and sports organisations are the figures most likely to be quoted in the news, adding authority and most often a celebratory tone to the start of a partnership. Their words featured in news output that was predominately originated from generic press release material regarding international sport broadcasting rights acquisition, and therefore served the profit-generation part of the PPP. This PR dominated news construction articulated the need to win subscribers with alluring sport content, and positioned StarTimes as similar to other global pay television channels promoting its services

and company branding. The image building sought to equate StarTimes products with other sports broadcasters like SuperSport, with marketing aimed at the sports broadcaster industry rather than the general public. StarTimes being China's first sport-oriented international pay-TV company is therefore using Africa as its launch pad to expand markets for sport subscribers through increased channels.

However, announcements of StarTimes sponsorship of national teams presented a mixed picture. The Senegal Professional Football League president Saer Seck greeted a partnership deal with StarTimes as holding the potential to "increase the visibility of our championship" (Darmalingum 2018e) and therefore had a strictly football business focus. But elsewhere, public relations converged with public diplomacy to highlight country identity factors. StarTimes president Pang Xinxing hailed a sponsorship deal with the Ghana Football Association as "not only the cooperation between the two sides, but also a starting of cooperation between China and Africa on football industry" (Chunikiah 2016a). This quote links the business dealings of StarTimes to China-Africa relations, thereby positioning the deal as a contribution to economic diplomacy. However, as pointed out in previous chapters, the China frame was weak. Repercussions on a nation-state level were also implied in a deal in Uganda, with The Federation of Uganda Football Associations (FUFA) president Moses Magogo proclaiming StarTimes sponsorship as "transformational for the sport in the country" (Ramjan 2018).

There are implications for these developments. Promoting the availability of more sport content approaches the audience as a consumer, but sponsorship of a national team involves the audience as a citizen who may view the national team as more than a commodity to be commercialized; a citizen may view a team as part of cultural identity. Ziyati and Akindes (2014) speak of football becoming a “corporate entity [...] where the cultural practice of playing and admiring the sport has given way to the reproduction of a valuable and popular commodity” (p36). Such is the sensitivity of this issue, in South Africa a law was passed in 2005 prohibiting subscription TV services from restricting FTA broadcasters from televising national sporting events (Smith 2015). But in StarTimes narrations, the view of fans does not come through; frame sponsorship ensures that only the top echelon of the sport media business is heard. The lack of stories regarding the impact of StarTimes sponsorship on national teams exposes a public diplomacy gap in research. While sport diplomacy research usually focuses on using sport to fuse relations between nations (Rofe 2018), the tensions between sport, political economy and public diplomacy factors deserve more exploration.

Interviewees: borrowed boats

Previous chapters stated that StarTimes was not being used to promote China to a large extent. However, while StarTimes has not focused its strategic communication in the news towards the general public, it is using influential stakeholders to extend influence and build its reputation as a company. Research

has focused on the increased inclusion of social media influencers for new media sports marketing (Dixon et al 2015). However, social media influencing could be a route towards country image building diplomacy. According to Cook (2020), the use of a person's social capital for influence building is referred to as "borrowing the boat to reach the sea" (借船出海). In this research, image narrators on the interviewee side were mostly sports journalists who are actively co-opted into the narration of StarTimes through employment. These journalists could be playing a dual role, firstly for public relations but indirectly for public diplomacy. They communicate to wider publics on behalf of the company, as part of the African brand indigenization process but in addition also *shape* the communication through their perceptions.

Journalist A 2019 is a member of the Ghana Football Association and hosts a four-hour sports show on a radio station. Show content means that he "works hand in hand" with StarTimes due to its sponsorship of the Ghanaian Premier League:

"What they did was to get some influential journalists in the area of sports to be the influencers. They use the influencers to promote their coming events. Also, they have a YouTube channel to promote the Ghana Premier League. So once in a while they get sports presenters to work with them. For me on a personal level it has been beneficial because you get to be part of production work they are doing. Also, we get to enjoy the content for free."

Journalist B 2019 is a sports journalist and editor for a Ghanaian website. He is also a television football analyst on Ghana television, with one role being a pundit for the German Bundesliga. "StarTimes are sponsoring the Ghana Premier League and Division One which is a second-tier league, as well as women's football in

Ghana” he explains. “They are sponsoring virtually everything in football. My role as a journalist also provides me the platform to interact directly with StarTimes, because the German Bundesliga is brought to Ghana by StarTimes and Ghanaians really recognize the German Bundesliga.” StarTimes leverage his public profile for marketing purposes: “I do media work for StarTimes,” he says:

“I publish their press releases when they have an event, I broadcast it for them, I do a lot of publicity. I have got a substantial amount of numbers on social media: my website has over 20,000 likes on Facebook, over 15,000 on Twitter. I myself have close to 16,000 on Twitter, close to 10,000 on social media. I use all these handles to push the StarTimes brand, make it more vibrant in Ghana. I have direct access to the marketing manager, and communications manager. They call me about what they want to do, and they ask for my opinion.”

Journalist C 2019 describes himself as a sports journalist and a “digital media expert with deep interest in sports governance and African football” who has “been associated with StarTimes as a media influencer for three years.” Journalist D 2019 similarly is active for many media outlets, sports reporting on various platforms by conducting previews, live match updates and game highlights. These image narrators reveal the importance of their perceptions in influence building among African publics and the ongoing indigenization process. They operate from a good vantage point to see the operation first-hand and contribute views on the image they are also helping to construct.

These journalists define themselves as promoters for StarTimes, not China, a rationalization of benefit for the PRC party-state. Company and country images and purposes have been shown to converge (Wang 2006), therefore indirectly,

African StarTimes social media influencers can be said to be enabling China's public diplomacy efforts.

This can be conceptualized in different ways. It demonstrates the diffusionism of China's public diplomacy: the state outsources diplomacy duties to PPP contractors as part of FOACAC, and in turn the PPP contractor also sub-contracts promotional activities to local influential figures. The hand of the PRC state is twice removed, with the public mostly communicated to by the indigenous African spokesperson who is considered the voice of authenticity and credibility. This phenomenon can also be viewed as two stage outsourcing. While public diplomacy outsourcing is from the state to the nonstate actor, these African journalists represent the second stage of outsourcing, from the nonstate company to wider publics. Their deployment is similar to the practice of outsourcing of public opinion management activities to commercial companies whenever controversies arise involving China in the online press, to control negative narratives Batke and Ohlberg_(2020). Alternatively, they could be viewed as track three diplomacy: the first being the state, the second nonstate actors and the third the actors co-opted by track two operators. However this practice is conceptualized, these African borrowed boats seem aware of their sensitive obligation: to balance allegiance to the home country with priorities of the China-connected contractor.

Contract negotiations

An aspect of public diplomacy is influence building among key stakeholders in a society. Aligning the important figures in media and business towards China's aims is critical to secure a welcoming environment for Chinese investment. Influence building relates partly to Zaharna's theory of public diplomacy being a network, characterized by relational structures and dynamics (Zaharna 2014). Therefore, the sport media contracts StarTimes signs with football leagues represent relationship and influence building, both for the private business of the PPP and the wider arena of diplomacy. StarTimes is in a potentially advantageous position in that sport sponsorship is less developed in Africa (Amadi 2017), and therefore offers enormous potential long-term rewards with regards to broadcasting rights and intellectual property exploitation. Africa started opening up in earnest to the sports-media-business dynamic from the 1990s onwards, with satellite TV, media privatization and democratic politics spurring the arrival of transnational sport TV (Ziyati and Akindes 2014). To meet its aims, StarTimes declared itself determined to compete fiercely against MultiChoice, the owner of DStv (home of the SuperSport channel) and GOtv pay-TV broadcasters in Africa who dominate sport broadcasting (Forrester 2015, Olaoluwa 2021). But both public relations and public diplomacy are necessary for StarTimes to win over publics.

In previous chapters, it was revealed that the Innovation and Concord frames were strong, but a closer look at the news sample, and in the perceptions of media professionals, a more complex picture arises. This section focuses on narrations of

StarTimes sports contract deals. It highlights whether the success or failure of deals impact on the image of the company, China, or both. One issue is deal completion; as a relative newcomer in comparison to SuperSport, the company appears to have struggled to build relationships and influence in this marketplace. News coverage includes one-off narrations of deals; this seems to be because they later fell through, meaning no more stories. One report was that StarTimes and the Football Kenya Federation signed a five-year deal in 2015 to sponsor the national team, Harambee Stars (Sport Business Media 2015), but no further stories emerged. Another deal discussed was with the Ethiopia Football Federation back in 2017, but this seemed to not materialise. Federation marketing director Essayas Tafesse claims StarTimes “failed to submit details of its proposal and gave no response about its plans” (Darmalingum 2018f). Other problems were mentioned with regards to securing deals with national teams in French speaking Africa:

The pay-television operator StarTimes has been trying to secure rights to a domestic league in a Francophone country for over two years, having previously attempted and failed to secure rights to the Cameroonian Elite One and the Cote d’Ivoire Ligue 1 (Darmalingum 2018g).

Elsewhere the Ghana, deal signing was dubbed as “innovative” and “a bridge between Chinese and African sports industries” (Chunikiah 2016a), thereby blending nation-building and sport business objectives. A Ugandan contract was lauded by the Ugandan side as “a huge investment from a partner and we have a lot of confidence in it.” A Senegal deal with the national team was credited with

bringing competition against another pay-TV brand, Canal Plus, and the possibility of internationalization through the selling of players (Darmalingum 2018e). It added that “the Senegalese sport must be able to hope for a dazzling rise” but also noted that StarTimes was the subject of a legal dispute that claimed “StarTimes had no legal basis to carry out activities of pay television operator in Senegal” (Darmalingum 2018e).

The news stories suggest that the PPP private business has encountered growing pains as a deal broker, which impacts on the public diplomacy benefits accrued through partnerships. Contractual issues such as these all matter because if deals face complications, there is no public relations win and in turn, no public diplomacy outcome. And contracts are not likely to come to fruition if StarTimes cannot engage with the real-world complexities of African relations. This is a reminder that while economy diplomacy can be negotiated from afar with government officials and diplomats, it is the Chinese contractors which arguably have the tougher role of embedding themselves in the sports ecologies of individual countries, dealing with multiple day to day functions.

As to interviewees, they gave a specific insight into the contract arrangements behind the Ghana Football Association (GFA) partnership. While the StarTimes president pronounced the deal with the GFA as a new era in China-Africa sport collaboration in the press, Journalist A 2019 took a more prosaic view, which instead of mentioning China-Africa public diplomacy emphasized the financial

importance of rights acquisition, explaining simply that “StarTimes came into Ghana primarily because it acquired the rights to the Ghana Premier League.” Media ownership is brought up by Media Scholar A 2019: “The very organisation that holds your airspace happens to be the same organisation that sponsors the world’s biggest game (football),” he observed wryly. This alludes to concerns expressed elsewhere that StarTimes contracts grants them excessive power. While this issue was not mentioned in the press, it gives a fresh angle on the Economic Consequences frame.

Another reputation problem is respondent concern about the perceived opaque deal making when the GFA contract was negotiated, as StarTimes did not come with the highest standing. According to Journalist A 2019:

Before they (StarTimes) came to Ghana, they had huge issues regarding transparency, especially, who [it was] owned by and the lack of transparency from the Football Association when the deal was signed. People raised questions because many heard it would be five years, then later it became ten years.

Such complaints have been made regarding loans to Africa by China for years now, undermining public diplomacy efforts and feeding into debt-trap colonialism tropes (Brautigam 2020). Researchers have complained that calculating the true level of loans to Africa has been impossible (Were 2018). For StarTimes to gain a similar reputation has an impact on both its own and China’s image. Journalist D 2019 gives a comparable account to the start of the sponsorship, but links StarTimes with Chinese government influence, and the narrative is negative, contrasting to the tone of Pang Xinxing in the news story. “Most people felt the

Chinese politically got involved with StarTimes getting that long term (10 year) deal with the Ghana Football Association.” Journalist C 2019 focuses on the financial angle: “The deal was tagged as controversial because it was initially reported to be five years but turned out under shady circumstances to be 10 years for 17.9 million US Dollars.” He is sceptical about the standpoint of the governing authority. “According to Ghana Football Association, StarTimes is the only broadcast company that has the capacity to provide adequate coverage for the league based on the proposal submitted, the best logistical and infrastructural capacity. I doubt [that] but GFA is has the power to decide.” Once again, China is not fully blamed, with African government responsibility also criticized.

While this research covers different projects and issues, a recurrent narrative is anxiety over China’s influence and intentions. As yet, Chinese public diplomacy has failed to respond effectively to these tensions, only minimize attention in the media given to anxieties. Given the colonial subjugation China suffered similar to Africa, its communication tool deficiencies are quite striking. Despite longstanding, post-WW2 multilateral bonds of friendship and intensified relations due to globalization, and in spite the perception that PPP contracts provide more flexibility for companies, distrust lingers. Findings indicate that the politics of the home country identity – namely financial transparency in deal making - are constraining attempts to improve China’s image through its companies.

Contract benefits

It should be remembered that if StarTimes PPP sport business development succeeds, there are public diplomacy benefits, with China's companies representing an economic model suiting African contexts. A battleground for the company has been fostering partnerships with non-African football franchises. This is essential for competition against rival broadcasters, credibility and subscriber attraction - and therefore the repayment of loans, which would indicate 'win-win' development. In 2021 a deal was signed with Manchester United station MUTV, which followed the 2020 securing of broadcasting rights for the Spanish La Liga in French and UEFA rights before that. The most prestigious and pricey brands, the English Premier League came in 2021, a sign that StarTimes is making significant inroads.

It appears that StarTimes has started to make manifest a 'community of a shared future' in football television that is inclusive of China, Europe and Africa. News stories in the sample narrate what StarTimes views as the many advantages of one partnership in particular: the contract with Germany's Bundesliga. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of sports marketer HS Media Group, Mr Taye Ige dubbed the arrival of the Bundesliga on StarTimes as a "dream come true" (Solaja 2017), allowing the partner to direct the positive narrative. Further, a highly significant story was linked to indigenous programming: StarTimes began dubbing the German Bundesliga, French Ligue 1 and the UEFA Europa League matches into

Twi, a Ghanaian language. This was explained by StarTimes marketing manager Akofa Djankui as a way to “make our content much more meaningful to our subscribers.” The dubbed matches were broadcast on Adepa TV, a channel created by StarTimes as part of the channel expansion after digital migration. This serves StarTimes’s pan-African credentials but also complements public diplomacy efforts, due to the support for African language programming. Discussion of new channels is covered in the indigenous broadcasting section.

The popularity of the European leagues in the news is mirrored in the interviews. On the matter of how StarTimes sponsorship had brought positive change, the interviewees discussed several factors. One was the subscription prices for consumers. Journalist A 2019 praises the fact that StarTimes “aren’t as expensive as SuperSport coverage because, SuperSport are the affluent society in terms of costs. StarTimes is relatively cheaper to acquire.” While sport sponsorship is the private aspect of the PPP, it is still defined by economic development issues linked to the needs of the wider public. Previously it was mentioned that access to pay-TV was limited for decades to the wealthy urban dwellers (Paterson 1998, Duncan 2017). FOCAC has meant that the fully neoliberal, market values approach of the Washington consensus is moderated, to adapt to the African population context. This seems appreciated by the journalist interviewees. Journalist A 2019 also admired how the company produced and promoted football to “bring the game to the audience, to educate.” Journalist B 2019 elaborates on how the audience has been better served since the sponsorship:

“A lot more matches are shown on FTA television. Match TV, Ghana TV Plus, as well as Ghana Television, show some of the matches as StarTimes also shows some of the matches. So, the availability of more matches on television for people to watch increased. There are other matches that are played on StarTimes, like the Presidents Cup and the Independence Cup. The sponsorship of StarTimes is completely different from how SuperSport were doing it. When SuperSport were in charge of the broadcast rights, they were showing all the matches of the Ghana Premier League and Ghana FA cup live on SuperSport and a few other matches given to free to air television.”

Researchers have pointed out that the emergence of pay-TV diminished access of FTA broadcasters major sporting events, leading some countries to legislate to protect some level of access (Evens et al 2013). Sensitivity to this issue seems to have led to StarTimes to also provide increased FTA access, even if in other areas the StarTimes relationship with FTA channels has received a poor press. The journalist comments show that the economic development path has meant departing from the western model of pay TV where highly restricted access is the norm, and this factor has helped its image with viewers. This type of PR will complement public diplomacy elsewhere. Given the distinctive edge of this pay TV model, it is surprising that it is not trumpeted more widely in publicity materials.

But overall, the sponsorship has added benefits to the strategic communication strategy. StarTimes caters to the budgets of a wider African consumer base but still manages to align with prestigious western brands, therefore adding to its value. The sealing of the Bundesliga relationship won across the board favour with the respondents. Says Journalist C 2019:

“The coverage of the Bundesliga is and has always been impressive and StarTimes has really helped the Germans to get into the Ghana markets. One

benefit is seeing coaches from the Bundesliga coming to Ghana to coach youngsters and sharing their experiences with them.”

This brings attention back to the non-profit side of the PPP. Sport diplomacy includes the sending of club envoys to conduct people-to-people engagement, building connections at a grassroots level (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, n.d.) The soccer coaching would add to public diplomacy, as would StarTimes involvement with journalism training. While elsewhere in this research the involvement with journalism training is mentioned in negative terms and research reveals a mixed impact on Chinese training of Africa journalists (Wasserman 2013, Umejei 2018), the sports journalists were nothing but enthusiastic about the opportunities to go to both Germany and China as part of their job and to learn new skills. These skills have helped with the indigenization of the Bundesliga in Ghana through Adepa TV, which is a win-win for the company, but also Africa and the German partner. Journalist B 2019 explains that when the Bundesliga started three years ago as part of the StarTimes contract, Ghanaian journalists were taken to China. This enabled Ghanaian commentary on Bundesliga and French league matches in Twi. Journalist B 2019 is positive about the channel:

“A lot of local content are shown, so that people feel involved. It was a strategy to bring the game to the local people because StarTimes can see that not all their local folks will understand the English language. The moment you run commentary on television in the local language, you bring the game closer to the people. You let the people feel that this is our game, they enjoy it much better.”

As well as sports journalists benefiting from the arrangement, media professionals working in newly refurbished production facilities, such as for TopStar (the

Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation venture with StarTimes) also receive China-based training. This represents yet another public diplomacy dimension to the influence building strategy. The training has also been geared towards StarTimes improving its image through African language promotion. This development reflects a policy direction of StarTimes, towards creation of indigenous content, which was discussed in the previous chapter. But generally speaking, these types of partnerships converge with the 'shared destiny' narrative of cooperation by producing advantages for all stakeholders. That said, StarTimes is the ultimate winner as these deals position the company as a gatekeeper for foreign brands seeking to capture the African market. Ultimately, the journalists are being trained to improve a Chinese owned company.

Disadvantages and setbacks

Public diplomacy according to Zaharna (2014) is contingent upon relationship structures and dynamics. A test of the durability of relationships StarTimes currently fosters is how partnerships withstand pressures. Journalist perceptions in this section indicate that there are public diplomacy perils when deals run into difficulties. This issue continued into 2021, with StarTimes withholding sponsorship payments to Ghana Premier League Clubs (Football Ghana 2021), but problems covered the period of this research.

The most significant setback mentioned in the news stories centred on the disbandment of the Ghana Football Association, an association StarTimes

collaborated with. In a documentary, an investigative reporter exposed widespread corruption in the Ghanaian game, the whole football structure collapsed, and the journalist behind the reporting was assassinated. As coverage of the scandal elaborated, “The Anas documentary known as ‘Number 12’ incriminated GFA executives including the recently resigned-president, Kwesi Nyantakyi, as well as some referees, taking bribes and engaging in other unethical practices” (Darmalingum 2018h). However StarTimes, instead of fleeing the crisis, reframed the setback in a positive way. Akorfa Djankui, head of marketing at StarTimes Ghana Djankui put it thus:

We do not think that the exposé is going to stop us or alter anything that we do in terms of coverage of the league, and, so, we are still in support of the good of Ghana football, and, so, we are waiting for the way forward. StarTimes supports the government in its quest to restore Ghana football to its glory. We are very patient. (Darmalingum 2018e).

This was the only negative sports issue, in contrast to the overwhelmingly positive slant of news stories. However, in interviews, it is made clear that other problems did occur. They are discussed below.

Contract woes

Sometimes high hopes expressed in news about contracts are not met in the real world. This relates to the business and affective dimensions of Ingenhoff and Chariatte’s 2020 model. Disappointment in StarTimes is linked to a setback mentioned in interviews but not news stories in the sample. The deal with the Ghana Premier League included the construction of modernised football pitches.

This contractual obligation was not fulfilled, to the disappointment of Journalist B 2019:

We were told that as part of the contract StarTimes should be building an astro turf playing facility for each of the ten regions in Ghana each year. From 2017 up to this time, it's almost three years, so you can imagine, if they had gone into the construction of these astro turf facilities, we would have had at least three constructed. On that score, StarTimes has scored zero because they have yet to start construction on any of the astro turf pitches.

The non-building of new pitches led to another image problem. StarTimes caused ire among fans when certain games were removed from home territory due to the poor condition of pitches. While not mentioned in research sample texts, this story was covered extensively in Ghanaian sport press. Journalist A 2019 elaborates this way:

In terms of infrastructure, they decided to move clubs to a venue where there are FIFA standard stadiums. This has affected attendance. We've received a lot of backlash from the clubs. It was done by StarTimes and the FA agreed that the games should be moved. The clubs felt it wasn't good because then they would lose their home supporters, and then there are additional costs because they have to travel to another venue.

But on this same topic, Journalist B 2019 came to the defence of the company:

The fact of the matter is that not all the football clubs have very good sporting facilities as in the football pitches. Most of the football pitches will not look attractive, and will not showcase very good football on television. StarTimes decided to bring most of the clubs to particular venues where the facilities are international standard, so initially the fans were not happy. But when they understood the reason why the teams had to go to play their matches at different venues, they appreciated the approach by StarTimes and they understood it. Later on, they came to understand that there was nothing that StarTimes could do.

While many fans probably supported the sponsorship money brought by StarTimes, when sentiment turned negative, it seems that the media influencers became mediators, relied upon to manage fan expectations and express qualified

optimism. Looking to the future of the sponsorship was an area discussed with realism by the interviewees. In Ghana, before COVID-19 struck, hopes were high that things were going to get on the right track. “It’s gonna be a new start,” said Journalist B 2019. But even before the new contract, Journalist A 2019 saw signs of improvement:

Since they came to Ghana, through meetings with journalists, they have improved on the transparency, they have tried to engage Ghanaian journalists and explain what they do and how the journalists should help them reach out to the Ghanaian people. They improved in getting their own equipment and training personnel to be able to deliver, so on air they improve.

This then shows that image success is partly contingent upon trust and communication with key stakeholders, who feel part of decision-making. This is in line with World Bank thinking on PPPs, which advocates mobilizing stakeholder support for better project operation (Eftimie and Sugden 2019). Reputation enhancement among publics for both the private sector and governments seems dependent upon involvement of concerned parties. The engagement with the football fanbase may have faced some setbacks, but the journalists act as a bridge between them and the company. It seems that the relationship building aspect of public diplomacy, with the contractor renegotiating, adapting and re-configuring according to circumstances is essential to delivering on FOCAC pledges.

Thus, StarTimes in Ghana endures, despite constant pressure. “I think things are going to be better,” proffers Journalist B 2019. “We have to wait and see how things are going to be done in this new administration so we can give a perfect

assessment of how StarTimes is impacting the development of football in Ghana.”

Journalist C 2019 is less satisfied with how things are, and thinks the company needs to provide more finances and content going forward.

StarTimes needs to offer a bigger package to the clubs [and] coverage-wise, the company is still operating at 40% compared to when previous broadcaster Multichoice (owners of SuperSport) was in place. Coverage of the league is not up to standard and needs to improve.

Journalist D 2019 agrees on that last point, stating that “Improvement is needed in the covering more live games and if possible, a highlight show after games.”

Perceptions regarding finances are therefore intrinsic to influence building with publics.

This section of the chapter focused on StarTimes as an emerging sport television brand. It examined how it has developed as a business, through signing broadcasting rights deals. It also looked at how the projects had been communicated: this was mainly through press-release led PR, but also through social media influencers in the shape of African journalists. Therefore, their perceptions of the StarTimes brand were crucial both for public relations and public diplomacy.

Most news narratives of StarTimes as a sports TV brand constructed the company as creating profitable and mutually beneficial partnerships, in line with the business part the PPP. However, the non-profit aspect of the PPP and public diplomacy are also served through such PR constructions of the deals with national teams, and the Bundesliga franchise bringing football coaches to Ghana

(Oduro 2019). It appears that the strategic communication messaging adapts according to the type of relationship to be forged.

Perceptions in interviews revealed the complex balancing act to be filled by social media influencers. Charged with the task of message dissemination for the broadcaster, they cooperate and coordinate with StarTimes, performing a key role in brand building. However, even though the African journalists have been co-opted by the company, they fall short of becoming StarTimes proxies, as they do not converge with the company. They were willing to contradict glowing pictures given in news, delivering frank perspectives on issues of finances and contract fulfilment. They give a realistic, multidimensional image of the company which is someone missing from the news sample. That said, on balance, they were supportive of StarTimes and are crucial for understanding perceptions at the grassroots of the soccer industry, to building bridges with audiences, especially given lingering suspicions regarding the influence of China. Critical is the supportive attitude towards gaining training in China. This shows that there is a willingness for these stakeholders to be trained to be influence producers with good insight into China, which can only be beneficial for public diplomacy progression in Africa. This all sheds an interesting light on nonstate actor public diplomacy. The resources of PR can perhaps complement public diplomacy, and sometimes converge. But the sub-contracting by the nonstate actor to an influential strand of the public leads to cooperation which gives space for agency. This is probably the most delicate aspect of public diplomacy and country

reputation enhancement, with success or failure based on the perceived interests of influence builders.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter looked at narrations regarding sport at StarTimes, using news coverage and interviews. This chapter adds to the literature regarding the image building role played by Chinese enterprises linked to China's internationalization endeavours, which may contribute public diplomacy outcomes. Results show that StarTimes has wielded considerable influence in defining the projects along favourable terms in the press, due to the preponderance of press release recycling by news organisations, and thus news aggregate sites in the sample. What is clear is that StarTimes has used the agency granted by FOAC contractor status to downplay these very same roots. China and the PRC are very carefully minimized in news stories, while the image of StarTimes as a leading force in pay television is maximized. This was especially the case for sport orientated stories. This finding speaks to the ambivalence Chinese enterprises may feel as they internationalize. The focus on public relations rather than public diplomacy reveals the enterprise's desire to succeed according to business credentials. While public diplomacy narratives are sometimes accommodated, for instance regarding the sponsorship of African football teams, the aim is mostly to position the company image in relation to other pay-TV brands. Therefore, in this chapter, there is less convergence between company and country image compared to the 10,000

Villages Project context. This is partly because the sport and indigenous programming content relates more to premium packages rather than consumption of CGTN output. While the private business development aspect of the company image does not conflict with country image building, there is less capacity for public diplomacy outcomes.

With regards to news and interviewee narrative overlaps, there is a mixed picture, with some convergence but also divergence on important issues. Therefore, there is a gap between news constructions and perceptions. Most China related, public diplomacy orientated news and StarTimes public relations represented glowingly positive discourses, narrated by people in high power positions. However, a more nuanced, sceptical set of narratives emerged in interviews with African media professionals who have a better grasp of public sentiment. The StarTimes news sometimes lacked authenticity in comparison to interviewee perceptions and it seemed at times that PR was used as a cosmetic covering real problems. They are beneficiaries of the company, but they also carry the burden of image indigenization. Thus, their frank but moderate views are vital for public diplomacy, balancing African and Chinese priorities. Without their contribution to strategic communication, reputation building for both the company and country would be difficult. StarTimes is still trying to find a hybrid that combines pan-Africanism with PRC notions of 'win-win' and a "community of shared future."

Findings suggest that public diplomacy credibility necessitates real sharing of responsibilities and power, for instance granting greater space for African agency in decision-making regarding the direction of the company. But this approach is linked to a more western, dialogue and co-creation method of public diplomacy. Currently, China has suitable resources in its nonstate actors, and tools such as increased media outlets through which to wield discourse power. However, the domestically determined top-down model that renders actors passive or controlled by the CCP contradicts the meeting of objectives to increase power through persuasion. Alignment at multilateral and national levels mean FOCAC has aims that speak to the needs of Africa. However, contractors that have to convert traditional diplomacy policies into public diplomacy outcomes are still struggling with their influence building methods. Track three diplomacy – StarTimes using its African stakeholders – will be essential for the growth of pan-African branding, which would in turn support the PPP ‘private’ arm. Until the public diplomacy model of engagement that represents China’s identity alters, its nonstate actors will be unable to use their resources and wield their tools in ways that improve country image building results.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The nonstate relation to the state has always impacted diplomatic relations. This research looked at the relationship from the angle of public diplomacy, in the context of China's development assistance in practice. Literature defining how China's nonstate actors contribute to the projection of the country's image overseas has thus far lacked the nuance that case studies can provide. Couching the actors as little more than government proxies may hold some credence but provides insufficient insight to explain nonstate-state interactions and their effect on public diplomacy practices. The overriding aim was to explore how public diplomacy activities have continued to evolve, by looking at China's experimentations with flexibility with regards to strategies, methods and tools to reach foreign publics.

This research sought to examine one context where public diplomacy potential exists for China, but has been less explored: development assistance in Africa. Capitalizing on developing world sentiment that the Washington Consensus had under-delivered, China has used the multilateral vehicle of FOCAC to promote itself as an alternative model of development. FOCAC action plans carried out by nonstate infrastructure contractors have presented China with the possibility to build influence in Asia and Africa one physical or digital infrastructure project at a time. Huawei signalled China's capabilities and objectives as a development rising power, but the nonstate-state relationship dynamic it represents deserves attention through more case studies.

Thus, this research focused on a case study of StarTimes, a nonstate Chinese pay-TV company with millions of subscribers to its channels in Africa. While most Chinese contractors are involved with construction infrastructure, StarTimes represents development more in terms of media and technology infrastructure, with operations spanning digital and satellite TV solutions as well as broadcasting and production expansion. The departure from a literature focus on mineral resources extraction for infrastructure assistance, as well as the nonstate dimension, all contribute to empirical originality. The study also adds to research into public perceptions of the Chinese companies and their relationship to China. Three nonstate-state relationship aspects formed the focus: nonstate-state interactions (such as financial and political arrangements), the constructed image of this relationship in the news, and public perceptions of the relationship. From those angles, the aim was to develop insights regarding the public diplomacy and image building contribution of StarTimes towards China. Therefore, the three research questions centred on three project areas and the image of China they represented.

The projects represented development assistance, so linked country image building, public diplomacy and development assistance (Pamment 2018, 2016). Development assistance potential to contribute to country image building was investigated through the public-private-partnership (PPP) dimension of China's 'win-win' development cooperation model. The PPP nonstate-state relationship is a feature of 2015 and 2018 FOCAC agreements, but this context is previously

under-explored. The PPP financing option, increasingly deployed for infrastructure projects within China, has been called two-track diplomacy (Li et al 2019) to conceptualize the connection between state bodies (track one) and nonstate entities (track two). It ties the nonstate actor to the state: policy banks underwrite StarTimes - but on the other hand, most projects have a profit motivation separate from country image building motivations. So, as a dimension of nonstate-state perceptions, a question was, in the news media, how the PPP relation between China and StarTimes was constructed and in addition how the same relationship was perceived by Africans. Did the news focus mostly on narrow company-orientated public relations, or wider public diplomacy narratives linked to China?

Communication science was chosen as the most suitable theoretical framework through which to look at the messaging of StarTimes projects and China, and the reception of African publics. Framing was selected as the analysis tool, based on an adaptation of De Vreese's 2005 model of frame building and frame setting, as it accommodated both news coverage and audience perceptions. The research questions looked at the nonstate relation to the state through three project areas in four findings chapters. The three areas were the 10,000 Villages Project, the African media ecosystem and sport-related sponsorship and content.

Data came from three sources: news coverage of projects from three databases, residents in a rural Kenyan village, and interviews with city-based media professionals from several African countries. Articles from databases were used

for news framing and interpretative content analysis, to examine media constructions of StarTimes. A limitation was the lack of a wide choice of stable databases focused on the company in Africa: no single suitable database meant that three were used. Another problem was the lack of stories: ideally there would have been thousands to analyse, but it is a company which has received scant attention from western academia in comparison to state organs CGTN, CCTV, China Daily or Xinhua. However, a strength is that this adds to the freshness of the research. Also, the sample covered a five-year period – 2015 to 2019, thereby revealing coverage over a lengthy period, adding to validity.

Aside from framing and interpretative content analysis, a data collection source was semi-structured interviews. While the small sample cannot be representative of the whole of Africa, it included respondents a group of countries: Kenya, Zambia, Ghana as well as company spokespeople based in Beijing and Kenya. Also, the respondents represented two important stakeholder groups for StarTimes: rural Kenyan StarTimes subscribers and metropolitan media professionals with a vested interest in how the company engages with Africa media ecosystems. Further, given that country image data from western pollsters is largely from outside the African continent, this research adds balance to country image literature on China.

If there was a problem, it was that much more could have been achieved with more data – longer interviews and more news stories. With regards to interviews,

elements might have been exploited with deeper questioning if the interviews had been conducted by myself face-to-face in Africa. Certain aspects of the data collection were harder to control due to my distance from interview subjects. That said, more data would not have changed the findings, only reinforced them – the validity remains. The news stories, from stable databases chosen to improve reliability, were a fair representation of the nature of StarTimes coverage. Its profile has been low, and that was one rationale for the originality of the research. As to interviews, the language barrier with village residents would still have existed, and my presence as a stranger in a remote village might have influenced factors in a way that I could not predict beforehand.

Because of data collection constraints, there are limitations regarding the generalisations of this research. For instance, only one village was canvassed for findings chapter one. However, the news reports on the 10,000 Villages Project, which also cover other countries, as well as interviews with city-based professionals, means that a diversity of perspectives is given.

Summary of results

Moving onto results, the chapter four first findings section had this research question: *What is the image of the 10,000 Villages Project and how does it impact the image of China?* The 10,000 Villages Project that StarTimes conducted linked the company to Sino-Kenyan bilateral relations, due to its non-profit orientated nature and nonstate-state media as StarTimes distributed CGTN. Village

subscribers held a very positive view on the project, which was a good public diplomacy outcome, but city-based media professionals were more sceptical, and mentions were minimized in the press. Framing results suggested that the project was not being used in StarTimes media to promote China's image, but Africans made a clear link to China's relations with Africa through the company. The villagers thought this was a beneficial relationship, but only the StarTimes employee among the city media professionals stated an advantage to these ties.

For the second and third findings sections (chapters five and six), the question was *'What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African media eco-systems and how does it impact the image of China?'* For these chapters, the news coverage sample and perspectives of city media professionals were used. The Concord frame was found to be strong, due to the positive coverage of StarTimes projects in articles. However, a key reason given was the influence of public relations on news production. By contrast in interviews, anxieties were expressed regarding China's involvement in development assistance projects; for example, the StarTimes contracts for digital migration and the confrontation with FTAs was discussed. However, in the third findings chapter, support for indigenous programming was framed favourably both in the press and by respondents. This indicates that when China is seen to serve African interests, public diplomacy favourability is improved.

Chapter seven focused on football sponsorship with the question, '*What is the image of StarTimes involvement in African soccer content and how does it impact the image of China?*' Using news coverage and sport journalist perspectives, this elaborated upon the ways through which StarTimes hopes to propel subscription uptake and become a serious rival to other pay-TV brands in Africa. The chapter emphasized the important role played by the journalists and conceived them as being a track three level of diplomacy, due their position as a bridge between the company and the public. While they were critical of StarTimes shortcomings, such as contract fulfilment, they wanted more and improved involvement rather than less. This was a sign that their agency could be of use to StarTimes.

De Vreese's model (2005)

The frame building and frame setting aspects of De Vreese's model were useful to highlight how StarTimes and China were framed in the news articles and perceptions of interviewees. With regards to news framing, results showed constructing media messages in development assistance projects used similar approaches, whether the aim was PR or PD (Signitzer and Coombs 1992, L'Etang 2009). For instance, for PR, company staff were quoted but for PD, there were quotes from government officials. However, with regards to whether that meant the actual discourses represented a mix of PD and PR, PD was minimized. There were very few quotes linked to the China government and the China frame was not strong. This showed the nonstate actor StarTimes made efforts to maintain

detachment from the party-state in its branding. However, the De Vreese model accounted for the mental frames of interviewees through frame setting which revealed a weakness in the StarTimes strategy. Respondents did not seem to distinguish between PR and PD, between StarTimes and China. The results were in line with the research of Wang (2006) that country and company images are connected in the minds of respondents. Therefore, company behaviour was impacting attitudes towards China.

Public diplomacy, PPPs and development assistance

There are many indicators that public diplomacy, public-private-partnerships and development assistance were complementary to each other, but the extent was dependent on the project. In findings chapter one, StarTimes was chosen as the contractor for a state-mandated project, by which I mean, mandated by China and Kenya, which connected the PPP to development assistance. The project, which involved satellite infrastructure, was warmly received, and therefore public diplomacy was achieved for China's model of development, linking all three areas. As contractors, the company is also financially interlinked to China through the 'public' side of the PPP. Secondly, there was a nonstate-state media alignment in the sense that StarTimes packages include CGTN Africa, giving subscribers access to programming constructed by the Party-state. This gave viewers access to content extolling the virtues of China's economic transformation, and the construction of China through television also reaped public diplomacy benefits,

creating another PPP, development and PD congruence. Thirdly, company and country interdependencies existed because of popular culture programming from China – channels that showed kung fu. Thus, StarTimes is a public diplomacy tool to generate soft power. All in all, it was clear in chapter one that the PPP arrangement of development assistance created opportunities for the track two version of public diplomacy.

For research questions two and three, the picture was more complex due to the focus on profit-orientated, private side of the PPP. There was an overwhelming tendency in the construction of company image for no mention of China to be made. The results show that China was not cited in 82% of stories. Only 8% of sample news stories fell into the category of China-Africa relations – 29 in total. Due to the PPP arrangement focus on the ‘private’, commercially oriented side of StarTimes, coverage was mostly public relations orientated news. The company certainly avoids being constructed as a PRC state proxy (D’Hooghe 2014). The small minority of stories linked to China is an indicator that there is a divergence between StarTimes and China image constructions in the news media. An example theme would be the coverage of sport. Only a small number of stories was in PD territory, relating to the sponsorship of the Ghana Football Association. This reveals that with Going Out, business rather than diplomacy was the priority. While StarTimes is indicative of state capitalism, there is no micro-management, careful control from Beijing over internationalizing companies such as these. Therefore, public diplomacy objectives were diminished. That said, the fact that

in interviews a connection was made with China means private business *did* have an influence on perceptions. Thus, the interplay between PPPs, PD and development assistance is real, whatever the configuration of the project.

The African role in China's public diplomacy

Interviewees who were rural and city-based media professionals had a core similarity: both connected StarTimes to the wider aims of China. In StarTimes news construction framings, China was minimized, to portray StarTimes detachment from the PRC state. But this was not a frame shared by publics, for whom the company-country divergence barely exists.

This merging of nonstate-state relationships in the minds of Africans meant that the company and country images reinforced each other, for better and worse. In rural villages, the dynamic was perceived positively. For the 10,000 Villages Project chapter, state and nonstate forces complemented each other and village interviewees were clearly influenced by China's 'development assistance' terminology.

By contrast in cities, the role of StarTimes and its connection to China raised concerns; public diplomacy messages regarding China-Africa relations are treated with suspicion. There is a struggle to influence key stakeholders. An example was the StarTimes difficult competitive relationship with free-to-air (FTA) broadcasters. The possible negative impact of StarTimes on FTA content providers

supports Zhang's view that capacity building for African companies should be a priority even as Chinese firms win contracts (2021). Another way respondents viewed China and StarTimes business dimensions in terms of implications for Africa was the loans issue. While sometimes development assistance was constructed as free money, interviewees were concerned with debts to China. Therefore, constructions were not dispelling 'debt-trap diplomacy' anxieties. Perceptions of insufficient transparency over economic diplomacy action plans showed that neither public relations nor public diplomacy could construct China or StarTimes in ways that bestowed news reports with credibility.

StarTimes has managed to keep a low profile compared to Huawei, but as its projects are spreading its influence and the subscriber base grows, that will not remain the case. It has the potential to score public diplomacy triumphs in development assistance, but it faces difficulties regarding deciding the direction in which to turn for its strategic messaging. The projects of contractors represent an outsourcing of public diplomacy, but the outsourcing is the job half done. The company has succeeded in 'Going Out' but not quite worked out the engagement after it has arrived.

The above proves that StarTimes business development for narrow company objectives impacts wider public diplomacy. But for public diplomacy to succeed, there needs to be a closer connection between frame building (media

constructions) and frame setting (perceptions). An ideal scenario would manifest itself in similar messaging across media constructions and public perceptions.

But there are barriers standing in the way of a closer connection. The news reports contained a considerable amount of self-framing through PR – how the company saw itself. One problem is frame sponsorship: the lack of independent journalism related to StarTimes meant power in controlling media constructions of the company. The result was that StarTimes activities – media content acquisition especially - were framed as positive in the vast majority of cases (86%).

Another, related problem is that the views of Africans were inadequately represented in the news sample, which reflected an engagement shortcoming on both public diplomacy and public relations fronts. Staying on message meant an absence of African members of the public in stories who could have carried narratives more persuasively. Press release related articles from StarTimes and partners did not focus on the views of ordinary African subscribers (rather than experts). In stories about the 10,000 Villages Project, the attention was on narratives about what residents would receive from StarTimes, not with perspectives of villagers, showing the lack of villager agency. The passive recipient constructions meant that a public diplomacy type dialogue opportunity was lost. This also confirmed that 'new' public diplomacy based on interaction and dialogue (Melissen 2005) was a faraway concept in StarTimes coverage.

Further, the narrow range of news narratives for StarTimes was a failure of both public diplomacy and public relations. Interviews suggest that the private side of the PPP has encountered contract problems, but not many issues seem to have been handled in the company's media outreach. The public relations gap could be seen in the response of interviewees, and impacted China's public diplomacy. Project problems should have invested the company with great knowledge regarding what works in public engagement practices. 1960s propaganda style media constructions which are entirely self-serving would not win over sceptics. China's public diplomacy policies created elsewhere or constructed via PR is too weak to counteract the anti-China narratives which speak to China being a threat, especially due to debt.

A public relations strategy that does not match realities of population perceptions will attract negative public diplomacy repercussions. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 2008 financial crisis and Washington Consensus shortcomings in delivering economic development in Asia and Africa all helped erode the image of the US. In this research, while the 10,000 Villages Project was a laudable embodiment of foreign aid, and satellite assistance complemented the development discourse on CGTN, the African side was not seen to be in the driving seat, apart from the government choosing the villages. Thus, parts of understanding the project are missing, such as its sustainability. A danger is that gaps between media images and public perceptions would lead to China having the same public diplomacy shortcomings as the US during the Gulf War. Therefore, in the context of

development assistance, the agency of both the nonstate actor and local stakeholders should be deployed to be responsive to local contexts. Below, the rationale for localized public diplomacy is emphasized, using the case study as evidence.

Development assistance projects represent a key aspect of the 'Going Out' policy, and practices to internationalize, glocalize and indigenize. The issue is the extent of control during these processes. According to Ching Kwan Lee, "China's strategy of 'Going Out' is ordained and promoted by the center but its execution and outcomes are equally, if not more, chaotic and unpredictable than these domestic ones. In Africa, Chinese state interests must contend with local African political economic and social pressures" (2017:9).

China's nonstate actors carrying out projects therefore represent a managed loosening of control to deal with these real-world contexts. 'Nonstate' in Chinese terms means interdependency with - but also some agency from - the Party-state. The nonstate handles outsourced FOCAC action plans projects according to PPP remits. While economic diplomacy policies can be negotiated from afar with government officials and diplomats, it is the Chinese contractors who must face publics and in the case of StarTimes, embed within diverse African media ecologies. Project implementation is interrelated with public diplomacy - winning over populations. But nonstate actors cannot handle these obligations without help: a further sub-contraction to engage African stakeholders is required. This

diplomacy does not entirely fit with the 'new' public diplomacy concept of a network, as the hierarchy remains, with Beijing retaining ultimate power (Ayhan 2018). However, it does involve numerous intermediary steps in relationship cultivation, where agency and autonomy are exercised. Most literature attention has been devoted to top-down public diplomacy, decided by the Party-state: slow, cautious and controlled. But development assistance spaces create organic, bottom-up public diplomacy characterized by resilience in the face of messy setbacks, hard fought pragmatic engagement within local contexts, and win-win based on practice rather than rhetoric.

Public diplomacy implications – the case for localized public diplomacy

This research is evidence of the need for outsourced, localized public diplomacy. It is necessary for a Chinese nonstate actor to not be seen as 'the other', but as related to grassroots conditions. All three project types had context related sensitivities with African respondents. The 10,000 Villages Project was a case in point. As satellite infrastructure was erected, so was awareness and connections at regional level with underserved subscribers and community stakeholders – schools and a clinic. By contrast, results showed that city dwelling respondents were more informed, sceptical and demanding. While kung fu was popular in rural areas, a Kenyan journalist viewed it with suspicion, believing that such content was a soft power generator on behalf of China. Differences between city and urban views is one reason of many for contextual, local public diplomacy practices.

The sports programming chapter seven presented the situation that the bridge between the company and publics is partly contingent on communication with journalists and social media influencers. Some journalist interviewees are social media influencers charged with the task of message dissemination for the broadcaster; they cooperate and coordinate with StarTimes, performing a key role in brand building. The African journalists have been co-opted by the company, but they cannot be interpreted as StarTimes proxies, as they do not converge with the company. But this is a strength, not a weakness for both public relations and public diplomacy. That African agency raises credibility, which is essential to improve company media constructions and African public perceptions of China.

Interviewees were not objective bystanders but concerned with StarTimes in regard to what the company and its relations to China mean for their specific context. Journalists, scholars and marketing managers know the economic and political situations which influence how StarTimes operates, which affected perceptions. This all indicates that as well as ICT infrastructure, both China and StarTimes need to pay more attention to relationship infrastructure. Far more scaffolding of key stakeholder relations is required.

But public diplomacy does not mean a need for companies to mention China frequently. It means that as the company embeds into African media systems, it is creating networks and spaces for its own African indigenization and also more fluid channels for Chinese state capital flows. An alignment between pan-

Africanism and China's public diplomacy needs must be a core aspect of the StarTimes identity. The creation of a pan-African brand will require numerous Sino-African hybrids forged through negotiation and experimentation, for instance in programme production. Creating programming that Africans like is a kind of dialogue, a type of cultural interaction. The increase in indigenous language content and partnerships with producers, accounting for 24 stories out of 283 (9%), possibly provided public diplomacy opportunities. This indicates that public diplomacy is not necessarily about lauding of China, but of promoting shared development interests between a Chinese company and African publics.

Research results revealed that StarTimes followed the international pay-TV format of being dominated by being foreign content promotion. The balance must shift, both in the indigenous television programming and the marketing of the programmes. While foreign programming like football and drama dubbed into local languages is popular, interviewee sentiment suggests that opportunities to forge an African brand identity are being missed. As for media constructions, there needs to be more emphasis on StarTimes stories related to its Africanisation.

A trend that seems to be developing is StarTimes TV formats in the form of competitions. StarTimes has had programmes linked to farming and entrepreneurship and BRI along these lines, all related to learning from China's economic miracle. In 2021 yet another competition type show arrived for Nigerian StarTimes channel ST Nollywood Plus, based on 'Okirika', the selling of second-

hand clothes (Vanguard 2021). Thus, the benefit appears to be that several shows provide a framework within terms of reference already determined by China's development assistance proposition, but orientated towards African contexts. There is freedom to be creative, but within boundaries already set. Jack Ma was on the right track, despite his subsequent downfall. His show on StarTimes was based on a frame of reference that suited both China and African entrepreneurship. His work with African entrepreneurs was good public diplomacy and put African show competitors within China's sphere of influence, while providing potential products for Alibaba's e-commerce channels.

There are other signs that StarTimes is flexible to experiment and adapt, to meet both African and China's needs, such as the move into news broadcasting during the pandemic. For the first time, StarTimes produced news content, daily programming aimed at providing news on the Covid-19 and ways to avoid infection (Xinhuanet 2020, Madrid-Morales 2021a). That was an example of StarTimes being used for dual roles, serving public diplomacy needs when deemed necessary (Russel and Berger 2020, Thorley 2019).

International coverage of China during the COVID-19 crisis also provides examples of why public diplomacy localization, and case studies reflecting localized contexts, are important. Research shows that pandemic-related discourses served to reinforce *already entrenched* views about China held in countries; narratives emerging from domestic political positions - *rather than China* - held the most

influence (Zhang and Shaw 2021). Research from Australia (Sun 2021), the US (Jia and Lu 2021) and Britain (Zhang and Shaw 2021) all revealed that the image of China and relations with the PRC were contingent upon domestic political, economic, and social contexts. This would also explain why news outlets from former colonies in Africa were more likely to rely on British and French agencies such as Reuters and AFP for COVID-19 coverage compared to CGTN or China Daily (Madrid-Morales 2021b).

Positive change would involve working with African media stakeholders who are open to China. The pro-China African interviewees were calling for such a connection. Through their messaging, the hand of the PRC state would be twice removed, with the public mostly communicated to by indigenous African spokespeople who are considered the voice of authenticity and credibility. This would be an example of bottom-up public diplomacy, to complement the top-down equivalent. The generation of diplomacy would be stimulated through agency exercised by the target of the diplomacy, through their ownership.

But the pro-China media professionals cannot be just deployed for 'borrowed boat' activities (Cook 2020). Their role should encompass a broader remit with decision making power. They should help forge common ground between the company, publics and key media stakeholders. Wang Yiwei (2013) referred to this as finding commonalities of purpose. This also has echoes of China's 'shared destiny for mankind' narrative. Local staff acting as intermediaries could help with

the relationship with the FTA brands and media creators with whom StarTimes could compete and cooperate. Tackling anti-China narratives would be to neutralize them as far as possible, by rendering them irrelevant. That said, as well as finding common ground with China's public diplomacy, equally important perhaps is StarTimes converging with public diplomacies in African countries. FOCAC is an articulation of a shared vision, but it is at a traditional diplomacy level. The irony would be that finding common space would make China's diplomacy more palatable and credible.

As well as embracing African stakeholders, China and Africa should also include non-African and non-Chinese partners as part of public diplomacy. Germany's Bundesliga conducting media and football training in Ghana was excellent PR and popular with African media specialists. The Bundesliga connection proved one of the few occasions where the news construction aligned with positive respondent perceptions. Now that Manchester United TV and LaLiga are also part of the StarTimes stable of channels, perhaps that could increase. In fact, it might present an opportunity for StarTimes to present itself as a gatekeeper to reach Africa's sports fans. The advantage for foreign brands is that there is a ready-made infrastructure for the marketing of their brands.

Localized engagement could be termed track three form of diplomacy, building on the two-track diplomacy model proposed by Kerr and Taylor (2013) as well as Li et al (2019). Track one would be the state, track two would represent the nonstate

actor, and track three the stakeholders among the foreign publics. The rationale behind a three-track dynamic is a recognition that while tracks one and two supply the instruments and channels for public diplomacy, it is only through the agency exercised by track three publics that public diplomacy is produced. Such a three-track system would cohere with localization, pan-Africanism and decentralization practices which converge with the needs of both Africans and China's nonstate actors. It also helps fill a gap in literature, which has focused more on African agency related to Sino-African traditional diplomacy (Development Reimagined 2021) and less on African stakeholder agency in relation to Chinese nonstate actors. The problem with traditional diplomacy is a perceived detachment from ordinary citizens, as pointed out by a scholar respondent. Through track three engagement, control over messaging by the PRC state would not so much be lost but shared, reducing local suspicions among key stakeholders regarding China's motives. This would be a step beyond the 'borrowed boats' (Cook 2020) or 'state proxy' (D'Hooghe 2014) types of relationship discussions, towards co-ownership and co-authorship of public diplomacy initiatives.

Further research possibilities

This research presented many contexts that are worth closer attention. For instance, far more case studies are needed of China's nonstate actors involved in business, including PPP arrangements. It is policy that the types of industries that Chinese companies 'Going Out' engage in should diversify, but literature reflecting

media and technology firms is underexplored. Research would further an understanding of how public diplomacy is created when its generation is not the main objective of a business. The BRI must be responsible for hundreds of such contexts. Chinese contractors occupy a share of over 60% of the largest international contractors (Zhang 2021) but there is little knowledge on how they engage in the societies they operate in. Zhang believes that they are “a distinct group of actors in China-Africa economic relations [...] cultivated by the state to help China attain a more favorable position in the international economy” (2021:3).

In particular worth attention are other Chinese media and technology firms in Africa. Similar to StarTimes in TV, there has been increased involvement by other nonstate Chinese media-related industries in Africa. An example would be music streaming company BoomPlay, owned by Tencent. In addition, taxi-hiring company Didi has just entered the African market. African students studying in China have become a target for recruitment by companies involved in areas including e-sport, e-commerce and mobile phones. African recruitment is the first stage of a vital cross-cultural process that builds understanding - essential for indigenization of Chinese brands in Africa. This has echoes of what Benabdallah called the ‘socialisation’ of other societies to Chinese practices under the tributary system (2019:101), updated to be ‘win-win’ cooperation in alignment with the FOCAC and its encouragement of Chinese companies in Africa. The building of the Chinese country image in African nations will ironically involve China trusting

Africans to be in the driving seat, steering public diplomacy activities and shaping China's image according to localized African interpretations of 'a community of shared destiny'.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Frame coding Information

Components of frames (Entman, 1993)	Yes (1)	No (0)
Is there a problem definition?		
Is there a causal interpretation?		
Is there a moral evaluation?		
Is there a treatment recommendation?		
Attribution of responsibility Frame: (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000)	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story suggest that someone has the ability to alleviate the problem?		
Does the story suggest solutions to the problem?		
Does the story suggest that an individual/country is responsible for the problem?		
Human interest Frame (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000)	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue?		
Does the story employ adjectives to influence emotions?		
Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?		
Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?		
Conflict Frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups or countries?		
Does one party-individuals-groups or country blame another?		

Does the story refer to two or more sides of the problem or issue?		
Does the story refer to winners and losers?		
Concord Frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story reflect agreement between parties-individuals-groups or countries?		
Does one party-individuals-groups or country praise another?		
Does the story refer to two or more aspects of an agreement on an issue?		
Does the story refer to win-win outcomes?		
Morality frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Does the story contain any moral message?		
Does the story make reference to improvement of life as a result of an event / action?		
Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?		
Economic consequence frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Is there a mention of financial loses or gains now?		
Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?		
Is there a reference to economic consequences or pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?		
Is there a mention of potential financial loses or gains in the future?		
China frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Is the word 'China' or 'Chinese' mentioned?		
Is China-Africa relations mentioned?		
Is anyone Chinese quoted?		

Does an African mention the word China or Chinese?		
Innovation frame:	Yes (1)	No (0)
Are new partners mentioned?		
Is the responsible individual / country mentioned?		
Is a new project or partnership mentioned?		

Appendix 2 Interviewees: Chapters 5 and 6

Job	Country
StarTimes Marketing Manager 2019	Kenya
Media Scholar A 2019	Ghana
Media Scholar B 2019	Kenya
Journalist A 2019	Ghana
Journalist B 2019	Ghana
Journalist C 2019	Ghana
Journalist D 2019	Ghana
StarTimes Public Relations Manager 2020	Beijing
Journalist E 2019	Kenya
Journalist F 2020	Kenya
Journalist G 2020	Zambia
Film Maker B 2019	Kenya
Film Maker C 2019	Kenya
Film Maker D 2019	Kenya

Appendix 3: Chapter 4 10,000 Villages Project Questions for subscribers

- 1) How long have you been watching StarTimes?
- 2) Where do you watch StarTimes?

- 3) Before StarTimes, what television station did you watch?
- 4) If you still watch non-StarTimes programmes, what do you watch?
- 5) What language programmes do you watch (African, English, Chinese)
- 6) What do you think of the content?
- 7) Do you watch any Chinese shows? Yes / No. Please give reasons why for your answer.
- 8) How can the content be improved?
- 9) Have you learned about China through this content?
- 10) What image do you have of StarTimes? Please tick from the choices below:

Very positive positive /neutral/negative/very negative

Please give a reason for your answer

- 11) What image does StarTimes give of China? Please tick from the choices below:

Very positive/positive/neutral/negative/very negative

Please give a reason for your answer

Appendix 4: Chapter 4 10,000 Village Project Institution Questions

1. Was a television in here before this Satellite Villages Project?
2. What reason was given for putting the television here?
3. How it is used: education, entertainment? Please give details
4. Who watches it? For what purpose?
5. What time of day do people watch?
6. What times of day is the TV most popular?
7. Who is in charge of looking after the television? Who outside the village comes to look after it? What instructions do they give you to look after it?
8. What difference has having the television made?
9. How can Startimes be improved in terms of content?
10. What is your impression of StarTimes: positive/negative/neutral? Please give a reason for your answer.
11. What is your impression of China: positive/negative/neutral? Please give a reason for your answer.

Appendix 5: Chapter 5 and 6 Interviewee Questions

Media Scholar A (Ghana)

1. What problems of development has Ghanaian media faced since independence from the UK? E.g. what economic, television access and indigenous programming issues?
2. Your article for The Wire mentioned that there had been military leaders as well as democratic leaders since independence from the UK - how did the leadership and governance in general shape political influence in and ownership of broadcasting?
3. Please give a background on Ghana's free to air channels. What have been the strengths and weaknesses regarding how FTAs serve viewers?
4. Some see StarTimes as a threat to the FTA channels during the digital migration process. What are the issues regarding their relationship?
5. StarTimes is involved in Ghana's media development through the Villages Satellite Project, where it is helping provide satellite infrastructure to rural areas. Please say whether you view this project is positive, negative, or neutral. Please also give reasons for your answer (3-5 sentences).
6. StarTimes is involved with football sponsorship in Ghana. Please say whether you view this as positive, negative or neutral. Please also give reasons for your answer (3-5 sentences).
7. StarTimes created a new television station in Ghana with ST Adepa. Please say whether you view this as positive, negative or neutral. Please also give reasons for your answer (3-5 sentences).
8. Do you view StarTimes as connected to the Chinese government, or as just another private television organisation that is no different from a western company? If connected, how do you view this connection: positive, negative or neutral? Please also give reasons for your answer (3-5 sentences).
9. What image does the StarTimes sponsorship give of China? Positive, negative or neutral? Please give reasons for your answer.
10. What do you think is the impact of China on journalism values in Ghana? Positive, negative or neutral? Please give reasons for your answer.

Ghana Journalists

1. Tell me about your background – are you a footballer, as well as a journalist?
2. In what ways does this bring you into contact with StarTimes, and who at StarTimes do you talk to?

3. There have been some upheavals in football in Ghana. Can you explain briefly what happened in the past year, with the creation of the Ghana Football Association, and the role StarTimes has played?
4. What does football in Ghana gain from StarTimes sponsorship? What has improved?
5. What does StarTimes gain from the sponsorship – how is this partnership of mutual benefit? Does it have broadcasting rights?
6. How has sports journalism, sports broadcasting and individual sports people in Ghana benefited from StarTimes? (e.g. please name some activities which have been useful).
7. Has there been setbacks during the sponsorship (e.g. the disbandment of the premier league)? In what ways can the sponsorship be improved?
8. What current image does the sponsorship give of StarTimes? Positive, negative or neutral? Has this image changed over time, and if yes, why? Please give reasons for your answer.
9. Have you personally met the Chinese representatives of StarTimes? If yes, what is your relationship to them? What are the roles of the Ghana staff, and what is the role of the Chinese staff?
10. What image does the StarTimes sponsorship give of China? Positive, negative or neutral? Please give reasons for your answer.
11. Would you like more involvement by China in football in Ghana? Give reasons for your answer.
12. What do you think, generally speaking, about the involvement of China in Ghana in general?
13. How do you see StarTimes developing in Ghana in the future?

Zambia interviewee questions

1. Can you introduce your professional background: what is your role at ZNBC, and how does it bring you into contact with StarTimes?
2. Before ZNBC got into partnership with StarTimes, what were the media development issues that Zambia had faced? What had been the basic trajectory over the decades from independence from Britain, democratic governance, media liberalisation and the position of ZNBC into the 21st century? Basically, what were the issues behind StarTimes being in a position to become a partner with ZNBC?
3. How do you think TopStar will impact upon ZNBC over coming decades? Are there both advantages and disadvantages?
4. From the ZNBC staff perspective, what did you think of StarTimes being involved with digital migration, and how the government handled the contract? How did ZNBC staff feel the financial impact would be? What are the issues, the advantages and disadvantages?

5. From the position of free-to-air channels, why are so many upset about TopStar? What is the balance of power between private TV channels and TopStar? And what specifically are the issues with Prime TV – why did it deteriorate so badly?
6. It has been said that ZNBC staff have received training in China, and that studios have been refurbished. What do you know about this, and what do you think about China's training of African journalists?
7. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the Villages Access to Satellite TV Project?
8. How has StarTimes / TopStar / ZNBC programming been influenced by COVID-19? What new programmes are there? What do you think of the TopStar involvement in news broadcasting?
9. What image do Zambians hold of China: positive, negative or neutral? Please give a reason for your answer. Do they know TopStar has a Chinese partner?
10. What image of China does TopStar give: positive / negative / neutral: please give a reason for your answer. Do you think they are connected or separate?

Kenyan Journalist Questions 2019

1. Tell me something about your background.
2. With regards to television in Kenya, what are the development issues that the media industry faces? With regards to access, content and ownership?
3. When covering a company such as StarTimes, what issues do journalists face? Inside and outside newsrooms? Who owns the newspapers, and how might that influence coverage?
4. Most of the articles about StarTimes seem to be press releases, with very few normal Kenyans quoted. What is the reason for that?
5. What is the StarTimes relationship with journalists? Do you think StarTimes is very concerned about its image?
6. Local language: Chinese content is being translated into Swahili. What do you think of the fact StarTimes has a Swahili channel? Purpose?
7. More local content: What do you think of Rembo TV, the investment of nearly \$2 million, aimed at women, indigenous content. Do you know anyone who works there?
8. The Kalasha International TV and Film Festival with the Kenyan Film Commission: StarTimes produced an app through which people needed to vote for their favourite film. What did you think of these types of

partnerships – who do you think benefits the most – Kenyan audiences or StarTimes? Potentially a huge marketing opportunity.

9. What do you think about the 10,000 Villages Project, to expand TV to rural areas?
10. What do you see as the positives of StarTimes?
11. What are the negatives of StarTimes?
12. What is the image of StarTimes? Is it perceived as a Chinese company? Is it important to be seen as a Kenyan company or independent from China?
13. How is China perceived? Do you think StarTimes helps with soft power?

StarTimes Public Relations Manager 2020 Questions

1. Can you introduce how StarTimes in Beijing differs from StarTimes in African offices, and what your relationship with the overseas bases? For instance, are different jobs done in Beijing compared to Kenya or Ghana? And currently, how many bases overseas are there?
2. I wrote two articles about StarTimes previously. Are there any misconceptions you feel are important to correct or points to clarify? For instance, what was the year and circumstance behind StarTimes being chosen as a contractor to carry out projects on behalf of the government? Did the relationship start in 2006?
3. With regards to indigenous programming, can you talk about the strategy behind that? Why is it important? In Beijing, what do you do with regards to programming in African languages? Do you in Beijing have any connection to Rembo TV or Adepa TV?
4. Content: I heard that there was a dating show produced in Beijing. Can you tell me something about that? What is the thinking behind it? Also, is anything produced linked to the Chinese Super League?
5. Content 2: Some subscribers in Kenya have told me that they like the kung fu type shows on StarTimes. What is the reason behind providing the Chinese content, including the dramas?
6. Training and education of African personnel: does that happen in Beijing? If yes, is it conducted with assistance from universities?
7. With regards to COVID-19, can you tell me the evolution behind the decision to run news shows about that? Can you tell me the languages used, the focus, who is involved, etc?
8. What has been the feedback so far from viewers regarding the COVID-19 content? What plans do you have in this regard in the future?

9. Do you think what StarTimes has an impact on how China is seen in Africa? What image of China do you aim for, if any at all?
10. Are there any final comments you wish to make?