X Zhang, H Wasserman & W Mano (Eds.), *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa: Promotion and Perceptions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xi + 237 pp. £39.99, ISBN: 978-1-137-53967-0 (eBook).

K Batchelor & X Zhang (Eds.), *China-Africa Relations: Building Images Through Cultural Cooperation, Media Representation and Communication*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. xv + 253 pp. £24.04, ISBN: 978-1-315-22909-6 (eBook).

In the context of today's era of the global economy, the development of China receives world media attention. In recent years, there has been a particular increase in interest in China and its relations with Africa, especially after the launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 linking China and African countries. *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa: Promotion and Perceptions* and *China-Africa Relations: Building Images through Cultural Cooperation, Media Representation and Communication* both make original contributions to this growing area of research by exploring Sino-African relations from various perspectives. They contain both theoretical dimensions and empirical studies that are multidisciplinary in nature, involving contributions from academics and professionals in a range of fields such as cultural studies, international relations and media and communication studies. This article seeks to conduct a meta-review of these two books.

The books contain a collection of contributions made by researchers in the context of two academic conferences. *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa* was published after the 'China's Soft Power in Africa: Emerging Media and Cultural Relations between China and Africa' conference held in 2014 at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC). This volume forms part of the Palgrave Series in Asia and Pacific Studies supported by the UNNC's Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies. One of the Routledge China Policy Series titles, *China-Africa Relations*, is an outcome of the 'Building Images: Exploring 21st Century Sino-African Dynamics through Cultural Exchange, Media Representation, and Translation' conference held at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom in 2016.

A central notion surrounding many chapters in both books is that of 'soft power', a term first developed by Nye (2008, p. 94), which refers to 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment'. The term is used in parallel to 'hard power', which includes military and economic power. Nye (2008, p. 94) offered a new term of 'smart power', which combines hard and soft power. While soft power is a commonly used notion in the literature, it remains a difficult concept to define precisely. The usefulness of soft power is also doubted by some of the contributors in these volumes, as Rawnsley (p. 19) argues that '"soft power" fails to capture the nuances of each type of international engagement and their possible consequences'. Although differences of opinion still exist, there appears to be some general agreement that several elements account for soft power, such as cultural cooperation, public diplomacy and media interaction. Many contributions in both books are devoted to the pivotal role played by the media in the construction of China's soft power in Africa.

The book by Zhang et al. begins with a brief introduction to the broad context of the volume by one of the editors, Xiaoling Zhang. The main body of the book comprises three thematic sections which explore both the representation and perception of China's soft power in Africa. Section I lays out the theoretical dimensions and historical contexts of the book. Rawnsley first deconstructs the concept of soft power and proposes alternative assumptions to the understanding of Sino-African relations in Chapter 2. Thussu compares the Chinese and Indian modes of soft power in Africa, which offer new lessons for countries in the Global South. Ran reviews China's media exchange with Africa from 1949 to 2013 in Chapter 4. Section II contains four chapters on the

promotion of China's media and soft power. Rønning explores China's image in Africa through examples of StarTimes and China Central Television (CCTV) and proposes a narrative model of soft power. Madrid-Morales studies the media coverage of Africa by the Xinhua News Agency between 1982 and 2012. Zhang and Matingwina propose a new paradigm of 'constructive journalism' to study China's media engagement in Africa. Tan-Mullins investigates China's overseas aid to Africa and the role played by the media in shaping public perception. Section III, consisting of five chapters, examines perceptions of China's soft power in Africa. Maweu interviews Kenyan journalists and the general public on their attitudes towards China's media presence and political engagement in the country under the 'Look East' policy. Wekesa assesses Chinese soft power in Africa through 'building blocks and themes' of examples from the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Skjerdal and Gusu's frame analysis discovers that the Ethiopian press normally portrays a positive image of China and seldom criticises its negative aspects. Mano reports survey results of ordinary residents in the Zimbabwean capital city on their views towards China. Johanson questions the effectiveness of the increasing Chinese soft power in Sudan. The concluding chapter by another of the book's editors, Wasserman, presents the major findings of the chapters in this volume and proposes more questions for future research.

Unlike the majority of contributions to China's soft power in Africa in Zhang et al.'s book, the book by Batchelor and Zhang contains contributions on mutual communications between China and Africa. Following an introduction by the editors on three abstract but central concepts to the book – image building, nation branding and news framing – Taylor sets the scene for the whole book. The remainder of the book is divided into two parts. The first part, composed of two sections, deals with image building through cultural cooperation and diplomacy. Section A puts Sino-African relations in their historical context with Lefkowitz exploring the representation of Africa in Chinese contemporary arts during the Mao era and Shuman investigating the African sport delegation visits to China during the Cultural Revolution. The four chapters in Section B focus on the cultural aspect of contemporary China-African relations. Batchelor explores the reciprocity of Sino-African cultural cooperation in the 21st century. King reflects on the perceptions of the Confucius Institute as a form of cultural diplomacy on the African continent. Gilbert considers China's book donations to African libraries as another form of cultural diplomacy. Madrid-Morales provides insights into the actors, messages and audience of China's online public diplomacy towards Africa. Part 2 looks into the same theme of image building from the perspectives of media representation and communication. Wekesa paves the theoretical pathways of the Chinese media and public diplomacy in Africa. Umejei conducts framing analysis of news articles on China's engagement in Nigeria, which portrays China as both partner and predator. Moving to the image of Africa in China, Zhang scrutinises how the *People's Daily* and *Southern Weekend* publications cover African stories for their domestic readers. Cao analyses the discursive structure of developmental discourse in the representation of South Africa in a CCTV documentary. This book concludes with two chapters relating to technology, which focus on the corporate social responsibility activities of two Chinese telecommunications giants: Huawei and ZTE in Africa by Ojo, and China's technical assistance in East Africa by Shi et al.

Contributors to both volumes have adopted innovative approaches, such as 'constructive journalism' (p. 93) and 'building blocks and themes' (p. 135), as well as a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore China-African relations from various perspectives. Qualitative methods are chiefly employed to analyse the content of media products, including news articles and television videos, as well as interviews with respondents. Most studies are descriptive in nature, carried out in a specific country or region, and restricted to local surveys or

interviews. The findings would have been more convincing if the authors had examined large, randomly selected samples of societies for empirical studies. Compared with the large number of qualitative studies, quantitative studies still remain scarce. Gilbert's chapter, which interweaves the media coverage of China's book donation to Africa and cultural diplomacy, and Madrid-Morales' chapter on the convergence of China's digital media and public diplomacy in Africa are good examples of empirical research which adopt a systematic approach and identify how the media interact with other variables believed to be linked to soft power, such as cultural and public diplomacy. More of this type of research is required in the future. Most studies included in these two volumes examine traditional media platforms, including newspapers, television and radio. It would be more interesting if more studies included emerging innovative media such as social media and online news websites. Nevertheless, both books reviewed above are among the first comprehensive investigations of China-Africa studies and contribute in several ways to our understanding of the role of media in this complex issue. These two publications make ideal readings for policymakers, practitioners, scholars and students both in academia and in the media industry.

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