



Chinese media in Africa, 1955-1999: an overview of an enduring asymmetric relationship

Dani Madrid Morales, University of Houston | @DMadrid_M

Sino-African mediated engagement today

Type of Involvement	Company Name	Industry	Date	Description
---------------------	--------------	----------	------	-------------

(Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2018)

Systemic Asymmetries (I)

- China **isn't welcoming of foreign investment in telecommunication and media/information industries**, even from countries/regions that the Chinese government considers “friendly”
 - Only one foreign company is present in China's telecom sector... Telefónica with 1 per cent (!!) stake in China Unicom.
 - It is a **highly regulated market**, considered very sensitive by Chinese authorities.
 - For many years, **foreign investment regulations** prevented foreign capital from being the majority in joint ventures. Naspers' ownership of Tencent (31 per cent) has been declining.

Systemic Asymmetries (II)

- Random (yet regular, and increasingly systematic) **curtailment of foreign reporting within China**.
 - Chinese reporters (like others) expect to be able to report freely across (most) parts the world, but **the same is not expected within China**.
 - Some **foreign media are inaccessible in China**.
 - Foreign correspondents might be “**invited for tea**” and their visas are not renewed when needed and decided by Beijing.
- Chinese journalists report from every corner of the world. Very (very) **few African journalists report from China**—those who do are often “invited” by Chinese organizations.

Systemic Asymmetries (III)

- China severely restricts the media content market, and limits the import of audiovisual content (both TV and cinema).

(Year 2016)		TV Series	Animation	Documentaries
Africa	Imports	0	0	3
	Exports	4	19	106
Europe	Imports	82	416	1,245
	Exports	11	41	15
United States	Imports	109	1,041	376
	Exports	30	419	240
Rest of America	Imports	1	0	34
	Exports	36	270	717

Systemic Asymmetries (IV)

- Chinese global media have small but relatively loyal audiences.
 - Chinese dramas (*dianshiju*) circulate globally and **are said to be** popular. A “Beautiful Daughter-In-Law” (媳妇的美好时代) had audience ratings of 3.2 in Egypt. In Tanzania, it had “six million viewers”.
 - Netflix has acquired Chinese **content from Youku and iQiyi**. Audience figures are non-existent.
 - Based on survey research by myself and Wasserman, **CGTN’s news content** to be reaching between 2 and 8 per cent of elite audiences in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa.
- In 2018, China’s TV & radio chief regulator “called for patience regarding Chinese media engagement with Africa”.

Ahistorical scholarship

- The study of contemporary Sino-Africa mediated exchanges lacks **critical readings of shared history**, and, crucially, a **diachronic perspective** (rather than the prevalent synchronic accounts).
- As Sverdrup-Thygeson (2017) has noted, history has been used as a **“tool” in China’s Africa policy**. Particularly, three historical event have been **appropriated and fetishized**:
 - Admiral Zheng He’s 15th century travels to the “West seas”.
 - Sino-African shared colonial subjugation.
 - Chinese material support to Africa under Mao Zedong’s rule.

Sources

- ☑ Memoirs, official records and histories written by Chinese journalists and scholars (e-g. 中國國際廣播回憶錄; 中国对外新闻传播史).
- ☑ Contemporaneous (now declassified) research reports, public opinion polls, audience surveys, memoranda and correspondence from the US Information Agency (**Record Group 306, US National Archives**).
- ☑ Contemporaneous press reports, “propaganda” material and copies of Chinese publications (**Jay Lovestone Papers, Hoover Institution Library, Stanford University**)
- ☒ Contemporaneous official records (**PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives**)

Missing African narratives

Reach of Chinese media

- The earliest examples of Chinese media reaching African audiences were **magazines**, such as *Peking Review*, *China Reconstructs* and *China Pictorial* in the 1950s
- In Tanzania, “a number of young intellectuals and activists in urban centres avidly read the ***Little Red Book***” in the 1950s.
- Radio arrived 1957 when the first Arabic broadcasts started. French was added in 1956, then Swahili (1961) and Hausa (1963).



Chairman Mao shakes hands with President Senghor.

President Senghor Warmly Welcomed



Chairman Mao meets with President Senghor.



President and Madame Senghor and their entourage arrived in Peking on an official visit on May 6. Greeting them at the airport were Chinese leaders Chou En-lai, Li Hsien-nien, Chen Hsi-lin, Hua Kuo-feng, Wu Teh and Hsu Hsiang-chiao, and a big crowd of welcomees.

LEOPOLD Sedar Senghor, President of the Republic of Senegal and Madame Senghor paid an official visit to the People's Republic of China from May 6 to 13 and then from May 16 to 18, 1974, at the invitation of the Chinese Government.

Chairman Mao Tse-tung on May 7 met with President and Madame Senghor, Senegalese government ministers accompanying them on their visit, and the Senegalese Ambassador to China. Chairman Mao and President Senghor had a cordial and friendly conversation. Present were Premier Chou En-lai, Vice-Chairman Wang Hung-wen, Vice-Premier Li Hsien-nien and Assistant Foreign Minister Wang Hai-jung as well as Chi Tsung-shun, Lu Hsiu and Tang Wen-sheng.

President Senghor held friendly talks on further developing the friendly relations and cooperation between China and Senegal as well as on the international situation. The two sides expressed satisfaction at the results of the talks and issued a joint communique.

During their stay in China the distinguished guests visited Peking, Tachai, Shenyang and Shanghai where they were accorded a warm welcome by the Chinese people.

The Senegalese people have a glorious tradition of combating imperialism and colonialism. They waged a protracted and heroic struggle to resist foreign aggression and shake off colonial rule and finally won independence for their country. Under the leadership of President Senghor,

the Senegalese Government and people have in recent years achieved continuous successes in the just cause of safeguarding national independence and state sovereignty, developing the national economy, implementing the "Senegalization" of foreign enterprises and management and building their own country. In international affairs, the Senegalese Government pursues a policy of non-alignment, opposes imperialism, colonialism and hegemonism, opposes superpower economic plunder and exploitation, safeguards the natural resources and maritime rights of the country, supports the national-liberation struggles of the African countries and regions which have not yet won independence, and supports the just struggles of the Arab, Indo-Chinese and Korean peoples. It has thus made useful contributions to the cause of the united struggle of the Third World countries and people against imperialism and hegemonism.

China and Senegal are both developing countries belonging to the Third World. Their people have supported and encouraged each other and formed a profound militant friendship in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, hegemonism, racism and Zionism. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, friendly relations and cooperation between China and Senegal have developed satisfactorily. The successful visit to China by President and Madame Senghor has consolidated and further developed friendly cooperation between the two countries and friendship between the two peoples. It is a positive contribution to the cause of unity against hegemonism of the Third World.

President Senghor and other distinguished Senegalese guests, in the company of Wu Teh, Chairman of the Peking Municipal Revolutionary Committee, visited Peking University. Picture: At the college-run pharmaceutical plant.



President and Madame Senghor and other distinguished Senegalese guests visited the Tachai brigade. They were accompanied by Vice-Premier Li Hsien-nien, Vice-Chairman Chen Yung-kui of the Shansi Provincial Revolutionary Committee and Chairman Kuo Feng-hou of the Tachai Brigade Revolutionary Committee.

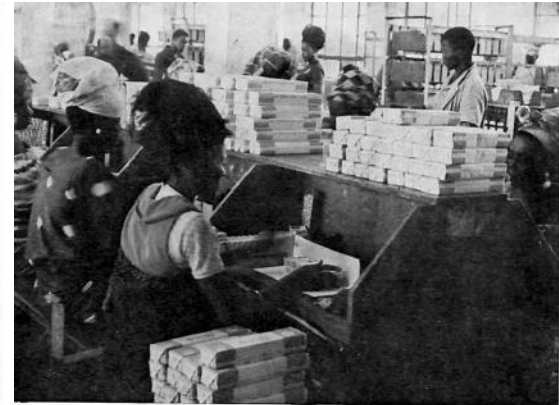


China Reconstructs

VOL. XXI NO. 9 SEPTEMBER 1972



Chileans rally to protest U.S. imperialist plunder and exploitation of their country and support the nationalization of the copper mines.



The packing room in a match and cigarette factory, an example of national industry being developed by the Republic of Guinea.

The Third World's Struggle Against Imperialist Economic Plunder

THE developing countries can win victory and freedom only by persisting in their struggle." Though the speaker, an Iraqi delegate interviewed after the third session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, was speaking from his personal experience and convictions, it was the voice of the entire third world.

At the U.N.C.T.A.D. session, which met in Santiago, the Chilean capital, from April 13 to May 21, the oppression, plunder and ruthless exploitation of the third world by colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism came in for a broad-sided exposure from representatives of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. They waged a sharp face-to-face struggle on issues of trade, sea-bed resources, payment of debts, financial aid, international shipping, commodity markets, international currency and other questions.

Under the guise of "aid" and "cooperation", through export of capital, dumping of goods, grabbing of important raw materials and

strategic resources of the developing countries, controlling their economic lifelines, undermining their national industries and shifting their own monetary and economic crises onto them, the United States and other imperialist countries have continually obstructed the economic growth of the vast majority of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Exchanges at Unequal Values

One of the traditional ways the imperialist countries employ to exploit the developing nations is to monopolize the international market, force down the prices of raw materials exported from the developing countries and raise the prices of processed products, that is, buying low and selling high.

The developing countries depend chiefly on the export of their raw materials to exchange for industrial processed goods, a situation created by long-term imperialist domination. Today the export of primary commodities (fuel, farm and mineral products) still accounts for 80 percent of their total exports. Quite

a few of these countries still have a "monoculture economy" and can only export one or two kinds of products to get foreign exchange. This enables the imperialist countries, with their control of the international market, to exploit them through trade and run their economies.

According to data published by the United Nations, world prices of raw materials in 1963 were more than 38 percent below what they were in 1951, and after that fluctuated at levels below the 1963 prices. In 1970 there was again a big drop in prices of some raw materials; the price of wool stood at 14.5 percent below the 1963 figure, copper 3.1 percent, wheat 3.2 and cocoa 24.4 percent.

During the same period, however, the United States and a few other "developed" countries raised prices on their industrial products sold to the regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

According to U.N. figures, taking prices of manufactured goods in 1950 as the base figures, by 1963 these prices had risen 23 percent,

and were still going up in 1970. The price of U.S. processed products rose 24 percent in that year alone. According to a report in the magazine *Vision*, from 1966 to 1970 the rising prices of imports in Latin America caused that region to suffer a loss of nearly U.S. 2,700 million dollars. Over 1,100 million dollars of this was in 1970 alone.

This "scissors differential" created by the sharp drop of raw material export prices and the sharp increase in prices of processed-product imports brought double losses to the developing countries. The *Irish Times* pointed out that as a result of worsening trade conditions the developing countries lost 13,400 million dollars in the period from 1950 to 1965.

In 1954 Colombia could exchange 14 sacks of coffee for a jeep. By 1969, 43 sacks were needed. A western press estimate says that in 1960 a developing country could purchase a tractor by exporting one ton of cocoa, but now five tons are needed. Such intensive economic exploitation is inevitably giving rise to strong indignation and protest on the part of the peoples of the developing countries.

Trade Discrimination and Control

In order to end their disadvantage of having only raw materials to export in the international market, in

recent years the developing countries have made efforts to build up their national industries and are turning out some light industrial products for export such as textile goods, leather manufactured goods and bicycles. But tariff and non-tariff barriers on imports of both raw materials and industrial manufactured products into the United States and a few "developed" countries seriously impede the growth of the developing countries' economies and foreign trade.

The Declaration of Lima passed in November 1971 pointed out that while the proportion of world exports coming from these countries dropped from 21.3 percent in 1960 to 17.6 percent in 1970, processed products from the United States and a few "developed" countries kept flowing into the markets of the developing countries. Hitting at the former's national industry, this has increased their international payments deficits. United Nations data shows that every year between 1962 and 1970 the developing countries imported more than they exported. Their total amount of imports over exports for the nine years reached 16,900 million dollars.

Taking advantage of their monopoly of the merchant marine business, some "developed" countries also extort a great deal of money from the developing countries in

shipping charges. On March 19 of this year, *Prensa Latina* reported that the annual payment for shipping charges in Latin America alone amounts to 3,000 million dollars.

Heavy Debts

The imperialist countries, on the one hand, grab huge profits from the developing countries through all these means, leaving them no other way to make up their deficits but to ask for loans abroad. On the other hand, through loans and "aid" they extort high interest from the developing countries, which, instead of helping them extricate themselves from their difficulties causes them to go deeper into debt.

A report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development stated that in 1969 the external debt of 80 developing countries was twice what it was in 1961, reaching 59,000 million dollars. This was 4,700 million dollars more than their total income of 54,300 million dollars from exports in 1970. Press reports say that the total amount of foreign loans to the developing countries stands at over 65,000 million dollars at present. In fact, most of the developing countries are now in the situation of asking for new loans to pay their old debts. Over one-third of the loans asked by developing countries in 1970 from the industrial capitalist countries and the international financial organizations under their control were used for payment of such debts and interest on them. As the United States and a few "developed" countries intensify this kind of robbery of the developing nations of the third world, the burden of debt on the latter is bound to increase.

Economic Crises Shifted

Like someone "using the neighbor's field as an outlet for his overflow", U.S. imperialism has always shifted its economic crises onto other countries, and it is the developing countries which suffer the most harm. In every economic crisis in the capitalist world since World War II, none of the developing countries escaped damage as a result of the forcing down of raw

SEPTEMBER 1972

33

34

CHINA RECONSTRUCTS

Missing African contributions

The role of Chinese correspondents

“I sent a telegram to [Malian] President Keita. Two days later, he called back and invited me for an interview. I immediately flew from Conakry to Bamako. I had been to Bamako more than three months ago. (...) I explained to the President China’s rejection of the “Two-Chinas”. He replied to me frankly by saying that they had not established diplomatic relations with Taiwan. He said he had heard a Taiwanese national was in the country and guaranteed me he would be expelled”

Wang Shu, China’s first correspondent in Guinea

African voices

- A few months before Radio Peking decided to launch Swahili radio services, a group of Swahili speakers were hired as “foreign experts” and brought to Beijing.
- They trained several Chinese reporters to be able to report in Swahili.
- Once Chinese reporters (thought) they were comfortable with the language, the Tanzanian “foreign experts” were sent back. They did not go on air, and they did not report independently.

Missing African audiences

Listeners and readers

- China's official historiography highlights the **success of radio broadcasting to Africa** (Xianfeng Gan, 2004)
 - At the Hausa department, between 1963 and 1978, 47,414 letters were received.
 - In 1990 alone, more than 35,000 letters were received.
 - According to journalists working at the time, these numbers were higher “than the BBC or Voice of America received annually”
- Survey research at the time reveals a different picture. **Chinese broadcasts never developed an audience**. There was no market for it (like there was none for other international broadcasters).

Foreign Radio Listeners in 1960

	BBC	RTF	VoA	Radio Cairo	Radio Moscow	Radio Peking
Nigeria						
Every day	41%	1%	7%	1%	2%	1%
Several times a week	12	4	7	1	3	1
Once a week	1	2	5	2	2	#
Once of twice a month	1	#	1	#	1	1
Less often	#	1	1	#	#	#
Ivory Coast						
Every day	[7]	10%	[5]	[2]	[5]	[1]
Several times a week	[22]	16	[15]	[2]	[13]	[4]
Once a week	[14]	11	[17]	[2]	[20]	[5]
Once of twice a month	[1]	1	[3]	[1]	[9]	[6]
Less often	[3]	2	[2]	0	[1]	0

Enduring Asymmetries

- The asymmetries in Sino-African mediated engagements today have their roots in the history of China's foreign information/propaganda campaigns:
 - Preponderance of **official narratives** and ideological messages.
 - Small audiences for Chinese content, **no audience for African content** in China.
 - (To a lesser extent), **limited African voices** and narratives
- Sparks has called for “[r]esurrecting the **imperial dimension** in international communication” (2015).
 - Soft power might not be the most appropriate construct.