China in South Africa: the media's response to a developing relationship[i]

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Abstract

The formal invitation extended to South Africa by China late in 2010 to join the BRIC formation of emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China) may be seen as a confirmation of the growing economic ties between China and South Africa. The expanded trade between these two countries is seen as an opportunity for South Africa to meet its development needs. For China, the interest in South Africa as an emerging market forms part of its growing interest in Africa for resources, markets and diplomatic support. But this involvement has not been unequivocally welcomed. While for some China's growing concern in Africa is seen as an opportunity for the continent to grow its economies and become a stronger presence in international markets, others are concerned that the economic boost that China brings to the African continent comes with too many strings attached. These critics are concerned that China's controversial human rights record may pose a bad example for African countries, especially when China's domestic policies lead to neutrality over human rights abuses in African countries where it seeks to establish links with the ruling elite. Some of these critics go as far as to say that China's involvement in Africa constitutes a new type of imperialism and a 'scramble for Africa'.

This paper investigates how the South African media reports on China, and how this reporting compares with reporting of other BRIC countries in order to establish whether the negative views of China's involvement in Africa noted in the literature also holds true of the South African media. The article aims to contextualise this reporting through a reference to the South African media landscape as itself a contested and transitional space.

Introduction

The relationship between China and Africa goes back a long time. When examining current Sino-African relationships within a new global world order, an examination which forms the broad framework for this paper, it would therefore be useful to follow Zeleza's (2008) advice to adopt a perspective that transcends simplistic categories and instead "recognizes the complexities, contradictions and changing dynamics of Africa's age-old engagements with China".

The first instance of "Sino-African contact" can be traced back to 1415, when Admiral Zheng He visited more than 30 countries in Africa (Waldron 2009: vi). Official relations between Africa and China in contemporary times can be seen to start in 1955 with the first Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, aimed at promoting economic and cultural co-operation. The Bandung conference became a "powerful symbol of the viability of Afro-Asia as an identity and political concept" (Le Pere & Shelton 2007:69), and is also the place where China for the first time encountered African liberation movements. African states were especially receptive for the revolutionary example of Maoist China, being themselves engaged in liberation struggles against their colonial masters. China undertook to be a reliable ally and development partner (and supplier of weapons) of colonized African states, especially those with liberation movements like South Africa, South West Africa (presently Namibia), Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Anglola, Mozambique, Guinea and Cape Verde (Le Pere & Shelton 2007:49-52). A proliferation of Sino-African diplomatic agreements took place in the 1950s and 60s, with the first of these an agreement between China and Egypt in 1956 followed in later years by diplomatic ties between China and Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Guinea, Mali, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya, Tunisia, Ghana, Congo, Central African Republic, Zambia, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Mauritania (Waldron 2009: vi-x). As the Cultural Revolution gained momentum (1966-1976), official ties between China and these countries were severed as China withdrew from foreign commitments and recalled its ambassadors to African countries (with the exception of Egypt) (La Pere & Sheldon 2007:58; Waldron 2009:x-xiii). Economic ties remained, however, and in the 1970s China funded several large infrastructural projects in Africa, including the famous Tanzania-Zambia (Tan-Zam or TAZARA) Railroad from 1970-1977) as well as 75% of the military aid given to the African Union. The relationship between China and Africa has therefore been 'episodic', ranging from "intense activity" in the 1960s and 1970s to neglect in the 1980s (Alden 2007:9). (For the internal politics in China that shaped its foreign policy, see Alden 2007:9-11. For a more detailed outline of the development of Sino-African relations and between China and developing countries more generally, see Pere & Shelton 2007:41-63).

The development of China-Africa relations in the 21st century gained impetus when it became clear in the 1990s that to maintain the "roaring pace" of its economic growth as a result of economic reforms, it would need to look for a new sources of energy and natural resources to feed its "seemingly insatiable appetite for energy resources"(Daly 2009:78) - which it found in Africa (Alden 2007:11-12). By the mid-2000s, over 800 Chinese companies were trading in 49 African countries, resulting in a steep rise in trade (Alden 2007:14). Last year (2010), China became the continent's largest trade partner, making up 10.4% of Africa's total trade (Buthelezi 2011). This trade has not only increased 10-fold in the decade between 2000 and 2010 – compared to the eightfold increase in trade with the rest of the world – but even outperformed the rapid boom in gross domestic product (GDP) in China. China's interest in Africa has however not only been motivated by economic concerns, but also extended into the political and military arena as China looked for partners in the

developing world that could strengthen its position in the face of economic sanctions and political attacks after crackdowns on pro-democracy protests in the 1990s (Zheng 2010).

This intensified political-economic relationship in the era of globalization and within a changing global geo-political landscape, started to raise questions as to how China's renewed interest in Africa should be viewed; whether China should be seen as a 'partner or predator', the consequences of the tension between the US and China over mutual interests in Africa (Mills & Thompson 2009:56), China's support for corrupt African leaders in undemocratic regimes, Chinese companies' harsh labour practices and the importation of Chinese labour to the exclusion of local workers (Sautman & Hairong 2007). At the same time there is the recognition that Chinese aid usually does not come with as many political and economic strings attached as aid from the US, due to the Chinese policy of "non-interference in domestic affairs" (Daly 2009:82; Sautman & Hairong 2007). China has ingratiated itself to African countries by cancelling bilateral debt of 31 African states to the value of approximately $1.27bn, and continuing to give billions in development assistance (Tull 2006).

As far as South Africa is concerned, its current formal relationship with China in the post-apartheid era should be seen as part of larger geopolitical shifts and a changing world order. Both countries form part of a "new geography of international relations" emerging since the end of the Cold War (La Pere & Shelton 2007:84). The rise of countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China and their increasing impact on the global political and economic stage, indicate that the "global South of developing countries no longer occupies a peripheral and generally marginal position in international affairs" (La Pere & Shelton 2007:84). China and South Africa are seen to be part of the vanguard of states in the Global South that seek new strategies to redress the systemic marginalisation of the Global South and reposition the South as a growth engine for the global economy and a strategic political formation (La Pere & Shelton 2007:84-85). The rise of China in tandem with other emerging markets has also led to calls to examine new regional formations such as 'Chindia' which not only shift the global political-economic centres of gravity, but also reshape the global public sphere and communications landscape (Thussu 2010:243-245).

The formal diplomatic relationship between South Africa and China was initiated shortly after South Africa's formal transition to democracy. China had broken formal economic ties with South Africa in 1960, and focused its attention during the apartheid years on the liberation movements (Taylor 2006:128). Initially the apartheid government's ties with Taiwan were retained in the post-apartheid era, within a system of dual recognition of Beijing and Taipei, leading to a bidding war between these two countries for investment in South Africa. However, in 1996 pres Nelson Mandela announced that the ties with Taipei would be broken and Beijing alone be recognized (Alden 2007:33).

South Africa has become regarded by Beijing as "the continent's mineralogical treasure house', as the world's largest producer of gold and big reserves of "industrially important

metals and minerals" (Dayly 2009:80). South Africa is one of the two leading African countries (next to Angola) with whom China does business (De Beer & Schreiner 2009). The latest figures from South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry indicates China as the top exporter to and importer from South Africa by country (DTI 2011). The dynamic relationship between South Africa and China as emerging powers within the new global geopolitical and geo-economic order was formalised recently when South Africa received an invitation in December 2010 to become part of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) group of emerging powers (Seria 2010). South Africa's entry into this formation underlines its role as an economic leader on the African continent (for a detailed discussion of the various historical stages in China's relationship with South Africa, see Taylor 2006:127-152).

Although a vibrant and lucrative one, the relationship between China and South Africa has been rocky at times. Resistance against Chinese involvement is led by the trade union federation Cosatu, who has described cheap imported Chinese goods as a 'tsunami' that will damage local industries, especially the textile industry. South Africa's textile union estimated that 800 manufacturing units and 60 000 jobs have been lost as a result of Chinese imports (Radebe 2009). Yet South Africa, like other African countries, however also owes a historical debt of gratitude toward China for its support of anti-colonial and anti-liberation movements (Radebe 2009).

China's role in post-apartheid South Africa is therefore not a straightforward one, but marked by historical legacies and contemporary political-economic power relations. Whether viewed as a positive engagement or a negative impact, the size and impact of this engagement cannot be ignored. It can therefore be assumed that the relationship between these two countries would enjoy significant media coverage. The question is how this relationship would be portrayed.

Zeleza (2008) has categorized the portrayals of the deepening economic relationship between China and Africa as a whole as being either in terms of imperialism, globalization or solidarity. To these categories one could add an Orientalist narrative, in which China is either presented as a threatening Other (the 'yellow peril', or the evil dr Fu Manchu, the evil genius or super-villain set on undermining the West to achieve global domination, Sautman & Hairong 2007) or as a mysterious, exotic and unknowable force (as an 'ominous dragon' that has to be 'fed' with African minerals, e.g Daly 2009, De Beer & Schreiner 2009).

What has been the case in the South African media? How has the relationship between China and South Africa been portrayed? How has China and its presence in South Africa been represented? Has the closer association between South Africa and China as partners in the BRICS grouping had an impact on China's image in South African media? These are the questions this paper will begin to explore. To understand the context within which the relationship between China and Africa has been represented in South Africa, a brief overview of salient points regarding the development of the South African media in the post-apartheid era has to be given first.

Media in a transitional democracy

The South African media has undergone a complex range of shifts and transitions since the end of apartheid. Space does not permit us to go into details of the contestations and negotiations regarding the media's changing role in society here (for discussions of the transformation of South African media, see Wasserman 2010a; 2010b; 2009). What is relevant to note however is that the media in post-apartheid South Africa operates within a new global environment, where geopolitical power relations have been redrawn since the Cold War, but also a changed domestic environment, where political transformation required a response from a media that was seen as still serving a small elite. The end of apartheid therefore meant that the South Africa re-entered the globalised media environment at a time when the Cold War Divisions between East and West were fading and new global geopolitical formations started to emerge. The coincidence of democratization in South Africa and the end of the Cold War does invite some parallels between the media in South Africa and the media in post-Communist countries in Eastern Europe and Asia,where authoritarian control of the media for political means has given way to twin processes of democratization and marketization, which have circumscribed the nature and extent of media transformation in these environments (Sparks, 2009; Splichal, 1992).

Within this new global environment South African media also repositioned itself as an emerging power on the continent and further afield, while opening itself up to new global flows of cultural content as well as the interpenetration of global capital (Tomaselli 2000). While the South African media reoriented itself to this new global landscape, it also had to redefine its role domestically, in relation to a contested public sphere, marked by severe class inequalities and competing normative expectations of what the media's role in the new democracy should be (for a discussion of these various normative positions, see Wasserman 2006). A double repositioning has therefore been going on in the South African media – a reorientation towards the global media landscape, as well as a rethink of its role within the country and the paradigms within which journalism is being practiced (cf. Berger 2008).

As far as the internal repositioning concerned, several clashes between the media and the post-apartheid government have occurred since democratisation. The media are under pressure from the ANC government who is routinely attacked by especially the print media (and reciprocrates with counter-attacks) and wants to establish a statutory Media Appeals Tribunal as an alternative to self-regulation. While the print media by and large serves a small elite audience (with the exception of the newly emergent tabloid press aimed at a black working class, see Wasserman 2010c), the public broadcaster, the SABC, is beset by governance and financial problems to the point where calls have been made for its dissolution and replacement by a distributed public service model (Fourie 2010). This might lead us to expect that the mainstream print media would see a relationship with China

mostly in economic terms, as this would be an interest of their affluent audience, while their professional ideology of being a watchdog and 'unofficial opposition' to the ANC government (See Wasserman 2010b) would lead them to be sensitive of any suggested possible political influence by China. In turn, the SABC, often being accused of succumbing to editorial pressures from the government, might be expected to be more welcoming of South Africa – China relations sponsored by the government. One may therefore assume that the South African commercial press, with a strong oppositional to antagonistic stance in relation to the government, might be more critical in their reporting of China as a predatory influence with negative impacts on the fledgling democracy and human rights culture. On the other hand, one might assume that the SABC might be inclined to provide more positive coverage of the government's attempts to forge closer links with China.

This raises the problem – how do various South African media report on the country's growing relationship with China, and in relation to other emerging powers? Would it even be possible to speak of *the* South African media's representation of China?

Before we tackle directly, let us first look at previous studies in this area in an attempt to establish how China was covered in the media on previous occasions.

A controversial relationship

China's presence in Africa is usually viewed as a controversial one, and often portrayed as a Manichean binary – either "predator" or "partner" (cf Le Pere 2006), "friend or foe", "comrade or colonizer" (Nullis quoted in Zeleza 2008:173).

Questions are frequently posed in terms of an 'either-or', as in the following remarks by Firoze Manji (2007:vii):

> Is China just the latest in a line of exploiters of Africa's rich natural resources who put their own economic interests above humanitarian, environmental or human rights concerns, or is China's engagement an extension of 'South-South solidarity'? Does China's engagement enable African countries to free themselves from the tyranny of debt and conditionality that, through two decades of structural adjustment programmes, have reversed most of the gains of independence, or is Africa just swapping one tyranny for another?

China's role on the continent has come under intense scrutiny by Western powers, fearing that their business interests – tied to a 'good governance' agenda – might be under threat from the Chinese who do not set the same conditions for investment. The West fears that China's *economic* involvement in the continent would allow it to develop strategic alliances that will also its *political and military* presence (Parenti 2009).Western countries, primary

among them the US, are faced with the dilemma of how to promote their economic interests while not undermining the institutions of a liberal, constitutional state which they see as a necessary condition for flourishing market economies (Alden 2009:103-4). This fear could also stem from Western assumptions about itself as a saviour of benighted Africa, while ascribing exploitative motives to its competitors (Zeleza 2008:174). Consequently, Chinese investors have often been portrayed in alarmist terms as ruthless, predatory or exploitative. Concerns by Western powers over China's rise to prominence have often been ''fed by media determined to stoke the fires of controversy" (Alden 2009:107). Western commentary are often "hysterical and hypocritical" (Zeleza 2008: 175):

> The language is one of possessive paternalism, simultaneously disdainful and dismissive of both Africa and China, while bemoaning and dreading the loss of historic Euro-American hegemony over the continent. The message is loud and clear: China cannot be good for Africa, as the West has been. It is a discourse in which western benevolence and Chinese malevolence are assumed and compared, often unashamedly.

The media's concerns over China's role in Africa also extends to its influence on media development itself. As Banda (2009) points out, Chinese investment in media development on the continent goes further than investment in infrastructure, to "ideological expurgation" and "cultural reproduction" as well. The Zimbabwean publisher of the weekly South African newspaper *Mail & Guardian*, Trevor Ncube, has been quoted (by Brautigam, in De Beer & Schreiner 2009) as saying: "(The Chinese) are all over the place. If the British were our masters yesterday, the Chinese have come and taken their place" (Brautigam, 2008).

Dominant discourses frequently highlight China's support for undemocratic rulers such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe (Obiorah 2007:49) its destructive approach to the environment, disregard for human rights, disrespect for workers' rights, intolerance of an opposition and free press (Manji 2007:vii; Karumbidza 200788). Fears have been expressed that African leaders may point to China as an example of economic development without democracy to rationalise their own authoritarian rule (Obiorah 2007: 45). The underlying assumption in these media discourses, as Zeleza (2008: 175) has pointed out, is that Chinese are corrupt and authoritarian themselves, and therefore have no qualms in flouting Western standards of good governance; because Chinese workers are used to poverty they can work cheaply under poor conditions in Africa. Western reportage about China's involvement in Africa has therefore prevailingly predicted that "Chinese trade, political and security cooperation may enable repressive regimes in Africa to avoid even the relatively limited constraints on their

conduct imposed by Western donor conditionalities" (Obiorah 2007:47). This concern about China's lack of commitment to democratic values can also be seen in media coverage in other countries with whom China are engage in bilateral co-operation, e.g. India (Rao 2010).

On the other hand, positive views of China's role in Africa include the hope that China can serve as an alternative political-economic framework to the Washington consensus which has put pressure on African countries to adopt 'structural adjustment' marketization programmes (Obiorah 2007:42); an influx of modernisation, capacity building, human resources training and scientific exchanges (Karumbidza 2007:91). This positive view tends to regard Sino-African relationships as South-South solidarity in an era of globalization – a continuation of a historic cooperation that could save Africa from economic marginalization in the new global landscape (Zeleza 2008:174).

Zeleza (2008:174) sums up the various positive and negative portrayals of China as fitting into one of three frames: imperialism, globalization and solidarity.

There is reason to suspect that South African reporting in South African media might follow much the same pattern. As far as an *anti-imperialist* sentiment goes, Zeleza (2008:179) points out that some of the most vociferous criticism against Chinese involvement in Africa has come from South Africa. Criticism (inter alia from former president Mbeki) that China should not be allowed to "colonize" Africa, is regarded by Zeleza (2008:179) as being rooted in South Africa's own "hegemonic ambitions" on the continent due to its economic prowess. (See Wasserman 2011 for the dominant discourses of pan-African nationalism in the Mbeki era) Concerns have also been expressed that China might interfere in South Africa's domestic policies, as it has done in other countries e.g in Zambian elections (Parenti 2009). When South Africa refused a visa to the Dalai Lama in 2009, it was widely seen as a result of pressures from China. South Africa also, like China, supported calls for the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir to be dropped, and the two countries vetoed sanctions against Mugabe in the UN Security Council (De Beer & Schreiner 2009).

Linked to this anti-imperialist position, one might assume, would be the recognition of China's historic role in supporting the liberation movements in South Africa. This remembrance of past *solidarity* could lead the South African media to be more sympathetic – or at least less distrusting – of China's motives than the Western media. But South Africa's emergence as a rising power after its years of isolation and sanctions during the apartheid era has also meant that a new form of *solidarity* with China could have emerged. South Africa has been keen to assert its position in a reconfigurated landscape as part of a "growing family of revisionist developing countries that have – with more diplomatic aggression, ideological cohesion, and political co-ordination, and greater nuance – advanced a discourse and agenda that seeks to enable the South to engage and participate more meaningfully in shaping the tenor and substance of inter-state relations" (Le Pere & Shelton 2007:84). This positioning would lead one to expect that the discourse on China in South

Africa might be welcoming of the assistance that China could afford South Africa in its own economic development and its support in coming into its own into a new *globalized* environment, especially as a newcomer in the BRICS club of emerging nations.

But one has to be careful of assuming that the South African media is a monolith. As briefly alluded to above, the South African media landscape is a contested one, with various positions linked to different political-economic positions. Given the fragmented nature of the South African public sphere and the huge inequalities between potential audiences briefly described in the section above, a question that arises is how the various media platforms in the country will follow either of the above typifications or emphasise certain aspects. One assumption might be that the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Association (SABC), which has a broader public mandate than the commercial press but a closer relationship with the government (for which it has been duly criticized), might take a more optimistic, pro-South-South view as it follows the official lead from government, and also might be more inclined to show solidarity with a historical ally in the liberation struggle. In contrast, the commercial press, with its predominantly elite audience might be expected to show closer allegiance to Western powers and therefore display a more critical view of what may be seen as China's imperialistic ambitions on the continent. At the same time, and contradictorily, the business press might welcome the opportunity that closer ties with China might afford South Africa to assert itself in the globalized marketplace.

A previous study (De Beer & Schreiner 2009) of media coverage of China's involvement in South Africa has pointed to the fact that this relationship is a newsworthy one, i.e. that news events pertaining to this relationship are likely to receive coverage. The reason for the high volume of coverage is that China's involvement in Africa activates both political and economic discourses, the two highest areas of coverage in SA media after general society matters (De Beer & Schreiner 2009).

A previous content analysis of South African media coverage of China (De Beer & Schreiner 2009) found that contrary to the above assumptions of China's presumed deleterious impact on South Africa, South African media have not been overly negative in their reporting. China received only a little more negative coverage than other foreign powers like the US and the UK, leading the authors (De Beer & Schreiner 2009) to conclude that the media image of China's involvement in Africa seems on the whole to be more that of a developmental partner than that of an exploitative colonialist.

The favour seems to be returned by Chinese media. In a Media Tenor analysis in 2009 of the coverage of South Africa in the Chinese media, the Chinese media revealed a positive stance on South Africa. This analysis resonates with another study (Zheng 2010). of reporting on Africa in Chinese newspapers during the important FOCAC China-African summit in Beijing in 2006. Zheng's study found that the relationship between China and Africa was overwhelmingly portrayed as a mutually beneficial one and based on principles of equal

partnership rather than a neo-colonialist attitude (Zheng 2010: 274-275). It should be remembered that the coverage studied in these two analyses took place in the runup to the World Cup in 2010, which may have added buoyancy to South Africa's image.

Research questions and method

In De Beer and Schreiner's (2009) study they recommend that future research into the topic of media coverage of China's relationship with Africa extend the analysis to include Brazil, Russia and India, in the light of the increasing importance of these countries in the new global configuration of emerging states. Subsequent to their study, South Africa was (although not uncontroversially) accepted into the BRIC grouping of emerging economies. This raises the question as to how China's relationship with South Africa is portrayed in comparison to Brazil, India and Russia.

This study therefore builds on De Beer and Schreiner's (2009) study to firstly find out if and how the image of China in the South African media has changed in the subsequent period, especially given the fact of South Africa's rise in prominence as a full member of BRICS and its official accession to the group at the end of 2009. This study also adds a further dimension to the previous study by briefly exploring how different South African media have reported on China and provides some contextualisation which further qualitative studies may build upon to establish the underlying reasons for these differences.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Was the coverage of China in the South African media predominantly positive or negative in the period 2010-2011?

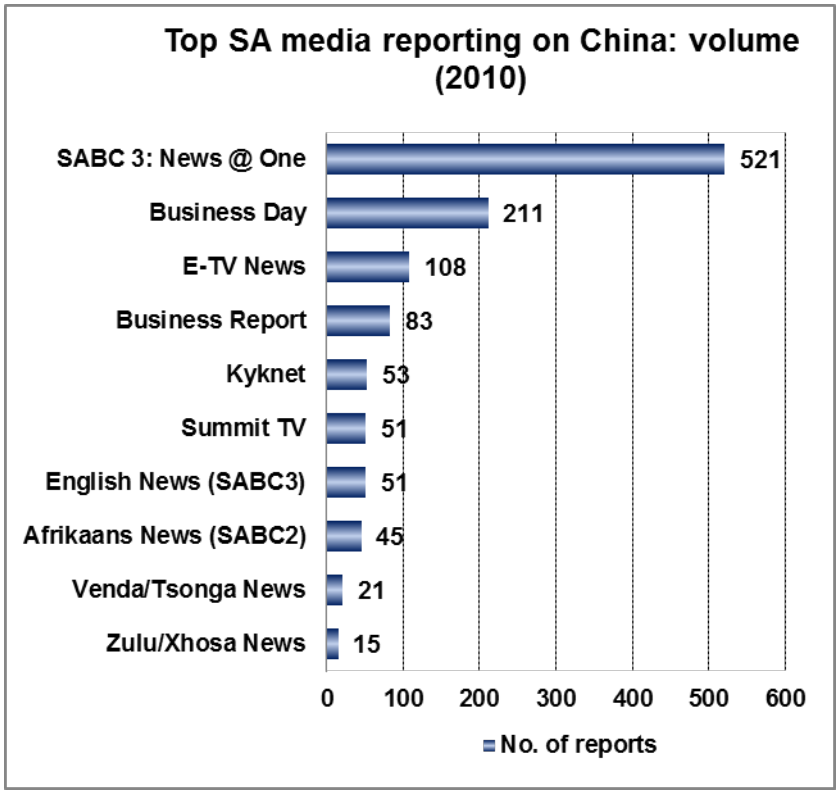
2. How did coverage of China during the 2010-2011 period compare with a similar previous study (De Beer & Schreiner 2009) conducted in 2009?

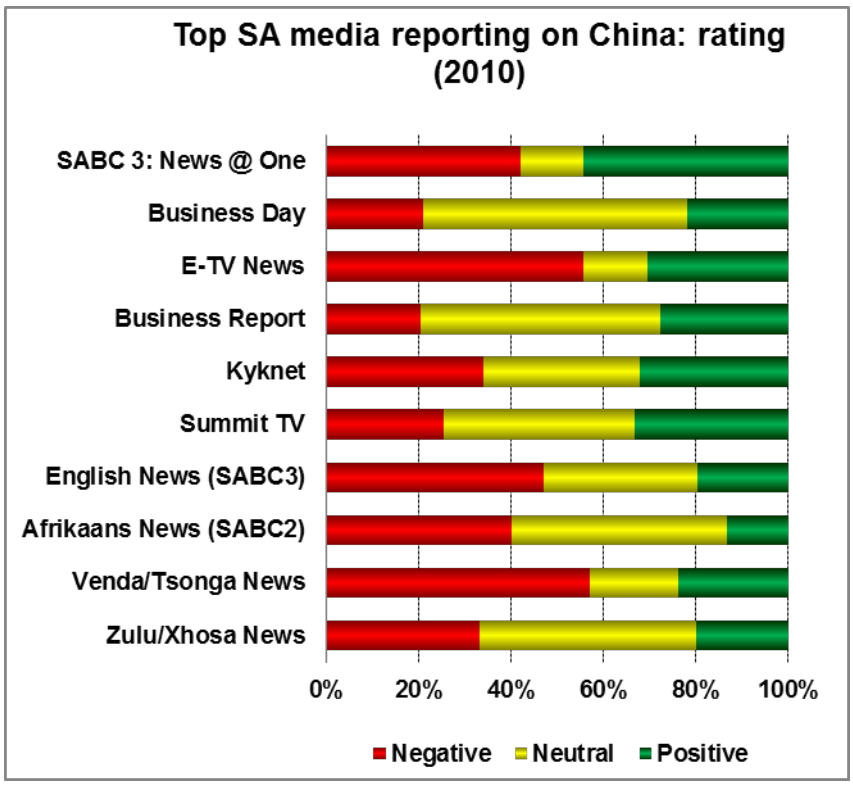
3. How does coverage of China compare to coverage of other BRIC countries, both quantitatively (in terms of frequency of reports) and qualitatively (in terms of positive or negative slant of article) during this period?

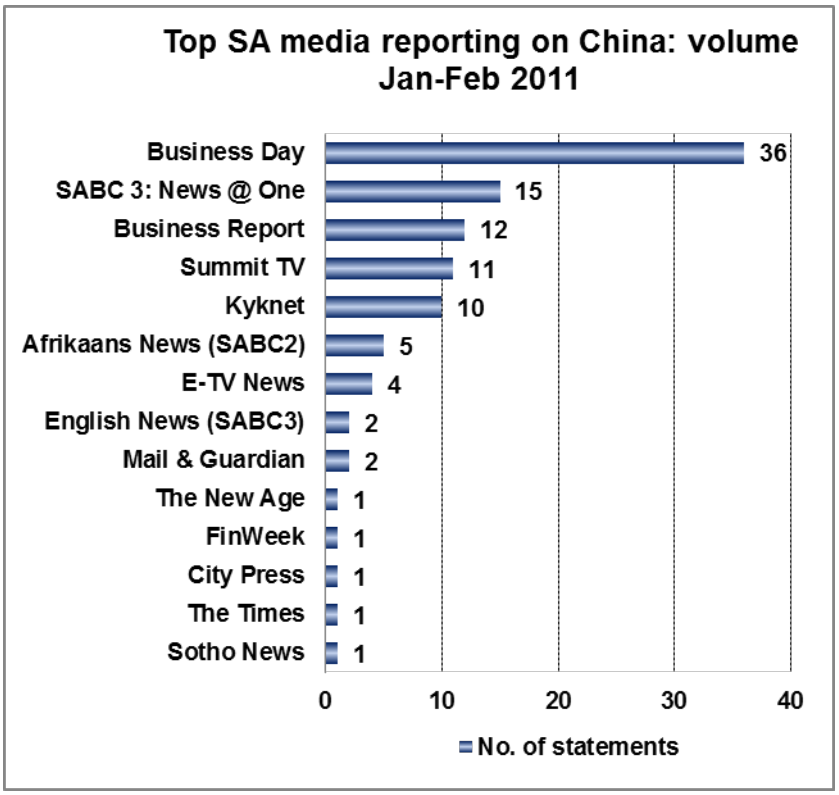
The method followed is similar to that of De Beer & Schreiner (2009) who used similar data produced by the media analysis organisation Media Tenor. The data was generated through a computerized content analysis of major newspapers, TV news channels and radio stations, i.e. across all mainstream 'traditional' (excluding the web) platforms. Reports are analysed on a sentence by sentence basis, to identify mentions of China, Brazil, Russia and India. All statements are then evaluated for their attitude toward the topic, in this case the countries in question. Coders, trained to code according to the criteria, are subject to bi-monthly validation tests as well as weekly spot-checks. Inter-coder reliability of at least 80% is achieved.

Findings:

1. **Research question 1: Was the coverage of China in the South African media predominantly positive or negative in the period 2010-2011?**






Top SA media reporting on China: volume
Jan-Feb 2011
Business Day
SABC 3: News @ One
Business Report
Summit TV
Kyknet
Afrikaans News (SABC2)
E-TV News
English News (SABC3)
Mail & Guardian
The New Age
FinWeek
City Press
The Times
Sotho News
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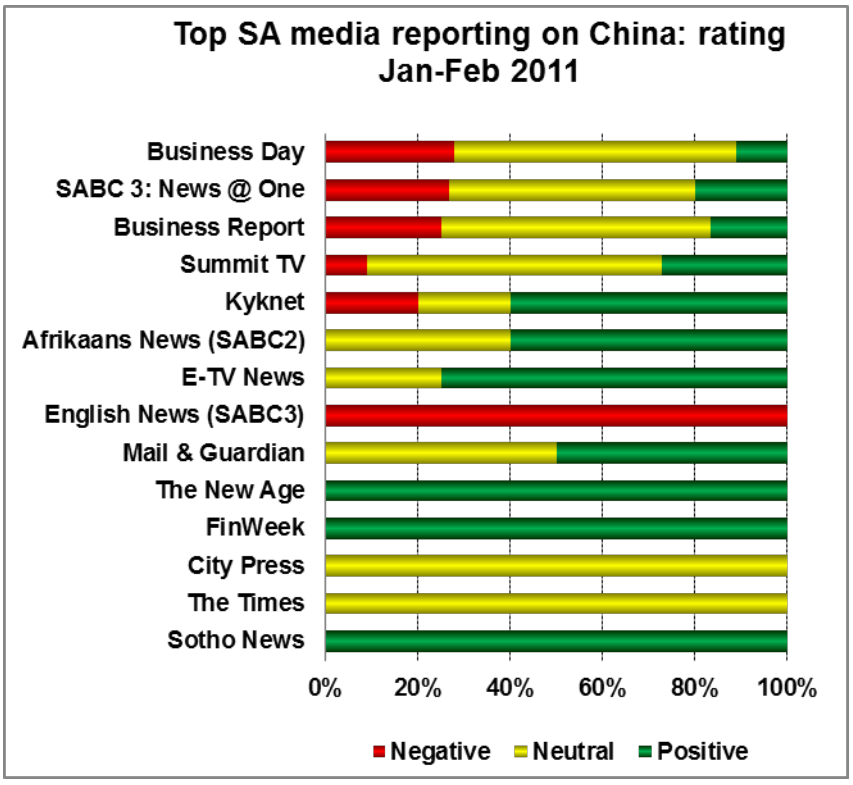
40
No. of statements

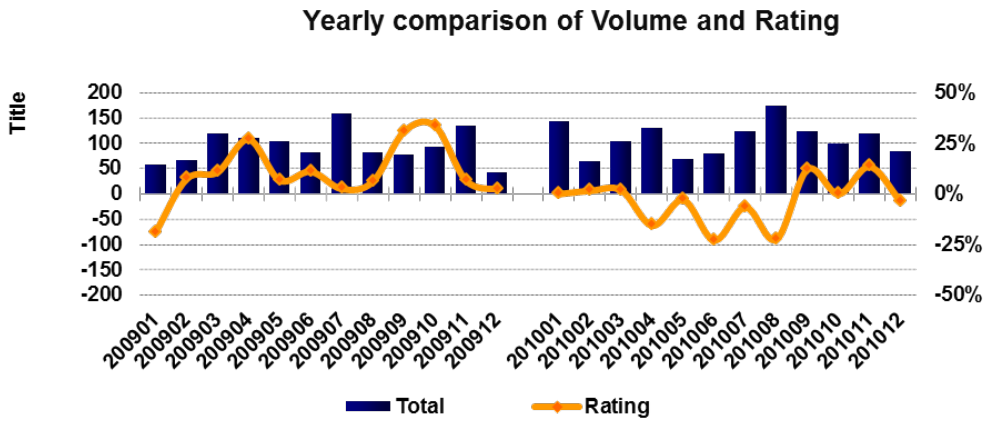

Top SA media reporting on China: rating
Jan-Feb 2011
Business Day
SABC 3: News @ One
Business Report
Summit TV
Kyknet
Afrikaans News (SABC2)
E-TV News
English News (SABC3)
Mail & Guardian
The New Age
FinWeek
City Press
The Times
Sotho News
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
Negative
Neutral
Positive

A total of 1159 statements were coded in 2010 and 101 statements from the first two months of 2011, covering the major print and broadcast media in the country.

The above figures for 2010 and the first two months of 2011 show that China was considered a newsworthy story both in general news (e.g. on the public broadcaster's flagship television channel SABC 3) as well as in business news (with the national business daily *Business Day* ranking second overall in 2010 and taking the lead in the first two months of 2011). As mentioned above, these figures suggest that China activates both political and economic discourses, as an emerging economic power and a significant player in the new reconfigured global geopolitical landscape. The difference between various public broadcasting channels is also noticeable. Although the reason for this difference will require more detailed research of the type of stories covered and motivation for editorial decision-making, these differences do emphasise the difficulty of talking about 'the' South African media in monolithic terms. Further research should focus on how the stories covered in the various public broadcasting channels, aimed at audiences that are economically and socially differentially positioned, might be informed by either economic or political concerns. One possibility might be that coverage aimed at elites would focus on economic opportunities, e.g. have an economic rather than political frame. If these stories had a political frame, it might be more likely to result in negative coverage, as elite audiences would be more likely to have political differences with the government. Conversely, working class audiences might be more critical of the economic implications of Chinese involvement on their everyday lives (e.g. job losses in the labour market), but this might not necessarily translate into political criticism. This might lead the SABC to decide not to flight economic stories on the ethnic-language channels, but not necessarily producing a story from an alternative frame, leading to an overall lower volume of coverage. This hypothesis would however have to be tested further.

As far as the first research question is concerned, it seems that assumptions in the literature about China as being portrayed either in highly positive terms, as a saviour or close partner for African states, or in highly negative terms, as an exploitative neo-colonial predator. Instead, the coverage in those outlets with the highest volume of reports has been fairly balanced in 2010, with an almost equal balance in positive and negative statements on SABC 3 news, and a majority neutral statements in *Business Day.* In 2011, even after the announcement of South Africa's accession to the BRIC group, both the top two outlets had a majority of neutral statements.

2. **Research Question 2: How did coverage of China during the 2010-2011 period compare with a similar previous study (De Beer & Schreiner 2009) conducted in 2009?**



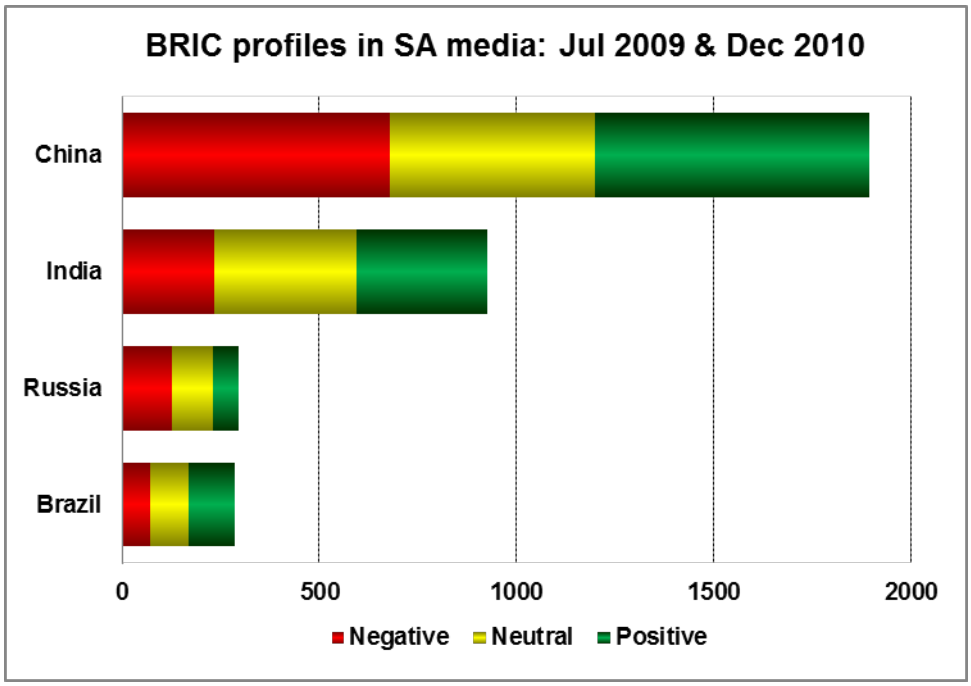
While the variance between different outlets may be explored further, and some outlets (like the commercial television channel e.tv) did have a noticeable number of negative statements, the figures from 2010-2011 seem to indicate a continuation of the trend reported on in De Beer & Schreiner (2009), namely of a balanced to cautiously optimistic picture on China emerging from South African media rather than an overly negative or overly positive one.

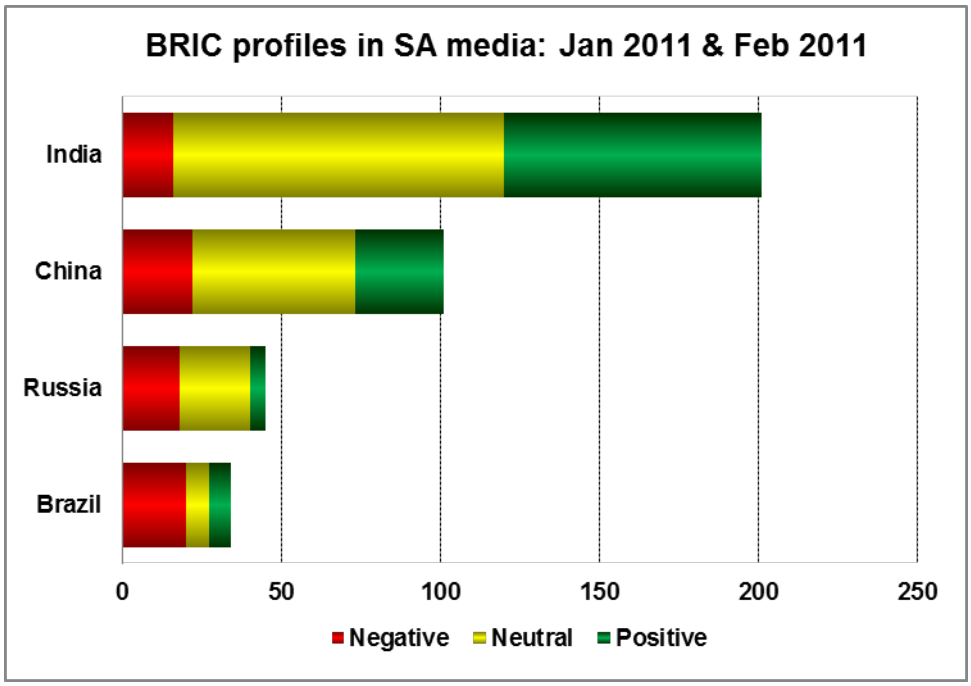
When reports in all media outlets analysed are compared on a year-to-year basis between 2009 and 2010, the beginning and end of 2010 again displays a tendency for the majority neutral reports. A clear dip is however noticeble towards the middle of 2010, when reporting overall became quite negative before picking up again toward the end of 2010.

This drop in positive reporting, and in fact the only time during the two years under comparison here when reporting was consistently negative, may be attributed to reporting on several natural disasters in China.

Natural disasters were the main cause of negative coverage in China. This indicates that South African media took most interest in foreign news events when it pertains either to conflicts or accidents/natural disasters. These disasters include the Yushu earthquake of 6.9 Richter that struck in Qinghai, killing at least 2000 and injuring more than 10 000; rainstorms in Southern China that left at least a 115 dead in May and flooding in June that killed at least 88 people and forced 750 000 to evacuate their homes, etc. Although not all South African media necessarily reported on these disasters, they did make for negative news topics that influenced the rating for the period. The fact that these statements have been coded as negative of course has to do with the subject material rather than the attitude towards China that they represent, which underlines the need to complement a statement analysis with a discourse analysis that would enable a more in-depth understanding of the themes and narratives emerging from the reports in question.

3. **Research Question 3: How does coverage of China compare to coverage of other BRIC countries, both quantitatively (in terms of frequency of reports) and qualitatively (in terms of positive or negative slant of article) during this period?**





In terms of the volume of coverage, China topped the list of BRIC countries reported on in the South African media in 2010. Between July 2009 and December 2010 China was referred to in 1896 statements in the South African media, compared to almost half that, 926, for India. Russia and Brazil fell rather far short of China and India, with 294 and 286 statements respectively. In the first two months of 2011, China and India again topped the list of BRIC countries reported on, although India received almost double the number of statements (201) than China did (101). These figures suggest that the 'Chindia' region (Thussu 2010) is emerging as a focus point for South African media interest in the BRIC countries, as they are bigger trade partners than Brazil and Russia.

In the first two months of 2011, issues related to the economy topped the list of topics being reported on in relation to China's relationship with South Africa. The economic situation and market position of China received the most coverage, while mergers and economic co-operation, general economic issues, companies and economic policy , China's situation in the global economy, economic regulations, executives and management, and products and marketing made up the rest of the top 10 issues reported on in South African media over this period.

As for the attitudes of these reports, again the overall picture of China was not an overwhelmingly negative one, nor was it only a positive one. Statements on China from 2009-2010 were on the whole very balanced, with 696 positive versus 678 negative and 522 neutral, comparing well to India, which received 333 positive statements, 234 negative and 359 neutral over the same period. In the first two months of 2011, China was also painted in a fairly positive light. 21% of statements related to China during this period were negative and 27% positive.

Conclusion and Further Questions

Literature about China's role in Africa suggests that China's presence on the continent is often viewed in stark binary terms, as either an exploitative, predatory force or a benevolent, development partner.

An analysis of attitudes in the South African media over the last three years (if De Beer & Schreiner's 2009 study is included), suggest that overall a more balanced view of China is emerging. Individual reports may still take an either/or stance, but when considered on the whole and across a range of media platforms, China is not represented in either a starkly positive or starkly negative light. It would seem that a cautiously optimistic attitude characterizes South African media coverage. The overall balance between positive, negative and neutral statements may suggest an understanding that China's role in Africa is a complex one, which cannot be pigeonholed as either a 'bad' or 'good' news story. South

Africa's association with China as a partner country in the BRICS formation might in future continue to shape positive coverage. The large component 'neutral' statements may also reflect the strong influence of the normative values of 'objectivity' and 'balance' on South African professional journalism practice.

What may be the reasons for this? Perhaps the Zuma era represents a more pragmatic view towards international relations than the Mbeki-era, where pan-African nationalism (see Wasserman 2011) was the dominant discourse as far as South Africa's external relations were concerned.

The media's orientation might also be moving towards greater commercialism, where economic interests outweigh political ideology.

Whatever the reasons – and these reasons would only become apparent in more multi-levelled studies that go beyond content analyses - , the Manichean visions of China's presence in Africa therefore seem not to hold within the South African context. Instead, in the light of the balanced view of China in the South African press, Zeleza's (2008:177) recommendation to allow for complex and contradictory views of the relationship might be a good one to follow.

As Zeleza (2008) suggests, more work needs to be done by international media to understand China better and study it so as to be able to provide more nuanced coverage.

Methodologically, the above approach has its limits, as only statements are coded and not narratives or themes. A critical discourse analysis of these texts should also be conducted in future to complement the outline analysis of attitudes. It would be interesting to find out which aspects of China are considered positive (eg when both business and public media might be positive but for different reasons), also when natural disasters might result in negative coding but a (for argument's sake) a positive discourse with relation to the country's ability to respond to those disasters.

Furthermore, although the sample used in this study includes a wide range of print and broadcast media, further studies should also analyse non-mainstream media platforms such as community media and tabloid newspapers to get a broader insight into how non-elite media, aimed at the working class and the poor, represent China. One assumption might be that these media, whose audiences are more likely to experience negative impact of China's involvement in South Africa in terms of job losses and plant closures, would paint a less positive picture of the relationship between these two countries.

The South African media texts could be complemented further by qualitative analysis such as interviews with journalists to establish their views on China and how these views play out in their practice.

What does seem clear is that China has achieved a firm place on the South African news agenda and is likely to remain there for years to come – even if the relationship and its mediation might become increasingly complex.

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