

## A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF WESTERN MEDIA CONTENTS ON PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA(PRC): HOW IS PRC'ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT WITH AFRICA CONSTRUCTED IN THE WESTERN LENS

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### ABSTRACT

*The impact of globalization on China's national strength has been a subject of considerable academic interest. Globalization and national strength are positively correlated, according to an increasing number of studies, with China's strength steadily increasing as globalization rises. A significant contributing factor to this phenomenon has been the increased frequency of China-Africa trade, a development that has garnered considerable attention from Western documentary producers. This study critically examines how Western documentaries have influenced the discourse around China's economic engagement in Africa through the Western television documentary *The Chinese Are Coming: Episode 2* as a case study. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model with Foucault's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research deconstructs the discourse strategies of BBC documentary about descriptions of China-Africa economic activities. from three levels: textual features, discourse practices, and broader social contexts. There is an expanding literature on China-Africa interactions and Western media representation, but there is a research gap on how Western documentaries (such as the BBC) construct narratives and ideologies around China's economic engagement in Africa. The way that China's economic involvement in Africa is portrayed by Western documentary media would therefore be examined from the perspectives of text, discourse practice, and social practice. Additionally, the way that China is portrayed by these media would be examined, as would the ideology that underlies these discourse constructs.*

Keywords: China; Africa, western documentary, critical discourse Analysis, stereotypical impression, ideologies

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### INTRODUCTION

China has significantly expanded a number of development and modernization initiatives with Africa from the beginning of the 21st century. In the form of large-scale infrastructure investment, trade agreements and financial cooperation, China has become an important economic presence in Africa. Unsurprisingly, these movements in different forms have caused many Western nations interests as they have long put their media focus on the so-called third world countries. While China's official narrative emphasizes mutual benefit and common development, Western media often portray these collaborations in a highly critical light, characterizing them as exploitative or neocolonialist (Frynas, 2007; Franks & Ribet, 2009).

Prior to the 1970s, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) foreign policy and interactions with the African continent were driven by a desire to establish alliances in order to confront major global powers, such as the United States. Consequently, these interactions were predominantly regarded as a form of philanthropic assistance to African countries (Kachiga 2013). However, since the 1970s, with the advent of economic reforms, market values and capitalism have become increasingly evident in Mainland China. The country's foreign policy has evolved to prioritize "co-development" or "bilateral cooperation" as a basis for its interactions with other nations (Anshan 2008, p. 27). Strategies such as the encouragement of direct investment by Chinese private companies in African countries (Yu 1988) have been employed. The formal depiction of these cooperative endeavors by the Chinese government has emphasized mutual benefits and self-reliance with respect to domestic affairs (Kachiga 2013). In 2013, the value of bilateral trade between China and Africa exceeded 200 billion US dollars, largely attributable to the mutually beneficial policy established during the 2006 China-Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC).

Scholars in the academic community have differing opinions about interaction between China and Africa. A considerable number of Chinese scholars posit that China's economic engagement in Africa is a mutually beneficial arrangement for both nations, with the emergence of new companies and technologies leading to enhanced employment opportunities for the local populace (Li 2007; Wenping 2008). Through its combined business, investment, and technology distribution in and with Africa, China is forming a "South-South economic cooperation" to challenge the West, as Mawdesley (2008, p. 515) explains (see also Rupp 2008). In this sense, China's actions are contributing to the reiteration of the imperial control form previously established by the West (Said 1985; Six 2009).

Conversely, other scholars have posited that China's economic involvement in Africa is primarily motivated by its strategic objectives. This perspective asserts that China's desire regarding natural resources and energy sources is a primary motivator for its actions on the African continent (Franks & Ribet 2009). This viewpoint has been further critiqued by some scholars, who contend that China's economic involvement in Africa is indicative of a neo-colonialist agenda, characterized by the utilization of natural resources on the African countries (Frynas 2007). Moreover, it is noteworthy that China is widely recognized for its opaque and unethical governance. Some scholars have expressed concerns that China's extensive involvement in African infrastructure could hinder Western countries' efforts to encourage better governance in Africa (Alden 2007). Concurrently, Brautigam (2008) suggests that the flood of low-cost Chinese goods could have a big impact on competition in local markets.

The differences in the scholars' views highlight the competing ideologies. This research focuses on how Western documentaries construct and disseminate discourses of China-Africa economic interaction. To sum up, the existing literature on China-Africa interaction mainly deals with the political and economic dimensions (Alden, 2007; Mawdesley, 2008), paid limited consideration of the media's involvement in shaping these perceptions. Furthermore, while there have been studies that have

explored the portrayal of China's rise in the Western media (Franks & Ribet, 2009), the use of documentary to construct China's economic engagement in Africa remains an under-explored area.

The questions centered on the disparity between how China presents itself and how China-Africa relations are portrayed in the Western media. Western documentaries portrayed China as a neocolonial force in Africa by highlighting stereotypes and ideological biases. The purpose of this study is to explore how China-Africa ties are portrayed in Western media. The specific research question guiding this study is as follows: To what extent, if any, stereotypical representations, and ideologies are embedded in the Western documentaries of China's economic involvement in Africa?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### GLOBALIZATION AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION

In the current age of globalization, media content disseminated through numerous interconnected channels possesses the potential to be distributed both domestically and internationally. According to scholars specializing in the study of globalization, local media content has a significant impact on people's understanding of distant places and cultures (Appadurai, 1996; Thompson, 1995). The consumption of diverse media content serves as a means to "nourish" audiences, fostering their capacity to envision and comprehend the lives of those represented (Boltanski 1999).

The idea of discourse, which is made up of collections of signs that influence our daily social lives and the power that goes along with them, is highly valued by post-structuralists who take inspiration from the Foucauldian viewpoint (Foucault 1989). In this way, every symbol, word, image, and audio element of the media content we encounter on a daily basis carries within it an overarching discursive capacity of reality-creation (Orgad 2012). Media representation serves as a framework for discourse-based meaning creation, claims Hall (1997). This representation constantly shapes our perception of the world rather than just reflecting our current everyday existence (Hall 1997).

### POST-COLONIALISM AND STEREOTYPING

The idea of media representation and power is welcomed by academics, who also start to closely analyze some of the issues present in specific media content. One of the recurrent themes in the research of media representations in the Third World is postcolonialism. As introduced by Edward Said (1978), who significantly pointed out that the "Orient" in the eyes of the West is distant from modernity and othered, which in turn reflects and reinforces the long existing imperialist control over the East. The idea of modernity has long been ingrained in Western depictions of the East, according to a large body of literature. Francis Fukuyama (2006), who focuses on modernization, also questions the naturalized idea of modernization as a way to define the East using Western-imposed concepts like economic advancement or technological advancement. Media researchers started to discover that similar problematic structures existed in a variety of settings. According to Dahlgren (1982), for instance, Western news that incorporates material from the Third World is frequently portrayed as the antithesis of Western news. More significantly, the connection between the West and the non-West is usually presented in binary terms, and the West is invariably seen as possessing superior attributes like stability and non-violence (Dahlgren 1982). It is simple to design the potential meaning of unequal power and convince the audience that it is a "convincing reality" (Pickering 2001, p. 75).

According to Pickering (2001), stereotyping is the process of creating a stigmatized image for a group of people who have specific predefined traits. By doing thus, members of a group are restricted to their own interpretations and denied the opportunity to be understood in different contexts (Hall 1997). An unassailable power dynamic between people, groups, or even nations would eventually arise from the general diffusion of this one-dimensional thinking about a certain group.

### CURRENT DISCUSSIONS ON WESTERN DEPICTION OF CHINA-AFRICA

The state-run media apparatus in China serves as the ruling party's mouthpiece and watchdog (Yan 2000; Wang & Wang 2014). It should not be shocking to learn that China's expansion in Africa is consistently presented as advantageous to both parties. Conflicting issues were avoided, including illegal immigrants, low-quality Chinese goods, and local African grievances (Sautman & Hairong 2009). In this regard, documentaries from democracies like the US and the UK, where the media serves as a government watchdog and monitor (Wallach 1990), may present distinct images.

The current literature has recognized the long-standing Western media portrayal of the non-Western world—especially China and Africa—as being less developed than the West (Kachiga 2013; Rotberg 2008; Franks & Ribet 2009). There aren't many findings from studies that have examined how China is portrayed in ties with Africa. Benabdallah (2015) conducted a study that offered some preliminary ideas in this particular field. She read articles about China-Africa relations from China Daily and The Economist. Mostly, she discovered that Africans lacked agency. The political science aspect of the narrative is the subject of other discussions. For instance, Chilton and Schaffner (2002, p. 5) stress that the China-Africa relationship is a never-ending "power struggle" between the two sides as well as those who wish to oppose or uphold the partnership. Some explanations for this dearth of research are offered by studies conducted by Sautman and Hairong (2009). They accurately noted a few challenges, such as the dearth of clear information regarding Chinese operations in Africa and—above all—the decontextualized critics, especially Western media producers (Sautman & Hairong 2009). It becomes quite difficult to comprehend how China, one of the biggest economies and the primary Western (particularly American) fictional adversary, is portrayed from a Western perspective. In fact, the author chooses to explore the potential power dynamics generated in the Western documentaries on China-Africa relations after acknowledging the paucity of studies that do so.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study takes a qualitative method to Western documentaries and uses case studies to analyze the portrayal of China-Africa economic interaction, particularly in the BBC's *The Chinese Are Coming: Episode 2*. Unlike quantitative methods, which aim to generalize findings from large data sets, this study focuses on a particular area of study and further reveals the hidden construction mechanism behind texts (Hansen 1998). In the meantime, the documentaries themselves are the authors' subjects of interest. It makes sense to use textual level analysis for this study rather than ethnographic or social media criticism. The most logical and suitable option for this research is textual analysis. It successfully accomplishes the author's goal of dismantling the Western construction of China's presence in Africa by emphasizing how People from different cultures and subcultures recognize their identity and their place in the world (McKee 2003).

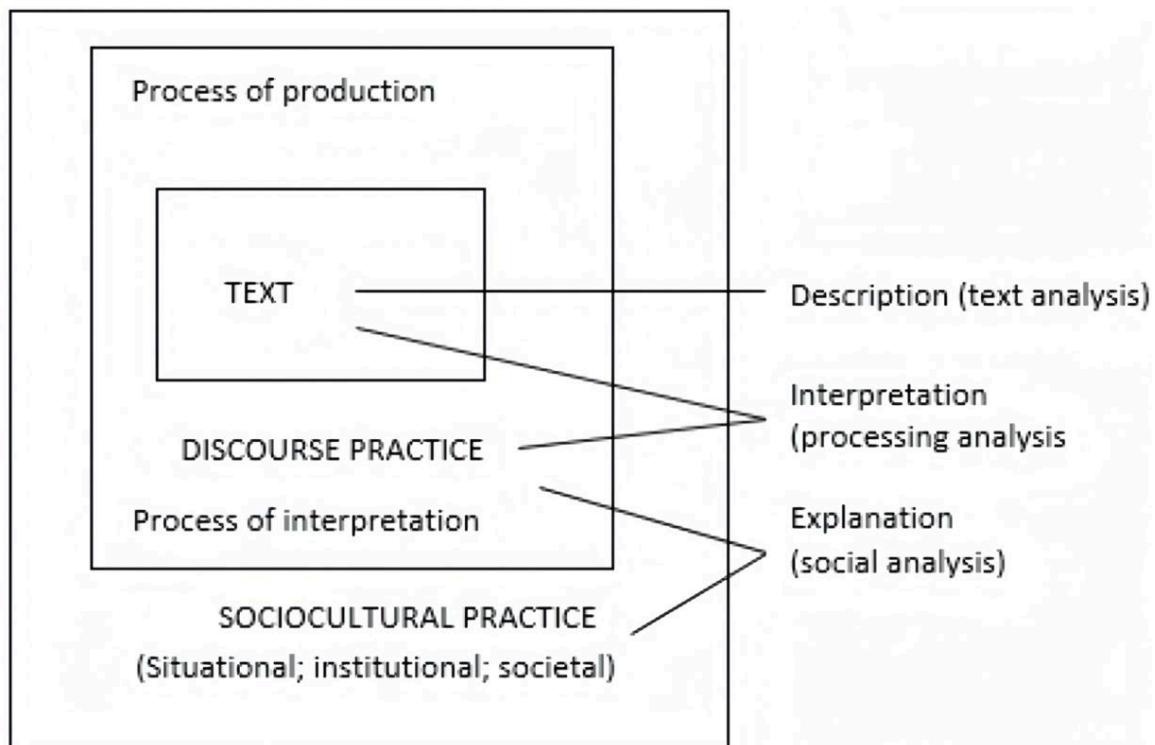
This thread of methods becomes particularly helpful in the current research here, as this study clearly encompasses several layers of cultures. As noted by many scholars, including McKee (2003) and Cuff et al. (1998), non-Western cultures are not necessarily understandable using the ultimate scientific method of reasoning embedded in the Western legacy of reasoning. It is clear that our study encompasses Chinese, African, and Western cultures. Therefore, analyzing the materials using a single mechanism of knowing without taking into account the potential settings and histories might only lead to prejudices rather than useful results. As previously said, the author essentially supports post-structuralists who view languages and texts as a means of creating meaning that eventually influences individuals' meaning-making processes rather than merely reflecting our reality (McKee 2003).

In specifically, critical discourse analysis (CDA), a specific method within the discipline of textual analysis, is suggested. First, according to Fairclough's (1992) conceptualization, discourse entails a complicated web of relationships between individuals, objects, and any discursive communicative entities. Studying the discourse that surround and illustrate particular discourses is crucial. The CDA approach effectively uncovers the previously hidden power dynamics and relationships between all agencies, including people, groups, and nations, as long as they are the ones represented in texts. It does this by carefully dissecting the texts, connecting related discourses, and placing them in larger contexts.

Two more important concepts in the use of CDA are hegemony and ideology. The CDA technique views texts as representations of power dynamics and, ultimately, as instruments that construct ideologies. It is largely based on Michael Foucault's (1989) concept of knowledge/power. The way the dominant social group creates a naturalized power superiority over subordinates is referred to as an ideological construction (Gramsci 1971). In actuality, a certain hegemony is established at that point, wherein only the advantages and principles of the ruling party are taken into account (Gramsci 1971). These circumstances are significant because they are ultimately concealed by the media and the interactions we have on a daily basis. Thankfully, CDA is commended for its capacity to use rigorous research procedures to reveal these covert power disparities. Furthermore, CDA plays a key role in our topic, which centers on China, Africa, and Western nations like the United Kingdom. This is due to the fact that the China-African relations portrayed in these documentaries clearly encompass a variety of stakeholders, such as governments, institutions, and individual businesspeople (Wodak & Meyer 2001). With its rigorous research methodology, CDA effectively dissects any potential ideological constructs from organizations in China, the UK, or Africa. An abstract idea of international relations and foreign policy could lead to a tangible conversation.

Practically speaking, the documentary texts would be subjected to a three-dimensional CDA framework (Fairclough 1992). Stated differently, the primary analytical instrument was the three-dimensional framework developed by Fairclough (1992). Textual level: The text's description is the main focus of the first level. It is important to identify and display the texts' formal features for following phases. This involves determining the nominalizations or adjectives used. Discursive level: The texts and their potential interactions with other sources are the main focus of the second level. In addition to being a product in and of itself, the text is also a product of specific, potentially mandated procedures. This influences how the texts themselves are interpreted as well. Examining the texts' genre and intertextuality, for instance, is necessary. Societal level: The third dimension invites the researcher to study the texts in the context of society and places the research in those circumstances. This would make clear the potential societal contexts that shaped the works' composition. It could be used, for instance, to find out how two institutions or social groupings now relate to one another. In other respects, it aids the researcher in presenting the texts' potential social impacts.

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (Source: Fairclough, 1992)



The Chinese Are Coming, a BBC 2 documentary, debuted in 2011. In order to investigate Chinese influences, host Justin Rowlett visits three continents. His trip through Southern Africa is chronicled in the first episode. It includes interviews with local sellers, sampling of Chinese-made goods, and conversations with prosperous Chinese businessmen in Africa. It's clear why this episode was chosen. A British man enters an African nation and raises serious concerns about the influence of China on these nations. It is the perfect location for the blending of Western, African, and Chinese civilizations. More significantly, it is a clear location where the other two parties are viewed from a Western perspective. The study's query of how China might be depicted from a Western viewpoint in the context of China-Africa ties may be addressed by examining the recorded video and the filmmaking process, which produced useful textual resources.

To be more precise, the author would first divide the documentaries into segments that tell individual stories. Every linguistic component, such as dialogue, narration, and subtitles, would be recorded and arranged into distinct storylines. The three-dimensional CDA mentioned above would then be applied to the texts. The most important issues in the documentary would be presented in a more condensed and targeted segment, in addition to a general results section that would offer some broad findings from the texts. This can spark additional conversation to address the research question.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Attempting to comprehend the circumstances of the documentaries should be a key step in addressing my study issue. The author be aware of the circumstances in China, Africa, and Britain at the time the documentary was shot. Setting the study's subjects in context is crucial for any textual analysis study. Practically speaking, I could find it helpful to identify themes in the documentary. Documentaries are meticulously made films that employ prefabricated narratives to convey specific logics, despite their apparent status as merely media content that documents reality. The producer is presumed to have complete control over the positioning of voiceovers or film, and this study aims to investigate how this approach may impact the final meaning-making process. As a result, the author carefully analyzes every component discussed in the documentary and arrange them into sensible categories. It is expected that certain of the discourse's categories would outperform the others. The study next explains how these decisions create a defined knowledge about China or the connection between China and Africa and why the Western perspective may have stereotyped particular parties.

Another important area to start making improvements for this study is by looking at other comparable papers in the field. Apart from a forementioned study on news outlets' coverage of the China-Africa relationship, there aren't many more sources of literature in the same area. Other studies have looked at China's internal affairs and the role of the media in China-Africa ties via a Western documentary lens. For instance, Franks and Ribet (2009) highlight the field's complexity due to its multi-country involvement and the media's greater role in communicating each party's aims. Regrettably, other works of literature could only be utilized as supplementary materials to support specific study procedures. The author may, for instance, use Chow (2014), who studied how China is portrayed in documentaries that emphasize photographic realism, to imply that some of the narrative decisions made in the chosen documentaries are an attempt to assert realism or not. The author hopes to start fresh conversations in the field by engaging with these relevant subjects.

Although the discussion above mostly supports the use of CDA for this study, CDA is never a foolproof method to solve every scientific issue. In particular, Rose (1996) pointed out that CDA frequently suffers from interpretation bias and is heavily

reliant on the author's personal experience with the circumstances. Since the author's perspective is the sole participant in the majority of the study process, this criticism is simple to comprehend. In order to present a more methodical analysis, the author must once more evaluate her level of acquaintance with each of the civilizations mentioned in the texts. Furthermore, as a textual analysis technique, CDA does not offer "scientific" or "quantifiable" information about how the texts may have been interpreted by several wide audiences (Morley 1992). However, this criticism is not a critique of the methodology per such; rather, it is an appeal for more varied audience research in disciplines that are linked to the topics under study. Finally, as was already indicated, this study only examines the films' textual aspects without delving deeper into their visual or aural components. Time and resource constraints are the primary causes. Such research may be started if the author had access to more workplace or personal materials. Regarding the ethical aspect of this work, the author finds no noteworthy ethical problems.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, this study aims to deconstruct the textual content of the documentary of *The Chinese Are Coming: Episode 2*, revealing ideology and stereotypes implicit in its depiction of China-Africa relations.

**Textual Level**

On the text level, the vocabulary of documentary shows obvious ideological tendency. The frequent use of macro-descriptive terms such as "largest", "biggest" and "vast" builds an exaggerated image of China's influence in Africa. Nominalization strategies, such as "Chinese influx" and "flooding of workers," create a sense of overwhelming invasion. Negative words, including "poachers," "repression," and "despotism," reinforce the "China threat" narrative. Similarly, economic vocabulary focuses on terms like "resources," "copper," and "ore," emphasizing the extractive and selfish nature of China's presence. This choice of text is consistent with the overall narrative of the documentary, which is that China is a destructive and exploitative force in Africa.

Macro description:	World; global  Largest; biggest; giant; huge; vast; most; major
Noun:	Poachers; repression; despotism
Noun phrase:	Legions of construction; pioneer of migration; allegations of human rights; Explosion of trade; influx of Chinese; flooding of workers.

Table 1. Construction of the Chinese image in BBC document of *The Chinese Are Coming: Episode 2*

Business; trade; economy
Worker; oil; iron ;construction; railway; resources; copper; ore

Table2. The selection of economic vocabulary in *The Chinese Are Coming: Episode 2*

**Practical Level**

Following the above text-level analysis, this study will turn attention to the practical level and primarily talk about the discourse generation and consumption of *The Chinese are Coming: Episode 2*.

In terms of discourse generation, the documentary strategically chooses topics such as "human rights violations", "environmental degradation" and "market domination" to construct a biased narrative. For example, a description of the ivory trade in Zambia's Kafue National Park casts China as the main cause of ecological damage, while a discussion of competition in the Zambian market emphasizes China's economic dominance. Besides, the use of participatory narrative strategies, in which the host actively participates in the events, adds credibility to the documentary while subtly embedding subjective bias.

As far as discourse consumption is concerned, the consumption of documentaries depends on the credibility of BBC's institutional reputation. Its framing strategy and selective focus on the negative aspects of China-Africa relations lead viewers to internalize a stereotypical and one-dimensional view of China as a neocolonial power. The lack of balanced perspectives, such as African voices that emphasize mutual benefit, underscores the documentary's intent to shape public perceptions of Western ideology.

## Societal Level

At the social level, Western documentaries reflect broader ideological influences and Western cultural hegemony. The BBC's continued dominant discourse reinforces the existing stereotype of China as an economic predator. This is consistent with the West's broader geopolitical strategy to portray China as a threat to global stability. Moreover, the BBC documentary's framing reveals an inherent imbalance in discourse between developed and developing countries that now tends to construct biased narratives of Western interests.

## CONCLUSION

The BBC documentary *The Chinese Are Coming: Episode 2* is used as a case study in this study to critically analyze how China-Africa economic connections are portrayed in Western media. By using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, this paper analyzes the textual level, practical level and Societal level, and reveals the stereotypical and ideological prejudices that western documentaries construct about China as a participant in neocolonialism. The results show that Western documentaries tend to be exaggerated and negative imagery, directional themes, and a single perspective to reinforce Western hegemonic ideology.

This study provides a critical perspective for the representation of China-African economic relations in Western documentaries and contributes to the field of media research and discourse analysis. In terms of theoretical contributions, this study adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to analyze discourse strategies in media discourse. The extension of this method enhances the applicability of CDA to multimodal texts such as documentaries. Moreover, in terms of practical contributions, by shedding light on the ideological and power dynamics embedded in Western media, this study highlights the role of documentaries in shaping public perceptions and influencing geopolitical discourse.

Although the contribution of this study, there are some limitations. Specifically, this study uses case studies to mainly analyze the documentary *The Chinese are Coming: Episode 2*, which may not fully represent the extensive coverage of China-Africa relations in Western documentaries. The dataset needs to be expanded to include multiple media sources or documentaries for a fuller understanding. In addition, while this study focuses primarily on narrative, it does not adequately explore audience reception or the impact of these narratives on public opinion. Future research may include audience studies or surveys to assess how viewers interpret and internalize this media representation. Finally, this study focuses mainly on Western media and does not analyze how Chinese or African media represent China-Africa relations. Including these perspectives will offer a more thorough view of narratives surrounding this topic.

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