Editor's introduction

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The flow of media between East Asia and Africa is a largely untold story. Whereas it sometimes seems that the only thing growing faster than Asia-Africa trade and investment is reporting on Asia-Africa trade and investment, this intensive coverage finds it difficult to step outside of its own assumptions and to discuss itself as media. Tracking, describing, analyzing and critiquing the increasingly complex relationship between East Asia and Africa has developed into a burgeoning scholarly field and a competitive journalistic beat. However, those following this growing field are frequently exasperated that after more than two decades of mounting column inches, many half-truths are stubbornly repeated in the popular press and many more questions remain unasked. This edition of *African East Asian Affairs* turns the focus on the role of media in East Asia-African relations. In particular, we have brought together scholars busy developing new, exciting ways of analyzing the frontiers of Asian-African media engagement and the role it plays in mediating the wider economic and strategic relationship between these two regions.

Accounts of bilateral relations and infrastructure, mining and financing deals

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have so far played a major role in scholarship about the growing engagement between East Asia and Africa, while the wider socio-political forces that mediate these exchanges remain relatively under-explored. I hasten to say that it is not my intention to criticize the former approach. Describing the terms and effects of these political and financial developments is crucially important work and the findings of these scholars have both shaped the field within which we work, and reflect the importance of Asia-Africa relations in the global economy. However, I also feel that not exploring the underlying social reality within which these developments occur and the way that discourse shapes their logic risks reducing the actors to ciphers or monoliths.

The problem is that identifying the forces structuring this underlying reality, finding ways to analyze them and measuring their effect is a complex endeavour. There is a reason why "Africa" and "Asia" remain such valuable shorthand, because once we split them into the billions of individual Africas and Asias engaged in the transactions that constitute "Africa-Asia engagement", we risk drowning in discourse. Yet, the fact that concepts like soft power, national influence and public diplomacy are nebulous don't make the role they play in facilitating the mining, infrastructure and logging contracts constituting Asia-Africa engagement any less important. In fact, one could argue that they not only create the political environment within which such deals become possible, but also that their very nebulousness stands in interesting contrast to the level of government resources spent on them.

Due to various historical factors, the East Asian powers driving the current expansion of East Asia-Africa relations have limited hard power options in Africa. Compared to the presence of US military bases in countries like Ethiopia, as well as France's relatively frequent military action on the continent, China is largely constrained by its long-standing dogma of non-intervention, as is Japan by its peacetime constitution. In addition to these policy constraints, the exercis-

ing of hard power in foreign climes remains an unattractive option for these powers, due to its expense, logistical complications and inevitable international backlash. At the same time, despite the worrying flare-ups of violence in areas like the DRC and the Sahel, the World Bank estimated that a third of Sub-Saharan countries had economic growth rates of 6% or higher in 2012. Asian investment is playing a significant role in the region's current focus on economic growth, resource beneficiation and infrastructure development. We therefore find ourselves in a moment when economic ties and closer relationships are being pursued by both sides. That said, this deepening of the relationship has also led to a debate about whether its structure is economically sustainable – an issue prominently raised by South Africa's President Jacob Zuma in his speech at the opening session of the 5th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Beijing in July 2012. One could argue that as the economic engagement between East Asia and Africa grows in complexity, intangible factors mediating this relationship will come to play a more fundamental role.

For this reason it becomes crucial to focus in more detail on what constitutes relations between states. A state is more than its government, and for each picture of a ministerial handshake one sees the relationship between East Asia and Africa described as neo-colonial. For researchers to gain more insight into what constitutes the core of East Asia-Africa relations, and how citizens on both sides perceive this situation, it is necessary to immerse themselves in media. Yet the act of immersion isn't enough. We need the tools to sift through the masses of media produced every day in order to clarify what is being expressed. Providing a few tools for the job and case studies of such analyses in action is the goal of this edition of *African East Asian Affairs*.

Up to now, Africa-Asia media exchange has flown under the radar: From the Cold War, when Japanese animation was shown on apartheid-era South African state TV, and martial arts films from Hong Kong sold a new model of post-

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colonial glamour to the whole of Sub-Sahara Africa, to the current expansion of Chinese state-owned media like CCTV and Xinhua to African markets and the growing participation of African in globalized online consumption of media from Japan and South Korea (for accounts of some of these developments, see Prashad, 2003; Van Staden, 2010, 2011; Wu, 2012). The history of African consumption of East Asian media is important as an under-examined part of the larger history of cultural globalization and East Asia's part in it, but also because governments like those of Japan and the People's Republic of China are taking the role of media in foreign policy increasingly seriously, as evidenced by the expansion of Chinese state-owned media and the Japanese government's *Cool Japan* campaign.

However, this immediately brings up a host of new complications. Just as Asia-Africa relations are in a state of unprecedented flux, so is the mediasphere. Historical bastions of Western media have over the past few years simply evaporated or have curtailed their foreign reporting. We have seen the popularization of user-generated online media, and attempts to meld the prestige of a famous masthead with the economics of blogging. In addition, the last decade and a half has also seen the rise of non-Western 24-hour television news giants like Al-Jazeera and CCTV. The rapid expansion of the latter has drawn particular attention in Africa. This is not only because it challenges the traditional hegemony of Western broadcasters on the continent, but because its presence in Africa is explicitly linked to correcting perceived unfair Western portrayals of China's role in Africa (Ngomba, 2012; Wu, 2012). CCTV is certainly not the first non-African state-owned broadcast entity on the continent and it is also not the only service purporting to correct perceived negative reporting about a state's foreign policy. For example, France 24 states its mission as "to cover international current events from a French perspective and to convey French values throughout the world." However, the launch of CCTV, as well as the enhanced presence of the state-owned news agency Xinhua and China Radio International, drew atten-

tion to the fact that the Chinese government felt that the growing economic engagement between Africa and China had to be bolstered by positive perceptions. However, it is easy to overstate the significance of this move. In the first place, CCTV and Xinhua aren't specifically 'targeting' Africa – their African expansion forms part of a worldwide expansion strategy (Branigan, 2011). In addition, China has maintained a media presence in the form of Xinhua bureaus and radio broadcasts in Africa from the Cold War. What changed is not the fact of the presence itself, but its scale and its tenor. Cold War Chinese media broadcasts were quite propagandist and frequently included invective against Western imperialism and Soviet 'revisionism' (Hutchison, 1975). However, since the 1990s CCTV has reflected China's turn towards business and investment while also being influenced by increasing commercialization of the media within China (Zhao, 2000). In addition, since investing in a large production facility in Nairobi, CCTV Africa has worked to develop more African content, and has hired many Kenyan staff members (Jacobs, 2012). When focusing on broadcast content, the description of CCTV as representing China or the Chinese government is oversimplified. Rather, it is competing with other international and local media outlets in an increasingly crowded African media space while remaining extremely sensitive to issues directly relating to China, controversial news topics such as Tibet, and Chinese interests in individual African countries. In this sense, the Chinese press is trying to play an unfamiliar role in Africa – not only to report African news to Chinese audiences at home, but also to represent Africa to African audiences while competing with local and international press. This is a difficult task for any news operation – doubly so when media is viewed as a form of state-based soft power. For example, in August 2012 Zhong Jianhua, the Chinese special envoy to Africa, criticized Chinese journalists for "not reporting on Africa in an effective way" (Yang, 2012)

Another, more central, concern with making the debate about Chinese media in Africa only about the expansion of state-owned media is that despite the elevat-

ed symbolic status these companies occupy as organs of state and their historical role as the tealeaves one reads to try to understand behind-the-scenes Beijing, it is yet unclear how wide their influence is really felt in Africa. CCTV Africa and China Daily Africa are both still recent arrivals and much research is still needed regarding their actual efficacy as both sources of news and influence. The expansion of state-owned media in Africa cannot be seen in isolation from what seems to me the more fundamental Chinese contribution to the African mediascape – the expansion of internet and mobile phone networks by companies like Huawei and ZTE. The provision of affordable smartphones and internet access isn't only leading to the expansion of the African mediasphere, it is providing both Africans and Asian migrants to Africa radically new tools of self-expression. We are standing at the dawn of a revolution in Africa's powers of self-narration, and a significant part of this shift is due to this kind of data network provision.

This shifting landscape presents new challenges and opportunities for researchers interested in looking at the fine grain of the Asia-Africa relationship. In this edition of *African East Asian Affairs* we offer new perspectives on the role media is playing in mediating and directing this relationship. We aim to contribute not only specific case studies, but also to point out methodological tools open to those interested in gauging the way media undergirds this intercontinental relationship.

Our first two articles suggest two separate methodologies for dealing with reporting about China in online newspapers and portals.

Bob Wekesa's article *The Media Framing of China's Image in East Africa: An Exploratory Study* uses framing theory to examine the coverage of China in four East African newspapers. Referring to the cognitive context within which readers position and interpret pieces of information, framing theory presents a useful approach to newspaper coverage. This is particularly because it goes beyond

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simply asking whether the coverage in question is objective or not. Leaving aside the thorny issue of whether objectivity is truly an achievable goal in journalism, putting objectivity at the center of the enquiry also forces the researcher into the role of adjudicator, which is not the most relevant position for someone focusing on the issue of national influence. Wekesa makes the point that in the realm of national image, perception and believability is a more relevant attribute than truth. His division between strong frames (indicating high levels of believability in either a positive or negative context) and weak frames (indicating higher levels of ambiguity, complexity or 'objectivity') provides researchers with a way to ascertain what the effect of China coverage in the African press will be on perceptions of China in East Africa. His conclusion that despite the presence of critical coverage, the majority of articles on China lean towards both positive and economic/business framing complicates easy assumptions about China's image among ordinary Africans.

This method stands in contrast to Jaroslaw Jura and Kaja Kaluzynska's computer-aided quantitative methodology in their paper *Not Confucius, nor Kung Fu: Economy and Business as Chinese Soft Power in Africa*. They conducted both word frequency and word adjacency surveys of articles and reader comments about China from Angolan and Ghanaian online newspapers and portals. Their findings present a surprising challenge to received ideas of soft power. Joseph Nye (1990) famously argued that US soft power is primarily generated through cultural influence and a reputation for democracy and human rights – a soft power model that has had significant influence on Asian diplomacy in Africa and elsewhere. Jura and Kaluzynska find a distinct lack of interest in Chinese culture and history among African journalists and readers. In contrast, they find that Africans are singularly focused on China's business success. They come to the conclusion that in contrast to Nye's classification of economic might as hard power, in the case of China, reporting on economic development should be seen as an under-explored aspect of soft power.

The first two papers analyze online newspapers. Despite drawing on newspapers and portals from different parts of Africa, and using quite different methodologies, their findings are remarkably similar. Both studies reveal that the aspect of Chinese engagement in Africa that draws the most attention from the African press is economic engagement. The fact that, despite differences in region and method, both studies confirm this point presents compelling evidence that should inspire new ways of thinking about Asian soft power expansion in Africa. At the same time, the focus on how journalists frame China-Africa relations also implies a focus on elite expression. Despite the fact that reader comments are an increasingly important aspect of online news, the analysis of newspaper provides an important view into elite decision-making.

Yet, the rapid expansion of social networking in both China and Africa is changing this landscape and our second pair of papers provides contrasting ways of approaching this influence. Yu-Shan Wu's paper *The Political and Diplomatic Implications of Social Media: the Cases of China and South Africa* gives us a bird's-eye view of the expansion of social media in China and Africa, particularly focusing on South Africa. She asks what the impact of rapidly proliferating social networking is on the relationship between the citizens and governments of these respective countries and to which extent social media represents a new channel of communication between them. Contrasting the use of social media in mediating citizen-government interactions in China and South Africa, she argues that despite the Chinese government's restrictions on certain online expression, Chinese social media has evolved into a space for innovative negotiation between the state and citizens. Netizen comments aren't necessarily ignored in China and in some cases they have led to change. In contrast, the rapid increase of South Africans participating in social networking has not led to a similar level of engagement from the South African government. This is not only due to a certain lack of interest from the majority of South African leaders, but also because South African users tend not to use social media for direct political ex-

pression to the same extent as their Chinese counterparts. However, due to the rapid adoption of smartphone technology and Africa's current tendency to leap-frog over stages of technological evolution, this might change. She concludes by looking ahead at the possible impact of the rapid growth of social networking on China-Africa diplomacy.

Wu's overhead assessment of large trends in social media and diplomacy in the China-Africa space gives way to Jinghao Lu and my article *Lonely Nights Online: How Does Social Networking Channel Chinese Migration and Business to Africa?* We looked at social networking's mediating role at the grassroots level, particularly as regards to how it influences migration and business devel-opment. By concentrating on Chinese small and medium enterprises in Ghana, we attempted to provide researchers with a broad outline of which modes of social networking play particularly significant roles in drawing Chinese mi-grants to Africa and building business ties between China and Africa. We also point out some of the opportunities and challenges facing researchers interested in looking at the various corners of Chinese social networking. In the second place, we analyzed the conversations taking place on Chinese-language online forums, highlighting three main themes in the larger conversation among Chi-nese considering migrating to Africa. By providing translations of some of the discussions falling under these themes – discussions of business and job oppor-tunities, discussions of professional and romantic relationships with Africans and discussions of the African landscape – we hope to open a wider conversa-tion about the role of social networking in China-Africa migration - an issue that deserves a lot more attention.

These papers constitute initial steps in what will hopefully become a wider con-sideration of the role of media in general and new media in particular in the East Asia-Africa relationship. Our intention was not only to raise new questions, but also to start readers' thinking about other lacunae in this field. These include

questions around media consumption patterns among Africans and Asian migrants to the continent, the role of fandom in perceptions of different East Asian countries among Africans, the integration of African media consumers into transnational consumption communities dominated by East Asian production hubs, and the role of social networking in facilitating African migration to East Asia.

We hope this volume will prove useful not only to researchers interested in Asia -Africa relations but also to those focused on media's dual power to both create new diplomatic opportunities and to close them down. We hope that in this way we can complicate and enrich the discussion of the influence of media in Asia-Africa relations.

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