

Report on China's Image in African Countries along the "Belt and Road" during COVID-19



China House

Report on China's Image in African Countries along the Belt and Road in the Face of the Covid-19 Epidemic

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the domestic mainstream media coverage of China in relevant African countries along the "Belt and Road" during the Covid-19 epidemic. In addition, this study seeks to explore a holistic media portrayal of China in relevant African countries and to get a more accurate, complete, and scientific understanding of the China-related public opinion in African countries along the "Belt and Road." By this, we hope to consolidate the excellent results achieved within the "Belt and Road" for China and further enhance the initiative in the future. The report serves as a comprehensive reference to promote win-win development of China and the countries along the Belt and Road and to fully develop healthy, equal, and stable China-Africa relations.

This research project is a collaboration between the Institute of International Communication of the Institute of Belt and Road and Global Governance at Fudan University and the China House's research team. The study selected Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Zambia as the target countries, and interviewed a number of mainstream media reports about China between January 1 and September 1, 2020. The study found that the image of China in the African countries along the "Belt and Road" is both positive and negative, and generally moderate and neutral. South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Zambia tend to hold a positive image of China, while Kenya and Nigeria tend to have a slightly negative image of China. China's positive image is characterized as follows: 1) China's effective prevention and control of its own covid-19 epidemic; 2) China's ongoing economic assistance to Africa and debt relief measures during the epidemic; 3) China's provision of medical assistance to African countries during the epidemic. China's negative image is reflected in: 1) the inappropriateness of China's covid-19 prevention and control methods; 2) the impression that China's aid to Africa, which may threaten the sovereignty of African countries and breed local corruption; and 3) the negative impact of the activities of individual Chinese or Chinese enterprises in Africa on local communities.

In addition, the study analyzed 1,303 foreign reports (as opposed to local original reports.) The reports that we analyzed are published by mainstream media in African countries. It is important to note that the sources of the reprinted reports mainly come from Western media, and the reprinted reports contain more content about non-African affairs and hold more negative comments about China in terms of ideology and political system than the local original reports.

The study concludes with three major themes related to the epidemic and China's image: African countries' perceptions of China's fight against the Covid-19 the impact of the Covid-19 on the Belt and Road project in Africa, and African countries' perceptions of China's loans and aid to Africa.

At the end of the study, the report also proposes possible coping strategies such as increasing investment in Africa, strengthening the supervision and regulation of non-government exchanges in African economic activities.

I. Background

Since the Bandung Conference in 1955, contemporary China-Africa relations have been on the fast track: in 1959, China established diplomatic relations with Guinea, the first sub-Saharan African country. In the mid-1960s, at the invitation of the Tanzanian President, China spent five years in building a railroad that connects Zambia and Tanzania, making the Tanzanian railroad an important economic link in the region. In the 20th century, China has actively supported national independence movements in African countries since the 1970s and relied on the 26 affirmative votes of African countries to restore China's seat at the United Nations.

The establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 was a milestone in the further development of China-Africa relations, since 2013 the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has encouraged more Chinese investors and entrepreneurs to go to Africa. Today, China is the largest trading partner of many African countries -- China contracts about half of Africa's infrastructure projects. About one million Chinese people live in Africa, more than 3,000 Chinese enterprises are operating in Africa. In addition, China has become the number one destination for African students to study abroad. China-Africa cooperation extends from politics and economics to science, education, culture, health, peace, and security. It is also undeniable that China-Africa people-to-people exchanges have been further promoted.

However, the development of China-Africa relations has not always been smooth sailing. In recent years, as exchanges between China and Africa have expanded, various discordant voices have inevitably drawn public interest.

The case of the Kenyan ivory queen is an example of Chinese poaching and trafficking of rare animal products in Africa. The case of the destruction of the animal protection zone by the Mombasa–Nairobi Standard Gauge Railways an example of the damage to the local environment caused by Chinese infrastructure investment in Africa. More importantly, Chinese illegal activities in Africa impose negative impacts on the environment and local communities. The case of the 3 Chinese murdered in Zambia in 2020 is an example of the dangers Chinese face in Africa. The events listed above are complicating China-Africa relations in the new era.

In early March 2020, Covid-19 cases from sub-Saharan Africa surged up in Nigeria. By the end of March, there were fewer than 40 cases in Africa, most of which were imported cases originating in Europe. By September 1, 2020, the number of Covid-19 cases in 55 African countries totaled about 1.25 million, which is 5% of the global number of Covid-19 cases. African countries have about 30,000 deaths and the fatality rate is around 2.4%, which is lower than most European and American countries.

The World Health Organization has indicated that the African COVID19 epidemic may have passed its peak. South Africa is the most severely affected country on the continent, with about 660,000 cases of corona-virus, which ranks South Africa at the seventh-highest number of cases worldwide. In contrast, in some African countries, corona-viruses have not had a significant impact from the healthcare perspective, such as Kenya, where there have been fewer than 600 Covid-19 deaths. A recent WHO study suggests that the proportion of the African population that is asymptomatic is about 80%, while 40%-50% in other regions.

Nevertheless, inadequate health care systems and insufficient medical equipment and personnel have affected the control effect of the epidemic in many African countries.

According to the United Nations, 56% of the African population lives in slums and only 34% of the population has access to hand-washing facilities, which makes it extremely difficult to maintain social distances and obtain protective gear such as masks and disinfectant in slums. In addition, the epidemic is exerting a huge impact on Africa's economy and food security. Some African countries that rely on resource exports and tourism are facing fiscal deficits as the global economy grinds to a halt, while others are mired in debt crises. Analysis by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa predicts that the new crown will reduce Africa's economic growth rate from 3.2% to 1.8%, which could push 7 million Africans into extreme poverty. Eighty percent of the African labor force is working under the informal sectors that do not provide thorough schemes for social security. Lockdown in Africa signifies the fact that the majority of Africans would suffer from food insecurity, poverty, and undernutrition.

In response to the plight of the epidemic in Africa, the Chinese government, enterprises, and private organizations have actively provided assistance. For example, the Chinese government and some private foundations have donated a large amount of medical equipment and protective gear, including respirators, N95 masks, protective suits, gloves, etc. to 54 countries in Africa. The Chinese Embassy in South Africa organized an online seminar with Chinese experts after the outbreak of the epidemic to share China's experience in fighting the epidemic with South African health system officials and experts. Sub-Saharan Africa became the main beneficiary of China's overseas assistance during the COVID19 pandemic.

II. Research Methodology

The methodology for this study contains a textual analysis of media reports and in-depth interviews, covering both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

(i) Countries in the Study

Taking into account the economic size, regional influence, and official and private diplomatic relations with China, the report selects representative countries in East, West, and Southern Africa. This study selects Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Ghana as the target countries of the study. These six countries meet the following three criteria: 1) they are influential in their regions; 2) they have close economic and trade relations and cultural ties with China; 3) and there have been some key events in recent years in their people-to-people exchanges.

Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa and hosts the headquarters of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In addition, Nigeria also plays a pivotal role in China-Africa relations ---- China is Nigeria's number one source of imports.

South Africa is the second-largest economy in Africa. China and South Africa established diplomatic relations in 1998. According to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, there are about 300,000 overseas Chinese in South Africa, mostly new expatriates, many of whom are engaged in commercial activities such as wholesale and retail trade. South Africa has Chinese chambers of commerce divided according to provinces and regions, and Chinese business gatherings such as China Trade City and China-Africa Trade City, which have a certain scale of Chinese groups. Johannesburg has the first Chinatown in Africa. At the same time, some Chinese are beginning to enter South African politics, and

South Africa has five Chinese members of parliament from Taiwan. However, some Chinese people are illegally selling and buying wildlife products in South Africa, which seriously affects the image of Chinese people in the country. As the Ministry of Culture and Tourism pointed out in an article on August 29, 2019, "Johannesburg has seized a small number of cases of Chinese citizens suspected of producing and selling counterfeit alcohol, medicine, and rhino horn, which seriously damages the good image of China and Chinese people. "This is a typical example. The epidemic has led to a serious security situation in South Africa where seven Chinese citizens have been killed in the past 50 days.

Despite its small economic size, Ghana plays a very important role in sub-Saharan Africa. Ghana, the most stable country in West Africa, is the first independent country in Sub-Saharan Africa and is rich in natural resources. China-Ghana relations have been on a stable and healthy track for a long time. Due to its rich gold resources, Ghana once attracted a large number of Chinese to mine for gold, creating a "gold rush," but it has also caused a series of problems. For example, the June 6, 2013 a *CNN* article "124 Chinese Citizens Arrested in Ghana, Need to Calm Down about Gold Rush," reported on the diplomatic fallout from the arrest of more than 100 Chinese suspected of illegal gold mining in Ghana by the Ghanaian government. In addition to illegal mining, illegal trawling by Chinese deep sea fishing vessels in West Africa, especially in Ghana, has been a critical issue that arouses a strong public outrage.

Kenya is the largest economy in East Africa and one of the fastest-growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Kenya's recent decade of structural political and economic reforms have contributed significantly to its social development. China and Kenya established diplomatic relations in 1963, and the relationship between the two countries has grown stronger since the 1980s, with leaders of the two countries making numerous visits to each other. The economic relationship between China and Kenya has also become increasingly close at the same time. Since Kenya's independence, China has provided Kenya with a variety of assistance, including grants, interest-free loans, and construction projects. Among the many China-Africa cooperation infrastructure projects, the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway is a shining star. The Monet Railway is the largest infrastructure project since Kenya's independence and the "flagship project" of Kenya's National Development Vision 2030. However, the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, which officially opened in 2017, has faced accusations and controversy over the destruction of wildlife reserves.

Zambia is the headquarters of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and remains active in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Zambia is also a founding member of these two regional organizations. In addition, Zambia is the second-largest copper-producing country in Africa. China and Zambia established diplomatic relations in 1964, and since then, leaders of the two countries have paid many visits to each other, and economic cooperation between the two countries has become increasingly close. China has undertaken the construction of the Tanzanian Railway, the Mulungushi Textile Company Limited, a Zambian-Chinese joint venture, the drilling of wells for water supply, agricultural technology demonstration centers, rural schools, the interior and exterior decoration of the main Zambian government building, the maintenance of urban water supply facilities, and other 43 projects. In 2005, an explosion at an explosives factory attached to the Chambisi Copper Mine, invested by China Mining Group, was the second-largest mining disaster in Zambia, causing public outcry against Chinese companies. Since then, there have been a number of labor disputes at Chinese-owned copper mines in Zambia. In addition, the murder of three local Chinese workers in a dispute over wages has also triggered strong repercussions in China.

Zimbabwe also has some influence in the southern African hinterland and close ties with China. The Chinese and Zimbabwean governments have signed agreements on economic

and technical cooperation, trade, investment protection, and double taxation avoidance, as well as a joint economic and trade committee. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1980, China has assisted Zimbabwe in the construction of a number of projects, including a cement factory, the renovation of a mobile telecommunications network, the National Defense College, the renovation and expansion of the Victoria Falls Airport, and the expansion of the Kariba South Hydroelectric Power Station, using export buyer's credits and government-subsidized loans from the Export-Import Bank of China. In terms of culture and education, the two sides also have a lot of contacts, and there is a Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe. In terms of medical care, China has been providing medical assistance to Zimbabwe since 1985, mainly in the fields of radiology and AIDS treatment. However, in recent years, Chinese people have been arrested for selling wildlife products and labor disputes with local Chinese companies, which have had a negative impact on China's image in the region.

(ii) Collection and Analysis of Mainstream Media Reports on China in African Countries

In this study, 3-5 representative media platforms in each country were selected. Through keywords search, China-related reports from January 1, 2020, to September 1, 2020 were collected from the selected media platforms. The sources of the reports (local original reports and reports reprinted by foreign media) were distinguished. Next, the content of each selected report is analyzed, and its China-related attitude is rated. Finally, the main positive and negative images of China were extracted from the original China-related articles in each country. 50 articles representing positive, negative, and neutral images of China were further selected in each country for the textual content frame analysis.

Kenya: Daily Nations, Standard, and Kenya Daily Post, the top three daily newspapers in terms of circulation, were selected for the study. Among them, the Daily Nations has a strong pro-government background, while the Kenya Daily Post is the organ of the former ruling party and represents a variety of views different from those of the current Kenya government, which is in line with the need for diversity of positions.

South Africa: Three media outlets that are representative of their respective fields were chosen: the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), The Star, and The Sunday Times, which represents an authoritative official voice because it is owned by the South African government. The Star has the largest circulation among left-of-center media and the Sunday Times has the highest circulation among critical media.

Zambia: *The Zambian Times* and *the Zambia Daily Post* are selected, as well as several local publications with a large readership.

Zimbabwe: *The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, and *The Sunday Mail* are state-owned media outlets, all of which are highly influential official media. *The Daily News*, *the Financial Gazette*, and *the Financial Gazette* are privately-owned media outlets. *The Daily News* and *the Financial Gazette* are mainly critical of the government, and their coverage of China is relatively negative.

Ghana: Four media outlets with greater local influence and diverse positions, content formats, and audience distribution were selected. Among them, *Daily Graphic* focuses on the position of the government and has the largest readership in Ghana; *Daily Guide* is owned by enterprises and its readers are mainly politicians and scholars, mainly critical of the government; *The Business and Financial Times* focuses on the position of the government and has the largest number of readers. *GBC Ghana*, the first television station in Ghana, had a monopoly on access to information and sources for many years.

Nigeria: Selected media are *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *Channels*, and *The Nation*. The Guardian is independent and left-leaning, which makes it a good comparison with the official media. The Punch newspaper is the most widely circulated newspaper in Nigeria and has a wide influence. The Channels station is highly politically neutral and being a television station enriches the media variety of the chosen media. The Nation, a pro-government state-owned media outlet, also has considerable local influence.

Table 1: Mainstream Media in Six African Countries

Country	Media Name	Capital	Political Position
Kenya	<i>Daily Nation</i>	Private Media	Alignment with the ruling party
	<i>Standard</i>	Banner Group (SG)	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>Kenya Daily Post</i>	Former Ruling Party of Kenya	More questioning of the government, different political voice from the ruling party
South Africa	<i>SABC</i>	South African Government Official Broadcast Group	Alignment with the ruling party
	<i>The Star</i>	Privately held independent/Sekunjalo Investment Holdings	He has a relatively neutral political stance and is involved in many negative social issues.
	<i>Sunday Times</i>	Privately held Arena Holdings, Africa's largest publisher of English-language newspapers.	Have more doubts about the government and belong to a different political voice than the ruling party.
Zambia	<i>Zambia Daily Mail</i>	Zambian Government	Alignment with the ruling party
	<i>Mwebantu</i>	Private Media	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>Lusaka Times</i>	Private Media	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>Zambian Watchdog</i>	Private Media	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>Zambia Reports</i>	Foreign Investment Community and Domestic Audience	Relatively neutral political stance
Zimbabwean	<i>The herald</i>	Government Holdings Media Group Zimpapers	Alignment with the ruling party
	<i>Newsday</i>	Privately held Alpha Media Holding	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>The Chronicle</i>	Government Holdings Media Group Zimpapers	Alignment with the ruling party
	<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	Government Holdings Media Group Zimpapers	Alignment with the ruling party

	<i>Daily News</i>	Jethro Goko, a private company	More questioning of the government, different political voice from the ruling party
	<i>The Financial Gazette</i>	Modus Publications, a private company	Relatively neutral political stance. The coverage is broad, mostly commercial, with no obvious bias toward political and economic analysis.
	<i>The Zimbabwean</i>	Private company Wilf Mbanga	More questioning of the government, different political voice from the ruling party
Ghana (Ghana)	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	A privately-held local company, Graphic Communications Group Limited	Alignment with the ruling party
	<i>Daily Guide</i>	Local private company Western Publications Limited	Relatively neutral political stance, mainly political reporting
	<i>The Business and Financial Times</i>	Private Media	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>GBC Ghana</i>	Government of Ghana	Relatively neutral political stance
Nigeria	<i>Punch</i>	Private Local Company PUNCH Nigeria Limited	Relatively neutral political position, free from government control
	<i>Channels</i>	Channels Incorporated, a privately held local company	Relatively neutral political stance
	<i>The Nation</i>	Vintage Press Limited, a government-owned company	Relatively neutral political stance, with some commentators showing a clear pro-China political stance
	<i>The Guardian</i>	Private Media	More questioning of the government, different political voice from the ruling party

After selecting a media platform, the research team searched the news by keywords such as "China", "Chinese", "Beijing", etc. A total of 3,416 articles, including 2,113 original local articles and 1,303 articles reposted from foreign media agencies were screened for the period from Jan 1, 2020, to September 1, 2020.]. 1,303 articles. (If a local article quotes from foreign media in original local articles, it's still count as a local article.)

Table 2: Number of China-related Reports in National Media (2020.1.1-2020.09.01)

Country	Number of China-related reports	Number of local reports	Number of reprinted foreign media reports
Kenya	1 279	1 110	169
Nigeria	1 038	481	557
South Africa	510	131	379

Zimbabwean	269	169	100
Ghana (Ghana)	262	164	98
Zambia	58	58	0
Grand Total	3 416	2 113	1 303

After selecting a sample of articles for reporting, all original local articles were manually scored on their attitudes toward China. Each article was cross-scored by two researchers in the scoring system. If the two scorers gave the same score, it was the final score for the article. If the two researchers did not agree on the scores, the two scorers re-scored the articles, and if the scores agreed again, the final score was the final score. If the two sides could not agree on the score, the average score was used as the final score. The scoring system is as follows: Each article is scored on a five-point scale for its attitude toward China. The lowest score is 1, meaning the most negative attitude toward China; the highest score is 5, meaning the most positive attitude toward China; and the lowest interval is 1 point. (See Appendix 1 for details of scoring.)

After selecting and scoring the above articles, the research team summarized and analyzed the content keywords of each local original report to identify the main positive and negative images of China in the mainstream media coverage of China from each country. Then, for each image, 6 representative articles and 14 neutral articles were selected, making a total of 50 articles from each country [Since there were only 58 articles from Zambia, the research team decided to select all 58 articles for the framework analysis]. The articles were sampled for the content framing analysis.

The research team also scored on attitudes toward Chinese and conducted a basic content analysis of directly reprinted foreign media reports.

(iii) Interviews with experts and people from African countries

After completing both quantitative and qualitative media analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted with people, experts, and scholars in each of the countries studied. In addition, the interviews were used to supplement and corroborate the results of the media analysis. Interviews were mainly conducted through online audio and video, with individual interviews conducted through text messages on social media platforms.

In terms of the selection of interviewees, about ten interviewees were selected from each of the target countries in this study. The interviewees come from different social backgrounds and professions: scholars in the field of China-Africa relations, journalists, government officials, doctors, university students, engineers, NGO workers, slum guides, and so on.

III. Analysis of China's overall image in Africa

(i) Overview of China's Overall Image in Africa

Generally speaking, among the mainstream media in the six African countries, local original reports on China are both positive and negative. Local reports show a moderate and neutral stance.

Among them, South African, Zimbabwean, Ghanaian, and Zambian media were generally positive in their China-related reports, with an average score of more than 3. The Zimbabwean media had the highest score of 3.544 for the image of China in their reports.

Kenya and Nigeria, on the other hand, tend to be more negative in their China-related coverage, with an average score of less than 3, with Kenya's media coverage of China scoring the lowest at 2.914. However, this score is also closer to a neutral 3, meaning that China's image in the country's media is neutral and slightly negative. However, this score is also closer to a neutral 3, meaning that China's image in the country's media coverage is neutral and slightly negative.

With the exception of Zimbabwe, the average scores for China media in the five countries were in the range of 2.9-3.2, with no significant differences between the scores. The scores for each country's media were normally distributed: the vast majority scored a neutral 3, while the most extreme scores of 1 and 5 were rare, meaning that the media in the six countries as a whole tended to be more moderate.

Table 3: China's Image Scores in Mainstream Media Coverage in Six African Countries

Country	Number of articles with different scores on attitudes toward China					Average Score
	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4	Score 5	
Kenya	81	166	688	118	57	2.914
Nigeria	23	104	235	114	5	2.946
South Africa	5	24	81	4	17	3.031
Zimbabwean	4	9	73	57	26	3.544
Ghana	4	34	84	34	8	3.049
Zambia	4	7	26	16	5	3.190
Total	121	344	1187	343	118	2.997

The country-specific distribution is as follows.

The overall average score of mainstream media in Kenya that covered China during the outbreak was 2.914. *The Daily Nation* scored 2.935, the *Standard* scored 2.892, and the *Kenya Daily Post* scored 2.654. This score means that the country's media were mixed in their coverage of China, with a slightly more critical assessment. This score also means that the country's media coverage of China is mixed, with the overall assessment slightly leans toward criticism.

South Africa's mainstream media gave an overall average score of 3.031 for their coverage of China during the outbreak. The official media, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), scored 2.778, which is neutral on the whole; the *Sunday Times*, a critical media, scored the lowest at 2.643, with more negative news about China; *The Star*, which has the most reports on China, scored the highest (3.491) and is objective and neutral on the whole, with more positive news than negative news.

The overall average score of the mainstream media in Nigeria on their coverage of China during the outbreak was 2.946, of which 3.18 was given to the *Punch*, 2.97 to *The Nation*, and 2.64 to *Channels* and *The Guardian*, both of which scored more or less negatively.

The Guardian is also the source of most of the coverage. Meanwhile, except for The Guardian, which has a clear negative bias, the distribution of the scores for all the other media is basically normal: most of the scores are neutral with a score of 3, while the most polarized scores of 1 and 5 are the lowest, meaning that no polarization is observed in any of the three media, which tend to be moderate in general.

The overall mean score for Ghanaian mainstream media coverage of China during the outbreak was 3.049. More than half of the reports in the four selected media outlets scored a neutral 3. Among them, the Business Financial Times and The *Daily Graphic* received an overall score of 3.22 and 3.16 respectively, which is neutral and slightly positive. The other two media outlets received slightly negative scores.

The overall average rating of the mainstream media in Zimbabwe for China-related reports during the outbreak was 3.544 points. Overall, except for *The Zimbabwean*, the distribution of scores for each category was normal: the majority of the scores were neutral (3), with the most polarized (1) and least polarized (5).

The overall average score of Zambian mainstream media coverage of China during the outbreak was 3.190, with only *Zambian Watchdog* scoring 2 and the rest of the selected media distributed in the 3 to 4 range. This means that the overall media coverage of China in Zimbabwe is mixed, and the overall assessment is on the positive side. It should be noted that the extremely low number of China-related reports is an important feature of the horizontal comparison between the mainstream media in Zambia and the mainstream media in the other countries studied.

(ii) Description and Analysis of China's Main Positive Images in Africa

China's positive image in Africa includes: 1) China's effective prevention and control of the Covid-19 epidemic; 2) China's ongoing economic assistance to Africa and its debt relief measures during the epidemic; 3) and China's provision of medical assistance to African countries during the epidemic.

The first positive image of China is the remarkable performance of China in the fight against the epidemic. In the process of building this image, the mainstream media in the selected countries mention China's material assistance to other countries in the epidemic, its strong public governance capabilities, and new medical initiatives such as Mobile Cabin hospitals and online medical consultations. The discourse shaping China's positive image in the fight against the epidemic: this type of reporting tends to use China's specific achievements in combating the Epidemic as examples to draw conclusions about the superiority of China's anti-epidemic strategy. The results are judged by whether the epidemic is under control or has disappeared. Another category of reports praises China's achievements in vaccine development.

Second, China's positive image also includes its partial loan forgiveness and debt extension for Africa and the fact that China has invested heavily in the construction of infrastructure in Africa. China has a long history and tradition of economic assistance to Africa, especially in infrastructure and health care, which is one of the cornerstones of good China-Africa relations and has created a positive image of China's active economic and trade assistance to Africa. For example, in Nigeria and Ghana, the positive news related to loans and infrastructure aid have been reported by many media, including the Nigerian newspaper, The Nation, and The Daily Newspaper. The positive news related to loans and infrastructure aid have been also reported by many media in Ghana, including the *Daily Graphic* and the GBC Ghana. In addition, China's railroad and power projects in Africa were also reported. Most of the articles were analytical, looking at the factors that China's lending to African countries would lead to win-win situations for both sides, and China's official position on the

"Belt and Road" project was completely apolitical, which aims at "co-consultation, co-construction, and sharing.

Although the opinions that “Chinese loans in Africa will jeopardize the sovereignty of African countries” appears in both the Nigerian and Ghanaian reports, in addition to the voices questioning the nature of the project, the historical descriptions of African loans by relevant experts, and the horizontal analysis of inter-country loans by parliamentary officials, the overall public opinion is generally oriented toward explaining, clarifying, and affirming the common prosperity of China's aid. It is the first step in the development of friendly relations with China.

Thirdly, China's donations and assistance to African countries in the new epidemic are also one of the main positive images of China. The aid from the Chinese government to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce to Chinese enterprises was reported in all countries. Assistance from the Jack Ma Foundation was also reported in several countries. In these reports, China is portrayed as a generous and selfless global power that has taken an active role in international responsibility and has helped to alleviate the economic and social hardships in Africa through tangible material assistance during the outbreak of the epidemic. For example, Chinese medical assistance and information sharing have been widely reported in the Nigerian media. In the Nigerian media (Punch, The Nation, The Daily), there were numerous reports about the medical supplies and Corona Virus treatment programs provided by the Chinese government, enterprises, and NGOs to Nigeria during the outbreak, as well as articles commenting on China's contribution to the global fight against the epidemic.

Table 4: Analysis of China's Main Positive Images in Mainstream Media Coverage in Six African Countries

Positive Image	Country	Viewpoints	Angle	Case in point
China's Epidemic Prevention and Control Efforts	Kenya	China takes the epidemic seriously and has a strong capacity to deal with it.	Praise China's strong governance capabilities by describing the efficient operation and rapid establishment of the Cubicle Hospital.	Cubicle hospitals are large, fast-moving, quick to build, and efficient.
	Zambia	Proper protection of Zambians in China by China: Zambian students in China were well protected and housed in safe conditions during the outbreak.	To quote the report of the Chinese government on the safety situation of Zambians in China during the outbreak, and to adopt a credible attitude to show that Zambians in China are well settled.	The Chinese Ambassador to Zambia, Li Jie, has assured that 4,000 Zambian students in China are free of the coronavirus, including those in the worst affected city of Wuhan.
	Zimbabwean	Appreciate China's epidemic prevention measures and consider it a good reference.	China's experience in fighting epidemics in Africa has been very helpful in evaluating local epidemic measures.	A video conference with Chinese medical experts helped Zimbabwe reassess its epidemic preparedness measures.

	South Africa	China has become one of the leading countries in vaccine development.	Describes the success of China's government-led approach to vaccine development and its leading role in COVID-19. It also highlights the relatively Western approach to vaccine development that has not received regulatory approval.	The Chinese state has invested significant resources in vaccine development. China has encountered many difficulties in vaccine development in the past and currently, but China has been improving vaccine regulation.
China's Economic Assistance and Investment in Africa	Kenya	China's debt relief for Kenya has contributed to the economic development of Kenyan society.	List the debt relief, and show the importance of this debt relief to Kenya by describing the magnitude of the debt.	Kenyan businesses are greatly welcomed and appreciated.
	Zambia	China's partial debt relief for African countries affected by the epidemic has effectively relieved the economic and social pressure on African countries and contributed to their economic development and social reconstruction.	The list of debts forgiven by China to African countries shows the wide range of debts that China has forgiven to reflect its economic and social contributions to African countries.	China has forgiven the debts of a large number of African countries that were severely damaged by the epidemic.
	Zimbabwean	Praised China for taking the lead in forgiving the debts of African countries due to the epidemic.	He mainly praised China's kind offer of debt cancellation and further discussed whether Zimbabwe is eligible for debt cancellation. It concludes with a call for other creditor countries and institutions to follow China's example.	Zimbabwe is suffering from illegal Western sanctions, which have led to increased financial pressures. China has made numerous statements opposing the destructive sanctions and calling for their unconditional removal.
	Nigeria	President Muhammadu Buhari praised China's contribution to reversing Nigeria's infrastructure deficit.	China's construction of railroads, roads, airports, and power stations has reversed the fiscal deficit in the country's infrastructure, which is a huge challenge for the country's development, and Chinese help is therefore very important.	The President said, "Please express your gratitude to President Xi Jinping for his contributions to China's efforts to reverse the infrastructure deficits we have suffered in the railroad, highway, airport, and power sectors.

	Ghana	China has forgiven interest-free loans to fight the epidemic together with African countries.	Showing China-Africa friendly relations by quoting Chinese official responses.	China will build the headquarters of the African Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the Ethiopian capital.
	South Africa	Over the years, China-Africa infrastructure cooperation has achieved great success.	China's infrastructure development in Africa, with no strings attached, is driving regional economic development.	If the advantages of the AfCFTA are to be leveraged, regional infrastructure development is needed, and if the infrastructure development gap in Africa is to be closed, all partners, including China, need to be brought in through the Belt and Road Initiative.
China's Medical Assistance to African Countries in Epidemic Situations	Kenya	China's First Lady donated a large amount of medical supplies to Kenya, demonstrating the friendship between China and Kenya.	China's importance to Kenya is demonstrated by the importance of her status as First Lady.	China's First Lady donated a large amount of medical supplies to Kenya, which was well received in Kenya.
	ZAMBIA	By donating a large number of medical supplies to support Zambia, China Construction Group demonstrates China's support for Zambia's fight against the epidemic.	By reporting on China Construction Group's donation of medical supplies, we generalize it and build a narrative of "China helping Zambia fight epidemic".	The Consulate General of the Republic of Zambia received \$38,000 worth of medical supplies from China. China Construction Group as a donation to help in the fight against COVID19.
	Zimbabwean	The President thanked China for its long friendship and help during the epidemic.	From the perspective of the long-standing friendship between China and Tianjin, he described his gratitude for the long-standing support and assistance from the Chinese side and praised the brotherly and sisterly friendship between the two countries.	The President said that China's donation is a testament to the long history of friendship between the two countries.

	Nigeria	China's Active Contribution to Nigeria's Anti-Epidemic Efforts	List of medical supplies donated by Chinese companies in Nepal and the experiences of Chinese doctors in fighting the epidemic.	China brought 16 tons of medical supplies (including test kits, respirators, sterilizers, disposable masks, N95 masks, medications, rubber gloves, protective clothing, goggles).
	South Africa	China Becomes One of the Leading Countries in Vaccine Development	Describes China's successful government-led approach to vaccine development at the forefront of COVID-19.	China completes two vaccine plants in a few months.
	Ghana (Ghana)	Chinese Companies Donate Medical Supplies to Ghana Police	A brief description of the Chinese company's assistance to the Ghanaian police, and the Ghanaian response.	Chinese Company Delivers 75,000 Ghana Currency Units of Immune-Boosting Drugs

In addition, several Kenyan mainstream media outlets have reported on China's commitment to the existing multilateralism-driven international order, represented by the United Nations, in its approach to international relations, in contrast to the anti-globalization and undermining of the UN-dominated international order by the US administration under Trump. For example, Kenya's Daily Nation's article "WHO warns against virus overreaction as death toll hits 1,868" explicitly cites the seriousness of the World Health Organization's epidemic preparedness efforts as a way to highlight China's active participation and the irresponsibility of the Trump administration.

Media coverage in Zimbabwe has extended from success in fighting the epidemic to praise of institutions and systems, linking the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party to success in fighting the epidemic and focusing on China's strengths in institutions and systems. For example, in *The Herald of Zimbabwe*, "China shows Covid-19 can be 'stopped in its tracks'" ("China shows Covid-19 can be 'stopped in its tracks'"). "It also praised the development of China's public health system, describing the relationship between China's political action, institutions, and successes in fighting the epidemic, and then systematically praising China at the institutional level.

China's positive achievements in social governance have also been reported by some of the Zambian media as a positive image of social governance and innovation. For example, in the article "China's education reforms spur economy," the Zambian Daily Mail details how China's educational innovations have produced a large number of qualified, well-adapted general laborers who can meet the needs of modern society and thus revitalize the economy. The positive image of China's social governance was also discussed in the interviews with Nigerian government official Chris and scholar Ovigwe, where many Nigerians praised China's recent economic boom and the large number of people who have been lifted out of poverty in a few decades. "China's "meritocracy" in social governance is something the Nigerian government should learn from."

China's leadership and development in science and technology, with reports on China's 5G, vaccine research and development, and clean energy innovation, have created a positive image of China. For example, Zambia Reports in "Time To Focus On The East, As

China Beats US In Key Technology Patents" ("Time To Focus On The East, As China Beats US In Key Technology Patents") , an article detailing the innovation of Chinese companies in the field of scientific patent development has shown that China is a leader in science and technology, and that China's innovation in 5G, vaccine development, and clean energy has created a positive image of China.). Ovigwe, a Nigerian international relations scholar, pointed out that many Nigerians perceive China to be technologically advanced and that Chinese people use advanced technology. The fact that Chinese technology is actually improving the lives of some Africans is more relevant to the self-interest of ordinary Africans. For example, the low cost of cell phones made by Chinese Transsion company has made it possible for many hard-pressed Nigerians to have access to smartphones and the Internet.

(iii) Description and Analysis of China's Main Negative Images in Africa

The so-called "negative image" of China in local original reporting in mainstream African media is characterized by: inappropriate methods of prevention and treatment; neo-colonial overtones of Chinese aid to Africa, which may threaten the sovereignty of African countries and breed local corruption; and the negative impact of the activities of individual Chinese or Chinese enterprises in Africa on local communities.

One of the criticisms of China in the African media also comes from the issue of the Covid-19 epidemic: China's approach to Corona-Virus prevention and treatment has been the target of some media criticism. Most of the attacks in this area are about the transparency of information and the strictness of some of China's epidemic prevention measures, which cause "unnecessary inconvenience" to the population. Compared to the "results-oriented" perspective of positive images of the same topic, the construction of negative images of China on the topic of the Covid-19 epidemic has been more "value-oriented", i.e., from a "civil rights value" based on the West. "This negative image is dominated by questions about China's "transparency of information disclosure" and the "restrictions on personal freedom" of China's coercive isolation measures.

The second criticism of China in the African media comes from the issue of economic aid: some reports accuse China's economic aid to African countries of "neo-colonialism". The first is the questioning of Chinese economic aid to Africa as "neo-colonialist," suggesting that Chinese loans and aid are tainted by opaque conditions that may be covetous of the country's sovereignty and resources. The "neo-colonial" approach has led to strong skepticism among some segments of the African community about the sustainability of Chinese investment in Africa. Those who oppose Chinese projects believe that their leaders are "selling their sovereignty" to obtain Chinese investment, arguing that "China's ostensible investment as a loan is in fact a new form of colonialism that will undermine the sovereignty of African countries. Although this point has been clarified by statements from relevant experts and government officials, this viewpoint appears frequently in the media, influencing the public's judgment and impression. The second is to report on Chinese economic aid and construction loans together with the problems of the local government, suggesting that Chinese speculators are taking advantage of the corruption of the African government. For example, the Kenyan report partially establishes a correlation, or even causation, between "corruption" and "good relations with China. Some of the Nigerian reports claim that the government was unaware of the content and potential terms of the loan agreement with China when it was written in Chinese.

Third, one of the sources of China's negative image in Africa is the activities (especially illegal activities) of Chinese companies or Chinese nationals in the region. Such incidents are amplified by some local media and have a negative impact on China-Africa relations. For example, in Ghana, Zambia, and Nigeria, there were reports of illegal Chinese mining or the negative impact of mining by Chinese companies on the local environment. The South African interviews and reports also include some coverage of these issues. There were

additional reports from Ghana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa involving labor issues and illegal business operations, such as the continued operation of Chinese businesses that did not comply with the lockdown measures during the epidemic. There is also a small amount of coverage of wildlife poaching. South African journalist Tulani mentioned in an interview that China's demand for rhino horn and other wildlife products has accelerated local poaching, and Ghanaian media have reported that China's demand for donkey skin has led to a high incidence of donkey poaching, putting pressure on local farmers. Emeka, a Nigerian scholar, has also pointed out the violation of labor rights by Chinese companies in Nigeria. In Zimbabwe, the shooting of local workers by a Chinese boss has had a very negative impact on local public opinion. In Zambia, there have been reports of Chinese workers taking local jobs. Other negative impacts of Chinese presence in Africa on local communities have also been reported. In Ghana, for example, all four selected media outlets reported on illegal mining by Chinese companies, which caused environmental pollution; overfishing by Chinese fishing boats, which led to a fish reproduction crisis and threatened the livelihoods of community fishermen; and unapproved operations by Chinese companies in the face of an epidemic lockdown to avoid taxation. For example, GBC Ghana's article "Chinese fishing trawler fails to pay \$1m fine" briefly explains how the Committee on Fisheries is concerned about the case of the Chinese company's illegal activities was adjudicated to demonstrate the fishing crisis caused by overfishing by Chinese deep sea fishing vessels.

In the interviews, four South African and Nigerian interviewees also mentioned the stereotype of the poor quality of Chinese-made products, such as Doctor Dayok, who pointed out that the quality of Chinese infrastructure aid projects may need to be improved, although this may be more due to corruption in their local governments. This also led some Africans during the pandemic to question the quality of masks and protective gear produced and exported by China.

(iv) Analysis of Direct Reproduction of Foreign Media Reports on China by Mainstream Media in African Countries

From the sources of mainstream media reports on China in African countries, it can be seen that in the five countries studied, except for Zambia, there are many cases where local media directly reprint foreign media reports on China. The third part of this report analyzes China's overall image in Africa, focusing on the original African media reports. Given that directly reprinted foreign media reports are also presented on these media platforms and read by the local population, their impact on the local African population cannot be ignored. Therefore, this section will briefly analyze the foreign media reports about China that are directly reprinted by mainstream African media (see Appendix 2 for a detailed analysis).

Table 5: China's Image Scores in Mainstream Media in Each Country in Reproducing Foreign Media Reports and Local Original Reports

Country	Reprinting of foreign media reports	Local Original Report
Kenya	2.918	2.914
Nigeria	2.791	2.946
South Africa	2.741	3.031
Zimbabwe	3.089	3.544
Ghana (Ghana)	2.786	3.049
Zambia	N/A	3.190
Grand Total	2.860	2.997

From the table above, it can be seen that Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Ghana scored significantly higher on China's image in their original local reports than in their reprinted foreign media reports. Kenya's image of China in reprinted foreign media reports scored slightly higher than the local original reports, but only 0.004 points higher. On the whole, the original local media reports on China in these African countries were more positive towards China than the reprinted reports in foreign media.

In terms of the media from which the reports were reprinted, European media such as *Agence France-Presse* (France), *Reuters* (UK), and *BBC* (UK) accounted for the vast majority of the reprinted foreign media reports, with 559, 364, and 157 articles respectively. Some of the reports from *China Daily*, *Global Times* and *People's Daily* were also reprinted, but the number was much smaller than that of European media. The number of reprinted media sources varies from country to country. For example, Nigeria mainly reprinted *AFP* reports, South Africa mostly reprinted *Reuters* reports, and Zimbabwe reprinted dozens of *Xinhua* reports. (See Appendix 2 for a list of media sources by country.)

Table 6: Scores of Major Media in Five African Countries for Reproducing Chinese Foreign Media Reports on Source and Image of China

Reproduction of report source country	Number of China-related articles	Average China Image Score
France	565	2.842
United Kingdom	551	2.830
China	56	3.444
United States of America	47	2.561
Qatar	7	2.785
Germany	7	2.821
India	3	1.833
Turkey	2	3.000
Australia	2	3.500
Russia	2	3.500
South Africa	1	3.000
Zambia	1	3.000
N/A	59	2.999
Grand Total	1303	2.860

In terms of content, the reprinted foreign media reports basically covers the above-mentioned positive and negative content extracted from the original local reports. From the above table, it can be seen that the Chinese image in the Western media reports reproduced in African countries is relatively negative (e.g. France 2.842 points, UK 2.830 points, USA 2.561 points, Germany 2.821 points), while the Chinese image in the Chinese media reports reproduced in African countries is relatively positive, with a Chinese image score of 3.444 points.

Among the positive reprinted reports, the Ghanaian media *Daily Graphic* reprinted a story praising China's cooperation with African countries in the fight against epidemics, mentioning China's establishment of epidemic prevention and control centers on African countries and the forgiveness of interest-free loans. The Nigerian newspaper *Punch* reprinted a *Xinhua* report on the arrival of Chinese epidemic prevention supplies in Nigeria. The Kenyan *Standard* reprinted the *Xinhua* report, which gave a positive perspective on China's assistance and collaboration with Africa in the economic and public health fields, and portrayed China as a positive and responsible power that is actively assisting Africa in the epidemic.

However, the Western media also carry reports that contain many elements that are detrimental to China's image. For example, by reporting on news events such as the National Security Law in Hong Kong, they criticize China's political system. Such reports have appeared in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, and the negative commentary reprinted cites China's "lack of democracy in its political system, authoritarian surveillance, and information censorship" as the main points of attack. Similar paraphrasing of Western commentary can be seen, in part, as export of Western values. The opaque Chinese information about infection and outbreak control during the epidemic and the coverage of Dr. Li Wenliang were covered in the media in five African countries. Some reports attributed this to systemic problems. In Ghana, for example, the *Daily Graphic* made accusations against China regarding Hong Kong. Reports on the issue of opinion control and information privacy, threats to data security involving Tiktok appeared in several countries, with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation reporting that Twitter blocked pro-Chinese accounts and Taiwan banned the download and use of Zoom on information security grounds. The Nigerian newspaper *The Guardian* has also reprinted the *AFP* news of Trump's ban on Tiktok and WeChat.

In general, the sources of reprinted foreign media reports are mainly Western media. In terms of content, there is more content on non-African affairs and more ideological and political system bias and malice towards China than local original content.

IV. Each of the three main research themes is addressed

(i) African countries' views on China's corona-virus prevention and treatment

As analyzed above, perceptions of China's corona-virus prevention and treatment in African countries are both positive and negative. Both original and reprinted reports show this trend.

The discourse of positive reporting is results-oriented: this type of reporting tends to draw conclusions about the superiority of Chinese protest tactics, exemplified by the concrete results of the Chinese anti-epidemic campaign. The only criteria for judging the results is whether the epidemic is under control or has disappeared. In a nutshell, "No matter a black cat or a white cat, a good cat is one that can manage the epidemic. For example, the article "China reports no new domestic cases after weekend spike" in the Kenyan daily *The Nation*, May 12, 2020, first described the overall epidemic in Wuhan, China, as being under control in May. The article then focused on China's use of strong public authority to organize a major test involving tens of millions of people and to take decisive measures to quarantine the infected, which resulted in a rapid reduction of cases, and used the example of zero local growth in the number of confirmed cases over several days to argue that China's blanket epidemic prevention is scientifically correct. This positive image of China was also

repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. Chris, a Nigerian government official, pointed out that China's donations are commendable

The discourse of the negative coverage is more value-oriented: it criticizes the transparency of information disclosure in China and the restrictions on personal freedom imposed by China's coercive isolation measures, based on Western values of civil rights. Some of this negative reporting is reprinted directly from foreign media. also, for example, in *Zambian Watchdog's* March 30, 2020, "China may have lied about its new crown epidemic data" ("China could be lying about Covid-19 figures"), while from the perspective of openness and transparency, the Li Wenliang case is used to criticize China for concealing the epidemic and hold China responsible for the global outbreak.

(ii) The Impact of the Covid-19 Epidemic on the Belt and Road Project in Africa

In the Belt and Road reports, media from African countries report on specific aid projects such as ports, railroads, power plants, etc. The positive reports often acknowledge China-Africa cooperation and the positive impact these infrastructure projects have on local economic development. The positive reports often acknowledge the positive impact of China-Africa cooperation and these infrastructure projects on local economic development, while the negative reports mention China's environmental pollution and China's control of Africa through the capital. There are also articles that analyze and express concern about China's growing influence in Africa from a geopolitical and international security perspective.

Chinese companies and Chinese people in Africa are also an important aspect of the Belt and Road. Under the economic hardship caused by the epidemic, some Chinese enterprises have received positive comments from the African media for their project funding and loan injections to existing Belt and Road projects. However, there are reports that some Chinese enterprises have been arrested or suspended for failing to comply with local lockdown requirements and insisting on production under the epidemic.

In addition, the epidemic highlights the strong dependence of some African economies on Chinese products. For example, Nigeria imports a large number of products made in China, which cannot be shipped out under the epidemic, and the disruption of the supply chain has had a huge impact on the Nigerian economy. As a result, local media have warned the government to develop the local manufacturing sector to reduce production costs for local production and reduce dependence on imported products. China's infrastructure assistance projects in power and transportation can also help African manufacturers reduce production costs.

(iii) African countries' views on China's loans and aid to Africa

1. On the issue of epidemic aid, the attitude of African media is generally praise-oriented, which includes quoting Western media reports on China's aid to other countries.

The "image of a responsible great nation" is the theme of the discourse used by mainstream African media to create a positive image of China. For example, in the article "China First Lady donates medical supplies to Kenya" in *Kenya's Daily Nation* (July 27, 2020), the author counts China's past assistance to Kenya in various aspects demonstrates the consistency, continuity, and systematization of China's economic assistance to Kenya.

Since COVID-19, the Chinese government and enterprises have donated a large amount of aid and materials to African countries, most of which are directly connected to African governments. Ovigwe, a Nigerian expert on China-Africa relations at *Development Reimagined*, pointed out that China should improve its reporting on the whereabouts and impact of its donations and materials. Much of the reporting on aid today focuses on the delivery of aid to the other government, and there is a lack of tracking of how the donations are benefiting ordinary people.

2. Polarized assessments of lending, including praise for China's debt relief and criticism and concern about China's covetousness of sovereignty, "neo-colonialism," loan sustainability, and lack of transparency.

In the midst of the epidemic, debt has become a top concern for recession stricken African countries. Nigeria's debt-to-GDP ratio currently stands at 28%, and most African countries' debt-to-GDP ratios will rise further as GDP growth slows. 22% of the public debt owed by sub-Saharan Africa in 2018 is held by China.

At the China-led "Extraordinary Summit on China-Africa Solidarity and AntiEpidemic", President Xi Jinping announced that China will cancel its interest-free loan debt to African countries under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) until the end of this year, and expressed China's willingness to work with the international community to The company also increased its support for "particularly hard-hit and stressed" African countries, including "further extension of debt forbearance periods. Reports of loan forgiveness add to the positive image of China as a responsible power.

In terms of the negative image of "neo-colonialism," one way to look at it is to directly link China's economic aid to Africa to neo-colonialism, and to express concern that the aid China receives might affect sovereignty. Such concerns are also often based on popular distrust of the African government among its people.

For example, on the issue of loans in Kenya, there have been some reports that the good relations between China and Kenya are due to government corruption, see the July 3, 2020, Daily Post Kenya report "You won't believe why Nhulu and China are always so close" ("You won't believe why"). UHURU and China will never part").

The sustainability of loans and the ability of African governments to repay their debts may be a cause for concern about sovereignty. This situation seems to be particularly acute in Kenya, where 89% of Kenyans believe the government has borrowed too much from China, according to Afro-barometer, Africa's largest pollster. Indeed, the impact of COVID19 further threatens the African country's ability to repay its debt, with the Budget and Appropriations Committee of Kenya's National Assembly warning Kenya Railways for failing to repay \$357 million in debt due this year on the Mombasa Nairobi railroad.

The decline in the government's ability to repay loans has led to speculation and skepticism in the media and among the general public about the consequences of not being able to repay the debt. Some media reports have cited loan and sovereignty crises in other African countries, even in developing countries in Southeast Asia. For example, the Nigerian media outlet The Guardian referred to the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, which was leased to China for 99 years, in the article "Between scaremongers and philanthropist narratives: China-Africa relations". There were also reports in Zambia that the government would mortgage a copper mine. Media commentary in Nigeria suggests that China's introduction of a debt sustainability policy framework may help reduce negative perceptions of China's debt. The lack of trust in the government in most African countries, as well as the lack of public awareness of the conditions under which the government accepts loans, may have a negative impact on the local population's perception of Chinese loans.

A similar concern may exist among African governments, as the controversy over Chinese loans in Nigeria has led to a proposal in the House of Representatives to investigate Chinese loans to Nigeria since 2000, which has been opposed by Nigeria's Minister of Transportation, who believes that such a move would cause the Chinese to suspend or reduce their loans to Nigeria. Nigerian government official Chris said the legislature is sometimes

skeptical about the loans, while the law enforcement agencies that actually use the loans tend to approve and praise them.

Along with cooperation with African governments in various fields, one of the keys to building a positive image of China in Africa is how to increase public trust in China's lending and investment assistance through measures such as transparency of information and debt sustainability frameworks or private sector cooperation.

V. China's coping strategies

From this study's analysis of media coverage and interviews with local people from all fields, it can be seen that African countries' perceptions of China are mainly characterized by a small number of areas, multiple interpretations of the same topic, and different reactions from government and civil society.

The relatively small number of areas covered means that there are not many topics that can really be "worked on" in China-Africa relations. Issues such as territorial disputes, ideological differences, scientific and technological competition, and trade disputes do not figure prominently in China-Africa relations as they do in the relations with other major countries. In the thousands of media reports analyzed, as well as in the interviews conducted, China-Africa relations have focused on epidemic prevention and control, Chinese economic activities in Africa, and China-Africa cultural exchanges, with almost no extraterritorial third-party involvement.

A plurality of interpretations on the same topic means that public opinion in African countries is not "one-sided" in its judgment of China's many African-related initiatives: on the issue of the Covid-19 epidemic, "China is effective in fighting the epidemic" and "China is effective in fighting the epidemic" in almost all of the six countries surveyed. China's success in fighting epidemics and attempt to hide epidemics" ranked as one of the top three positive images and one of the top three negative images of China in the media of these countries; on economic and trade issues, "China's economic aid and investment are beneficial to Africa's development" also existed in almost all the countries surveyed. The positive image of "China's economic activities in Africa are beneficial" and the negative image of "China's non-economic activities are neo-colonial"; the negative image of "Africans in China are racially discriminated against" on the issue of cultural exchange is also present in almost all six countries. In the interviews with local people, however, a significant number of them also believed that the unfair and unreasonable treatment of Africans in China was the result of misunderstandings caused by a sense of strangeness and alienation between different civilizations, rather than subjective and malicious racial discrimination. Thus, almost all of the concerns that are important in Sino-African relations are at the forefront of public opinion and are subject to both strong and weak criticism.

The difference between government and the civil society reaction is that the more positive reports on China on the same topic come more from pro-government media and upper-middle-class people with deeper ties to the government (e.g., government-funded Ph.D. students coming to China for further study/exchange), while the more negative reports come more from civil society organizations, especially opposition forces that are in a confrontational position with the government, such as some NGO groups, opposition party organs, and a portion of the private media and independent news commentators. This means that there is a clear rift in perceptions on the same issue. This is another key point that our country needs to be aware of in formulating its response: rather than defining African

countries as a single actor with a monolithic internal structure, they need to be seen as a community of different interest groups with different demands.

Combining the above basic characteristics with the interviews conducted by the research team with dozens of local Africans from various fields and backgrounds, the research team's basic recommendations for China's response to local Chinese public opinion in Africa are as follows.

First of all, it is necessary to concentrate our efforts and resources on epidemic prevention and control, debt relief, and post-epidemic economic reconstruction, because these are the areas that the mainstream media of African countries, regardless of political affiliation, pay most attention to. As we can see from the study, the judgment to make the mainstream media of African countries have a positive impression of China in these areas is very result-oriented, meaning that if they can actually solve the problems faced by African countries (debt, epidemic, poverty, deficit, etc.), they will be able to successfully build a positive image of China. Therefore, a solid strengthening of all-round investment and assistance in infrastructure and health care in Africa is the foundation of everything.

Secondly, it is necessary to convey as much as possible to the local community the positive perception of China's investment and economic assistance, especially which directly related to epidemic prevention and control as well as post-epidemic reconstruction. On the one hand, it is important to ensure that good motives can achieve the expected results in a good way, i.e., openness and transparency in the investment and aid construction process, as well as scientific evaluation of economic factors such as debt sustainability, otherwise, aid construction and loans will be misinterpreted and discredited. For example, Chinese investment in African countries to set up factories promotes local employment, but if Chinese companies are involved in bribes in Africa, much of the local media and public opinion will focus on the corruption problem, but not on how to boost employment. In the case of environmental damage, the environmental damage would have been the first thing to be noticed by the local media, rather than the benefits of infrastructure. In another example, China's donations to Africa during the Covid-19 epidemic were widely reported, but the tangible changes that the donations and aid brought to the region were rarely communicated. So, while it is important to ensure that economic and social assistance to African countries is on the right track, it is also important to ensure that the law enforcement is proceeding well. In short, it is important to minimize material with negative images and to actively use positive images to spread them.

Third, it is necessary to reinforce the regulation of businesses or individuals engaged in illegal activities in Africa. The negative impact of Chinese in Africa on local communities is undoubtedly one of the most important factors affecting people-to-people exchanges. Illegal mining, fishing, and logging cause damage to the local environment and greatly affect the livelihoods of local people, and labor issues such as labor problems can further increase the negative impact on China's image. Some Chinese in Africa are taking advantage of legal imperfections and governmental corruption in some African countries to make money illegally, which can easily be generalized to Chinese people or Chinese companies in Africa, even though they may be individuals or companies in China. Local governments often face problems of corruption, and some Chinese avoid punishment by paying bribes, making it difficult to effectively manage these illegal activities. Therefore, Chinese embassies and consulates in the region should do a better job of educating these people and businesses to abide by the law, and actively cooperate with the local government in handling relevant cases. According to an editorial in the Nigerian Guardian, Chinese companies should try to employ local workers in non-high-tech positions, follow local labor laws, and pay attention to community governance and environmental protection issues involved in the project.

Fourth, further strengthening people-to-people exchanges. China has generally maintained good relations with most African countries, which is the result of China's long-standing emphasis on Africa-Africa relations since the 1950s. The effect of China's long-standing emphasis on Africa-Africa relations has been proven in this epidemic: on sensitive topics in all areas of China-Africa relations during the epidemic, and even on the much-publicized "discrimination" against Africans in China, most African governments and some scholars have actively clarified the situation for China, reassured some of its people, and protected the rights of Africans in China. China's image. In addition to maintaining good official relations, in-depth people-to-people exchanges should also be emphasized as an important way to "connect people's hearts and minds," and to ensure that China-Africa relations are stable and far-reaching. In Africa, people's trust in the government is low, and inter-governmental cooperation alone is not enough to build a positive image of China in African grassroots society. Although a good relationship between the government and the people can ensure that Chinese investment and construction in Africa will go smoothly and achieve common development for both sides, it will bring the following uncertainties.

First of all, with the advancement of B&R, more and more Chinese enterprises and businessmen are entering Africa. China's interaction with African countries is getting closer and closer, and its influence in local politics, economy, and society will be further deepened, making China an important topic for local governments. If there is a lack of communication between China and Africa, and if the grassroots in African countries do not have a deep understanding of China, the change of government or the general election, the opposition parties or forces will use the topic of China as a public opinion tool to confront the current government and make negative news about China, and the rise of the opposition parties or forces to power will lead to China's strategic passivity and affect local projects and investments.

Secondly, the development of China-Africa relations is inevitably accompanied by an influx of people from African countries into China. In contrast to previous decades when the pattern was predominantly Chinese, there is now an influx of Africans into China. There are more and more African communities in China and more and more students of African descent in Chinese schools. Only a broader mutual understanding at the grassroots level can ensure that people of African descent in China are well developed and do not feel "Other-ed" by the Chinese people. As many scholars and journalists mentioned in the interviews, the so-called discrimination against African Americans in China is not necessarily the result of subjective malice on the part of the local Chinese people, but rather the result of a lack of understanding between different cultures that leads to a sense of alienation and distance. The relationship between African Americans in China and Chinese society will undoubtedly spread rapidly through the Internet, which will internally affect the relationship between non-Chinese people in China and the local society, as well as the relationship at the national level.

In addition, this study found that the mainstream media in African countries reprinted far more articles from Western media than Chinese media when they broadcast news on sensitive China-related issues. Only by strengthening people-to-people contacts can we bring a rich and three-dimensional image of China into the public in Africa, so that ordinary Africans can perceive a beautiful China that is constantly developing and progressing, full of unlimited vitality and potential, outside of media propaganda.

Appendix 1: Detailed Rules for Scoring China's Image in the African Chinese Media

Table 7: Scoring Details

1 point	The article has a negative view of China, and this negative view involves a systematic and fundamental rejection of China's diplomatic motivations, political system, social governance, and cultural development.
2 points	The report has a negative view of China, but this negative view is limited to criticism of a specific practice and does not involve deep, systemic, ideological disagreement.
3 points	The report has no clear pros or cons for China.
4 points	The article takes a generally positive view of China, as well as a positive view of a specific policy or event.
5 points	The article takes a generally positive view of China, and the object of this positive assessment is China's systemic, general, and deep-seated institutions, strategies, and motivations.

Appendix 2: Analysis of Media Coverage in African Countries

I. Kenya

Of the 1,279 media reports collected in Kenya and actually used for the analysis, 13.2% of the articles were reprinted from foreign media. Only three media sources were reprinted: *Reuters*, *BBC*, and *Xinhua*. The average score for reprinted articles was 2.918, slightly higher than the average score for original local media articles (2.914) by a small margin.

Table 8: Distribution of Sources in Kenyan Mainstream Media that Reproduce Foreign Media Reports and Their Rating of China's Image

Media Name	Country of Media	Number of reports	Average score
<i>BBC</i>	United Kingdom	86	2.81
<i>Reuters</i>	United Kingdom	79	2.98
<i>Xinhua News Agency</i>	China	4	4
General		169	2.918

In terms of content, some of the Kenyan media's reports from the West are about Hong Kong and seriously defame and attack China's basic political system and territorial sovereignty; there are also false accusations about China based on the epidemic and Sino-US relations. For example, the East African Banner reprinted several false *BBC* reports on the so-called "one country, two systems challenged".

The Kenyan mainstream media have reprinted several reports by *Xinhua News Agency*, and these reports have shaped China's international image in a positive way. For example, on March 15, 2020, the Standard reprinted *Xinhua's* "China-Africa unity, joint anti-virus efforts unshaken by rumours" and "China-Africa joins hands with China". Fighting Epidemics, Not Moved by Rumors", the article gives a positive perspective on China's economic and public health assistance and collaboration with Africa, and portrays China as a positive and responsible power that is actively assisting Africa in epidemics.

II. Nigeria

Of the 1,038 reports collected in Nigeria, 53.7% were reprinted by the media. The reprinted media sources included *AFP*, *Reuters*, *Xinhua*, and the UK Newsnow news portal, with *AFP* as the main source.

In terms of content, 23 of the foreign media articles reprinted in Nigeria dealt with Hong Kong issues, while 63 dealt with China-US relations. As for the image of China, the foreign media scored significantly lower (2.791) than the local articles (2.946).

Table 9: Distribution of Sources of Foreign Media Reports in Nigerian Mainstream Media and Their Rating of China's Image

Media Name	Country of Media	Number of reports	Average score
<i>AFP</i>	France	469	2.767
Newsnow	United Kingdom	20	2.625
<i>Reuters</i>	United Kingdom	13	2.923
<i>Xinhua News Agency</i>	China	8	3.187
DPA	Germany	6	3.125
Sputnik	Russia	1	3
Unknown Media	N/A	40	2.975
General		557	2.791

III. South Africa

South African local media reported 131 articles, while its foreign media reported 379 articles. The main sources of the reprinted articles were *Reuters*, *AFP*, *New York Times*, and other media. On the whole, foreign media reprinted articles gave significantly lower scores to China's image (2.741) than local original articles (3.031).

Table 10: Distribution of Sources of South African Mainstream Media Reproducing Foreign Media Reports and Their Rating of China's Image

Media Name	Country of Media	Number of reports	Average score
<i>Reuters</i>	United Kingdom	253	2.796
<i>AFP</i>	France (France)	73	3.329
Bloomberg	United States of America	11	2.18
<i>Xinhua News Agency</i>	China	10	3.9
Opinion (<i>NYTimes</i>)	United States of America	4	1.375
<i>The Washington Post</i>	United States of America	3	2.5
<i>Indo-Asian News Service</i>	India	2	2
DPA	Germany	1	1
<i>IANS</i>	India	1	1.5
<i>The Conversation</i>	Australia (Australia)	1	4
<i>Associated Press News</i>	United States of America	1	2

Unknown Media	N/A	19	3.05
General		379	2.741

IV. Zimbabwe

There were 169 local and 100 foreign media reports in Zimbabwe.

Unlike several other African countries, Zimbabwe's mainstream media carried numerous positive reports from Chinese media such as *Xinhua News Agency* and *Global Times*. For example, it reprinted the *Xinhua News Agency's* report "Infrastructure investments boost Zim-China relations," which explained the benefits of China's infrastructure investments in Zimbabwe and the consolidation of bilateral relations.

At the same time, the Zimbabwean media have also reprinted some of the reports from Western media such as *AFP* and *Reuters*, which are both positive and negative, mainly neutral and less negative.

As a result, the overall image of China in the Zimbabwean articles reprinted in the foreign media is neutral and slightly positive, with a score of 3.089. However, China's image still lags far behind the score 3.544 of the Zimbabwean originals. However, there is still a large gap compared to the score 3.544 for China's image in the original Zimbabwean article.

Table 11: Distribution of Sources of Foreign Media Reports in Mainstream Media in Zimbabwe and Their Rating of China's Image

Media Name	Country of Media	Number of reports	Average score
<i>Xinhua News Agency</i>	China	28	3.246
<i>AFP</i>	France (France)	17	3.059
<i>Reuters</i>	United Kingdom	12	2.833
<i>BBC</i>	United Kingdom	11	3
<i>Bloomberg</i>	United Kingdom	8	3.375
<i>Al Jazeera</i>	Qatar (Qatar)	6	2.583
<i>CNN</i>	United States of America	3	2.33
<i>China Daily</i>	China	2	4
<i>Anadolu Agency</i>	Turkey (Turkey)	2	3
<i>Global Times China</i>	China	2	3.25
<i>People's Daily Online</i>	China	1	4
<i>Forbes</i>	United States of America	1	4
<i>The Guardian</i>	United Kingdom	1	2
<i>AP</i>	United States of America	1	4
<i>NYTimes</i>	United States of America	1	3
<i>Havard Business Review</i>	United States of America	1	3

<i>Business Insider</i>	United States of America	1	3
<i>Lusaka Times</i>	South Africa	1	3
Wheels 24	ZAMBIA	1	3
General		100	3.089

V.Ghana

Of the 262 China-related reports in the Ghanaian mainstream media, 37.4% were reprinted by foreign media (98 reports). The reprinted media sources were mainly Western media, mainly British and American, including news portals such as *BBC*, *CNN*, *Reuters*, Project Syndicate, and EuroNews, and mainly *BBC*. The Ghanaian media = only reprinted one Chinese media report from the *Global Times*, which detailed the process of the acquisition of Ghanaian minerals by a Chinese mining company in Shandong Province.

In terms of content, the Ghanaian reprinted articles mainly discussed epidemic issues, mainly related to epidemic prevention and control and epidemic surveillance, and expanded these topics in a more negative way, using the lack of information transparency in epidemic prevention and control as the main starting point to illustrate China's lack of freedom of expression and democratic spirit. On the whole, the average score of the Ghanaian media on the image of China in the articles carried by foreign media was 2.786, much lower than the average score of the local original reports (3.049).

Table 12: Distribution of Sources in Mainstream Media in Ghana for Reprinting Foreign Media Reports and Their Rating of China's Image

Media Name	Country of Media	Number of reports	Average score
<i>BBC</i>	United Kingdom	60	2.76
<i>CNN</i>	United States of America	8	2.375
<i>Reuters</i>	United Kingdom	7	2.86
Project Syndicate	United States of America	7	3.2
EuroNews	France (France)	6	2.17
Washington Post	United States of America	3	3.33
Bloomberg	United States of America	2	3
aljazeera.com	Qatar (Qatar)	1	4
RIA Novosti	Russia	1	4
Sky Sports	United Kingdom	1	3
<i>The Conversation</i>	Australia (Australia)	1	3
<i>GlobalTimes Global Times</i>	China	1	3
General		98	2.786

VI.Zambia

Among the 58 Chinese media reports collected in Zambia, not a single article was reprinted by foreign media.

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