

China and the Power of Attraction

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Soft Power in Sino-African
Diplomacy



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May 2020

Abstract

Over the last decades, Sino-African diplomatic relations have undergone various changes, corresponding with China's strategic objectives in and with the respective countries. Under the Xi administration, China's approach to diplomacy has focussed on the quest of becoming a major global power while, or rather through, upholding its traditional values. This paper seeks to analyse how the current discourse on Sino-African diplomacy fits into the context of China's soft power expansion, which has been pursued as part of its re-emergence. A Critical Discourse Analysis of Xi Jinping's opening speech at the 2018 FOCAC summit was conducted in order to create a thorough understanding of the discourse that informs Sino-African relations and the broader social practices it is embedded in. It was found that Xi actively contributes to the creation of an attractive image of China. He draws on the three conventional soft power resources of an attractive culture, political values and foreign policy, as well as new narratives. This discourse was further amplified by Chinese media practices. The social practice analysis showed that soft power in Sino-African relations provides an effective tool for China to pursue its objectives as a rising global power.

Keywords: China, diplomacy, Soft Power, Sino-African relations, Critical Discourse Analysis

Words: 9992

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List of abbreviations:

CCTV - China Central Television
CDA - Critical Discourse Analysis
CGTN - China Global Television Network
CPC - Communist Party of China
FOCAC - Forum on Chinese-African Cooperation
IMF - International Monetary Fund
PTT - Power Transition Theory
SCIO - State Council of Information Office

1. Introduction

“Giving more and taking less” and creating a “community of common destiny”. These are two of the main principles of the Communist Party of China’s *New Philosophy of Chinese Diplomacy*, which has guided its approach to foreign relations since the beginning of the Xi Jinping era (State Council of Information Office (SCIO), 2014). The way in which China presents itself on the global stage is of particular interest in the context of its rapid growth rates and growing economic influence in other countries, particularly in the global south. With these new diplomatic narratives, China communicates its quest of becoming a major global power while, or perhaps rather through, upholding its traditional values (Chen, 2016; SCIO, 2014). China’s approach to diplomacy, which shows a strong focus on presenting itself in a positive light, reflects its use of soft power, also described as the power of attraction. According to Joseph Nye (2004: 11), soft power, in international relations, describes a country’s ability to achieve its foreign policy goals through cooperation, rather than through coercion. Thus, the exertion of soft power aims at *making others want what you want* (*ibid.*). In recent years, the Xi administration has made the expansion of soft power one of the main objectives in China’s foreign policy. The African continent is one of the main targets of this charm offensive. China has put a vast amount of capital into the creation of culture centres, media systems and the launch of international exchange programmes, to name a few. Yet, a major part of China’s perceived attractiveness stems from its practice of influencing other countries’ economic development (Morgan, 2019) and the way in which it strengthens the voice of developing countries in international organizations. This shapes the way in which the targeted actors of the soft power offensive view China and, thus, creates the basis for cooperation (Nye, 2004: 5). Given China’s increasing presence on the African continent, particularly in economic sectors, understanding the underlying influences of soft power that shape these ties is of great significance in the study of international relations.

1.1 Purpose and Aim

China’s current focus on soft power expansion as part of its much-debated re-emergence entails several implications for its approaches to diplomatic relations, shaping the way in which other international actors view China. This, in turn, shapes the nature of

international collaboration and cooperation between China as an exporter of soft power and those affected by it, influencing policy makers' political behaviour. However, the fusion of soft power and diplomacy is argued to be poorly understood and lacks empirical evidence (Doeser and Nisbett, 2017). In an attempt to improve the understanding, this case study assesses the link between Sino-African diplomacy and the Communist Party of China's (henceforth CPC) current focus on soft power expansion as part of China's re-emergence. Thus, the main aim is to assess how soft power is reflected in Xi's opening speech at the 2018 FOCAC summit, which is the main forum for Sino-African diplomacy. The following research question shall be answered:

How does Xi Jinping discursively construct Sino-African diplomatic relations in the context of China's soft power expansion?

Given China's increasing influence on the African continent, a nuanced understanding of Sino-African diplomacy and the underlying social practices it is driven by is crucial. This study seeks to fill the research gap between diplomacy and soft power, thereby serving two purposes: Firstly, it shall provide new insights into the strategic use of soft power and complement the body of research on the rise of China. Secondly, the insights gained from a thorough assessment of the CPC's approach to Sino-African diplomacy shall provide the basis for further analyses of diplomatic discourses and the conceptual understanding of soft power.

1.2 Outline

Firstly, the development of Sino-African diplomacy is mapped out, followed by an overview of the research that has been done on China's soft power. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis: discourse, soft power and power transition theory. The fourth section explains the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. After that, the three-layer analysis of the selected case is presented, analysing its textual components, the discursive practice and the social practice it is shaped by. Lastly, the findings are concluded and their implications are identified. This seeks to establish a holistic understanding of the case and provide further insights on the use of soft power in diplomatic relations.

2. Background

2.1 Sino-African Diplomacy

The research on Sino-African diplomatic relations has focussed on two main aspects which shape the way in which China approaches African governments: economic interests and concerns about changes in the global order.

Concerning economic interests, the notion of Africa “fuelling China’s modernization” has been at the core of the debate. China imports nearly one quarter of its oil from Africa, making the five most oil-abundant nations (Angola, Equatorial-Guinea, Nigeria, Republic of Congo and Sudan) its main export partners (Rich and Recker, 2013). Furthermore, Brautigam and Xiaoyang (2009) stress Chinese concerns of food security as one of the key factors. The Chinese modernization process entails a strong urbanization movement, which pushes farmers into the cities, thereby creating deficits in agricultural production, leading China to shift its focus on importing African crops (Brautigam and Xiaoyang, 2009). In terms of Chinese exports, African emerging economies provide lucrative markets for manufactured products and telecommunication networks (Liang, 2012). The new interdependent patterns of economic relations create incentives for the Chinese government to strengthen its ties with several African countries, manifested through close diplomatic relations.

Secondly, China’s approach to diplomacy has been shaped by concerns about the role which it has assumed for itself within the changing geopolitical system. In the context of the non-Alignment movement of the Bandung Conference in 1955, China has presented itself as a partner in the African countries’ anti-colonial struggles (Patterson, 2007). These diplomatic advances were further enhanced by China’s aim of receiving African countries’ support in the One-China policy, which denies the recognition of Taiwan (*ibid.*). While the 1970s saw Chinese aid flows into Africa as part of China’s alliance-forging objectives, there was a decline in the 1980s, as China’s focus shifted towards internal modernization under Deng Xiaoping. However, in the context of the Western disapproval of the events on the Tiananmen square 1989, the Chinese Communist Party found itself in search of allies, increasing the diplomatic advances to African leaders yet again (Patterson, 2007).

The post-cold war diplomatic developments, specifically the creation and strengthening of Western-led intergovernmental forums and trade agreements, provided further ammunition for China’s quest for alliances with African countries (Chen, 2016).

Furthermore, the lacking success in Western-led development paradigms, particularly the Washington Consensus, have provided a basis for China to offer alternative ways of international cooperation to African countries. As Liang (2012) asserts, China's focus on "development first" as part of its modernization strategy is more appealing to many African governments than the Western paradigm of "democracy first" (Liang, 2012). China's dichotomization of Western and Chinese approaches to development have shaped the narrative within the discourse of Sino-African relations: China attempts to find *business-partners* rather than a pursuing a *development project*, like the West has been perceived to do, and thereby given rise to accusations of reinforcement of dichotomous relations of developer/developing (Liang, 2012; Woods, 2008; Easterly, 2006: 189). The close diplomatic ties between China and African governments manifested through the Chinese-led creation of the Forum on Chinese-African Cooperation (henceforth FOCAC) in 2000, which constitutes an arena for promotion of mutual economic growth and poverty reduction, an increase in international competitiveness, and improved Chinese and African bargaining power opposite the West (Enuka, 2010). This corresponds to the diplomacy strategy that was established in 2014 by China's State Council of Information Office, which emphasizes the strategic balance of pursuing own interests while facilitating a "community of common destiny" with its partners in the global south (Chen, 2016; SCIO, 2014). Since its creation, FOCAC summits have been held every three years. Beyond their practical importance, their symbolic power is strong: In 2018, more African presidents attended the FOCAC summit than the General Assembly of the United Nations (Dahir, 2018).

Overall, it shows that China's diplomatic approach to Africa has changed according to China's strategic objectives, concerning both domestic growth and the way in which it seeks to position itself on the global stage.

2.2 China's Attractiveness

The research on China's rise increasingly highlights its use of soft power. According to Joseph Nye (2004: 11), states can increase their influence in international contexts not only through hard power tools, such as economic pressure and military force, but also by the means of soft power, meaning attractiveness in the eyes of others. Over the last two decades, the CPC has acknowledged the importance and potential of the "power of attraction" (Ratha, 2019) and successfully exerted soft power through what Nye (2004) describes as the three key resources: political values, attractive culture and foreign policy.

2.2.1 Political Values

While focussing on symbolic friendship in the post-war era, the 2000s saw the narrative shift towards trade partnerships and mutual benefits in Sino-African relations (Liang, 2012; Punnoose and Vinodan, 2019). This entailed a focus on Confucian values of mutual respect and harmony, as well as an emphasis on sovereignty, which also guided China's approach to peace and security concerns (Hagström and Nordin, 2019). This contrasts the values that were exported from the US and that focussed on individualism, liberalism and democratic values. Thus, China's export of political values has been viewed as a combination of two aims: the provision of an alternative to US-values, and the creation of non-interventionist values that correspond with its economic strategy (Liang, 2012; Ratha, 2019). However, as Zhao (2013) stresses, China's export of values are that of the dominant class and stand in stark contrast to its internal struggles. Thus, while presenting its values of harmony and mutual respect to the world audience, China shifts the international community's focus away from the domestic suppression of ethnic minorities and high levels of inequality (Zhao, 2013).

2.2.2 Cultural Attractiveness

The scholarly debate on China's increased cultural attractiveness has circled around two aspects: Firstly, through public diplomacy, China has actively created a positive image of the Chinese culture, i.e. through movie productions, the hosting of events such as the 2008 Olympic Games and the launch of over 450 Confucius Institutes in 120 countries. Furthermore, the provision of scholarships and exchange programmes facilitates greater connectivity between Chinese and international students (Arif, 2017; Johanson et al., 2019). However, it has been stressed that, unlike the US-soft power expansion, ironically described as McDonaldization, China does not attempt to *impose* its culture onto others. Rather, it focuses on *showcasing* it, thereby preserving its exemplary role in the global arena (Liang, 2012; Zhao, 2013). The second source for increased cultural attractiveness stems from China's international media influence. In 2009 alone, China spent 6 billion USD on expanding its global media influence, launching news channels and social media platforms (Cook, 2020). China effectively increases its attractiveness through "positive reporting" in other countries. Hence, Chinese-owned outlets like CCTV-Africa not only portray China in a positive light. They have also established themselves as a credible, high-quality news channel for Africa. The practice of positive reporting on African news events provides an alternative to Western media outlets, whose accounts on Africa were found to be primarily negative (Gagliardone, 2013; Peterson, 1980; Jungherr et al., 2019:

405). Implicitly, China's soft power entails a high level of discursive power, manifested through Chinese media's capacity to influence people's opinions outside of China.

2.2.3 Foreign Policy

Foreign policy, particularly a country's capacity of achieving moral authority and legitimacy in the eyes of others, constitutes the third pillar of soft power (Nye, 2004: 11). Three aspects illustrate this: China's financing practices, Xi's political charm offensive and China's role in international organizations.

Firstly, through foreign aid and development finance strategies, China has established itself as a new partner for African governments. While traditional donor practices by Western institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have focussed on loan conditionalities and democratization, China emphasizes its recognition of national sovereignty in its donor practice (Woods, 2008). This has increased its attractiveness also in the eyes of non-democratic governments and given rise to accusations of China giving "Rogue-aid" (Broich, 2017). Furthermore, China has become the main economic partner of several African countries. Between 2003 and 2008, Chinese FDI flows into Africa, primarily into the mining and construction sector, have increased from 75million to 5.4bn USD. Since 2014, China's FDI flows in Africa have exceeded that of the United States. (SAIS-CARI, 2020a; Megbowon and Adekunle, 2019). Between 2002 and 2018, the value of exports from Africa to China has increased from 4.61bn to 36bn USD, compared to 10bn USD exports Africa-US (SAIS-CARI, 2020b). By establishing itself as the main financier for African countries, China has gained attractiveness. Using data from Afrobarometer Round 6, Morgan (2019) found that China's economic ties with Africa play a major role for the level of perceived attractiveness, specifically in terms of investment into infrastructure and other development projects (Morgan, 2019).

Secondly, Xi's strategic charm offensive follows former president Hu's "harmonious world" objectives, which aimed to achieve greater levels of international cooperation and connectivity (Arif, 2017). This has informed the framing of initiatives such as the "Belt and Road" and "Asia Pacific Dream", which emphasize the mutual benefits, and thereby counter narratives of China aggressively changing the current world order (Jones and Zeng, 2019). In this context, the Chinese government has commonly made use of a "win-win cooperation"-rhetoric with other countries. However, as Lee et al. (2016) stress, rather than actually countering zero-sum relations, China uses the win-win narrative to legitimize its foreign policy objectives, which are based on the perception of China as a core country that maintains close ties with its peripheral partners.

Global governance organizations constitute the third realm in which China increases its soft power through its foreign policy. As Shambaugh (2013:125) argues, China's stand within the IMF and World Bank is slightly revisionist. While participating in multilateralism, it attempts to increase its own power within the system, balancing out the alleged Western dominance. In this context, China uses its relative power to become a voice for the developing countries, which it sees itself as part of. For example, it pushed for an increased voting power and representations of developing countries and countries in transition within the World Bank in 2010 (Lye, 2017) and actively contributed to the launch of new international financial institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Furthermore, China assumes a proactive role within the World Health Organization and contributes in international combat of piracy (*ibid.*). Thus, China establishes itself as a “responsible power”, increasing its attractiveness to other countries of the global south by giving them a voice and taking stances against the Western domination.

In the context of the development of Sino-African relations over time and China's exercise of soft power through the three resources of cultural attractiveness, political values and foreign policy, it shows that Sino-African relationships are strongly influenced by China's self-interested objectives.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following section presents the three theoretical frameworks that informed the analysis. Firstly, discourse shall be discussed, as it provides the basis for the applied method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Donoghue, 2018). Secondly, soft power as an adaptation of Nye's (2004) concept shall be laid out, providing an analytical tool to assess the discourse in question. Lastly, the Power Transition Theory (PTT) presents an analytical approach to understand the motives behind the use of soft power in the respective discursive context.

3.1 Discourse

The CDA draws on Fairclough's (1992) conceptualization of discourse, that views it as a set of ideas that is constituted by, and constitutes, social practice, thereby shaping social

relations (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 55; Bryman, 2012: 520). Thus, discourse, defined as “the interrelated texts, conversations and practices associated with a particular object” (Burnham et al., 2008) shapes the way in which social reality is understood by the producers and consumers of text. Here, Fairclough’s (1992) conceptualization draws in parts on Foucauldian accounts of power: By producing and reproducing knowledge, discourse constructs identities and social relations, which are subject to power structures (Jørgensen and Philipps, 2002: 58). Furthermore, in accordance with Gramsci's (1991) work on hegemony, Fairclough (1992) views discourse, represented in language, as a tool for exercising power, which can produce and legitimize dominance by shaping the audience's interpretations towards the “creation of a will” (Bryman 2012: 520; Donoghue, 2018; Van Dijk, 1993). In application to this study, the discourse in question is the narration of Sino-African diplomacy from a Chinese perspective, manifested through Xi’s speech. Drawing on Bamberg and Demuth’s (2016) work on narrative identity, it is assumed that Xi’s construction of relationships in the speech is shaped by his perception of self-identity, which is fluid and constructed by past events and experiences.

3.2 Soft Power

Soft power describes the power of *attractiveness* of an actor in the eyes of others. This increases his capacity to influence others in the pursuit of his objectives by facilitating cooperation rather than coercion. This, in turn, leads to the legitimization and enabling of a country’s hard power objectives (Nye, 2004: 25; Hagström and Nordin, 2019). Nye (2004) identifies three resources that states can use to exercise soft power: cultural attractiveness, morally superior political values and benevolent foreign policy that is perceived as legitimate (Nye, 2004: 11; Ratha, 2019). Furthermore, soft power is argued to derive from a country’s capacity of setting examples through its domestic policies (Nye, 2004: 8, 31). Thus, soft power presumes that a country can expand its influence in other countries if it uses the resources of soft power effectively, as this increases its attractiveness and makes other countries want to cooperate. Diplomacy, both bilateral and multilateral, is the arena in which the resources of soft power are being communicated (*ibid.*). Soft power is both structure- and agency based: On one hand, it is actor dependent, on the other hand, the resources of soft power and the capacity of exertion are structural conditions that have been shaped by underlying power structures (Bakalov, 2020; Callahan, 2015). Nye presents the behaviours and resources as one end of a spectrum of power:

Figure 1: Behaviours and Resources of Power

	Hard		Soft	
Spectrum of Behaviors	coercion	Command inducement	agenda setting	Co-opt attraction
Most Likely Resources	force sanctions	payments bribes	institutions	values culture policies

Source: Nye, 2004: 8

Nye's (2004) framework has been subject to debate, concerning the lacking clarification on the relationship between soft- and hard power, and the questions of universal applicability. Thus, this paper adapts the framework in two ways: Firstly, drawing on Huntington (1993), it assumes that soft power requires a basis of hard power, as economic resources and military power affect a country's capacity of presenting itself, for example through funding practices and international media expansion. Secondly, concerning the question of universal applicability, Nye (2004) views the successful exercising of soft power as inherently linked to liberal democratic values. He explains the United States' successful export of soft power with their universalistic values, implying that others should, and want to, follow its path (Nye, 2004: 33; Fan, 2008; Hagström and Nordin, 2016). However, the extensive study of previous literature gives rise to the assumption that the framework of soft power, if linked to 'Western' values, would fail to capture the soft power in the Chinese context. Thus, soft power is viewed in a more abstract way, applying its analytical tools rather than the universalistic values they are connected with by Nye (2004). Furthermore, soft power has been identified as a rather loose concept, which is insensitive to opposing interest groups within states (Fan, 2008;

Bakalov, 2020). Considering these adaptations, this paper views soft power as a part of hard power, that rests on three pillars: cultural attractiveness, foreign policy and political values. While being sensitive towards possible shortcomings, it views China as a unitary actor, represented by the CPC. The analysis shall investigate how soft power is reflected in the discourse on Sino-African diplomacy, giving insight on how the CPC uses it as a tool to increase its global influence as part of the rise of China.

3.3 Power Transition Theory

The exertion of soft power by a state is necessarily connected to situations of conflicting interests (Fan, 2008). Implicitly, China's soft power expansion needs to be viewed in the context of the changing global order. Power Transition Theory (PTT) provides a structural, probabilistic framework to analyse the relationship between states. It presupposes the existence of a hegemonic state, which holds the power within a hierarchic international system it has created. Once a rising power gains relative strength, it can challenge and/or surpass the hegemon. The rising power's actions are determined by its level of satisfaction with the system within which it is rising. Conflict is likely to occur if the rising power becomes dissatisfied with the system. It is unlikely to occur if it can surpass the hegemon within the given structures (Lemke and Tamm, 2003; Yilmaz and Xiangyu, 2019). PTT has been a widely-applied tool for analysing Sino-US relations over the past decades, China being the rising power within a US-led hegemonic system. Thus, PTT focusses on China's relation to the system within which it operates, in order to understand its satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Hence, PTT constitutes an analytical tool to analyse China's soft power objectives within the African continent in the context of its status within the current global order (Punnoose and Vinodan, 2019).

4. Methodological Framework

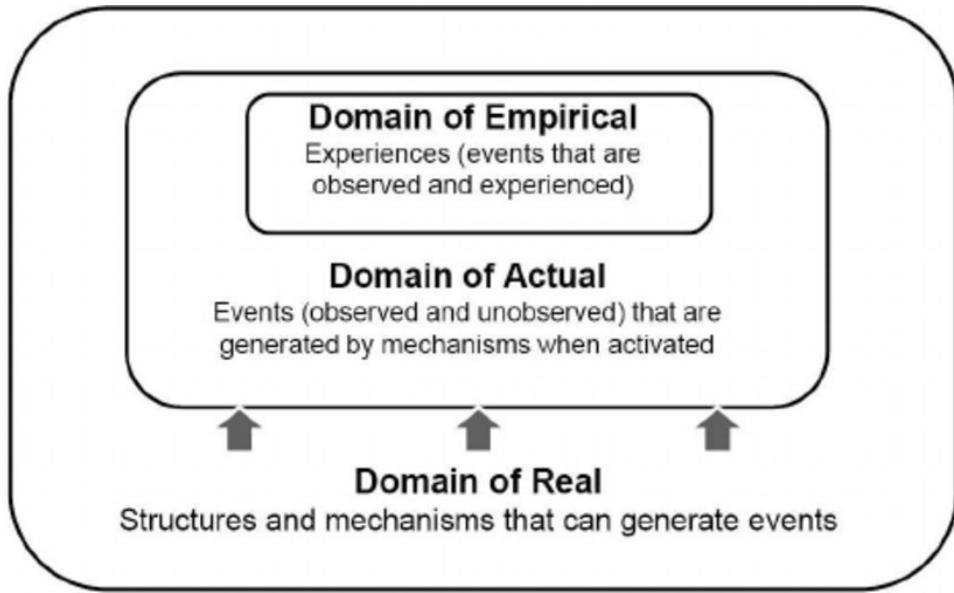
The research was designed as a single case study, which allowed for a holistic analysis of the given speech in its context. Following an inductive typology, the method and case were selected after the formulation of the research question based on the previous research (De Vaus, 2001: 220). The applied method was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), after Fairclough (1992), which enables the empirical analysis of "how discourses are constructed and maintained in relation to certain phenomena (...)." (Bryman 2012:

537). Thereby, it can provide a link between discursive and non-discursive events, uncovering power-structures that are being reinforced or maintained through language (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 64; Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 27). The method of CDA enables the researcher to view a text in its social context, through which meanings can be identified and understood (Gaubatz, 2008). This provides the analytical tool to understand how the discourse on Sino-African relations is shaped by China's soft power expansion. The following section lays out the epistemology, the source material and the operational framework. Lastly, the limitations will be discussed.

4.1 Epistemology

The epistemology follows Fairclough's (2005: 917) approach to organizational CDA, which is grounded in critical realism. Its ontology distinguishes between three domains: The *real* domain, which entails underlying mechanisms and structures, which create the *actual* domain, meaning events. Once these events are being observed or experienced, they become part of the *empirical* domain (Bhaskar, 1998; Mingers, 2004). Discourses, in this context, are part of the *real* domain, whose *actual* events can be captured through social research (Fletcher, 2017; Bryman 2012: 29, 537). Applied to the CDA framework, this implies that discursive structures need to be analysed in their relation to non-discursive organizational structures.

Figure 2: Three domains of Reality in Critical Realism



Source: Mingers, 2004

4.2 Source Material

The case was selected after consideration of previous literature, which gave rise to the assumption that the 2018 FOCAC summit constitutes an important aspect of Sino-African diplomacy, and is therefore likely to show soft power influence. The analysis drew on qualitative data in the form of a script and visual material, both featuring the english translation of Xi's opening speech held at the 2018 FOCAC summit. Two different versions were analysed: Firstly, the english transcript of the speech, published by XinhuaNet¹ on September 3 2018. Secondly, the video record of the speech published in english by CGTN² on Youtube on September 3rd, 2018.

4.3 Operational Framework

Fairclough (2001) argues that practices of production, such as language, are arenas which produce social life, for example economic or political relations, and vice versa

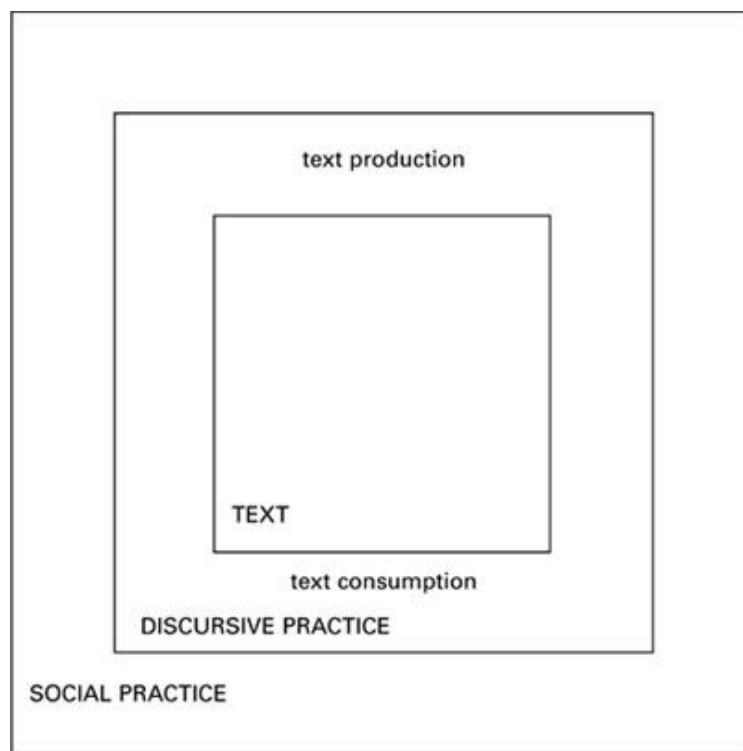
¹ See: Xinhua (2018) "Full Text of Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech at opening ceremony of 2018 FOCAC summit" *XinhuaNet*. 09.03.2018, available at:

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/03/c_129946189.htm

² See: CGTN (2018) "President Xi Jinping delivers keynote speech at opening ceremony of 2018 Beijing summit of FOCAC" available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTwau-THstg&t=1346s> (accessed: 28-05-2020)

(Fairclough, 2001: 123). CDA therefore provides the analytical tools to untangle the dialectical relationship between text and context through a three layered approach, which analyses 1) the text 2) the discursive practices within which it has been created and 3) the wider social practices within which the discourse is located. In order to increase the validity and interpretation of the analysis, the findings were triangulated with secondary source material (Creswell, 2014: 251; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 59).

Figure 3: Three dimensional model for Critical Discourse Analysis



Source: Fairclough, 1992: 73

4.2.1 Textual Analysis

The qualitative textual analysis followed the Miles and Huberman framework as presented in Punch (2005: 197), based on data reduction, data display and data analysis. The data reduction occurred through labelling and coding, both deductively and inductively. (Creswell, 2014: 248), informed by Nye's (2004) theoretical framework for soft power and the secondary source material. Based on the soft power resources, three categories were established prior to the textual analysis: cultural attractiveness, foreign policy and political values. Informed by the previous research, main codes were identified and connected to each category. The textual analysis then led to the *nvivo* creation of sub codes. Both the content and the use of language were analysed.

4.2.2 Discursive Practice

The discursive practice places the text within the broader context of social practice. It assesses the production and consumption of the text (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 62), assuming that the distribution of a text can influence and amplify the discourse by shifting the audiences' attention to certain things (Jungherr et al., 2019). Two publications were analysed, as stated in section 4.2. The aim was to detect whether the discursive practice in the publication process of the speech fit into China's soft power expansion. Following Jungherr et al.'s (2019) work on discursive power in the media, the analysis focussed on the publication of the speech and the structural determinants this was subject to, presupposing that news agencies influence the content they publish through framing practices, internal norms and organizational constraints.

4.2.3 Social Practice

The third layer seeks to analyse the discourse in relation to the social practice that it constitutes and is constituted by. This is based on the critical realist assumption that events (discourse) are the observable manifestation of underlying power structures within a social practice (Bryman, 2012: 537). Social practice in this context is seen as something that shapes peoples' knowledge, identities and relationships (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 60). Thus, the analysis sought to establish how social practice affected the discourse. The capturing of social practices requires the consideration of other social theories (Bryman, 2012: 538). Thus, the theoretical frameworks of soft power and power

transition theory were taken into consideration in order to approach the question of how the discourse on Sino-African relations fits into the broader scheme of social practice.

4.4 Limitations

The analysis was subject to four major limitations, concerning (1) the source material, (2) the research method, (3) the CDA and (4) the units of analysis.

- (1) The analysis focused on the english translation of a speech held in Mandarin. Thus, the translation may, intentionally or unintentionally, shift the original meaning of the speech (Behr, 2015). This is particularly problematic with regards to the fact that the sources that availed the english material, Xinhua and CGTN, are monitored by the Chinese government, implying a possible bias in the translation process.
- (2) Within qualitative research, one major concern is the subjectivity of the researcher (Creswell, 2014: 245). This implies that both the choice and interpretation of source material, as well as the analysis of the data may be subject to biases stemming from the researcher's status and constructed perceptions. The research practice of Western scholars tends to overlook the way in which Western centric schools of thought affect biases in the research of issues in countries of the global south, implying the need for self-reflexivity in research contexts (Kapoor, 2004; Bryman, 2012: 39). Thus, potential biases may have influenced the choice and interpretive analysis of the source material due to the researcher's Western-centric socialization. It follows that the credibility of the secondary source material may be affected by the same issue.
- (3) The CDA framework is limited by its political nature and its scope for in-depth analysis. Concerning the former, CDA is inherently political and critical towards the existing power structures. This is a desired feature, nonetheless it should be taken with care, since the research on CDA has come from a progressive, left leaning school of thought (Sengul, 2019). This implies the possibility of certain ideological predisposition in the research and application of the CDA framework. Moreover, CDA requires the inclusion of various sources and background information. Thus, the given frame of this research paper limits the scope for the

rigorous study of each mentioned aspect. Given the main focus on China, the recipient side is not subjected extensively.

- (4) Lastly, this study views China as a unified actor, and does not account for constructivist critiques. For example the aspect of a transnational class struggle in China (Patterson, 2007) are only touched upon briefly. Instead, Xi's speech on behalf of the CPC is viewed as a representation of Chinese interests. It is acknowledged, however, that this understates the complexity of the domestic interest groups in China. Similarly, on the recipient side, the study does not take into consideration the different internal preferences within the African countries, but views them as unified actors, represented by the attending presidents at the FOCAC.

5. Analysis

The following section presents the analysis of Xi's opening speech at the 2018 FOCAC summit, guided by the aim of understanding how the discursive construction of Sino-African relations is affected by soft power. Firstly, the textual analysis is presented, elaborating on the key findings that emerged throughout the coding process. Secondly, the analysis of the discursive structures is presented. And thirdly the social practice analysis is shown in order to contextualize the discourse.

5.1 Textual Analysis

The order of the following section corresponds with the frequency of the respective sub-codes that were identified³.

³ See section 3.2 and Table 1

5.1.2 Foreign policy: China's aid strategy

China as helper

The eight development initiatives that Xi states as part of the planned Sino-African cooperation are narrated with a strong emphasis on China's role as a helper. However, this is not connected to altruism. Instead, Xi communicates that China is developing, and it gives African countries the opportunity to benefit from that, through statements such as:

“it is for China to complement Africa's development through its own growth,”

and

“With open arms, we welcome African countries aboard the express train of China's development” (Xi Jinping, 2018⁴)

It can be argued that this is an effective way of increasing the perceived attractiveness of China, as it shows a different narrative than Western-led development paradigms. As scholars like Easterly (2006) argue, the way in which development projects have been approached by the West has largely been unsuccessful due to the fact that they have been pursued through a ‘planning’ mindset (Hall, 2016), which inherently implies unequal power structures between the planner and the “plannee”. Xi’s narrative shows a different view on development practice, clearly stating that China, itself, is developing. The critique to traditional donor strategies is further reflected in Xi’s narration of the Chinese strategy on Sino-African cooperation:

“China follows the principle of giving more and taking less, giving before taking and giving without asking for return.” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

The quote can be understood as a critique of traditional donor practices which have focussed on conditionalities and standards regarding the upholding of human rights and sustainability (Woods, 2008). Thus, the narration of China as a non-altruistic helper reflects soft power in two ways: Firstly, by presenting China as a generous alternative donor to traditional development institutions, Xi increases the attractiveness of China’s foreign policy strategy in Africa. Secondly, by openly communicating neorealist concerns (Lee et al., 2016), Xi uses a narrative that differs to philanthropic and altruistic aid

⁴ See: Xinhua (2018) “Full Text of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s speech at opening ceremony of 2018 FOCAC summit” *XinhuaNet*. 09.03.2018, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/03/c_129946189.htm

paradigms which have been connected to claims of reinforcing and producing asymmetrical power structures between the developer and the “developing” (Niyizonkiza and Yamamoto, 2013). Thereby, Xi can be seen as establishing a basis of trust for Sino-African relations. By offering African leaders to jump on board China’s development, there are no implied obligations. Instead, the narrative emphasizes on letting African leaders decide for themselves if they want to be helped.

Win-win cooperation and shared future

The term “win-win cooperation” is often connected to the notion of a “shared future” of the Chinese and African peoples.

“China and Africa have extended sympathy to and helped each other throughout all the years. Together, we have embarked on a distinctive path of win-win cooperation” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

However, despite communicating a win-win situation, Xi focuses strongly on stressing the benefits that Africa will gain through said strategy:

“Mutual help and solidarity is what has defined China-Africa relations over the years. Going forward, China will do more to help Africa alleviate poverty, pursue development, increase employment and income (...)” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

Thus, the win-win narrative increases the legitimacy of China’s objectives of influence in African countries. By shifting focus to the benefits that African countries gain from the win-win cooperation, the issues that may arise with China’s development practices are rhetorically overpowered. For example, as argued in previous sections, the expansion of Chinese influence in the telecommunications sector has implications for the neutrality of the reporting and increases China’s capacity of undermining African information systems (Gagliardone, 2013; Arif, 2017). Yet, by framing initiatives like these as a “win” for Africa, Xi presents China as a valuable partner in the development of specific sectors, while averting possible scepticism.

Sovereignty

Xi stresses China’s focus on sovereignty as part of China’s “five-nos” approach to Sino-African relations:

“(...) [N]o interference in African countries' pursuit of development paths that fit their national conditions; (...) no attachment of political strings to assistance to Africa; and no seeking of selfish political gains in investment and financing cooperation with Africa. (...) (Xi Jinping, 2018)

Recognizing others' sovereignty is a key element in China's approach to development policy. This effectively justifies the “no-strings attached” deals, which bypass conditionalities regarding democratization and human rights and environmental standards, which are commonly attached to loans from the World Bank or IMF (Woods, 2008; Liang, 2012). While the idea of “sovereign aid” has been met with criticism by Western established donors, it is an effective way for Xi to increase the attractiveness of China in African countries. Xi's emphasis on sovereignty almost exclusively focuses on the (non-)existence of *political* strings, leaving out the possible strings and dependencies that China's *economic* influence in Africa may bring about. Thus, the emphasis on political sovereignty obfuscates the lack of economic sovereignty in Sino-African relations. Thus, the focus is shifted away from the structures of dependency, which have marked China's practices in trade and infrastructure development across Africa (Maswana, 2015).

Overall, it shows that Xi's narration of Chinese aid strategy reflects soft power. This becomes clear with regards to his strategic use of narratives which create a positive image of China as a financier of Africa's development, while critiquing the “traditional” donor strategies.

5.1.3 Foreign policy - Framing foreign relations

Xi assigns the African countries three different identities in their relation to China: brotherhood, friendship and partnership. Stressing the functional aspects of narrative practice, Bamberg (2012) argues that a speaker narratively constructs identities based on where they position themselves in relation to the other (Bamberg, 2012: 102). Implicitly, Xi's choice of narratives depends on the role he assumes for China in the Sino-African relations in the specific contexts, and the African presidents' perception thereof.

Brotherhood

Chinese-African relationships are framed as brotherhood in two contexts: Firstly, with reference to his perceived status of China being a developing country:

“China, the world's largest developing country, and Africa, the continent with the largest number of developing countries, have long formed a community with a shared future” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

And secondly, when Xi focuses on the peoples as opposed to the nations or the governments:

(...) [C]ordial greetings of the Chinese people to the brotherly people of Africa” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

The construction of Sino-African relations as brotherhood can be argued to serve two purposes: Firstly, it creates a set of implications about mutual trust, unconditional support, and responsibility to help. This can be viewed as an attempt to increase attractiveness in the eyes of the African countries, as it underlines China's commitment to strengthening the voice of developing countries in International Organizations (Lye 2017). Furthermore, by framing Sino-African brotherly relations with an emphasis on the peoples, Xi shifts the narrative from diplomatic elite-centered to people-centered. Arguably, this increases the attractiveness of China's foreign policy objectives by countering the scepticism of China's domestic struggles concerning human rights and inequality (Zhao, 2013). Here, China's soft power use differs from Nye's (2004:8) framework, which presumes that soft power largely stems from the setting of positive examples in domestic contexts.

Friendship

The notions of friendship are connected with references to the past and emphasis on China valuing friendly relations:

“China values sincerity, friendship and equality in pursuing cooperation. The over 1.3 billion Chinese people have been with the over 1.2 billion African people in pursuing a shared future.” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

The mention of the long-standing Sino-African friendship may refer to China's support in the non-alignment movement in the post-war era and its steadily increasing engagement in Africa since the 1990s (Liang 2012). By constructing the relationship as a friendship, Xi implies that China's commitment to helping African countries is based on characteristics of sympathy and affection, rather than obligation or strategic intentions.

Thereby, China's foreign policy objectives are viewed in a light of moral legitimacy and appear more attractive.

Partnership

Notions of partnership are applied when Xi elaborates on strategies of Sino-African cooperation in the global arena:

“They have fully demonstrated the creativity, rallying power and efficiency of China-Africa cooperation, and lifted China-Africa comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership to new heights.” (Xi Jinping 2018)

Partnership, in a business context, is defined as “a relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities” (Merriam-Webster). Thus, Xi implies several things: Each partner is interested in gaining profit. There are set rules and contractual frames that may apply. Both partners are active agents who carry responsibility and are unlimitedly liable. Most importantly, however, the construction of a “partnership” presupposes equal levels of agency. By implying that China views African countries as comparable partners, Xi establishes a narrative of equal power. As argued earlier, this is an important aspect in China’s attempt to increase its attractiveness in the eyes of other countries, as it provides a different narrative to alleged Western paternalism in development related issues.

Multilateralism

China’s and Africa’s roles in the international system are narrated with a strong focus on multilateralism:

“We call for increasing the representation and voice of developing countries in international affairs and support efforts to strengthen the South, a weak link in the global governance system.” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

By stating that China will stand up for African countries, Xi uses the self-assigned role of China as a developing country as a way of increasing attractiveness in the eyes of the African countries, by establishing China as a partner in the struggle for representation (Huang and Ding, 2006). Thus, Xi illustrates China’s sympathy for Africa not only by framing the relationship in specific ways. He also shows that the Sino-African relations

are of great importance to China in the broader context of global governance, thereby establishing a dichotomization between *us* and *the rest*.

It shows that Xi's construction of identities in Sino-African diplomatic relations change according to the purpose of his words. The constructed relational identities illustrate Sino-African closeness and a clear narrative distinction between China and the West. It can be argued that this reflects a new type of soft power practice, which differs to Nye's (2004) concept in two ways: Firstly, it shows a clear focus on what can be described as the "negative exclusion of otherness" (Callahan, 2015). Secondly, it doesn't follow a "*look at us*"-rationale of positive example setting, but instead creates a "*we appreciate you*" narrative.

5.1.4 Political values - Confucian Values

The analysis showed that the export of attractive political values in this speech is solely linked to the export of Confucian values, not ideological political values or communist terminology. As Liang (2012) argues, China's main strength stems from its capacity to apply its traditional values to political contexts, as its domestic political values are, in most cases, neither perceived as attractive nor exportable. Confucianism is guided by the principle of harmony, both between people and between people and nature (Huang and Ding, 2006).

Harmony between people

Harmony constitutes the basis on which China's foreign relations are narrated, particularly its approach to issues of peace and security.

"Our goal is to make the world a place of peace and stability and life happier and more fulfilling for all." (Xi Jinping, 2018)

It can be argued that the reference to Confucian values of harmony increases China's attractiveness in the eyes of the international community as it effectively counters concerns about China as a threat to world peace (Hagström and Nordin, 2016). Implicit in the narration of the harmonious self is the implication of a dis-harmonious other. This has two implications: firstly, it legitimizes hostility against alleged threats to harmony, something that China has experienced in domestic contexts with the violent suppression of ethnic minorities, for example in the Xinjiang region (*ibid*). Secondly, with regards to

foreign policy, a clear distinction is made between the allegedly disharmonious Western forces, latently referring to colonialism and aggression (*ibid*). Thus, the focus on harmony in the construction of Sino-African relations contributes to an image of China as responsible and peaceful power. However, it can also be understood as a legitimization of hard power-based sanctions against threats to harmony, paradoxically circumventing its initial meaning.

Harmony between nature and man

Harmony between mankind and nature is the basis on which sustainability issues are being communicated:

“Let us build a China-Africa community with a shared future that promotes harmony between man and nature. (...) China will work with Africa to pursue green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable development and protect our lush mountains and lucid waters and all living beings on our planet.” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

By emphasising the importance that nature has traditionally had for China, Xi increases the credibility of the objectives on sustainability. This is strengthened by the focus on the future, which shifts the focus away from the environmental problems that China has been facing in its modernization process and accusations of the CPC’s lacking environmental accountability (Li, 2019).

Overall, Xi’s focus on Confucian values can be perceived as an attempt to increase China’s attractiveness in the eyes of the African audience in two ways: By framing projects and initiatives as based on “values”, the intentions behind it become more credible than if they had just been formulated as a political strategy. Secondly, the features of these values, namely sovereignty and harmony, can be argued to be attractive as they imply non-interventionist approaches to cooperation. This is particularly important with regards to Chinese relations with actors of other ideological positions (Liang, 2012).

5.1.5 Cultural attractiveness

Xi’s presents China’s cultural attractiveness in two ways: Firstly, with regards to the objectives of increased intercultural exchange, and secondly, more indirectly, when referring to old sayings and traditions.

Intercultural exchange

In the speech, Xi presents a clear ambition towards more intercultural exchange:

“More African culture centers will be opened in China and more Chinese culture centers in Africa. Qualified African educational institutes are welcome to host Confucius Institutes. More African countries are welcome to become destinations for Chinese tour groups.” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

The term “are welcome” indicates that Xi frames the expansion of Chinese cultural centres as something that the host countries have longed for. This illustrates China’s exertion of soft power through cultural influence and reflects the expansion of its public diplomacy sector (Johanson et al., 2019). However, this is narrated as a two-way project, with African cultural influence increasing in China as well. It can be argued that, in addition to “directly” exerting soft power through the spread of Confucian centres, the way that this enterprise is framed contributes to increasing China’s attractiveness, as it makes use of a win-win narrative.

Traditions

“As an ancient Chinese scholar once observed, (...) ” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

By highlighting Chinese wisdom, Xi actively contributes to increasing the perceived attractiveness of Chinese culture, which reflects the strategic use of soft power tools. Furthermore, he emphasizes on the attractiveness of African culture, again using the narrative of being partners in the struggle for representation on the global stage:

“Both China and Africa are proud of our splendid civilizations, and we are both ready to make greater contributions to promoting cultural diversity in the world.” (Xi Jinping, 2018)

It could be argued that this is an effective tool of creating a sympathetic image and evoking a feeling of appreciation in the audience. By stating that China recognizes the splendor of African culture, Xi increases the attractiveness of China.

Concluding the textual analysis, it shows that Xi’s construction of Sino-African relations in the context of soft power is ambivalent. On one hand, it corresponds with the concept of soft power, as Xi draws on the three resources of foreign policy, political values and

cultural attractiveness in order to draw an attractive picture of China. However, it differs from Nye's (2004) concept: The exported values are exclusively confucian values, there is no mention of political-ideological values or communism. This implies that Xi does not attempt to increase attractiveness by setting a positive domestic example. Instead, he seeks to raise attraction both directly, showcasing the greatness, generosity and benevolence of China, and indirectly, emphasizing on the greatness and potential of the African continent. It can be argued that this illustrates a new way of communicating soft power.

5.2 Discursive Practice

The discursive practice analysis provided insight into the context of production and consumption of the text. Specific focus was laid on the production part, analysing the two channels through which the speech was analysed.

5.2.1 Xinhua News

Xinhua News is China's most influential news agency (Xin Xin, 2009). The article that features the speech shows an emphasis on neutral reporting. The headline and the introduction illustrate neutrality and the apparent absence of framing, which could be viewed as a way of increasing the credibility of the article. The article only states Xi's opening speech, without any indication of other relevant speeches that were held on the same occasion, which implies the prioritization of Xi's role at the FOCAC over the attending African presidents.

Concerning the organizational constraints in Xinhua's publication of the speech, the internal norm setting plays an important role. Norms in news production concern a news agency's objectives of representing specific topics that it perceives as relevant to the public (Jungherr et al., 2019). In the free media this process is largely determined by the perceived relevance to the target audience and market-driven concerns of generating high print numbers (*ibid.*). In the case of Xinhua, production norms are heavily influenced by the interests of the CPC, as the news agency is viewed as one of the party's main "mouthpieces" (Xin Xin, 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that the publication of the speech reflects the CPC's interests of portraying topics to the Chinese and international public in a way that fits into its political discourse. This is further underlined by Xinhua's business model, which is assumed to influence the editorial decision making (Jungherr et al., 2019; Reese and Shoemaker, 2016). The media in China is overseen by

the CPC. Thus, the produced reports are published to, and evaluated by, party officials before reaching the public (Qinglang 2004). Furthermore, the influence of the CPC reaches down to the salary systems of Chinese News Agencies, providing salaries and housing benefits to the reporters based on their political attitudes (*ibid*), which implies that the published content is heavily influenced by party objectives. It shows that Xinhua's publication of the speech is subject to various gatekeepers, in terms of both content production and structural determinants. Given that the media output is heavily influenced by the CPC, it is implied that Xinhua's discursive practice reflects the soft power objectives that are stated in the speech.

5.2.2 China Global Television Network (CGTN)

The video coverage of the 2018 FOCAC summit was primarily done by the China Global Television Network (CGTN), run by the state-owned media organization CCTV. Formerly known as "CCTV international", CGTN was launched for two purposes: distributing CPC propaganda and, somewhat paradoxically, becoming a credible internationally recognized news agency (Fearon and Rodriguez, 2019). Implicitly, its content reflects the party's objectives and distributes those to international audiences. CGTN was the main actor in the coverage of the FOCAC 2018, providing the videos of the speeches, information, and background reports, for example in "Talk Africa", a news show that features interviews with political speakers from across Africa⁵, all of which was published on CGTN's Youtube channel. The video is kept neutral, featuring only Xi's speech with a female live translator in English. The lower third includes an easy-to-follow summary. CGTN's practice of posting a high-quality Youtube version of the speech in English shows its focus on distributing the speech in a way that could address large audiences outside of China, where Youtube is blocked (Cook, 2020). The added summary indicates an attempt of availing political content to audiences who may not be familiar with the issue. Furthermore, the publication of "Talk Africa" formats show the aim of engaging African audiences. The Youtube search "FOCAC 2018" showed that the available videos were almost exclusively published by CGTN and CGTN Africa⁶, which, implicitly, monopolizes the information flow to the viewers. The fact that CGTN is funded and overseen by the Chinese government implies that it is subject to several gatekeeping forces which ensure that the content is in line with the party's values. However, the government's influence is not revealed in CGTN's produced content,

⁵ Talk Africa, CGTN <https://africa.cgtn.com/category/talk-africa/>

⁶ Youtube Search: "FOCAC Beijing Summit 2018" https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=focac+beijing+summit+2018

which limits its credibility significantly (Cook, 2020). Concerning CGTN's organizational capacity, the Chinese government is said to spend several billion dollars on its international news agencies yearly (*ibid.*), thereby increasing CGTN's resource capacity for producing high quality content and recruiting highly skilled international staff, establishing itself as a major player in other countries' media spheres through comparative advantage. CGTN Africa for example has established itself as one of the most popular media outlets on the African continent, practicing "positive reporting" of African news events (Cook, 2020; Gagliardone, 2013). The coverage of the 2018 FOCAC summit reflects this, as it provides informative videos that are easily available and well produced, showing the aim of reaching African audiences.

In conclusion, the discursive practice can be argued to fit into China's soft power exertion in two ways: Firstly, the news outlets amplify the discourse that is portrayed in the speech by distributing it in specific manners. This is particularly important with regards to CGTN's coverage to African audiences: The channel through which the alleged targets of soft power receive the speech is, in itself, part of the very source that exercises the soft power, namely the CPC. Secondly, the two news channels themselves can be argued to be an instrument of soft power, as they actively influence the image that international audiences have on China. Thanks to the organizational structures of state-ownership, this image is an attractive one.

5.3 Social Practice

5.3.1 Power Transition as Social Practice

The third layer of analysis concerns the forces that drive China's soft power application in the construction of Sino-African relations. It relates a social practice, which informs a society's knowledge, identity and ideology, to the discursive event (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 60). The previous research has shown that China is currently expanding its power on the global stage. Thus, the social practice, which this section analyses, is the rise of China within the current world order, transitioning to a new global power. With reference to Gramsci's (1991) work on cultural hegemony, it is assumed that the CPC's paradigm of power transition significantly informs the Chinese society's knowledge and ideology. This is due to two reasons. Firstly, there are high levels of political trust in China (Lingnan and Yang, 2019) and the political and civil society sphere in China are strongly intertwined (Huang, 2015). Secondly, due to high levels of discursive power of state-owned media channels, such as Xinhua.net, it can be assumed that the public's

knowledge is largely influenced by the CPC's objectives of becoming a global power, thereby constituting a social practice.

5.3.2 Sino-African Relations and Power Transition

Having established that China's power transition constitutes a social practice, it can now be analysed how this is reflected in the discourse on Sino-African relations. Revisiting section 3.3, Power Transition Theory (PTT) presupposes that there is a rising power within an international system that is led and created by a hegemon. So long as the rising power is satisfied with the system, it is likely to maintain the balance of power. However, if the rising power views the system as counter-productive to its own growth, it is likely to challenge it (Tammen et al., 2017). Thus, “(t)he degree of satisfaction influences the behavior of a contending state and the nature of its relationship with the international status quo (defined as the established and generally accepted rules, norms, principles, and arrangements) as represented by the hegemonic custodian state and its auxiliary institutions” (Yilmaz and Xiangyu, 2019: 319).

How satisfied is China? The in-depth analysis of Xi's text under consideration of other secondary literature gives rise to the assumption that China is satisfied with the current global order. This is for two reasons: Firstly, the US-led hegemonic system is argued to structurally reinforce the unequal power structures in north-south relations (Irogbe, 2005). These flawed North-South relations provide the basis on which China can increase its influence on the African continent, offering alternative paths to development. This is reflected in Xi's speech, for example when he states that “*Hegemony and power politics persist; protectionism and unilateralism are mounting*”, which China seeks to counter by enhancing “*(...) mutual support on issues involving each other's core interest and major concerns (...)*” (Xi Jinping, 2018). Thus, Xi uses the structural underdevelopment of African countries (Amate-Fortes et al., 2015), as a ground for China to present itself as a supporter and financier of Africa's development. The second aspect that implies China's satisfaction with the current system shows in its capacity of growing not only within, but also independently of, the international system. Thus, while maintaining and strengthening its position within the institutional structures of global governance, China has also built a new system, based on its own principles and norms (Yilmaz and Xiangyu, 2019). Thus, the capacity to grow parallel to, and independently of, the current international system, implies that China is unlikely to become dissatisfied. This notion is reflected in Xi's speech on several levels. His emphasis on the importance of multilateralism shows that China remains an active player in the current system. Yet, the presentation of China's Belt and Road-Initiative and the repeated notion of a “*China-Africa community with a shared future*” (Xi Jinping, 2018) imply the creation of

a separate system, which is informed by Chinese practices, values and norms. Those are, as presented earlier, different to the ones that have shaped the current, Western-led international system, showing a strong focus on sovereignty and economic support, as opposed to democratization- and human rights based development practices.

Putting Xi's narration of Sino-African diplomacy into the context of China's power transition shows that soft power provides an effective tool for the discursive communication of China's power transition practices. Furthermore, the role that China assumes for itself and Africa in the context of power transition has implications for Sino-African relations, making Africa a partner in China's quest for growth and the creation of a new, parallel system. Thus, Xi's speech increases China's attractiveness not only rhetorically, but provides substantial foundation for attraction, inviting the African leaders to become part of the system that China creates for its own rise.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Soft power and Sino-African diplomacy

Referring back to the research question, the analysis has illustrated how Xi's construction of Sino-African relations is influenced by China's soft power expansion. China's current position in the geopolitical system, and its transition to a new global power create the basis on which Sino-African relations are being approached. It was shown how the discursive construction thereof reflects China's soft power expansion, both structurally and practically. Structurally, the speech reflects soft power in two ways: Firstly through Xi's references of China's economic resources, through which it can present itself as a benevolent helper for African countries. And secondly, the publication practices of the speech amplify China's capacity of soft power exertion, as both CGTN and Xinhua.net hold high levels of discursive power and contribute to the creation of an attractive image of China. In terms of the practical application, Xi's speech draws on all three resources of soft power as identified by Nye (2004:11), political values, cultural attractiveness and foreign policy. However, beyond this, Xi's construction of Sino-African relations differs to the way in which soft power has traditionally been viewed: While Nye's (2004) framework contends that the successful exertion of soft power occurs through example-setting and favourable domestic policies, Xi's speech clearly indicates that China does not follow this practice. Moreover, the narrative appears to deliberately divert

the focus away from China's domestic policies. Secondly, instead of exporting a certain set of universalistic policies and attitudes that appear attractive in the eyes of other countries, China's strategy of increasing its soft power rests on the role it can take on in other countries' development processes. Thus, Sino-African relations are not constructed through a *look-at-us-narrative*, that implies the self-image of a role model. Instead, Xi frames his approach in a *we-appreciate-you* manner, creating a new way of communicating soft power.

6.2 Implications and further research

The implications of the study for the understanding of Sino-African diplomacy show both empirically and with regards to the analytical approach to soft power: As shown, soft power plays a vital role in the formulation of diplomatic relations and presumably shapes the addressees' political behaviour significantly. Therefore, the research on China's current development and its role in the global order should be sensitive to the use and effects of soft power and reach beyond the analyses of its economic influence. Furthermore, the properties of soft power imply the need to study changes in the attraction of the subject audience in order to gain a deeper understanding into the relationship between two countries and the policies that are thus created. While this study has mainly focussed on the question of how the social practice of China's power transition has affected the discourse, it has been beyond the scope of this study to answer the question of how the discourse shapes social practices and affects the attraction. It is suggested that Africans' perception of China, particularly its investment practices, has become increasingly positive (see Morgan, 2019; Larue, 2019), which can serve as a starting point for further research. Lastly, it has been shown that there is a new pattern of soft power, which refrains from setting positive domestic examples and, instead, increases attractiveness by offering development opportunities and amplifying narratives of *us-against-the-west*. This creates the basis for further adaptations and revisititations of the analytical and methodological study of soft power, as well as further contributions on the relationship between, or interdependency of, soft power and hard power.

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Appendix

Table 1: Coding scheme

<u>Main Categories</u>	<u>Main Codes</u>	<u>Sub Codes</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Freq</u>
Foreign policy	Foreign Relations	Brotherhood Friendship Partnership Multilateralism	“We will fully honor the promises we have made to our African brothers.” p. 4 “And we are so delighted to have all of you with us, friends both old and new (...)” p. 1 “(...) and lifted China-Africa's comprehensive and cooperative partnership to new heights.” p. 9 “China stands ready to work with	5 7 3 8

	Aid strategy	Helper Sovereignty Win-Win Cooperation Shared future	<p>other international partners to support Africa in pursuing peace and development.” p. 3</p> <p>“(...) we welcome African countries abroad the express train of China’s development.” p. 3</p> <p>“We follow a "five-no" approach in our relations with Africa: no interference in African countries' pursuit of development paths that fit their national conditions.” p. 2</p> <p>“Together, we have embarked on a distinctive path of win-win cooperation.” p. 2</p> <p>“Let us build a China-Africa community with a shared future that delivers happiness to all of us.” p. 7</p>	20 4 10 11
Political Values	Confucian values Ideology/Communism	Harmony between peoples Harmony with nature -	<p>“Our goal is to make the world a place of peace and stability and life happier and more fulfilling for all.” p. 5</p> <p>“Together, we could make China and Africa places for people to live in harmony with nature.” p.8</p> <p>-</p>	6 4 0

Attractive Culture	cultural relevance	Cultural exchange	“(...) we will inject lasting impetus into invigorating our civilizations and cultures, enriching our artistic creations, and provide rich cultural nourishment for China-Africa cooperation”. P.7	4
	Traditions	Reference to old sayings or principles	“As an ancient Chinese scholar once observed, (...) ” p.2	3
		Rich culture	“Both China and Africa are proud of our splendid civilizations, and we are both ready to make greater contributions to promoting cultural diversity in the world.” p. 7	3