China Daily Africa: Constructing China’s Soft and Hard Power for Africa’s Security

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Abstract

This study applies framing and resource-dependence theories to a content analysis of a census of news articles and reports published in China Daily Africa’s (CDA’s) weekly edition from October 1, 2013, through September 30, 2017. It demonstrates how CDA’s news and reports on China’s modernization program, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a dimension of its evolving foreign policy, serve to strengthen and expand its relationships with Africa. Some findings: (a) the hypothesis that CDA’s coverage of BRI will, more often than not, indicate a win-win, symmetrical strategy espoused by China’s government was not supported; (b) the differences between Africa benefitting more than China from BRI and win-win outcomes were statistically significant, by message valence ($\chi^2 [1, N = 704] = 56.09, p < .001$), indicating that Africa was mentioned significantly more as benefitting in articles with one-sided message valence than in those with two-sided valence, as were results for win-win outcomes; and (c) the coverage of BRI was more within economic and trade contexts (that is, soft power) than within political (that is, public diplomacy), cultural and educational contexts (soft power) and military contexts (hard power). Such news-coverage patterns suggest a smart-power strategy geared toward enabling maximum regional effects of BRI and toward ensuring Africa’s security.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, census, China Daily Africa, content analysis, hard power, smart power, soft power
China has made remarkable progress under the leadership of CPC [Communist Party of China] and remains an inspiration to developing countries and the whole world. In the past 30 years and more, over 700 million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty, creating a Chinese miracle in the history of poverty reduction.

—Nigeria’s President Muhammadu Buhari in a congratulatory letter to President Xi Jinping of China on the opening of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 14 October 2017

Simply put, the more China can demonstrate that the Belt and Road initiative is open to outside participation in this way, the more it will be embraced by global (and even American) firms and suppliers. . . . I know the United States has been among those countries apparently most skeptical of the Belt and Road.

—Former U.S. Secretary of Treasury Henry M. Paulson Jr. at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Beijing, May 14, 2017

China’s cultural interactions with Africa date to the early 15th century (Morangi, 2017); its symmetrical relationships with the continent and with its peoples are age-old. Those interactions are being deepened—and strengthened—by China’s government’s policies on building an infrastructure for the continent’s integration into an increasingly globalizing economy underpinned and propelled by technological and managerial innovations. Two recent examples of such policies are the Beijing Action Plan, which was declared on November 4-5, 2006, in Beijing, during a meeting with 48 African countries; and the Forum on China-Africa

Additional examples of its growing global influence are indicated in the six economic corridors that are the lynchpin of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, for example, which runs from Xinjiang province to the Gwadar port in Pakistan, plans to build highways, railways, an international airport and pipelines. Further evidence of China’s global influence was provided on 24 October 2014, when, at the invitation of China’s government, representatives from 21 Asian nations agreed to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which would provide funds for infrastructural development in poorer Asian countries. Another is the BRICS-sponsored New Development Bank, which became a reality in December 2015, when 17 funding members signed an agreement to establish AIIB, a parallel effort to the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which, since its announcement by President Xi Jinping in Kazakhstan on September 7, 2013, has sought to expand China’s influence and presence globally.

Since President Xi Jinping’s announcement of BRI in September 2013, his government has been engaging in concerted efforts toward ensuring the success of the initiative. The purpose of this paper is to investigate, through content analysis, how it is reported in a census \((N = 704)\) of *China Daily Africa (CDA)*. If implemented strategically, BRI has the potential to project as much of China’s central government’s soft power as it does its hard power in Africa, thereby ensuring Africa’s security.
Significance of Study

China is investing billions in BRI. In December 2015, it launched “real win-win cooperation” by pledging to invest $60 billion in new funds on the continent. With so much at stake, it stands to reason that China will require the cooperation of nations and institutions, not least the news media. As veritable social institutions, they seek to fulfill the interests and to respond to the concerns of their audiences. In a political system of the likes of China, such role is not only expected but is required of media outlets. BRI is China’s vision for a cooperative mechanism for enhancing regional connectivity and for building a brighter future together. Rolland (2017c) described BRI as a

Chinese vision for regional integration. It is not just about, simply about infrastructure development. It’s really comprehensive. . . . It is China’s vision of itself, for itself as a great power and as the preponderant power in the region. And when I say region, it’s from China’s eastern shores to Portugal to the Middle East to Central Europe to Central Asia through the eastern shores of Africa. So, it’s a big landmass.

The news media are key players in the success—so far—of BRI in its early form. This study is the first such effort to document clearly how a state-owned enterprise performed its role on behalf of China’s governing council. It is important that a state-owned news outlet take charge of its own story, in light of the possibility that China’s message could be ignored or garbled or reduced essentially to bromides, as Lueck, Pipps, and Lin (2014) found in a study of The New York Times’s coverage of the introduction to the West of the Confucius Institute, a medium of China’s soft power:
What was striking about the news coverage of the Confucius Institute in *The New York Times* was the lack of coverage as news. At no time during its initial 5 years of Confucius Institute reportage did *The New York Times* consider the establishment of the institute in the United States as worthy of a news story. The possibility of an institute in Zimbabwe was considered newsworthy enough for a short news story; yet, the newspaper did not publish even a news brief on a proposed U.S. institute. (p. 343)

This study is a stocktaking of the professional response of one of China’s primary news conduits to the world: *CDA*, one of five international editions of *China Daily*, China’s largest English-language newspaper launched 1 June 1980 as the voice for the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. The purpose of *CDA*, established mid-December 2012 in Nairobi, Kenya, is twofold: (a) to strengthen “the relationship between China and the African continent” (“China Daily Newspaper,” 2012, para. 2); and (b) to increase China’s international media presence. Therefore, an assessment of its reportage of one of China’s signature global programs can provide evidence of the newspaper’s responsibility and contribution to Beijing’s global mission of “socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era,” as enunciated by President Xi on October 18, 2017, in Beijing, at the start of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

**Paucity of Previous Studies**

This line of research is unexplored—in the English-language literature. An extensive search of academic databases did not unearth any significant content-analytic studies on news-media coverage of BRI, let alone a news-framing study with a clear focus on Africa. A large number of studies, however, have been conducted to address definitional issues such as soft, hard
and smart power (e.g., Kiliptari, 2013) or to analyze the implications of modernization in the world’s developing regions for bolstering China’s soft and hard power globally (e.g., Adem, 2016).

Others have offered descriptions of key terms in BRI (“Keywords to Understand,” 2017a, 2017b); analyzed energy resources cooperation, including oil and gas cooperation along the Maritime Silk Road and Economic Belt (e.g., Hao et al., 2017); examined the development process of each node in the Silk Road (e.g., Xu et al., 2017); and investigated the intersection of geopolitical and strategic narratives within a historical context of BRI (e.g., Sidaway & Woon, 2017).

Studies published in Chinese journals explored BRI reports to the Chinese (e.g., Yin, 2017; Ma, 2017) and in overseas newspapers, such as in The Wall Street Journal (Zhou & Kang, 2016), The Washington Post (Zhu & Huang, 2016), and The New York Times in the United States, and Dawn in Pakistan (Wu & Liang, 2017). Similar reports have appeared in mainstream newspapers in Japan (Wu, 2017), Australia (Sun & Jiang, 2017), and in Arab countries (Huang, 2106). In contrast to research whose foci were news outlets operated by non-Chinese media organizations, this study examines the coverage of BRI in a state-run news organization whose primary readership is outside China. Newspapers in China are traditionally guided to use different reporting strategies and tactics when targeting domestic and overseas audiences (Guo, 2013; Lian, 2016; Dai, 2017). For example, a news outlet is expected to use “on a waiting list of reëmployed” to describe unemployed Chinese at home, and “unemployment” (Guo, 2013) for overseas markets. In that context, it is important to investigate reports from a state-run news outlet that targets readers not only outside China, but those in major African markets.
Still other studies have examined environmental and social challenges of Chinese foreign direct investment in Pakistan and have proffered guidelines for ensuring a win-win strategy for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Huang, Fischer, & Xu, 2017); have argued that BRI is a grand global strategy for achieving the Chinese dream (Aoyama, 2016; Wang, 2016); have concluded that BRI frames China’s foreign policy (Xue, 2016); and have viewed BRI as a platform for accomplishing China’s economic and strategic objectives (Rolland, 2017a, 2017b; Summers, 2016). Previous investigations of direct media role in BRI, more so, that of a Chinese state-run news medium, are nonexistent.

**Theoretical Framework: Framing (and Frame-Building) Theory and Resource-Dependence Theory in the African Context**

**Framing and Frame Building**

The use of frames is a pervasive and a ubiquitous journalistic practice of news selectivity; that is, media staffers select, structure and present the news in a manner consistent with specific news-reporting criteria. Traditionally, the criteria that determine the editorial process are standard: the newsworthiness, impact, relevance and importance of a news item, all cast within the context of what readers, in the judgment of the staffers, will find informative and useful. Writing and distributing the news are contingent upon how an organization wishes its citizenship and social responsiveness to be perceived by its stakeholders. For governments in particular, their public information officers also seek to balance government agendas and the public interest. Where, however, the state owns the media, professionalism in news judgment is given short shrift. Because government-information officers tend to toot the horns of their employers and project a public image deemed favorable to the management of their governments or agencies, concepts such as government propaganda and spin continue to ricochet throughout the public
sphere and serve as strategic guideposts for news stage-managed by public-information staffers. Such news is a major element in a nation’s public diplomacy, making framing a tool for both diplomacy (say, soft image) and for a justification of military power (hard image).

The framing of BRI news has become a major activity of Chinese news media, which, as state-run organizations (SROs), seek to present news in a manner consistent with China’s domestic and global vision. Their news coverage almost always perpetuates a strong sense of interests that are hewn to the official line. It is within such news frames that audiences are exposed to discourses, analyses and presentations on BRI. In historical context, media framing is the way in which government information is created, managed, and disseminated to audiences. Seminal work by Goffman (1986) described framing as a form of communication and defined “framing” as a “schemata of interpretation” that enables individuals to “locate, perceive, identify and label” occurrences or life experiences. He argued that framing help individual to understand the occurrences by organizing the individual’s collective experiences that guide his actions.

Consequently, framing is a tool used by media and politicians to make salient points that would direct their readers to a desired frame of mind. In the words of Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), media’s framing characterized an issue in news reports that impact on how the audience interprets the story. From this perspective, the independence of journalists appears to be based on their freedom to choose what actors and frames are regarded as relevant. To influence how frames are built in the media, one thus has to be perceived as a relevant and legitimate source of information. In the case of BRI, several government agencies and operatives attempt to manage the debate and define what this initiative is all about; that is, to frame the issue in a strategic context. Framing theory, commonly associated with agenda-setting theory, also provides the foundation for this study in that it analyzes how journalistic narratives can be used to project the
desired actions in different frames through the lenses of China’s government. Such projection is accomplished strategically. China does not build its actions piece by piece; rather, it integrates them into what Swidler (1986) terms “strategies of action,” which are a general way of engaging in actions to reach goals. Swidler (1986) wrote: “The view that action is governed by ‘interests’ is inadequate in the same way as the view that action is governed by non-rational values” (p. 276).

Audiences use framing to develop a particular conceptualization or reconceptualization of an issue and event (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing helps them construct and decipher meanings in their attempt to make sense of everyday life (Ferree, 2002). In fact, frames provide a structure that draws boundaries around specific categories to define some ideas as in and others as out to block the related ideas in a network through an active process (Reese, 2007). In a broader sense, frames simplify and condense the world to produce “cognitive cues” that help people to evaluate the situation and act upon it accordingly (Benford & Snow, 2000; King, 2017). Frames are manifest in constructing our social reality and in developing our perceptions of everyday life by focusing our attention on what “is in frame” and what is “out of frame.” It conveys one set of information rather than another through the process of inclusion and exclusion and transformed the aspects of social reality from routine complaints, grievances and social condition to the injustice and intolerable deed that needs corrective action (Benford & Snow, 2000; Ward & Ostrom, 2006).

Reese (2010) conceived of frames as a strategic resource that can be constructed and exercised by an individual or group of individuals to examine the dormant features of the text, such as reasoning devices such as defining problems, evaluating the morality of situations, and using specific keywords to reaffirm the concepts of primary frames. Reese (2010) further argues
that “frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese 2001, p. 11). Some scholars believe that frames interpret packages, organize everyday reality, and provide meanings “to an unfolding strip of events” through a process of “selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gamson & Modigliani 1987, p. 143; 1989; Gitlin, 1980, p. 7; Tuchman, 1978, p. 193). The features of inclusion and omission are equally important in framing process as it “limits the range of debate” and guides the audience perception (Martin & Oshagan, 1997, p. 691).

News organizations intentionally select some information and omit others to foster a single point of view that supports the status quo (Watkins, 2001). This argument is also supported by Entman’s (2003) work in which he argues that frames regulate the prominence of an issue by deëmphasizing some of its aspects and highlighting others, thus leading to discourses that benefit one side while clouding the other. Entman (1993) argues that “to frame a communicating text or message is to promote certain facets of a ‘perceived reality’ and make them more salient in such a way that endorses a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or a treatment recommendation” (p. 51).

**Resource-Dependence Theory (RDT)**

This theory treats organizations as organic entities—that is, as organisms nurtured and sustained by their environmental networks. It views an organization as dependent on networks of other organizations and social agencies for its survival (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), and situates an organization in the domain of other community-based organizations or environments on which that organization relies for its sustainability. Low availability of resources creates a high ex ante uncertainty about the future of a dependent organization. In essence, then, an organization’s effectiveness in managing, producing and distributing goods and services is
contingent on its ability to acquire critical resources from its external environment while seeking to control its resource dependencies by creating different forms of interorganizational networks or arrangements.

CDA depends primarily on its benefactor—the Communist Party of China—for its financial lifeline and operations. It also cooperates with other media outlets for newsgathering and reporting. Collectively, CDA’s professionalism is informed by its dependence on its networks (media and extramedia), by its journalistic autonomy to the extent allowed by the Communist Party, and by the relationships it creates and maintains as it acquires resources to accomplish its goals in behalf of its stakeholders. Interorganizational relationships and dependence on environmental resources can create environmental uncertainty; however, they can also increase opportunities to develop new capabilities and launch new products without investment in new infrastructure and may motivate an organization to seek favorable relationships with other organizations (Ahuja, 2000; Klein & Pereira, 2016). In December 2012, CDA launched its Africa edition, as did China Central Television’s (CCTV’s) launching of CCTV Africa early in 2012, both without significant investment in new infrastructure.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Research Questions**

RQ1: What types of coverage are used most frequently to report BRI in *China Daily Africa*?

This question focuses on the frequency of the nature (or type or journalistic style) of coverage of BRI. Possible options: hard news, feature stories, editorial and letters to the editor. Traditionally, hard news reports the circumstances of a recent event or incident considered to be of general interest and has local, regional, national, or international significance. In contrast, soft news
usually centers on the lives of individuals and has little, if any, perceived urgency. It is not uncommon for critics to suggest that a de-emphasis on hard-news stories characterizes the bottom-line mentality of media conglomerates that want to maximize profits by satisfying the largest number of readers and viewers. Because BRI is a long-term global initiative for China, news accounts on it may not necessarily be reported as an urgent, temporary, one-time spectacle; therefore, we expect a significant number of feature stories in CDA.

RQ2: What are CDA’s news sources on BRI?
From where does CDA gather its information on BRI? The possibilities: government officials, everyday citizens, academic institutions or research centers, company or entrepreneur, international organizations, other media organizations.

RQ3: What are the dominant frames—e.g., politics, economics and trade, and culture and education—on CDA’s news articles or reports on BRI?
This question seeks to identify the dominant BRI frames used since 2013, when President Xi Jinping called for establishing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, now known collectively as BRI. In the four years since launching BRI, as President Xi said during his keynote address at the Beijing forum on May 14, 2017, the initiative has (a) deepened policy connectivity, (b) enhanced infrastructure connectivity, (c) increased trade connectivity, (d) expanded financial connectivity, and (e) strengthened people-to-people connectivity. Accordingly, we identify the collective mission of BRI as fourfold: politics, economics and trade, culture and education, military and armed forces.

RQ4: Who are the primary beneficiaries of China’s BRI in Africa, as indicated in CDA’s news coverage?
This question has four possible coding options: (a) China, (b) Africa, (c) win-win outcome, and (d) difficult to determine. Because “China has become the de facto world leader seeking to maintain an open global economy” (Gardels, 2017), and is the progenitor of BRI, we have reason to expect that it will be identified as a primary beneficiary of the initiative.

**Hypotheses**

**H1:** CDA’s coverage of BRI will, more often than not, indicate a win-win symmetrical strategy espoused by China’s government.

This hypothesis hews to China’s noninterventionist strategy by which it refrains from interfering in other countries’ internal practices even when they contradict those of their diplomatic and trading partners. It also grounds China’s relationships in a symmetrical strategy, which emphasizes mutuality of interests and of outcomes. Thus, the hypothesis is premised on host nations’ benefitting as much from the partnership as does China.

**H2:** The frames that CDA will use in its coverage of BRI will be significantly associated with whether the newspaper will use a one-sided versus a two-sided reporting strategy.

Because BRI is a signature project of the Communist Party, it is expected that CDA will balance its professional judgment vis-à-vis its reports and article on it by demonstrating its own brand of journalistic values on both what to report and how to report it.

**H3:** The primary beneficiaries presented in CDA’s coverage of BRI will be significantly associated with whether the newspaper will use a one-sided versus a two-sided reporting strategy.

BRI is China’s marquee of global influence, placing an obligation on China’s media to support the global mission of the Communist Party of China. China is engaging in media-related strategic influence in Africa (Leslie, 2016), where, in January 2012, China Central Television
(CCTV) established CCTV Africa; where, in 2008, China African News Agency was launched; to where, in 2006, the overseas headquarters of Xinhua News Agency was moved from Paris; and where, in 2006, China Radio International’s first foreign radio station was established in Nairobi. The point here is that China acknowledges the importance of the news media as vehicles for fomenting its desired global brand: its image and its influence.

**Method**

Because of the small number of articles available since BRI was announced in late 2013, we decided to use a census of all news articles, reports, editorials, and letters to the editor on BRI published in *China Daily Africa Weekly* from October 1, 2013, through September 30, 2017. We identified 704 articles that met those criteria. That start date was informed by President Xi Jinping’s speeches, first in September 2013 at Nazarbayev University, in Kazakhstan, and, then, in October 2013, in Indonesia’s parliament, where he proposed establishing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, respectively, both of which are now referred pithily as the Belt and Road Initiative.

The researchers trained four independent coder pairs—all undergraduate communication students in a senior research methods class in an African university and none of whom was involved in developing the coding protocol. They coded the units of analysis in the *China Daily Africa Weekly* database, using three search terms: Belt and Road Initiative, Silk Road, and Maritime Silk Road. (It must be noted here that the database was a weekly compendium of news articles and reports published daily in the print edition of the online equivalent.) Human, not computer-assisted, coding was employed in part because of findings that computer programs had difficulty detecting valence, recognizing subtle nuances in media coverage, linking an attribute to
a unit of analysis (Conway, 2006). In essence, human coding permits more granularity in deciphering the meaning of a construct.

To assess reliability, a rotation of coders further coded 15% of all articles or reports, a proportion that Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) and Wimmer and Dominick (2014) deem acceptable. Krippendorff’s alpha coefficients (2004, 2011) for nine variables, used as measures of intercoder reliability, ranged from .78 to 1.0. Krippendorff (2004) and Lacy, Watson, Riffe and Lovejoy (2015) advise researchers to use variables whose alphas are higher than .8. An additional coder conducted an intracoder test primarily because of the long time it took to code 704 articles and reports. Lacy, Watson, Riffe and Lovejoy (2015) recommend that “[i]f the coding process takes an extended period of time, the researcher should conduct more than one intercoder reliability check and at least one intracoder check” (p. 806).

IBM SPSS Statistics Version 24 was used to analyze the data.

Findings

RQ1: What types of coverage are used most frequently to report BRI in China Daily Africa?

Hard news (nearly 90%) was by far the most favored news format of BRI articles. Feature stories accounted for about 7% of all articles and reports; editorials, 1.6%; letters to the editor, 1.3%. Perhaps the inherent nature of BRI suggests that it is strictly a Chinese-style business approach to projecting the mutual interests between China and Africa.

RQ2: What are CDA’s news sources on BRI?

A higher percentage (37.4%) of everyday citizens’ views was reported in CDA’s coverage on BRI than those of governmental officials (31.5%). Experts’ perspectives were also presented in those reports as statements from academic institutions or research centers (16.6%).
Based on these results, it is plausible that everyday citizens’ thoughts and opinions were more often reported in BRI and BRI-related news, perhaps as a function of a growing public awareness of government action and of the large-scale social movements that are fixtures in the everyday life in China: “unorganized interests” (Guthrie, 2012, p. 85); collective action; and social networks, all of which make them indispensable to ensuring the effectiveness of government operatives. Such a societal development and the advent of market forces have engendered “the combination of social organization and popular participation . . . and the empowerment of people and society in which free development of both individuality and collectivity is attainable” (Chun, 2013, p. 106).

RQ3: What are the dominant frames—e.g., politics, economics and trade, and culture and education—on CDA’s news articles or reports on BRI?

In light of these accomplishments, the dominant frames are as follows: economics and trade, 64.2%; politics, about 25%; culture and education, about 10%; military and armed forces, 1%. Such frames are likely to enhance the Chinese government’s goals in using BRI as a platform for peace, prosperity, openness, innovation and connectivity among civilizations.

The large proportion of economics and trade articles—more than 64% of the total—was nearly evenly split between one-sided and two-sided articles (Table 1). Even though the focus was on government pronouncements, there were statements on policies, activities and actions being undertaken to enhance the profile of BRI in general, but with specific references to BRI-related or -inspired projects on the ground. Surprisingly, none of the articles was two-sided, meaning they were all skewed toward ignoring the challenges or risks of BRI. A (professional) practice of publishing government-inspired narratives seems plausible in this context.

An example of an article with a one-sided political frame:
Activities are in line with China’s soft-power projection, commensurate with its growing status as a global leader. . . China’s response to Africa’s natural disasters is unabated, and there is no doubt that it will eventually emerge as the continent's most significant humanitarian partner (Kagiri, 2017, p. 9)

Another: Alpha Conde, the rotating chairman of the African Union and president of the Republic of Guinea, said, “The Belt and Road Initiative is a major financial and infrastructure plan that will become even stronger, and Africa needs to continue to carry out structural reforms and adapt to the investment needs of the world” (in Daffae, 2017, p. 3).

The cross-tabulations for both culture and education and military and armed forces also showed statistically significant differences between one- and two-sided message valence.

A statement by Annie Callanan, newly appointed chief executive officer of global book publisher Taylor and Francis, in a feature story in CDA has major cultural and educational implications for the reporting of China’s presence in Africa: "When I look at the way the China story is being told, it often has a Western filter. What diversity should mean is that we really do have a diverse perspective and allow voices from countries like China to be unfiltered and directly heard" (in Moody & Dongjie, 2017, p. 32). Similarly, China’s voice in Africa—and in the world—need be heard in its entirety—unfiltered.

Culture and education are indicated in news articles that, for example, call for “capacity building, exchanges and joint research programs. Incorporating young researchers is also an urgent need as interest in archaeology is seemingly waning in the younger generation” (Morangi, 2017, p. 7).

RQ4: Who are the primary beneficiaries of China’s BRI in Africa, as indicated in CDA’s news coverage?
This question has four possible response options: (a) China, (b) Africa, (c) win-win outcome, and (d) difficult to determine. Findings were evenly split between Africa and win-win (shuang ying) outcomes. This finding seems consistent with the government’s policy of not interfering in the domestic policies or practices of countries and of ensuring mutuality in the relationships between China and its partners, not least those in Africa. Is government policy suggested in the news coverage of BRI? The organizational theory of resource dependence situates organizations in the domain of other community-based organizations or in environments on which an organization relies for its sustainability and well-being (Klein & Pereira, 2016; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Does ownership of the media determine their content? The evidence seems contradictory. In one study, newspapers did not systematically give higher ratings to films in which their own conglomerates had a financial interest (Rossman, 2011). Sjøvaag (2014) reported similar findings from a content analysis of chain newspapers in Norway. Other studies, however, find that ownership and the financial interests of owners influence media content (e.g., Gilens & Hertzman, 2000; Panis, Bulck, Verschraegen, Burg, & Paulussen (2015; Shmykova, 2014). But the financial challenges of the newspaper industry, particularly that in the United States, are being exacerbated by its failure “to find a viable digital-news model as traditional forms of revenue—advertising and subscriptions—continue to evaporate like rain in the Sahara” (Cohan, 2017).

China’s win-win, symmetrical development strategy is apparent in the news coverage of BRI. A key question in this study is, Who are the primary beneficiaries of BRI in Africa? Our analysis indicates two equally frequent answers: Africa and “win-win outcomes.” At the ninth BRICS summit in Xiamen in September 2017, President Xi iterated his government’s win-win, symmetrical philosophy: "Let us set sail from Xiamen and join hands to usher in the second
'golden decade' of BRICS cooperation and deliver greater benefits to the [Chinese] people and our five countries and around the world.”

Comments Peter Frankopan, a professor of global history at the University of Oxford: "It is a very consistent message, which he also has demonstrated with the Belt and Road Initiative, to want to achieve greater cooperation, more trade, stability, greater prosperity and win-win outcomes" (in Moody & Nan, 2017).

An editorial opinion iterated that practice: “And we are confident that, by implementing the China-Africa 10 Cooperation Plans and the African Union's Agenda 2063, as well as China's Belt and Road Initiative, we can deliver more tangible benefits to both of our peoples” (“Stronger Media Voices,” 2017, p. 16).

H1: CDA’s coverage of BRI will, more often than not, indicate a win-win symmetrical strategy espoused by China’s government.

This hypothesis was not supported. Surprisingly, the online coverage indicated as much emphasis in win-win outcomes as in Africa per se—an even split. It is plausible that the difficulty in attaining a nuanced distinction between Africa and the “win-win outcomes” may explain the even split between those two constructs. Inarguably, China was not singularly identified in the articles as a beneficiary of BRI. It is plausible that China’s attempt to be self-effacing enabled it to project win-win attributes matched only by the projection of Africa (not China) as a beneficiary. Thus, Africa and a win-win, symmetrical outcome hold sway in the news coverage on the initiative.

H2: The frames that CDA will use in its coverage of BRI will be significantly associated with whether the newspaper will use a one-sided versus a two-sided reporting strategy.
This hypothesis was supported. While CDA had fewer frames on politics than on economics and trade, the number of its political frames was higher than those on culture and education. It is plausible, then, that, at heart, BRI has a stronger political component than it does memes that may be more entertaining than substantive.

A chi-square ($\chi^2$) test indicated significant differences between one- versus two-sided message valence across four BRI frames ($\chi^2 [3, \text{ } N = 704] = 164.08, p < .001$) (Table 1), suggesting that when using frames on politics, education/culture, or military, the reporters tended to use one-sided messages more often than when a frame was on economics or trade. Overall, CDA, a state-run enterprise, was more favorably disposed to BRI than not, especially when the newspaper used one-sided message valence. And there were nearly twice as many one-sided articles—those that ignored the challenges, risks or difficulties in fulfilling the goals of BRI—as there were two sided (that is, articles that also reported challenges and difficulties). Such a finding iterates the demonstrated importance placed on China’s success by its media staffers.

H3: The primary beneficiaries presented in CDA’s coverage of BRI will be significantly associated with whether the newspaper will use a one-sided versus a two-sided reporting strategy.

This hypothesis was supported. Surprisingly, “China” was not a frequently identified beneficiary in the BRI coverage in CDA. Admittedly, BRI has been criticized as being more beneficial to China than it is to Africa: that it was designed to provide more energy security for China; that it was created to absorb industrial overcapacity and to expand access to overseas markets, hence creating more jobs at home; and that it would help overcome the transportation of hydrocarbon through routes such as the South China Sea (Guluzian, 2017). But results of this study show that Africa and China are equal partners in the news articles and reports. When beneficiary is cross-
tabulated with message valence, it is clear that Africa is more significantly presented as the beneficiary in one-sided reports than it is in two-sided, as are the results for the win-win outcomes ($\chi^2[1, N = 704] = 56.09, p < .001$) (Table 2), suggesting that the continent is portrayed more significantly than not as benefitting from BRI without any discernible drawbacks or glitches.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of this study indicate that a major role of the government-run CDA is to support China-Africa relations by framing BRI to promote China-Africa friendship and uphold our common interests. Our media should fully leverage their strengths in telling the true stories of the friendship between China and Africa and their mutually beneficial cooperation and help build up positive energy for China-Africa ties. (“Stronger Media Voices,” 2017, p. 16)

Secondarily, such framing helps bolter China’s soft and hard image in at least two ways. First, that means a number of African countries have a “‘looking East policy’ that shows their close ties with Asian countries, including a willingness to cooperate with China” (read: soft image). Soft power is both perceptual and cognitive—that is, it is a mental frame that people (domestically and internationally) have of national institutions and their operations. Perceived soft power is manifested in national attractiveness and accomplishments, in power dynamics, in global influence.

Second, it also means that “under the Belt and Road, we have developed two engines—one is infrastructure building, another is industrialization. We call it cooperation between China's industrial experience and also China's development resources, together with Africa's
development for industrialization” (read: hard image) (Smith-Asante, 2017, p. 15). This conclusion squares with Kiliptari’s (2013) argument that, in our digital information age, state power is derived from a combination of sources; therefore, hard power, which subsumes the military and the armed forces, and soft power, which subsumes culture, education and attractiveness, separately and individually, do not determine national power. “Rather,” as Kiliptari (2013) asserts, “it is the ‘smart’ combination of the relevant elements at a state's disposal that gives certain states their power” (p. 80). This “smart combination” is commonly associated with the nomenclature “smart power”—that is, “... the combination of hard and soft power. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye, 2009, p. 7). Again, as Kiliptari (2013) notes,

Chinese self-conceptualization gives indications of the importance and availability of both hard and soft power components, but does not characterize itself as utterly soft or utterly hard-line. Rather it gives preference to appropriate composition of both and takes note of the place and timing of their use. (p. 96)

For BRI, Africa is precisely that place, as this study indicates that only 1% of the frames in CDA were coded as “military and armed forces,” both coercive, hard-power elements. Therefore, we conclude that this study presents evidence that BRI in the African context projects China’s soft and hard power, the former to a much larger degree than it does the latter. The unabating development challenges of the continent seem to justify invoking a response from China that is aligned much more with the hallmarks of soft power—politics, culture, economics, (infrastructural and community) development—than with those of hard power. It is smart power, a strategic response predicated on conditions on the African continent.
Analysis of the sources of BRI’s articles and reports highlight the importance of “everyday citizens” to the country’s major global project. Such an outcome reflects the growing importance of citizens in a new China, one marching toward strengthening its role as a global leader.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the possible pitfalls of having significantly more articles in the one-sided category. On the issue of using one-sided versus two-sided messages, Pratt (2004) wrote: “Organizations know full well that the value of the information distributed by their communication practitioners tends to be downplayed by receivers, more so if they perceive that information as a mere outpouring of self-serving ‘good news.’” (p. 19). Professionalism is, therefore, called for to ensure a proper balance between the frequency of the use of one-sided versus two-sided message valence.
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Table 1

Cross-Tabulation of BRI Frames With Message Valence (N = 704)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Message Valencea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One Sided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics and Trade</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Education</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military and Armed Forces</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2(3, N = 704) = 164.08, p < .001$

a A news article or report either largely ignores the negative consequences of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the challenges, risks or difficulties in (or associated with) fulfilling the goals of the BRI (one sided) or presents them in two-sided messages.
Table 2

Cross-Tabulation of BRI Beneficiary With Message Valence (N = 704)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beneficiary</th>
<th>Message Valencea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One Sided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win-win, symmetrical strategy</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 (1, N = 704) = 56.09, p < .001 \]

\(a\) A news article or report either largely ignores the negative consequences of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the challenges, risks or difficulties in (or associated with) fulfilling the goals of the BRI (one sided) or presents them in two-sided messages.
Figure 1. Sources Identified in News Articles and Reports on Belt and Road Initiative in *China Daily Africa*

![Graph showing sources identified in news articles and reports on the Belt and Road Initiative in *China Daily Africa*]