

Framework Differences and Ideological Logic: A Comparative Study of the Belt and Road Initiative Reports on China-Africa Relations by Xinhua News Agency's Africa Edition, BBC News Africa, and Two Other Media Outlets

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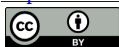
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Abstract

Africa is a key partner of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and English-language media targeting Africa shape African audiences' perceptions of China-Africa BRI cooperation and China's international discourse power. This study selects four representative Sino-Western English media for Africa, conducts a comparative analysis of their 2021-2025 China-Africa BRI reports via content analysis and news framing theory, and constructs a three-level analytical path of framework identification, word choice analysis and agenda-setting logic mining. The results show that Chinese media adopt win-win development and livelihood improvement frameworks with positive reporting tendencies, while Western media focus on debt trap and colonialism frameworks with negative biases. Such disparities stem from ideological differences, geopolitical competition and media positioning divergence. The study also puts forward targeted suggestions for optimizing China's Africa-oriented communication strategies, filling the research gap in the field of Africa-oriented English media and China-Africa BRI cooperation.

Keywords

China-Africa Cooperation, The Belt and Road Initiative, English-Language Media for Africa, News Framing, Agenda-Setting

1. Introduction

Africa is an important partner of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The practical

cooperation between the two sides in areas such as infrastructure construction, medical and health care, and agricultural development has become an important driving force for the development of the African continent (Dong, 2025). Over the past 12 years, Chinese media have always adhered to the diplomatic principle of consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, focusing on the value of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation brought about by the cooperation (Hu & Li, 2025). Western media, however, have frequently labeled China-Africa cooperation as a “debt trap” and “neocolonialism”, and have made one-sided and negative interpretations (Shao et al, 2025).

English-language media targeting African audiences have a direct impact on how African people perceive Sino-African cooperation, and thus affect the effectiveness of China’s communication with Africa and the enhancement of its international discourse power. Existing research mostly examines the news coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative from a global perspective, focusing on the macroscopic stance differences between Chinese and Western media, but pays little attention to the specific field of English-language media dedicated to African communication. Even less has been done to analyze how these media use specific news frames and precise word choice strategies to guide African audiences in forming their perceptions of Sino-African cooperation. Based on this, this paper selects four representative English-language media for Africa, namely Xinhua News Agency’s Africa Edition, China Daily’s Africa Edition, BBC News Africa, and The Africa Report, as research subjects. It conducts a comparative analysis of their news reports on the Belt and Road cooperation between China and Africa, mainly exploring two questions: First, what news frames do the four media build when reporting on the Belt and Road cooperation between China and Africa? Second, what agenda-setting logic and ideological differences between Chinese and Western media are reflected behind these frames?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Support

The news framing theory is a core theoretical framework in the field of media studies. Its essence lies in the fact that media reports are not mirror-like representations of objective reality, but rather, under the influence of multiple factors such as their own stance, editorial policies, and social environment, they provide audiences with specific perspectives and interpretive frameworks for understanding events through selective reporting, emphasis on key points, and meaning construction (Cai, 2025).

2.2. Literature Review

Existing research has achieved some results regarding media coverage of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, but when it comes to the specific field of “China-Africa cooperation scenarios + English-language media in Africa” that this study focuses on, there are still three obvious limitations, and no connection has been estab-

lished with deep-seated factors such as ideology and geopolitical interests.

Firstly, the research scope lacks specificity. The majority of existing studies focus on the media's coverage of the overall implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative from a global perspective (Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2022). The research scope is too broad, neglecting the unique characteristics of China-Africa cooperation that are centered on people's livelihood and practical win-win outcomes. A generalized global perspective study fails to capture this trait, resulting in research conclusions that are difficult to meet the actual needs of communication in Africa.

Secondly, there is insufficient distinction made between the communication carriers. Some studies have mentioned the communication differences between Chinese and Western English-language media (6), but they have not clearly distinguished between English-language media targeting a global audience and those aimed at African audiences. There are essential differences in the communication logic of the two, but existing research has not given sufficient attention to this.

Thirdly, the depth of research needs to be expanded. The current studies mostly remain at the surface-level analysis of news content, merely pointing out that Chinese media adopt a positive stance in their reports while Western media take a negative one (Malik et al., 2025), without systematically comparing the differences in news framing between the two sides in light of specific topics of the Belt and Road Initiative (such as infrastructure cooperation, debt issues, and improvement of people's livelihoods).

2.3. Research Gaps

Overall, there is still a significant gap in the academic field regarding the media coverage of the "Belt and Road Initiative", and no focused research has been conducted on the "African cooperation scenarios + English-language media in Africa + the connection between frameworks and ideologies". This academic void in this specific area provides a clear entry point for this study.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Subjects and Sample Selection

This study selected four representative non-English media as the core research subjects, namely Xinhua News Agency Africa Edition, China Daily Africa Edition, BBC News Africa, and The Africa Report. The positioning, target audience, and communication orientation of these four media vary significantly, enabling a comprehensive coverage of the core perspectives of both Chinese and Western media on Africa. The detailed analysis is as follows:

- (1) Xinhua News Agency Africa Edition: An official media outlet, covering all sectors of Africa;
- (2) China Daily Africa Edition: The core carrier of official Chinese media on Africa;
- (3) BBC News Africa: A Western mass media, reflecting the mainstream posi-

tion of the West;

(4) The Africa Report: Focusing on the elite groups in Africa, it combines African perspectives with Western tendencies.

The sample scope of this study is limited to the news reports related to the “Belt and Road” cooperation projects between China and Africa that were published by the above-mentioned four media from January 2021 to December 2025. The period from 2021 to 2025 was chosen to reflect the normal development characteristics of China-Africa cooperation in the post-pandemic era.

Exact sampling procedure:

1. Systematic searches were conducted on the official websites and databases of the four media outlets.

2. Search terms used: Belt and Road Initiative, China-Africa cooperation, BRI projects in Africa, China-Africa infrastructure cooperation, China-Africa debt issues.

3. Article types included: news reports, feature stories, news commentaries, and analytical articles related to China-Africa BRI cooperation.

The sample selection criteria are as follows:

(1) Topic relevance: The news topic is directly related to the “Belt and Road Initiative” cooperation projects in Africa;

(2) Content depth: It can reflect the media’s stance and cognitive framework;

(3) Sample uniqueness: Exclude the repeated reports of the same event by the same media.

Duplicate removal rule: Repeated reports on the same event published by the same media outlet were excluded, and only one unique report was retained for each event.

After conducting systematic searches and strict screenings on the official websites and databases of four media outlets, a total of 200 valid samples were obtained, with 50 samples from each media outlet. The sample size is balanced and representative, enabling the subsequent quantitative statistics and qualitative analysis to be carried out.

3.2. Research Methods and Theoretical Framework

This study employed content analysis and comparative research methods, based on the news framework theory, to construct a three-level progressive analytical path of “framework identification—word analysis—logical mining”.

In the qualitative analysis section, this study focuses on the content, framework, and meaning construction process of the news samples. It conducts three main analyses: first, analyzing the media’s preference for the content to be reported; second, interpreting the key points and prominent contents of the media reports; and third, interpreting how the media, through narrative frameworks, sentence style choices, and source combinations, etc., give special meanings to events.

All coding work, including frame classification and sentiment labeling, was completed by one single coder. The coder first clarified the coding rules and con-

ducted a pilot test on 20 articles to ensure understanding. Formal coding was then carried out independently for all 200 samples. Each article was coded for its dominant frame and labeled with a sentiment orientation (positive, negative, neutral).

To ensure the reliability of single-coder coding, a validation procedure was adopted:

(1) A 20% random sample (40 articles) was selected and recoded after a two-week interval to avoid memory bias.

(2) The inter-temporal consistency rate reached over 90% for both frame classification and sentiment labeling.

(3) Two researchers with expertise in media framing reviewed the coding scheme and results to confirm validity.

This process ensured the consistency and reliability of the coding results.

3.3. Core Analytical Framework

Based on the core research objectives, theoretical support and research methods, this study has constructed a three-level progressive analytical framework of “framework identification—word analysis—agenda setting”, with each level deepening and interlocking with each other, ensuring the systematicness of the analysis process and the depth of the analysis results. The specific contents are as follows:

3.3.1. Framework Identification-Primary Analysis: Capturing Surface Phenomena

Four core types of news frameworks are defined in neutral terms, with clear coding rules for consistent classification.

(1) Win-win Development Frame

Neutral definition: Emphasizes mutual benefits, joint contribution, shared benefits, and long-term development of China-Africa cooperation.

Coding rule: Assigned when the report focuses on equal partnership, economic growth, industrial upgrading, or sustainable development brought by BRI cooperation.

(2) Improvement of People’s Livelihood Frame

Neutral definition: Highlights improvements in education, health care, employment, daily life, and social welfare for local African people.

Coding rule: Assigned when the report centers on livelihood projects, personal stories of beneficiaries, education support, medical assistance, or poverty alleviation.

(3) Debt Risk Frame

Neutral definition: Focuses on concerns about loan repayment, fiscal pressure, debt sustainability, and potential financial risks linked to BRI projects.

Coding rule: Assigned when the report emphasizes debt burdens, repayment difficulties, credit risks, or negative fiscal impacts of Chinese loans.

(4) Neo-colonialism Frame

Coding Unit and Supplementary Rules:

The coding unit is the entire article, meaning each news report serves as one

independent analytical unit. Each article was assigned one single dominant frame only, determined by the most prominent theme, core narrative, and primary focus of the text. For mixed or ambiguous articles that include multiple perspectives, the final frame was coded based on the overall orientation and the most heavily emphasized content. Neutral reports that only present objective facts without obvious stance or tendency were labeled as “neutral” and not classified into the four core frames.

3.3.2. Word Choice Strategy Analysis—Secondary Analysis: Decomposition of Middle-Level Strategies

Word selection is the core carrier for media to convey their positions and construct meanings (Xie, 2015). This study conducts a word choice strategy analysis on the reports of four media outlets regarding the “Belt and Road Initiative” cooperation between China and Africa. It is mainly divided into the following two levels:

(1) Extraction of Frequent Words and Quantification of Emotional Tendencies: Using Python to build a sample corpus, NLTK tools are employed to extract frequent words. These are classified into positive (such as cooperation, development, benefit), negative (such as debt, risk, trap), and neutral (such as project, agreement) categories. The frequency and proportion of each type of word are counted to uncover the hidden media positions and ideological tendencies behind the words.

(2) Interpretation of Implicit Meanings in Key Expressions: Analyzing the implicit meanings of frequent words and core sentence structures (such as affirmative sentences, interrogative sentences, and negative sentences). For example: Chinese media frequently use “win-win” and “mutual benefit”, implicitly conveying the ideology of win-win cooperation; Western media frequently use “debt trap” and “neocolonialism”, implicitly conveying the ideology of zero-sum game. Revealing the strategies used by the media to convey specific viewpoints and guide the audience’s cognition through word choice.

This study employed Python and the NLTK library for text preprocessing and sentiment analysis. The detailed preprocessing procedures are as follows:

(1) Tokenization: Articles were split into individual words and punctuation using NLTK’s `word_tokenize` method.

(2) Stop-word removal: Common English stop words (e.g., “the”, “and”, “a”) were removed using NLTK’s standard stop word list to reduce noise.

(3) Lemmatization: Words were reduced to their base dictionary form using NLTK’s WordNet Lemmatizer to unify morphological variations.

(4) Sentiment lexicon: The VADER sentiment lexicon (optimized for social media and news text) was used to label sentiment as positive, negative, or neutral.

(5) Quoted speech treatment: Quoted content within articles was retained and included in the analysis, as direct quotes reflect core media narratives.

(6) Normalization: Word frequencies were normalized by article length (as a proportion of total tokens) to avoid bias from varying document lengths.

(7) Additional processing: Lowercasing, punctuation removal, and filtering of non-alphabetical characters were applied to standardize the text.

3.3.3. Agenda-Setting Logi—Three-Level Analysis: Deep Logic Exploration

The media do not randomly select their reporting framework and language; instead, they are deeply bound to their own positioning and are closely related to the ideology and geopolitical stance of the country they belong to. The agenda-setting logic analysis of this study is mainly divided into two aspects:

(1) The correlation between media positioning and framework selection: Analyze the internal logic between the positioning of the four media and the news framework they choose, and clarify the transmission mechanism of “positioning determines framework”.

(2) The influence of ideology and geopolitical interests on reporting: Based on the geopolitical landscape of Africa, analyze the ideological and cooperative concepts conveyed behind the “win-win development + improvement of people’s livelihood framework” of Chinese media, as well as the ideological and geopolitical interest competition logic of “zero-sum game” behind the “debt trap + colonialism framework” of Western media, and reveal the deep-rooted reasons for the reporting differences.

3.4. The Rationality and Limitations of the Research Design

This design demonstrates its rationality in the following aspects:

(1) The method selection is suitable for the research problem and can effectively reveal the differences in media coverage—the mixed method of content analysis and comparative research, which not only presents the surface differences through quantitative data, but also explores the deep logic through qualitative analysis, adapting to the core issue of “news framework + ideological differences”.

(2) The research subjects are representative and can reflect the main characteristics of China-Africa communication—the four media cover both the East and the West, have different positioning and different audiences, and the samples have diversity and representativeness.

(3) The analytical framework is progressive layer by layer, ensuring a systematic retrieval from phenomenon to essence—the three-level progressive analysis of phenomenon (framework identification)—strategy (word analysis)—essence (agenda setting), which conforms to the cognitive logic from the surface to the deep.

(4) The research steps are clear and feasible, ensuring the standardization of the research process and the credibility of the results—the research process is standardized of the research process are standardized, each step operation is clear, repeatable and verifiable.

This study has the following limitations: This study focuses on four major English-language media outlets from both China and the West. Although it has good representativeness, it does not include African local media or media in other lan-

guages. And it mainly focuses on analyzing the textual content of news reports, but does not involve the analysis of the actual dissemination effects of news reports and the psychological acceptance of the audience.

4. Empirical Analysis

This study focused on four media outlets from both China and the West (China Daily Africa Edition, Xinhua News Agency Africa Edition, BBC News Africa, The Africa Report), selecting effective reports on China-Africa Belt and Road cooperation from January 2021 to December 2025 (50 articles from each outlet, totaling 200 articles) as samples. It was conducted by thoroughly analyzing each article from the three dimensions of “core orientation”, “language expression”, and “information source”, summarizing the overall content and tendencies of the news, and selecting typical cases for detailed analysis to present the differences in reporting between the two sides.

4.1. General Trend Summarization

From the perspective of framework distribution, both Chinese media outlets mainly adopted the “win-win development” framework and the “improvement of people’s livelihood” framework. Among the 50 news reports of the African edition of Xinhua News Agency, the “win-win development” framework accounted for 25 (50%), while the “improvement of people’s livelihood” framework accounted for 17 (34%); in the 50 news reports of the African edition of China Daily, the “win-win development” framework accounted for 23 (46%), and the “improvement of people’s livelihood” framework accounted for 17 (34%). Neither of the two media outlets adopted the “debt trap” framework nor the “colonialism” framework.

The reports of Xinhua News Agency adopt an objective and rigorous news writing style, with concise and straightforward language and high information density. Each individual report focuses on a single theme, and its examples are mostly the implementation details and immediate results of specific projects, highlighting the concrete value of cooperation. During the writing process, brief interviews with government officials, enterprise leaders, local beneficiaries, and experts are cited to avoid subjective evaluation, presenting the facts and the viewpoints of the interviewees. The coverage areas include infrastructure, agriculture, trade and economy, people’s livelihood, culture, etc., with a particular emphasis on the presentation of the effectiveness of agricultural technology transfer and people’s livelihood projects.

The report of China Daily is both professional and readable. Its language lies between news reporting and commentary analysis. It is good at integrating logical explanations and value judgments, and often employs rhetorical devices such as metaphors and quotations to enhance its impact (Li & Mei, 2025). Its examples not only include specific projects but also integrate macro trade data, policy documents, and academic research conclusions. The quoted content is often analytical and pays more attention to the long-term strategic significance of cooperation

for Africa's industrialization, globalization, and green transformation. Its sources are more extensive, covering government officials, scholars, business representatives, members of international organizations, even former foreign ambassadors and economists. The perspective is more comprehensive. The coverage area expands beyond traditional infrastructure, economy and trade, and people's livelihood to highlight emerging fields such as digital economy and green development, such as the expansion of broadband networks in Rwanda, the promotion of electric vehicles in Ethiopia, and the Casio-Daiichi-Morocco lighthouse factory. This showcases a more forward-looking and global perspective.

In terms of frequently used words, the two media have a high degree of overlap. The words "cooperation" and "develop" consistently rank among the top two in terms of their occurrence frequency. In the 50 samples of Xinhua News Agency's news, "cooperation" appeared 129 times and "develop" appeared 106 times; in the 50 samples of China Daily's news, "cooperation" appeared 153 times and "develop" appeared 133 times. In addition, the words "support", "technology", "build", "promote", "partnership", and "investment" are also common high-frequency words in both media.

In contrast, the news reports on the "Belt and Road Initiative" in Central Africa by BBC News Africa and The Africa Report focused more on the risks of cooperation, mainly focusing on controversial topics such as resource exploitation and environmental pollution. From the perspective of framework distribution, the two Western media outlets centered on the "debt trap" framework and the "colonialism" framework. In the 50 news samples of BBC News Africa, the debt trap framework accounted for 26 articles (52%), and the colonialism framework accounted for 22 articles (44%); in the 50 news samples of The Africa Report, the debt trap framework accounted for 20 articles (40%), and the colonialism framework accounted for 20 articles (40%). Neither of the two media outlets had the "win-win development" framework or the "improvement of people's livelihood" framework.

According to quantitative data, among the 50 news samples of BBC News Africa, 28 were negative-oriented reports, accounting for 56%; 17 were neutral-oriented reports, accounting for 34%; and only 5 were positive-oriented reports, accounting for 10%. In the 50 news samples of The Africa Report, 30 were negative-oriented reports, accounting for 60%; 16 were neutral-oriented reports, accounting for 32%; and only 4 were positive-oriented reports, accounting for 8%. Overall, the reports presented a pattern dominated by a skeptical tendency, supplemented by objective narration, and with an extremely low proportion of positive recognition. In the neutral-oriented reports, although achievements such as China's assistance in Africa's infrastructure construction and promotion of trade growth were mentioned, controversial topics such as debt risks and resource plundering were often connected with the use of conjunctions like "however" and "although", presenting a narrative structure of "first raising then lowering". Positive-oriented reports mostly indirectly recognized China's irreplaceable role as the main infra-

structure builder and fund provider in Africa, lacking direct and positive evaluations of the cooperation's effectiveness.

Among the 50 news reports sampled from BBC News Africa, the word "debt" appeared 219 times, "investment" appeared 169 times, and "loan" appeared 159 times. Criticisms such as "debt trap" and "neocolonialism" were frequently mentioned.

In terms of language style, Western media frequently employ interrogative and negative sentences to intensify the controversy. For instance, in the report of BBC News Africa, there is such a sentence: "Is China's trillion-dollar gamble worth it?" "Is China luring poorer countries into debt?" It leads readers to form negative perceptions; negative sentences such as: "China has refused to cancel the debt." "The project failed to meet the promises." directly present the flaws of the project; while the affirmative sentences in the report are only used to state factual information about the investment scale, etc. By leveraging debt and trade data released by institutions like the World Bank, they enhance the authority of the argument and further support the core argument of "risk exceeding return". This sentence structure combination makes the report both thought-provoking and critical, further amplifying the dissemination effect of the negative narrative.

In terms of source selection, Western media extensively quoted the viewpoints of expert think tanks, data institutions, and African government officials, emphasizing the debt pressure and cooperation drawbacks. Although they included the perspectives of grassroots African people, most of the quotations were fragmented and focused on presenting negative experiences such as excessive resource exploitation and the impact on daily life. They did not fully present the actual cooperation achievements of the "Belt and Road Initiative" between China and Africa.

4.2. Case Study Analysis

The report by Xinhua News Agency, "China-backed 'Smiling Children Program' Brings Hope to Ethiopian Students", adopts a framework of improving people's livelihood and focuses on livelihood issues. It vividly showcases the tangible cooperation achievements of the China-Africa "Belt and Road Initiative". The Chinese-supported "Smiling Children Program" covers 96 schools in Ethiopia and provides daily meals and learning supplies to over 100,000 impoverished students.

The entire report consists of positive sentences, such as: "The program provides daily meals to underprivileged students across Ethiopia" and "The daily meals and solar lamps donated by CFRD have significantly improved her school performance". It presents a harmonious picture of China helping Ethiopia improve the health and nutrition of children and increase the education rate of teenagers, conveying the value of China-Africa "Belt and Road" cooperation. The report frequently uses positive keywords such as "offer", "boost", "improve", "encourage", "enhance", etc., without any negative words or questioning expressions.

In terms of source selection, the report cited positive feedback from local beneficiaries and government officials in Africa. Freshman Eyob Nigussie said, "The

daily meals provided by the CFRD were extremely essential. Without them, I would have starved or become a beggar.” Keneni Abebe, who achieved high scores in the exams, mentioned, “The balanced diet helps me stay at school longer to attend tutorial classes and study in the library.” Ebsa Nemomsa, the regional education director of Oromia, emphasized, “The school feeding program has increased enrollment, improved academic performance, and reduced dropout rates.” These genuine voices from beneficiaries and local officials fully confirm the significant importance of this program to education and social development in Ethiopia, and demonstrate the win-win value of China-Africa cooperation.

The narrative structure follows the logic of “outcome presentation—positive argumentation—theme elevation”. The article begins by stating: The “Belt and Road” projects of China and Africa have brought practical improvements to the daily lives of local people in Ethiopia. The text focuses on the implementation details and immediate effects of the “Smiling Children Project”, using concise and straightforward language, and citing brief interviews with local beneficiaries, government officials, and experts to present facts and the viewpoints of the respondents, highlighting the concrete value of the cooperation. The article concludes with “The CFRD pledged to continue alleviating hunger, improving health and nutrition, boosting school attendance, and enhancing academic performance, bringing hope and opportunity to thousands of Ethiopian children.” to form a complete and positive narrative loop.

In the BBC News Africa report titled “Zambia’s Debt Crisis: Is China’s BRI the Culprit?”, it focuses on the issue of Zambia’s debt default, directly linking Zambia’s economic predicament to China’s “Belt and Road Initiative”, and constructing a framework of debt traps.

The article begins with a rhetorical question: “Is China’s Belt and Road Initiative pushing Zambia into bankruptcy?” This sets a negative tone for the readers. Negative words such as “debt crisis”, “default”, and “burden” frequently appear in the main paragraphs. The article emphasizes: “Zambia’s failure to repay Chinese loans has pushed the country into a severe economic crisis.” It does not mention the multiple causes of the debt, but completely attributes the responsibility to the Chinese cooperation.

The source selection shows a clear bias. The core report cites the opinion of Western think tank expert Mark Jones: “China’s high-interest loans for infrastructure projects have created a debt trap for Zambia, with no way out.” As well as the statement by Emma Mwape, a member of the opposition party in Zambia: “The BRI projects have brought nothing but debt, and our country is now at the mercy of China.” However, it did not quote the Chinese response regarding debt relief, nor did it mention the more than 30,000 local jobs created by the China-Zambia cooperation projects or the improvement of the local power supply situation and other practical achievements.

The narrative structure follows the pattern of “questioning the opening—negative argument—guiding conclusion”. The text merely briefly mentions “China is

the main investor in Zambia's infrastructure construction", then uses "but" for a turn, emphasizing that the debt burden far exceeds the cooperative benefits. Finally, it concludes with "Zambia's experience serves as a warning for other African countries to avoid the BRI traps." This concludes the negative narrative loop, reinforcing the audience's negative perception of the risks of China-Africa cooperation.

By summarizing the overall news reports from four media outlets and analyzing typical cases, it can be observed that Chinese media mainly focus on positive coverage, highlighting the benefits of cooperation, and using positive words and affirmative sentence structures to emphasize value; while Western media mainly provide negative reports, focusing on disputes and risks, using negative words for speculation and question-form sentences to guide doubts. This difference essentially stems from the opposition of the agenda-setting logic of the two media.

5. Discussion

5.1. Analysis of the Logical Structure of Chinese Media Reports

Chinese media report with the core focus on the benefits of cooperation. This is essentially determined by their media function positioning, their mission of communicating with Africa, and the factual basis of the cooperation. As the core carrier for China to convey the concept of cooperation, it needs to present the actual value of China-Africa cooperation to African audiences, breaking through the negative stereotypes in Western media.

From the perspective of media function positioning, the African editions of Xinhua News Agency and China Daily are not merely information dissemination institutions; they are important components of China's public diplomacy towards Africa, bearing the core responsibility of "telling the stories of China-Africa cooperation and conveying the concept of mutual benefit". In the context where Western media have long dominated international public opinion and have widespread biases towards China-Africa cooperation, if Chinese media overly focus on controversial topics, they may be magnified by Western public opinion, further intensifying negative perceptions. Therefore, focusing on cooperation achievements is a rational choice for guiding positive perceptions—by intensively presenting actual cases of benefits received by African people, gradually building a cognitive consensus of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation between China and Africa, and countering the negative narratives from the West (Jiang & Gong, 2024).

From the perspective of the media's communication mission, the African editions of Xinhua News Agency and China Daily serve as the main force of China's official English-language communication to Africa. Their core mission is to convey the cooperative concept of "joint consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits" to African audiences. This mission determines that Chinese media will inevitably promote the positive aspects of China-Africa cooperation, allowing African audiences to intuitively feel the value of cooperation through specific achievements, rather than exaggerating disputes.

From a factual perspective, the “Belt and Road” cooperation between China and Africa has indeed achieved a considerable number of tangible results. These achievements have provided a solid factual basis for the positive coverage by Chinese media, enabling them to have objective cases to support their positive reports.

5.2. Analysis of Western Media Reporting Logic

Western media’s reporting focus is centered on cooperation issues, which is influenced by three factors: ideological differences, geopolitical interests competition, and the maintenance of media dominance (Yang et al., 2025). On one hand, the zero-sum thinking of the West makes it difficult for them to understand the win-win concept of China, and they instinctively interpret China-Africa cooperation as a struggle for interests. On the other hand, China’s cooperation has challenged the traditional spheres of influence of Western powers in Africa. As the conveyors of Western interests, Western media, through negative reporting, undermine the legitimacy of China-Africa cooperation and maintain Western dominance in Africa. This also corresponds to the characteristics of Western media in empirical analysis, such as citing the viewpoints of the questioning side from the Western side and using negative expressions.

Firstly, ideological differences are the root cause of this. The West has long been dominated by the zero-sum game mindset, so under this ingrained mindset, Western media instinctively interpret China’s cooperation in Africa as an act of seeking benefits and expanding influence, rather than genuine assistance. This directly leads to Western media automatically filtering out the cooperation achievements in their reports and instead focusing on controversial topics such as debt traps and resource plundering.

Secondly, geopolitical competition is the practical driving force. Africa was once under the colonial influence of the West, and the West has long held a dominant position in resource extraction, market share, and policy influence in Africa (Shu, 2025). China’s engagement in Africa under the Belt and Road Initiative has introduced new models of cooperation, which some Western observers perceive as challenging traditional patterns of influence. For instance, China’s infrastructure projects such as railway and bridge construction have enhanced the connectivity of the African region, but weakened the West’s control over African infrastructure; China’s provision of agricultural technology to Africa has helped ensure food security, but reduced the market for Western grain imports. Western media tend to emphasize risk-oriented narratives regarding China-Africa cooperation. Such reporting frameworks reflect divergent geopolitical perspectives, different editorial priorities, and distinct journalistic norms, which may lead African audiences to focus on uncertainties related to cooperation. In turn, these narratives help preserve long-standing Western discourse influence and structural advantages in Africa (He, 2009). This also explains why, in the empirical analysis, Western media frequently quote the skeptical viewpoints of Western think tanks and international institutions, while paying less attention to the feedback from the

African beneficiaries—the aim is to strengthen negative perceptions through professional perspectives and weaken the influence of China-Africa cooperation.

The reporting logic of Western media is full of contradictions: on the one hand, they claim to be objective and neutral; on the other hand, they filter out the achievements of cooperation with Africa, focusing only on controversial topics; on one side, they claim to care about the interests of Africa; on the other side, they rarely pay attention to the real feedback from the local people in Africa. Essentially, it is selective reporting driven by ideological bias and self-interest, which violates the basic principles of objective and fair news reporting.

5.3. Reflections and Insights on Non-Communication

The differences in media coverage between China and the West not only reflect the differences in national positions and interests between the two sides, but also reveal the core pain points in current dissemination in Africa. The Chinese side focuses on results and neglects closeness, emphasizing publicity but neglecting responses; the Western side emphasizes biases and neglects facts, emphasizing disputes but neglecting people's livelihoods (Chen et al., 2022). Neither side presents the full picture of China-Africa cooperation; instead, they conduct selective reporting based on their own positions. And the cognitive differences of African audiences are influenced by these communication differences. For China, it needs to find a balance between upholding its mission and being close to the audience—it should not only convey the value of cooperation but also enhance the closeness of news dissemination to local people. At the same time, it needs to face up to the Western media bias and break the monopoly of Western media by actively setting the agenda, citing diverse sources, and using local narratives to build a more objective and comprehensive narrative of China-Africa cooperation.

The so-called neutrality in international news reporting is relative. Media always represent the stance of their respective countries and, based on their own ideologies, select the content that best suits their own needs for reporting (Jiang, 2025). The differences in news reporting between Western and Eastern media also confirm the core viewpoint of the news framework theory: Media do not objectively present the entire picture of facts; instead, they use methods such as fact screening, framework construction, and strategic word usage to convey to the audience a perception that aligns with their own stance. This conclusion addresses the research gap in the literature review, which “most existing studies focus on the surface differences in the reporting of Chinese and Western media, without linking news frameworks to ideology”.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Research Findings

The Chinese side has a reporting orientation that focuses on the actual achievements of cooperation infrastructure projects, job creation, and improvement of people's livelihoods. They use positive words and affirmative sentence structures

such as “development”, “cooperation”, and “enhance”, and give priority to quoting the personal statements of local beneficiaries and local officials in Africa. On the other hand, the Western side’s English-language media in Africa focus on topics such as debt disputes and resource occupation triggered by cooperation. They use negative words and interrogative sentence structures such as “debt trap”, “risk”, and “neocolonialism”, and give priority to quoting critical viewpoints from Western think tanks and international institutions.

After quantitative verification, it was found that there was a significant difference in the reporting tendencies of the two sides. The proportion of positive-oriented reporting by Chinese media exceeded 80% (Xinhua Africa Edition 84%, China Daily Africa Edition 80%), with the core news framework being the “win-win development” framework (Xinhua Africa Edition 50%, China Daily Africa Edition 46%) and the “improvement of people’s livelihood” framework (Xinhua Africa Edition 34%, China Daily Africa Edition 34%). The proportion of negative-oriented reporting by Western media exceeded 55% (BBC News Africa 56%, The Africa Report 60%), with the core news framework being the “debt trap” framework (BBC News Africa 52%, The Africa Report 40%) and the “colonialism” framework (BBC News Africa 44%, The Africa Report 40%). The differences in content orientation, news framework, vocabulary expression, and source citation between the two sides do not overlap, forming a systematic opposition.

The essence of this reporting disparity lies in the differences in the selection of news frameworks under different positions. Chinese media construct a framework of “cooperative achievements + local benefits”, conveying to the audience the perception that China-Africa cooperation is mutually beneficial and win-win; while Western media construct a framework of “cooperative disputes + authoritative doubts”, conveying to the audience the perception that China-Africa cooperation is fraught with risks.

6.2. Practical Suggestions

In response to the issue that Chinese media reports mainly focus on the macro cooperation achievements and lack of relevance, it is suggested to customize differentiated content based on the audience levels on the basis of the existing reports: For the general public, increase the micro stories of ordinary Africans, focus on the specific benefits of individuals in the cooperation projects, combine with personal photos and short videos to enhance the sense of immersion, and use real cases to enhance the appeal of the reports; for the elite group, deepen the analysis of industrial upgrading and regional development value of the cooperation, quote the professional opinions of African entrepreneurs and scholars to enhance the persuasiveness; for the decision-makers, release special reports on the sustainable development and sovereignty guarantee of the cooperation, and respond to core concerns.

In response to the issue where Western media deliberately exaggerated the disputes over cooperation and the insufficient responses from Chinese media, it is

suggested to establish a “regularization mechanism for responding to disputes”: A proactive dispute response mechanism should be established, including conducting joint research and clarifying facts with local African media and third-party think tanks, in order to break the monopoly of the single narrative by the West.

In response to the problem that Chinese media have a monotonous communication style and insufficient adaptation to the habits of African audiences, it is suggested to break away from the pure text reporting model and create a “localized communication matrix”: Localized communication forms that are preferred by African audiences, such as short videos and data visualization, should be adopted. The mobile experience should be optimized and the communication efficiency should be improved.

6.3. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

The representativeness of the sample in this study has certain limitations: only 50 news reports from each of 4 media outlets were selected as the analysis objects. The sample size and coverage are limited, and no content from African local media, other language media, or self-media on social platforms was included.

In addition, this study focuses on the framing practices of Chinese and Western media, which to some extent portrays African audiences as relatively passive recipients of international media narratives. However, African actors, including political elites, civil society groups, and local journalists, also possess independent agency; they actively interpret, select, and reshape narratives related to the Belt and Road Initiative to serve their own domestic agendas rather than merely accepting external narratives passively.

This study has certain limitations in terms of depth: it only analyzed four dimensions of the report—the core orientation, language expression, information source, and narrative structure. It did not conduct an empirical investigation into the actual dissemination effect of the report, nor did it deeply analyze the differences among audiences of different age groups and different occupational groups.

Future research can expand the sample size, incorporate African local media and multi-language samples, and increase the analysis of social media content to enhance the universality of conclusions. Further comparative analysis can be conducted from both longitudinal time dimensions and horizontal media types. In addition, future studies may adopt questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews to explore dissemination effects and audience heterogeneity, as well as investigate how African stakeholders independently construct and utilize BRI-related discourses from endogenous African perspectives.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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