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Framing the Economy of the East African Community:
A Decade of Disparities and Similarities Found in Chinese and Western News Media’s Reporting on the EAC

Elizabeth K. James & Mark Boukes

Abstract

This study examines how the economic climate of the East African Community (EAC) was covered in Chinese and Western news media between 2005 and 2015. Framing devices measuring risk, opportunity, morality and valence were detected and analysed in four news agencies. A content analysis showed that both the Chinese and Western news media featured opportunism more prominently than risk, and this positivity regarding the EAC increased with time. However overall, the Western media framed the EAC more in terms of potential risks than the Chinese media. The Western media featured the voice of African actors more often, and in doing so, the economy of the EAC was framed somewhat less optimistically. Altogether, this study provides insight into the different ways that the Chinese and the Western news media framed the East African Community over the past decade.

1 Please cite as:
The philosopher John Dewey recognized that the people ruling society are those who are in control of the means of production, exchange, and communication. He surmised that the ruling system of power hinges on “business for private profit through private control, reinforced by command of the press” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 87). In the 21st century, this system of power is constantly shifting and acclimating to the fluctuations of the global economy. Sound evidence of this can be seen across the various regions of Africa. Due to the increasing amount of foreign investment opportunities and recent infrastructure developments, the East African Community (EAC) has gained considerable attention in global markets. With a population that exceeds 145.5 million, the five country bloc that includes Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda boasts one of the largest regional markets on the continent (African Development Bank, 2015).

Professionals within the financial sector logically would want to know whether the recent economic growth experienced by the EAC is built on solid foundations, and if it can be sustained in the future. Amongst a plethora of available sources (e.g., specialized online sources, corporate sources), studies have confirmed that these professionals use news media to contribute to an increased understanding of market movements (Davis, 2005). Framing devices are discernable from core news facts, and those frames that pertain to EAC economic issues may indicate whether it is a good time, or not, to start investing in the region. Within economically orientated news media, textual elements of framing devices will define the economy of the EAC, with particular attention given to factual representations (e.g., data and statistics) and semantic manipulations (Jerven, 2015, p. 12; Gamson and Madigliani, 1989). Because financial professionals use the media as one avenue to learn about the EAC, news coverage may have an effect on corporate decision-making (e.g., whether or not to invest resources in the region). According to Ndlela (2005), the “media do not merely reflect the
reality in Africa, they also recreate and reshape it through signifying practices and representations.”

With the current state of the decentralized global market, framing devices in the news media may help analysts understand the developments in global regions (McQuail, 2010, p. 381). Certain aspects of economic issues are selected and made more salient in the news media, thereby providing alternative interpretations of these issues (Entman, 1993; Hallahan, 2009). Determining what frames exist in Western and Chinese news media, and how they differ over time, provides comparable insight into the changing trends in the political economy. As the financial markets behave in increasingly interdependent and reactionary ways, the national identities of powerful global economies may be fading (Barber, 2002; Foley & Manova, 2015). Nevertheless, there are conspicuous differences between China and the West regarding their relationship to the African continent both in terms of (colonial) history as well as current business partnerships. The present analysis attempts to fill a research gap by examining how the framing devices featured in financial news about the EAC differ between China and the West over the ten-year time period between 2005 and 2015. The results of the study provide insight into how the economy of the EAC is perceived, and how the news media may influence the economic growth of the region.

Theory

Framing and Media Effects

Framing is conceptually connected to the underlying psychological and cognitive processes that people use to examine information, to make judgments, and to draw inferences about the world around them (Hallahan, 1999). Within the texts published by the news media, elements are included, excluded and emphasized (Hallahan, 1999). In the classical definition put forth by Entman (1993, p. 53) “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality
and make them more salient in communicating text.” In the context of the current study, this would mean to promote a perceived reality about the economy of the EAC.

The initial process of news production in Scheufele’s (1999) framing process model is termed frame building. This process focuses on the dynamics of how journalists choose specific frames in communication (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The purpose of the current research is to examine the result of frame building by comparing the specific properties of the news narrative about the EAC found in Chinese and the Western news media. Of the traits of media texts where framing devices have had a critical impact on information processing (Scheufele, 1999, p. 9), multiple factors could contribute to the formation of the perceived reality of the EAC’s economy, namely: judgments regarding the risk or opportunities of doing business in this area, moral evaluations and agency (Entman, 1991). Because people situate frames and localize them (Van Gorp, 2005), China and the West are discernible entities and can therefore be compared (Lake, 2006) as we do in the current investigation.

Types of Framing

To comprehensively compare geopolitical regions, we incorporated multiple generic news frames into the analysis. According to De Vreese (2005), the use of similar news frames in different political and journalistic cultures emphasizes the generic nature of such news frames, thereby rendering cross-national differences visible. Most relevant to the topic of the current study, the relative presence of the opportunity frame, risk frame, morality frame and valence framing were analysed.

In their content analysis of European politics in the press, Schuck and De Vreese (2006) identify the risk frame and its counterpart, the opportunity frame. Framing issues in terms of opportunity involves the perception that an action or process may involve pleasant future outcomes and is consistent in its expectation of eventual advantageous results (Schuck
The risk frame is conceptualized as a “future disadvantageous situation and the perception that an action or process may involve an unpleasant future outcome” (Schuck & De Vreese, 2006, p. 11). Negative evaluations contained in a framing device arguably lead professionals in the financial community to view the EAC as a less favourable region for economic investment, or a higher risk in terms of gains and losses. The opposite is true for positive, or opportunistic evaluations.

In the case of valence framing, the frame casts the same critical information in either a positive or negative light (Levin et al., 1998). Based on prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), decisions made by financial professionals would arguably be largely dependent on how the outcome of a decision is presented in terms of economic prospects (i.e., positively valenced) or gambles (i.e., negatively valenced). A hypothetical example being: a financial professional is informed that the value of the Kenyan Shilling depreciated by .5% in the last quarter of 2014 (negative valence) or, the Kenyan Shilling gained value with an accumulated 2% over the first three quarters of 2014 (positive valence).

The morality frame places the issue in the context of moral prescriptions (Semetko & Valkenberg, 2000), which are concerned with the distinction between right or wrong; essentially, they are defined as points of ethics. In the case of financial news media, moral prescriptions could be used to rationalize arguments for the allocation of money. The inclusion of moral rationality could contribute to the rhetoric used by actors when legitimizing actions, including those that impact financial outcomes. A moral explanation could be used to justify the allocation of public funds for a particular cause in the EAC, or the finalization of a policy effecting economic outcomes. Obvious examples of this are the arguments for setting up local initiatives by Western countries in Africa for reasons of solidarity, in support of social and civil outcomes that benefit the greater public. The absence of such a moral prescription would occur if an organization acted in the EAC for purely capitalistic reasons.
In order to comprehend the effect that framing devices can potentially have on various populations, it is useful to consider framing theory within the discipline of psychology. The concept of existing cognitive schemas is labelled by Scheufele and Iyengar (2014) as applicability effects, which is an effect caused by stimuli. Fiske and Taylor (2013, p. 452) define a schema as “an abstract representation, including the concept’s attributes and the relations among them.” The manner in which a person thinks about an issue depends not only on salient attributes that are current, but also other ideas and feelings that already exist in a person’s mind (Price et al., 1997). The impact of new information provided by a frame is likely to be used in subsequent evaluations made in response to the message, or in this case, a news article (Price & Tewksbury, 2007).

When processing financial communication, the salient attributes (i.e., frame) of a message render particular thoughts applicable, resulting in their activation and use in evaluations (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2014). An increase in the salience of positive valence frames enhances the probability that the economic decision makers internalizing it will perceive the region with the corollary sentiment (Fiske & Taylor, 2013, p. 303). Similarly, positively framed financial communication can enhance the perception of the economic health of the EAC, and subsequently reinforce trust in stability (Tong, 2014). When the media portray the EAC in terms of greater opportunity than risk, and more positively than negatively valenced, this arguably should cause financial professionals to reassess their perception of the region, making it more likely that they (consider to) invest capital or begin new business ventures in the region.

The Western versus the Chinese Perspective

The differing perceptions of the EAC are constructed from multiple influencing factors in China and the West. Since the 1955 Bandung Conference, it is thought that Sino-African
relations have hinged on China’s role to promote “third world nationalism and movements for equality,” while simultaneously offering their support as a counterbalance to the former European colonizers and the hegemonic power of the United States (Alden, 2007, p. 16; A’Zami, 2015). While China’s leverage in the political economy of Africa is understood by some as ideological aggression and a threat towards the West (Johnston, 2003), it should be noted that this is a complicated conjecture, one that is often simplified and projected in Western and Chinese mass media as a struggle for hegemonic power (Chen, Dollar, & Tang, 2015; Lake, 2006).

Meanwhile, China constructs its discourse with Africa in a starkly different way than the Western nations: Seeking mutual development as emerging markets, and in the global context, being weary of the Western, established markets (Musa, 2007). Essential to the Sino-Africa relationship, is the expansive economic growth experienced by China, which has caused the country to seek new sources of raw materials and energy. The Chinese address this need by building projects that tap into commodities available in Africa continent, and thereby increasing two-way trade between the continents (Beri, 2007).

As the EAC is more alike in its global economic status (developing, and emerging) with China, it is plausible that Chinese media view the EAC more as a kind of opportunity than the West does with its established economies. It can be postulated that the news media reflect the economic and political relationships that China has built with Africa over the previous 60 years, and by doing so promote the development of Africa without specific social conditions.

Western media, by contrast, have the inclination of portraying the African continent as unstable, underdeveloped and often in conflict (Ndlela, 2005; Willems, 2014). The prime device through which representations of Africa have been circulated through the Western media is through stereotyping, often in negative categories (Ndleda, 2005). Arguably, the
Western media is generally poorly informed, tending to generalize across the continent whilst relying on descriptions of “savagery, conflict, and tribal identity” (Mawdsley, 2008, p. 512; Ndleda, 2005). Devastating events such as the Rwandan Genocide continue to dominate the acuity that many Westerners have about the East African region. Currently, Rwanda is projected to post a real GDP growth rate of 7.5 percent, becoming a development success (African Development Bank, 2015), but stories of progress can take much more time to dissipate than stories of conflict.

In consideration of this, the following patterns are expected with regards to the framing of the EAC in the Chinese media relative to the Western news media:

H1: The opportunity frame is more prominent in news coverage about the EAC in the Chinese news media than in the Western news media.

H2: The risk frame is more prominent in news coverage about the EAC in the Western news media than in the Chinese news media.

H3: In terms of valence framing, news coverage about the EAC in the Chinese media will be relatively more positively valenced than in the Western news media.

China is taking steps to materially facilitate its rise as a superpower by influencing the world economy (Banda, 2009). This has ushered in a new phase in Chinese discourse about the international economy and its cooperation with other developing countries in international politics, including several African nation states (Alden, 2007, p. 35; Choo, 2009). In 2003, Former Premier Wen Jiabao declared that China offered their assistance to Africa “with the deepest sincerity and without any political conditions” (Alden, 2007, p. 15). Its objective is to facilitate economic expansion that is free from socio-political shackles (Johnston, 2003).

The Chinese government has financed a plethora of productive infrastructure projects in power, rail, and information and communication technology (Foster, Butterfield, Chen, &
Pushak, 2009, p. 2). These projects contribute to the transportation of goods, people and services and are essential for economic development. Additionally, they are massively *instrumental* in enticing investors from all over the world, and in bringing needed capital to the continent (Zafar, 2007).

Since the 1960s, the West has mostly used various channels of state institutions as their entry into Africa for the purposes of business (Berry, 1989). Western development initiatives are carried out by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governmental institutions, with the goals of economic growth often coupled with socio-political initiatives (Berry, 1989; Easterly, 2009). It is thought that the West previously attempted to bring progress and rationality to Africa during the colonial period by way of Christianity (Mawdsley, 2008), however in the present, it is ushered in with good governance and institutional oversight.

Unlike the West, the Chinese take a firm stance in their non-interventional institutional position with the Africans (Carmody & Owusu, 2007). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi defended China’s role in Africa, assuring that they “will not take the old path of the Western colonists and we absolutely will not sacrifice Africa’s ecological and long-term interests” (Burgman, 2015, p. 1). The West has the tendency to anchor financial matters to socio-political parameters, and places more emphasis on the functionality of institutions. The Western discourse about Africa has often been anchored on its need to “save” the continent from any number of maladies, incensing a particular brand of moral duty (Easterly, 2000, p. 2). It is therefore predicted that moral prescriptions will most be used to support Western public institutions in their justification for action. Hence, the following is expected regarding the morality frame:

H4: The morality frame is more prominent in news coverage about the EAC in Western news media than Chinese news media.
The Perspective of the EAC

By providing a quotation in an article, an actor can affect how an issue is framed in the media, which might dramatically influence how it will be perceived by stakeholders (Carpenter, 2010, p. 205) The economy of the EAC is ultimately an African issue, and it is of scholarly interest to know how the African perspective is reported in the Chinese and Western media. Without a voice in the media, actors lack the possibility to define what is at stake on an issue, which is considered a “supreme instrument of power” (Schattschneider 1988, p. 66; Tresch, 2009). In generating accounts, African individuals and collectives often have different purposes at hand and so have differing and competing uses for Chinese or Western journalists (e.g., Hilgarten & Bosk, 1988).

News agencies were established to provide previously inaccessible, objective international news content to newspapers, and in doing so, journalists collect statements from actors that are both positive and negative (Gorman & McLean, 2003, p. 7). Journalistic style differences provide an important point of departure between the West and China. Chinese “constructive journalism” (Yanqiu, 2014, p. 8) tends to favour covering positive angles and lessens naturally negative news events (Wekesa, 2014, p. 26). Western journalism, commonly known as performing the role of a Fourth Estate and functioning as a “watchdog,” stems from a liberal polarized model and emphasis is thought to be placed more on critical reporting from multiple perspectives (Moeller, 1999; Yanqiu, 2014, p. 8).

It can be argued that China’s policy of non-interference would mean that domestic political stories deemed to be controversial are likely to be ignored by Chinese news media (Gagliardone, 2013) and, by contrast, are more likely to be picked up by Western media. In light of this, it is predicted that Western news will incorporate more quotations of African actors because they will have the propensity of featuring the actor quoting a negative
statement as well as positive statements: Western media will probably allow a wider spectrum of African perspectives. It is therefore hypothesized that African actors will be quoted more frequently, and therefore the African voice will be more prominent in Western news media:

**H5:** *Western news media contain more often quotes from African actors than the Chinese media.*

For Africans, the EAC economy is likely perceived more positively and with lower risk due to *optimistic bias*, or the tendency for people to be more optimistic about events that are occurring to themselves (Weinstein, 1980). Optimistic bias refers to people’s tendency to think their risk is less than that of other people for a negative event to occur (Klein & Helweg-Larsen, 2001). Moreover, Africans themselves personally can experience the positive economic trend in their region, while for “foreign” sources it might be harder to be convinced of this from a distance. The expectation is therefore that granting agency to an African actor would lead to a more optimistic framing:

**H6:** *Articles that contained a quote from an African actor will (a) contain less risk framing, (b) more opportunity framing, and (c) are more positively valenced.*

**Economic transitions to the 21st century**

The EAC region has experienced robust economic growth since its Treaty for Establishment was signed in 2000. Following this, the legislative procurement of a Customs Union (2005), a Common Market (2010) and a Monetary Union (2013) have gradually helped to secure the reputation of the region as a stable investment opportunity. These policies were implemented to lessen the impact of trade barriers, and contribute to the ease of doing business.

The statistical evidence to substantiate the success of the economic development occurring in the EAC has been accumulating over the past decade (African Development
Bank, 2015; International Monetary Fund, 2015; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2015; World Bank, 2016). According to the *Africa Competitiveness Report*, sub-Saharan economies have registered an average growth rate of five percent over the previous 15 years (World Economic Forum, 2015). Further, a working paper published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), placed the region in the top-five percent worldwide for growth episodes during the period 2004-2013 (Gigineishvili, Mauro & Wang, 2014).

With these growth trends, the media discourse surrounding the African continent may be focused less on negative sociological metrics and dysfunctional institutions. With a more opportunistic discourse published in the news, it can be assumed that privatized investors would take notice, and focus on the economic potential of the continent, which could even further support the growth of the economy in the EAC. In light of this, and keeping in mind that the media normally reflect the real-world (domestic) economy rather well (e.g., Behr & Iyengar, 1985), it is predicted that the general economic outlook of the EAC both in the Chinese and the Western media will be increasingly positive.

H7: *Articles that are published later in the 2005-2015 period will (a) contain less risk framing, (b) more opportunity framing, and (c) are more positively valenced.*

**Method**

A content analysis was chosen as the research design because it allows us to disclose international differences and describe trends in media content without interference (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 50). Three Western news agencies and one Chinese news agency were chosen for the sample based on their reputation, influence, language (English), and availability in the *LexisNexis* database. Rather than newspaper content, news agencies were analysed because they have a very strong impact on the content of news outlets, which often are heavily dependent on news wires for the production of news (Lewis, Williams, &
Franklin, 2008). Arguably, the news being produced by newswires will be used by many news outlets and will therefore reflect a more generalizable picture of the complete news landscape.

The Xinhua General News Service was chosen to represent China because it is the official news agency of the country, and is consequently considered an authoritative source for information on economic performance and world affairs. The Western perspective was derived from three sources for two reasons (a) the conceivable notion of the West is a complex grouping and should be represented by multiple countries (b) the quantity of articles about the EAC was remarkably less in the Western news agencies than what was published by Xinhua. Three news agencies were sourced to represent the West Associated Press, Agence France Presse, and the Deutsche Presse Agentuer. The Associated Press (AP) is one of the largest and most trusted sources of independent newsgathering, headquartered in New York, and operating in more than 280 locations worldwide (AP, 2015). Headquartered in Paris and established as a state enterprise, Agence France Presse (AFP) is highly respected with bureaus in 150 countries and transmitting news in six different languages. Deutsche Presse Agentuer (DPA) is the leading news agency in Germany and is considered one of the four major international news agencies after AP, AFP, and Reuters. Globally, DPA serves approximately 2,500 subscribers in nearly 100 countries with correspondents covering 80 countries.

The choice for these four media agencies, thus, included three of the four biggest Western economies (i.e., the US, Germany and France) based on nominal GDP estimates and the biggest Eastern economy (i.e., China). Combined, the perceptions of financial experts, investors, and politicians in these countries may be very influential for the EAC.

**Sample**

News articles were retrieved from the *LexisNexis* database and analysed manually. Preliminarily, two parameters were met for inclusion in the sample. In order to ensure
regional relevance, the search string “East African Community,” was used to filter articles published between December 2005 and July 2015. The ten-year time period was chosen in order to attain a thorough longitudinal perspective. Additionally, the period spans three important accomplishments of the EAC’s economic integration: the ratification of the customs union (2005); the introduction of the common market (2010); and the ratification of the Monetary Union (2013).

Following the initial sampling procedures, the sampling units were manually filtered based on their financial relevance. This was determined by reading the headline and the first paragraph of each article. Articles were included if they were in the first instance focused on economic development, policies that had a direct effect on financial gains or losses, tangible gains or losses, or the actions taken in terms of global markets or investments relative to the EAC.

Following this selection, the final sample was obtained. All news articles about the East African Community (n.b., not a sample) were coded without a randomization procedure. The full amount of available news included 271 Chinese articles (i.e., Xinhua) and 118 Western articles (Agence France Presse: \( n = 67 \); Associated Press: \( n = 38 \); Deutsche Presse-Agentur: \( n = 13 \)). The coding unit of analysis was the full article. Intercoder-reliability has been assessed by 40 randomly selected articles from the full sample that were coded independently by a second coder not involved with the project.

**Measurement: reliability and variables**

In general, coding was reliable as the overall Krippendorff’s alpha for the five framing variables was .86. Below, we describe the specific operationalisations followed in the content analysis and their specific reliability coefficient scores.
The opportunity frame and the risk frame were both measured with five questions based upon Schuck and De Vreese’s (2006) operationalization. They measured whether an article contained (a) arguments that support the economic growth and/or stability of the EAC (opportunity) or are in opposition with this (risk), (b) emotional expressions that support (opportunity) or are in opposition (risk) of the prospective economic growth of the EAC economically/financially; (c) facts (e.g., statistics, data, information that is officially released in a report) that support (opportunity) or contradict (risk) the economic growth and/or stability of the EAC; (d) an outline of any general advantage or specific future benefit of the EAC stability and/or economic growth (opportunity) or any event or sociological problem that portrays the EAC as unstable, causing the region to be a risky region for investment (risk); (e) quote of any kind from an actor that is positive (opportunity) or negative (risk) in tone towards the growth and/or stability of the EAC. Inter-coder reliability was successfully achieved for the opportunity frame (Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .90$) and the risk frame ($\alpha = .91$). An article was understood to contain the opportunity frame (79.9% of the articles) or the risk frame (43.0%) if at least one of the five indicators was found in the article.

The valence frame was coded on a five-point scale to evaluate the general tone of the news article. The scale ranged from negative (-2), via mixed but slightly negative (-1), neutral (0), mixed but slightly positive (1), to positive (2). Inter-coder reliability reached the acceptable threshold ($\alpha = .79$). On average articles were rather neutral ($M = 0.33$, $SD = 1.16$).

The morality frame was drawn from the operationalization of Semetko and Valkenberg (2000) and measured with two questions assessing whether the article (a) contained any moral message or (b) offered specific social prescriptions about how to behave. Inter-coder reliability was also successfully achieved this morality frame ($\alpha = .87$). The morality frame was present when one or both of the indicators were found, which was the case in 19.2% of the articles.
To measure the presence of African agency, it was determined whether or not an African actor was quoted in the article, meaning that an active African voice was included in the text ($\alpha = .90$). A quote of an African actor was found in 74.4% of the articles.

*Analysis*

The data have been analysed with regression analyses: ordinary least squares (OLS) regression for the valence variable that was measured on an interval scale from -2 to 2, and logistic regression for *presence* of frames and African agency, because these variables indicated the presence (1) or absence (0) of this text feature.

All analyses included the article’s geographic region (i.e., China or Western) as an independent variable, just as the date of publication in years after 2005. Additional analyses have been carried out with an interaction term of both these two variables (i.e., context and year); however, these yielded all insignificant effects indicating that trends over time did not differ conditional on the context. Having no hypotheses for this specifically, we present the results without the interaction terms for reasons of parsimony. The analyses controlled for the natural logarithm of the articles’ length, because longer articles arguably will contain more frames or actors, simply, because there is more space to address these. For a fair comparison, it is important to take this into account.

*Results*

The data analyses began by examining the difference in the presence of African actors, as this dependent variable (endogenous) was a predictor (exogenous) of framing elements in the subsequent analyses. Thereafter, the presence of frames and valence was examined across regions and over time.
African Agency

It was expected that African actors would be relatively more often present in the Western media than in the Chinese media. A logistic regression predicting the presence of African agency in an article with the geographic region, timing and length of the article as predictors revealed a congruent pattern (see Table 1): African actors were more likely to be found in news coverage from the Western news agencies, which provides evidence for Hypothesis 5.

The findings illustrate that the chance to present an African actors increases for longer articles and the odds of including an African actors are 2.70 times larger for the Western news agencies than for the Chinese agency. Figure 1 shows the deviation between the Western agencies that include an African actor on average in 84.4% of the articles, whereas the Chinese agency does it in 70.0% of the articles. The presence of African actors seems not to have increased with time ($p = .110$).

Opportunity and Risk Framing

Theory led us to expect that coverage of the East African Community would be more focused on opportunities and less on risk in the Chinese media than in the Western media. Moreover, it expected that the trend would be more opportunistic over the course of time and when an African actor would be granted agency in an article. Table 2 shows the results of the logistic regression analyses predicting the presence of the opportunity and risk frame.
The results indicate that there was no significant difference between the Chinese and Western news agencies regarding the use of the opportunity frame. In the articles of Xinhua, the opportunity frame was found in 78.9% of the articles, whereas this was the case in 76.4% of the articles from the Western agencies. Hypothesis 1 was therefore not supported. However, with regard to the risk frame the expected pattern was yielded (see Figure 2): The Western articles contained significantly more often (50.9%) a risk frame than the Chinese articles (34.9%). Hence, Hypothesis 2 was supported. The odds of having the risk frame was 2.09 times larger for the Western news agencies than for the Chinese news agency.

Surprisingly, presence of African agency impacted the framing in a way opposite to what was expected. Articles that included an African actor were on average less framed in terms of opportunities (75.0%) and more framed in terms of risk (43.1%) than in the articles where African agency was absent (respectively, 85.3% and 28.1%). Hypothesis 6a and 6b, thus, were rejected: Quoting an African actor negatively impacted the framing of the EAC.

With regards to the time component in our analysis, the expectations were partly confirmed: The EAC, over time, became more often framed in terms of opportunity ($p < .001$). This is in line with Hypothesis 7b: With every year that elapsed, the odds of finding the opportunity frame increased with 1.34. However, the presence of the risk frame did not decrease in the period from 2005 to 2015 ($p = .921$); hence, Hypothesis 7a has not been supported.
Valence Framing

Valence framing, or how positive versus how negative an article’s tone was, has been assessed on a five-point scale and could therefore be analysed with an OLS regression model. The findings show that the Chinese and Western outlets did not significantly differ on their tone (see Table 3). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

[Table 3 about here]

Regarding the impact of including an African view in coverage, the same trend has been found as for opportunity and risk framing: Articles that included an African actor, on average, had a tone that was 0.28 points more negative than articles that not included African agency. Hypothesis 6c was therefore rejected. Finally, the results in Table 3 show that the valence of news coverage about the EAC became more positive in the ten-year time period under study. With every year, the tone increased about 0.10 more positive. Hypothesis 7c was therefore supported.

Morality Framing

The morality frame was not frequently included in news coverage about the EAC. Generally, it occurred in 18.2% of all articles. Table 4 shows that the difference in use of the morality frame between the Chinese (17.5%) and Western (19.4%) news agency was far from significant. Hence, Hypothesis 4 could not be supported.

Actually, none of the theoretically substantiated variables had an effect on the presence of the morality. Neither the year of publication nor the presence of African agencies had an effect on this. The only variable in the logistic regression model that predicted the
presence of the morality frame was the length of the article. This shows the importance of including this as a control variable in framing analysis: If there is simply more space for a frame to occur, this increases its likelihood.

[Table 4 about here]

**Discussion**

A longitudinal content analysis was carried out to gain insight into how the West and China differ in their perception, and consequently their portrayal, of the economy of the EAC in the news media. In doing so, the frames of opportunity, risk, morality, and valence were analysed over a ten-year period. The opportunity frame appeared in the content of Chinese and Western news agencies fairly equally, whereas the risk frame was utilized much more by the Western news agencies than the Chinese. It seems then that Western media does portray the economy of the EAC positively, but certainly not without inflections of caution or apprehension. According to geographical region, the positivity of the articles was also relatively similar. The morality frame was scarcely used in the news media from either region.

In agreement with what was predicted, African actors were given a voice more so in Western news media than in Chinese. However, this did not result in the articles being framed with greater opportunity or positivity. In contrast, the presence of an African actor increased the chance that the EAC’s economy was framed negatively, and with greater risk. For every year that elapsed, the articles increased in terms of opportunism and positivity, but they did not decrease in risk. Overall, the results point to shifts in perception, and diminish the assumption that stark differences exist between the perceptions of the EAC as portrayed in Chinese and Western news media.
African agency

African actors were indeed granted more agency in Western news media than in Chinese media, which supports the divergence of Chinese “constructive journalism” and Western watchdog journalism. Due to the fact that emphasis was placed on collective achievements, it is believed that Xinhua tends to overlook divisive issues. This outcome corresponds well with the fact that those articles which featured a quote from an African actor were less opportunistic, and less positive.

An additional analysis revealed that the majority of African actors that were given a voice in the articles were politicians, or officials within the public sector. Politicians may actively seek social change or reform, and in doing so, concentrate on the aspects of risk negativity of an issue (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). In pushing for reform, it is impossible to focus on the opportunistic or positive aspects of an issue alone, because this detracts from their argument for change. Krebs and Jackson (2007, p. 37) make it clear that “public rhetoric is of causal consequence only from the top down, as leaders of states and social movements deploy resonant language in an effort to mobilize support.”

Increasing Optimism

Both Western and Chinese media were relatively opportunistic about the economy and financial matters involving the EAC. In support of this optimistic trend, opportunism and tone collectively increased with every year that elapsed between 2005 and 2015. In accordance with these results, it can be assumed that the schemata of professionals in the financial sector were also gradually changing.

Hayo and Neuenkirch (2015, p. 28) asserted that individuals working in the financial sector rely particularly on news services to aid in their market assessments, stating: “how action and communication are perceived is a crucial component in this process.” It is then
feasible that the news media coverage in both emergent and developed economies has helped to inform the greater public about the EAC economic conditions, thereby fuelling the growth experienced in the EAC and other regions of the continent.

The African Economic Outlook 2015 report collaborated on by the African Development Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations Development Program, estimates that external financial flows to Africa have quadrupled since 2000. It is estimated that real GDP growth increased in East Africa from 4.7 percent in 2013, to an estimated 7.1 percent in 2014; thereafter, it was projected to decrease to 5.6 percent in 2015 and rise again to 6.7 percent in 2016 (African Development Bank, 2015).

The optimistic tendency observed in this framing analysis is mirrored by actual, projected and estimated economic growth, affirming that the framing devices are in congruence with market developments. The Western media utilized the opportunity frame nearly as frequently as the Chinese, with it appearing in over 75 percent of the media sample.

Assessments of Risk

It is undeniable that there are still a number of perceived barriers in Africa, such as unstable political environments, corruption, weak security, and a lack of skilled labour, all of which deter investment (Ernst & Young, 2015). It is apparent that these obstacles cause the EAC to be perceived with greater economic risk in the West because as predicted, the Western news agencies featured the risk frame more frequently than Xinhua.

One primary difference observed between the risk perceived by the Western news agencies and the Chinese news agencies was the implementation of the Customs Union, Common Market and Monetary Union. The Chinese media took a non-interventionist approach and simply stated what the intended outcomes of these political agreements were, broadly being, greater economic integration and better protocols for business.
In the Western media it was apparent that although these policies were agreed to in Parliament, there were conflicting realities in practice. The West places great importance in socio-political parameters, and the dysfunctionality of the legislation not only reflected an unstable political environment, but also caused both tangible ramifications in the private sector. As the executive director of the East African Business Council succinctly put it: “bringing our fragmented markets together and removing the barriers to trade is very beautiful, but our feeling is that there is a lot that is committed on paper that is not translated on the ground” (Manson & Wallis, 2015). Africans were outspoken in their disapproval of contradictory policies and unfulfilled regulations, and the Western media reflected this instability more so than the Chinese media. This is also a probable factor when considering why the risk frame did not decrease as time elapsed.

A lack of morality

The morality frame was present in a very small percentage of the sample, and further, there were no noteworthy differences between the geopolitical regions. It was originally assumed that members of Western institutions would use morality to strengthen their dialogue in the public arena; however, this assumption was not confirmed. Morality is possibly more commonly featured in opinion pieces or other editorial content, and not in newswire articles. When a moral prescription was offered, it was most often an African actor who was addressing fellow Africans to move beyond the obstacles that were standing between them and properly functioning political agreements (e.g., trade agreements between trading-blocs).

Future research

For future research, it is suggested that the content analysis could be combined with smaller units of analysis, such as the sentence or paragraph instead of the entire article.
Besides that it increases the number of units of analysis, it will help to capture a more detailed picture of the relationships described in a text.

Another interesting avenue for future research is to expand on the number of contexts that are being investigated. Whereas this study investigates the differences in framing between the West (i.e., France, Germany and USA) and China, it would be interesting to include more countries in a larger content analysis. By having more countries (i.e. at least 20), employing multilevel analyses could investigate the impact of a range of interesting higher-order factors, such as the foreign policy regarding Africa, having a colonial history, or a country’s balance of trade (i.e., import and export).

Finally, the current study relies on an analysis of news agencies’ portrayal of the EAC. It is, hence, not clear how this translates into actual media content. Though arguably there is a strong relationship, a further analysis of newspapers and television news could shed light on the content that actually reaches the audience.

**Conclusion**

To achieve levels of economic growth that are sustainable, the EAC must continually reassess their geopolitical relationships, within and outside of the continent. The mass media facilitates the movement of ideas, opinions and information, thereby facilitating the transference of intangible assets. The overall achievements of the global market are deeply contingent on political and social arrangements, the media being one of them (Sen, 1999). Partial theoretical support for the hypotheses was based upon long-established historical and ideological differences between China and the West. The results, however, did not portray a stark disparity between the two regions in terms of opportunity. What is now perhaps most relevant is the modern global economic climate, where capital flow resists the barriers caused by geopolitical boundaries, ideology and history.
The economy of the EAC is at times coddled by attractive statistics and encouraging data, but the news media is not ignorant to aspects of negativity, risk and conflict that obstruct growth. What is known is that the news media continues to influence decision-making, and the risk estimate of the EAC continues to be consequential to future investments. In this case, increased opportunism and optimism may be fleeting, but even in a most temporary bequest, it can contribute to a more favourable reputation for the EAC and its economy. The same stereotypes that have mired the continent for decades continues to do so, but with mass media as a facilitator, they too may be changing with time. The desire for robust growth and the balancing of power relations continue to affect how Africans speak about their own economic development with each other, and the global community. In a broader sense, shifts in the political economy will persist, and it will continue to influence how the world communicates about Africa.

References


Table 1. Logistic regression model predicting whether a quote of African actor was present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-10.12</td>
<td>(1.74)</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length (log-transformed)</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>5.99</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese vs Western agency</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>(0.30)</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years after 2005</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cells contain logistic regression coefficients (b) with standard errors (SE) in parentheses and odds ratio coefficients. *** p < .001, ** p < .05, * p < .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 1. The predicted probabilities (the dot) of presenting an African actor in an article of the Chinese or the Western news agencies with their 95% confidence interval (dotted lines).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opportunity frame</th>
<th></th>
<th>Risk frame</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( b )</td>
<td>( (SE) )</td>
<td>Odds Ratio</td>
<td>( p )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.86 (1.67)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-8.36 (1.52)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length (log-transformed)</td>
<td>0.59 (0.29)</td>
<td>1.80 (0.045*)</td>
<td>.045*</td>
<td>1.18 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese. vs Western agency</td>
<td>-0.16 (0.28)</td>
<td>0.85 (0.558)</td>
<td>.558</td>
<td>0.74 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years after 2005</td>
<td>0.29 (0.05)</td>
<td>1.34 (0.000***</td>
<td>.000***</td>
<td>0.00 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African actor present</td>
<td>-0.75 (0.34)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.029*)</td>
<td>.029*</td>
<td>0.72 (0.29)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo ( R^2 )</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Cells contain logistic regression coefficients (\( b \)) with standard errors (\( SE \)) in parentheses and odds ratio coefficients. *** \( p < .001 \), ** \( p < .01 \), * \( p < .05 \) (two-tailed).

*Figure 2.* The predicted probabilities (the dot) of containing the risking frame in an article of the Chinese or the Western news agencies with their 95% confidence interval (dotted lines).
Table 3. **OLS regression model predicting the tone of news coverage regarding the EAC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>b*</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>.638</td>
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<td>Length (log-transformed)</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese. vs Western agency</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
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<td>-0.05</td>
<td>.296</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years after 2005</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African actor present</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>.041*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance accounted for ($R^2$) .09

Note. Cells contain OLS unstandardized ($b$) and standardized ($b^*$) regression coefficients with standard errors (SE) in parentheses. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 4. **Logistic regression model predicting presence of morality frame in news coverage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>(SE)</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Constant</td>
<td>-12.24</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length (log-transformed)</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese. vs Western news agency</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years after 2005</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African actor present</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pseudo $R^2$ .10

Note. Cells contain logistic regression coefficients ($b$) with standard errors (SE) in parentheses and odds ratio coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed).