

# Bringing the Peripheries to the Centre: translation as a new dimension in understanding power relations

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# Outline

- Conventional approaches
- Why translation
- Case study

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# Conventional approaches

- ▶ Different lenses (principally within social sciences)
  - Absence of language and translation issues, neither in the more narrow sense of the way in which people of different countries communicate, nor in the broader sense of how culture is translated for the other
- ▶ Within translation studies, much of the research has centred on the West, and usually takes formerly colonized cultures as the other pole of study.

# Why Translation

- ▶ Revealing the inextricable links between translation and power.
  - It is shown to represent not only a means of establishing and maintaining dominance, but also of resisting it, and *revealing* the power dynamics that hold between states and between languages, beyond and behind the rhetoric put forward by both sides
  - It offers a certain measure of impartiality and a means of assessing power dynamics
- ▶ Enriching enquiries into the power dynamics

# Building Images: exploring 21st century Sino–African dynamics through cultural exchange and translation

## ▶ Research context

- In both the popular and academic discourses, there is a marked discrepancy between the discourses put forward by China, and the West.
- While Chinese leaders, together with the majority of African leaders, promote the ‘win–win’, friendship–and–equality discourse, reports and scholarship in the West have a tendency to view Chinese involvement with suspicion, and even alarm, accusing China of taking part in a new ‘scramble for Africa’.

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# Research questions

- What image(s) of Africa is (are) being ‘translated’ for the Chinese, and vice versa?
- Who decides what is to be translated, for whom, and for what reasons?
- What do these images reveal about the nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century Sino-African dynamics?

# The 1<sup>st</sup> part of the project

- A global survey of post-2000 translations of African literature into Chinese, and of Chinese literature available through translation in Africa.
  - What African literature has been translated into Chinese and vice versa?
  - What previously existing translations were there, and which of these are currently in print and available (or have been reprinted since 2000)?
  - What presence does African literature have on the Chinese book market (which publishers, how/where is it sold, how widely available), and vice versa?
  - How are the texts selected for translation (by whom)?
  - How is African/Chinese literature presented to the reading public (e.g. through book covers, blurbs, other para-textual material)?
- What do these translation patterns reveal about Sino-African power dynamics?

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> part: Contextualizing the findings through a multiple case-study

- Which aspects of Chinese/African cultures are represented in the 2014 'Focus on Africa' in China, and in the 2015 'Focus on China' in Africa?
- Which African films, documentaries, plays, concerts, and other types of cultural products are made available in China/Benin ?
- How does Africa/China feature in news reports in the Chinese/Benin media?
- **In all of the above**
- Which themes/images emerge most strongly, and are any themes noticeably absent?
- How are these images framed or explained or translated for the receiving audience?
- Who is responsible for selecting and shaping these instances of cultural translation?
- What do these instances of exchange/translation reveal about Sino-African dynamics?



Online-Africa Relations: Building Images

**Image Building through Cultural  
Cooperation, Media Representation, and  
Communication**

Forthcoming, Routledge

# China's Media and Soft Power in Africa: Promotion and Perceptions



## Both adopt interdisciplinary approaches

- Both bring together scholars from different academic disciplines and nationally diverse groups
  1. Exploration of the images projected and the messages conveyed to generate or influence public perceptions. The various strategies employed in constructing and shaping the images and messages are also examined.
  2. Examination of the different moments of China's soft power efforts in Africa—projection, representations and reception—for an understanding of how successful China is in spreading its influence in Africa.

# The importance of interdisciplinary studies

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