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Soft Power and Tourism: A Study of Chinese Outbound Tourism to Africa

Yu-Wen Chen & Niall Duggan[1]

Abstract: The increase of Sino-African interactions in trade, aid and investments has attracted Chinese tourists to Africa. The Beijing Action Plan of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) outlines China's cultural diplomacy in Africa, delineating a number of areas of cultural cooperation: education; press, publishing and media; and tourism and people-to-people exchange programs in academia and think tanks among young people, women and athletes. Though scholars of International relations (IR) have detected that tourism is one way of manifesting soft power, they do not feel comfortable nor ready to place the promotion of tourism into standard IR discourse. This is in contrast to scholars of tourism studies who have recognized the political nature of China's outbound tourism, particularly to less-developed areas such as Africa. In this paper, we have argued that the Chinese government uses outbound tourism to perform its perceived relationship with African countries; that is, Beijing aspires to be seen as a benign rising power willing to help weaker countries develop and establish harmonious ties. It is hard to separate the economic and cultural functions of outbound tourism, each of which reinforces the other, although not without limits. We find that not all African countries' national tourism policies are capable of, or willing to prioritize, attracting Chinese tourists. Moreover, we find that South Africa is most active in working with public relations companies in China to promote South Africa as a tourist destination.

Keywords: China, Africa, tourist promotion, soft power, South Africa

Introduction

Sino-African relations have increasingly become a subject of exploration among scholars, journalists and development policy practitioners (Large, 2008: 57). The focus of this article is to examine an area of Sino-African relations that has not been fully researched – that is, how China exercises its soft power using outbound tourism to Africa. As a part of the foreign policy strategy of peace and development of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China has been cultivating various relationships with developing regions. In Africa, China's policy aims to secure natural resources and consumer markets and to establish China's status as a leader in the developing world (Duggan, 2015).

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The increase of Sino-African interactions has attracted Chinese tourists to Africa. The Beijing Action Plan (2013-2015) of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) outlines China's cultural diplomacy in Africa, delineating a number of areas of cultural cooperation: education; press, publishing and media; tourism; etc. (Li & Rønning, 2013: 2). Non-academic reports on this genre of topic usually emphasize commercial marketing. Scholars who specialize in tourism studies (e.g. Tse, 2013; Arlt, 2013), interestingly, have pointed out clearly that Chinese outbound tourism cannot be understood as mere commercial activity. It is unique with regard to its political nature. Tse (2013) in his paper entitled "Chinese Outbound Tourism as a Form of Diplomacy" gave a number of examples of how the Chinese government uses outbound tourism to achieve its political aims, such as granting foreign countries Approved Destination Status (ADS) and encouraging mainland Chinese citizens to visit Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, as well as discouraging Chinese tourists from visiting Japan. There is growing agreement among scholars in tourism studies that both outbound and inbound tourism as a forum of people-to-people exchange is a tool of soft power (Stumpf & Swanger, 2015; Gou, Li & Wang, 2014; Weaver, 2015; Kwek, Wang & Weaver, 2014). Facilitating visits to less-developed countries is another example of how China uses soft-power diplomacy (Tse, 2013).

"Soft power" in this article builds on Joseph Nye's definition: "It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies" (2004: x). Soft power is developed and maintained over time through such medium as public diplomacy, the export of culture, and people-to-people exchanges (Melissen, 2005; Watanabe and McConnell, 2008). While soft power is not a tool for all states to deploy, states – China in particular – do take steps to increase their soft power (Paradise, 2009; Kurlantzick, 2007; Gill & Yanzhong, 2006). While many international relations (IR) scholars have indicated that tourism is one way for states to increase and maintain soft power, they do not feel comfortable nor ready to place the promotion of tourism into standard IR discourse. Scholars, such as Hollinshead & Chun (2012), who do research tourism as a source of soft power tend to focus on inbound tourism. The focus of this article is to fill that gap by examining the often-overlooked political effect of outbound tourism promotion (Richter, 1983).

Methodologically, we rely on desk research of relevant policy papers and campaign materials, as well as on two semi-structured interviews. The first was with an (anonymous) representative working for the South African Tourism Bureau to promote Chinese inbound

tourism. The second was with Tichaona Chifamba, news director of the Xinhua News Agency in Zimbabwe. Chifamba frequently comments on Sino-African tourism in the media. In the next section, we will begin with a literature review to provide a context on how the influx of Chinese tourists to Africa has taken shape.

Literature Review

Our literature review deals with two topics: 1) Sino-African relations and 2) the increase of Chinese tourists to Africa.

Sino-African Relations: A Historical Overview

Since the founding of the PRC, Africa has played a major role in China's international politics. This relationship, which has deep roots in history, has blossomed in recent years. From the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to the opening of China's economy in 1978, Beijing's African policy was heavily influenced by ideology (Li, 2007: 70). "There was the perception that the Third World offered China an arena in which to achieve its political/ideological objectives" (Yu, 1988: 850). Many scholars working in the area of Sino-African relations, such as Bruce D. Larkin (1971), believe that China had an ideological commitment to world revolution, and that this commitment was the driving force behind China's role in Africa (Larkin, 1971: 8). Mao himself claimed that China needed to play a role in the struggle against colonialism, imperialism and revisionism in the Third World.

Another crucial factor was the international isolation that the PRC experienced after the Chinese Civil War. George T. Yu explains that Africa offered the PRC "international recognition and support as the sole legitimate government of China" (Yu, 1988: 851). In a search for allies to break its diplomatic isolation, the fledgling PRC found in anti-colonialism a *cause commune* with African countries fighting for their independence. The colonial question, which concerned the peoples of Africa and Asia that convened in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, accelerated the PRC's involvement with Africa. The Bandung Conference laid the ideological and philosophical foundation for South-South cooperation (Choucri, 1969), a spirit and logic that are still evident and invoked by the Sino-African relationship today.

China's engagement on the continent also had technical and economic dimensions, albeit limited or symbolic. A large number of Chinese technicians and doctors have been shipped to Africa since the foundation of the PRC. The improvement to the lives of the people of the

poorest countries in the world as a direct result of this aid has been palpable (Snow, 1988: 159). Most independent African countries had officially recognized the PRC as a nation by the 1960s.

In the 1980s, Chinese involvement stagnated briefly as the PRC underwent major modernization in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping's reforms distracted China from working on its relations with Africa. When Gerald Segal (1992: 126), a leading thinker and writer on international affairs, wrote that Africa "will remain the least important area for Chinese foreign policy," he seemed to have good grounds to believe so. However, China returned to Africa – if indeed it had ever left – with force in the early 1990s.

Two factors brought about a change in China's attitude toward African states from the 1990s onward: First was the relative diplomatic isolation that ensued after the Tiananmen Square incident. Unlike Western countries, most African governments displayed a certain level of understanding toward Beijing's handling of the Tiananmen Square incident (Taylor, 2006: 62). A convergence of views as to the relativity or non-universality of the liberal democratic model revived the spirit of Bandung between China and Africa.

The second factor concerns economic matters. China's phenomenal economic growth resulted in a mounting need for energy and raw materials to fuel the Chinese economy, and a subsequent need for markets in which to sell Chinese products. In the late 1990s, the Chinese government launched a strategy, which encouraged Chinese state-owned enterprises and privately owned companies to expand into foreign markets. Africa became a top destination for a number of these companies. In 2009, China became Africa's number one trading partner. From 2009 to 2011, the scale of Sino-African trade expanded rapidly. During this period the total volume of China-African trade reached US$198.49 billion. Of this, US$85.319 billion consisted of China's exports to Africa, up 16.7% from the previous year, while China's imports from Africa accounted for US$113.171 billion, up by 21.4% (Information Office of the Chinese State Council, 2013). Natural resources accounted for the lion's share of Africa's exports to China, and huge Chinese demand has raised the price of these products, increasing overall GDP growth in Africa. In 2014, bilateral trade reached US$221.88 billion, two percentage points higher than China's total foreign trade in the same period. Moreover, the export of mechanical and electronic products and high-tech products increased by 13% since 2013. The turnover from completed Chinese contract projects in Africa was US$46 billion, up by 26% since 2013 (Chinese Ministry of Commerce, 2015). This has resulted in more kinds of exchanges (e.g., education, aid) and has encouraged more Chinese tourists to entertain the

possibility of exploring the African continent (Ministry of Tourism of South Africa, 2012). This paper will examine this phenomenon in the following sub-section.

Why Are More Chinese Tourists Visiting Africa Now?

Personal interests as well as institutional factors incorporating political and commercial interests are driving forces behind this increase. First, as China's economy rises, Chinese citizens can increasingly afford trips to other parts of the world. China is the world's current top spender in outbound tourism. According to estimates from the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in early 2015, China's expenditure in outbound tourism in 2014 was US$165 billion, a 20% increase on 2013's expenditure (World Tourism Organization, 2014).

In 2014, cultural similarities, geographical proximity and hence lower travel costs continued to make Asia the most popular destination for Chinese tourists. The second most popular continent for Chinese tourists in 2014 was Europe. Africa surpassed America to take third spot in attracting most Chinese tourists in 2014 (Travel China Guide, 2014).

The appreciation of China's currency and the depreciation of some African currencies in recent years have made travelling to Africa more affordable for Chinese tourists (Edinger & Lu, 2013). Many middle-class Chinese travellers are likely to have visited Europe, America and Asia. Some start to search for destinations that are more "exotic" for their growing appetite. For the Chinese, being able to travel to exotic foreign places and having adventures is something that one can show off to family members, colleagues and friends. The bourgeoning of various Chinese social media platforms fosters this culture (Hou & Wang, 2014). Africa is a continent with natural landscape and cultures that are starkly different from Asia, Europe and America. Countries such as Egypt, Kenya and South Africa offer novel experiences that have caught the attention of Chinese travel agencies. Kim, Guo and Argusa's 2005 survey found that Egypt is the third most attractive destination for Chinese tourists (after Germany and Australia) due to its rich history and culture. However, respondents to this survey also revealed that Egypt is their least preferred destination in terms of "good weather" and "safety".

Apart from the increasing capacity and interest of Chinese tourists to visit Africa, the rise of Chinese commercial activities in Africa has allowed the establishment of new flight routes, such as non-stop flights between Beijing and Johannesburg launched in January 2012 by South African Airways (SAA). This makes travelling to Africa much easier.

Institutional supports at various levels from both the Chinese government and African governments are also crucial. For instance, the FOCAC has encouraged closer tourism. Beijing has also granted more and more countries the Approved Destination Status (ADS), which is designed to encourage outbound Chinese tourism.

Chinese Outbound Tourism's Inherent Political Nature

Scholars in the discipline of tourist marketing and management (e.g. Tse, 2013; Arlt, 2013, Mak, 2013) have already recognized that China's granting of ADS is inherently a political decision, closely linked to China's strategic relations with a foreign country. Chinese citizens' overseas leisure trips are mostly guided by the ADS policy.

Outbound Tourism as a Political Tool

The ADS policy permits citizens to take overseas leisure trips on group package tours to countries that have negotiated an ADS agreement.[2] Beijing considers several criteria when giving the ADS to a foreign country (Kim, Guo & Argusa, 2005). Needless to say, the candidate country should have a good relationship with China politically. Benign political relations between states pave the way for cooperation.

In addition, several criteria gauge whether Chinese visitors can enjoy attractive tourist amenities, travel safely and freely without discrimination, and gain easy access to transportation. Finally, there are criteria to guarantee reciprocity, meaning that not only does the number of Chinese tourists to African countries increase, but the number of visitors from African countries to China should also increase (Kim, Guo & Argusa, 2005).

Despite the principle of reciprocity, China understands that it cannot attract equivalent numbers of tourists and obtain equivalent economic returns from less-developed countries. Table 1 gives us an overview of countries that have received the ADS throughout the years. Egypt was the first African country to be granted the ADS (in 2002). The latest African country to receive the ADS was Rwanda in 2013. Globally, China granted its most recent

[2] Between 1949 and 1982, few Chinese citizens travelled overseas except government officials, students and some businessmen. After 1990, leisure travel was finally approved as a legitimate reason for Chinese citizens to travel abroad. Since then, China takes an incremental approach in liberalizing overseas leisure travel. That entails negotiating agreements with different countries to permit Chinese tour groups to visit foreign destinations (Arita, La Croix, Mak, 2012: 3).

ADS to Ukraine in 2014, bringing the number of countries with ADS to 117. In total, 19 African countries have an ADS (Table 1).

Table 1: ADS Agreement by Year

Year	Recipients	Cumulative Numbers of Recipients
1983	Hong Kong, Macau	2
1988	Thailand	3
1990	Malaysia, Singapore	5
1992	Philippines	6
1998	South Korea	7
1999	Australia, New Zealand	9
2000	Brunei, Cambodia, Japan, Myanmar, Vietnam	14
2002	**Egypt**, Indonesia, Malta, Nepal, Turkey	19
2003	Croatia, Cuba, Germany, Hungary, India, Maldives, Pakistan, **South Africa**, Sri Lanka	28
2004	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, **Ethiopia**, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, **Kenya**, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, **Mauritius**, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, **Seychelles**, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, **Tanzania**, **Tunisia**, **Zambia**, **Zimbabwe**	63
2005	Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Fiji, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Mexico, Northern Mariana Islands, Peru, Russia, United Kingdom, Vanuatu	76
2006	Bahamas, Grenada, Mongolia, Tonga	80
2007	Andorra, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, **Uganda**, **Morocco**, Monaco, **Namibia**, Venezuela, Oman, Syria	91
2008	French Polynesia, Israel, Taiwan, United States	95
2009	**Cape Verde**, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, **Ghana**, Guyana, **Mali**, Montenegro, Papua New Guinea, United Arab Emirates	104
2010	Canada, Lebanon, Federated States of Micronesia, North Korea, Uzbekistan, Serbia	110
2011	Iran	111
2012	**Madagascar**, Columbia, Samoa, **Cameroon**	115
2013	**Rwanda**	116
2014	Ukraine	117

Source: Re-organized from China National Tourism Administration (http://www.cnta.gov.cn/html/2009-5/2009-5-13-10-53-54953.html)
Note: African countries are marked in bold.

It would be hard to imagine that a government would encourage its citizens to visit places like Rwanda and Ukraine and expect reciprocal returns. While elaborating on Beijing's logic to

sign each ADS agreement is beyond the scope of this paper, we aim to explain that outbound tourism to African countries is often used a tool for Beijing to exercise its soft-power diplomacy, as noted by Tony Tse (2013), a scholar of tourism studies.

Outbound Tourism as Soft Power Diplomacy

Soft power, according to Joseph S. Nye, occurs "when one country gets other countries to want what it wants" via "intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions" (Nye, 2005: 11). For Nye, soft power primarily relies on three resources: a country's culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). But combining these resources is not always easy (Nye, 2005). Nye has modified and enriched his definition of soft power several times in his intellectual journey, sometimes as a result of the criticisms and comments from other scholars. Among his critics, for example, is Todd Hall (2010). Hall is not satisfied with the pure effect of "attraction," which Nye believes is the main mechanism for soft power to work. The effect of attraction might sound intuitive, but it is not empirically testable (Hall, 2010). There might be discrepancies between the soft power messages sent to the target audience and the target audience's subjective understanding of the message. The question of how attraction can be translated into foreign policy outcomes is thus debatable (Ferguson, 2003).

The soft-power message that Beijing seeks to convey to African states is that China is a benevolent power that is willing to take care of weaker and smaller countries and form harmonious relations with others. In recent years, IR scholars such as Shih and Ying (2013) have argued that to understand the Chinese foreign policy, one has to recognize that pre-modern Confucianism and modern socialism have deep imprints on the Chinese perspective of international relations. While China may have successfully been socialized to become a nation-state and act like a nation-state, it still has a "civilizational" way of perceiving world order (Wang, 2008; Shih & Yin, 2013). Harmonious relations with other players are inherently important. This means that China does not wish to be seen as rising at the expense of others (Shih & Yin, 2013). It often unilaterally makes compromises, particularly vis-à-vis smaller players, to demonstrate its willingness to make sacrifices for the common good of the harmonious world (Ibid.). Previously, we noted that Chinese tourists bring more economic benefits to African countries than vice versa. This is one example in which Beijing shows that it makes sacrifices to help weaker counterparts. Apart from this, performing the role of a

donor, trade partner, counterhegemonic power and developing state vis-à-vis weaker African counterparts all serve such political purposes (Barr, 2011; Holyk, 2011; Kurlantzick, 2007; Huang & Sheng, 2006; Sheng, 2010; Paradise, 2009; Wang, 2008; Guo, 2007; Luo, 2012). These factors have all been highlighted as part of China's soft power, used without coercion to convince African counterparts of China's benign nature.

Politics dictate China's usage of outbound tourism to different African countries. The medium that allows Beijing to reach its political aim is not just economic but also cultural, as tourism essentially encourages the encountering of peoples from China and African countries. In this process, exchanges of cultures occur. In fact, since China's return to Africa in the mid-1990s, cultural exchange has become a factor in Sino-African relations. The head of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' African Department, Counsellor Wang Shiting, stated that "Africa has always been a top priority of China's foreign policy agenda because there is not only the common interest but most importantly there is a shared emotional bondage between China and Africa that spans over centuries" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Liberia, 2011). Much cultural interchange occurs naturally, either through immigration or tourism between China and Africa.

Not all scholars and experts (Corkin, 2014; Toh, 2013), however, are optimistic about China's ability to improve its soft power and using it as a mean to achieve the harmonious world order to which China aspires. Nye and Wang (2009) outlined the need for China to develop a strategy with soft power at its core to counteract growing fears among its neighbours of China's growing economic and military might. Nye (2013) highlights that, despite China's intention to increase its soft power, the areas in which it has invested have not created soft power due to their actions in other areas of international affairs. Consider the Philippines: Nye (2013) stated that "establishing, say, a Confucius Institute in Manila to teach Chinese culture might help produce soft power, but it is less likely to do so in a context where China has just bullied the Philippines over possession of Scarborough Reef" (Nye, 2013). Despite Nye's comments on the development of Chinese soft power, there seems to be an overall increase in Chinese soft power on the global stage. Even Nye noted that Chinese soft power in Africa and Latin America is increasing (Ibid.).

He (2009:11) argues that it is only in Africa where soft power has had an impact. Many others, however, do not believe that Chinese soft power in Africa is so highly developed. Academics, such as Corkin (2014), claim that "China has a moderate amount of soft power in

Africa". Some have gone further to state that China has no soft power in Africa, just economic power (Toh, 2013).

Our stance is in line with Li Mingjing (2009), who argues that whether a certain source of power becomes soft or hard depends on how one uses it. This is different from Nye's (2005) resource-based soft power. Economic incentives, such as those provided by Chinese tourism to Africa, can be considered soft power. This is because those economic incentives are not used to coerce African counterparts. If economic tools are used to coerce, they will be considered hard power.

To maximize economic benefits for African countries, local tourist operators need to learn Chinese language and culture, as well as to understand Chinese preferences and behaviours (Kings, 2014). Part of this knowledge is accumulated via interaction with Chinese people and learning by doing.

While those economic and cultural activities do facilitate exchanges between peoples of China and African countries, how these can actually meet Beijing's foreign policy aim is hard to measure. The effectiveness of such exchanges cannot be exaggerated either. For instance, the expectation that Chinese tourists will serve as "ambassadors for China" (Dynon, 2013) is more a beautiful slogan than reality. Chinese tourists in Africa generally come in groups on packaged tours. Their destinations and routes are normally fixed. They do not get to meet the locals who have no experience with China. Rather, they meet locals who have been more or less trained to meet their needs. Accordingly, the outreach of "Chinese ambassadors" is actually rather limited.

Furthermore, cultural encounters are not always peaceful. Misunderstandings and cultural clashes can damage the relationships between peoples and create unpleasant impressions of one another. Again, how such individual-level and cultural-level of exchanges can affect state-level relations is unclear and difficult to measure. There is great ambiguity in evaluating the soft-power influence of China's outbound tourism to Africa. We do not think we can offer a comprehensive measurement. What we attempt to do in the following is only to examine how African countries respond to the idea of attracting Chinese tourists to Africa. After all, China cannot unilaterally wield its influence. African countries need to make sense of China's rise and intention and to decipher what China's move implies for one's relationship with China (Shih, 2013). This understanding is eventually linked to each African state's self-understanding, interest and capability to interact with China.

An Examination of African Countries' Efforts to Attract Chinese Tourists

African countries have different levels of capability to lure Chinese tourists (Fu, Xue & Deng, 2014). Here we draw from existing global indicators, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) created by the World Economic Forum every two years. The TTCI is generated on the basis of a number of indicators, ranging from a country's general environment (e.g., business environment, safety and security, health and hygiene, human resources and labor market, availability of information, and communication technologies), to travel and tourism enabling conditions (e.g., prioritization of travel and tourism, international openness, price competitiveness, environmental sustainability), to infrastructure (e.g., air transport infrastructure, ground and port infrastructure, tourist service infrastructure), to natural and cultural resources.

According to the TTCI, Europe as a region normally fares much better than other regions of the world in terms of competitiveness in travel and tourism. Africa, by contrast, often fares worse in terms of global competitiveness. Although Africa has much to offer in terms of its nature and cultural heritage, the continent as a whole has much to improve with regard to its infrastructure, safety, health and hygienic conditions to attract tourists from other continents (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013: xxv-xxvii).

Table 2 compares African countries' performance in the 2013 and 2015 TTCI reports.[3] South Africa, Seychelles, Mauritius and Morocco are the top four African countries, although the order of ranking varies in both years. These four countries also have received China's ADS. South Africa has the best TTCI in the African region, but its global ranking is actually only 48 out of 141 countries in the latest (2015) report. Egypt, Cape Verde, Namibia, Botswana and Kenya feature among the top 10 African nations in both the 2013 and 2015 reports. Gambia was ranked 8th in the 2013 Index but fell to the 15th in the 2015 Index. Tunisia, not surveyed in the 2013 report, was ranked 7th in Africa in the 2015 report.

[3] The measures for TTCI are not exactly the same in 2013 and 2015. The coverage of countries being analyzed in 2013 and 2015 are not exactly the same either due to absence of data. For detailed information of the research data and methodology, please consult the World Economic Forum's reports directly.

Table 2: Africa's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Indexes 2013 and 2015

	2015 Index		2013 Index	
Country	Regional Rank	Global Rank	Regional Rank	Global Rank
Seychelles*	**2**	54	**1**	38
Mauritius*	**3**	56	**2**	58
South Africa*	**1**	48	**3**	64
Morocco*	**4**	62	**4**	71
Tunisia*	**7**	79	No data	
Egypt*	**8**	83	**5**	85
Cape Verde*	**9**	86	**6**	87
Namibia*	**5**	70	**7**	91
Gambia	15	109	**8**	92
Botswana	**10**	88	**9**	94
Kenya*	**6**	78	**10**	96
Rwanda*	12	98	11	105
Senegal	16	112	12	107
Zambia*	13	107	13	108
Tanzania*	11	93	14	109
Uganda	17	114	15	116
Ghana*	21	120	16	117
Gabon	25	124	No data	
Zimbabwe*	18	115	17	118
Swaziland	14	108	18	119
Ethiopia*	20	118	19	120
Cameroon*	23	122	20	121
Malawi	26	126	21	124
Mozambique	29	130	22	125
Ivory Coast	19	117	23	126
Nigeria	30	131	24	127
Burkina Faso	No data		25	128
Mali*	27	128	26	128
Benin	No data		27	130
Madagascar*	22	121	28	131
Algeria	24	123	29	132
Mauritania	33	137	30	134
Angola	34	139	No data	
Lesotho	28	129	31	135
Guinea	35	140	32	136
Sierra Leone	31	132	33	137
Burundi	32	135	34	138
Chad	36	141	35	139

Sources: Re-organized from Blanke & Chiesa (2013) and Crotti & Misrahi (2015).
Note 1: Top ten countries in each category of measurement are marked in bold.
*Note 2: * means a country has received China's ADS.*

African Responses

If China's soft power is really working, this should be evident from both governmental and non-governmental African actors (An, 1998). These actors should accept the importance of increasing Chinese outbound tourism to Africa and prioritize it in their policies. In other words, the target audience of China's soft power, such as governmental and non-governmental agents from African countries, start to feel that they are stakeholders of the issue of promoting Chinese visits to Africa. What we are examining here can be considered as the representational side of soft power, which Hall (2010: 210) defined as the ability of a state to "frame issues, advance their own interpretations, and consciously seek to shape the beliefs of others" (Hall, 2010: 210). Representational power can overlap with reputational power, defined as the manner in which reputations of a state can make it influential in some specific issues (Ibid.: 209). On the issue of Chinese outbound tourism to Africa, China's reputation as a top spender in the world makes many countries interested in tapping into the Chinese tourist market. The representational soft power of China, however, can be explored by examining whether African governments would prioritize attracting Chinese tourists in policies.

Our finding shows that while some African countries have formal or informal policies towards promoting tourism, not all of them have considered attracting Chinese tourists as a policy objective. This, however, does not mean that private or commercial actors in these countries are not interested in luring Chinese visitors.

Tanzania, for instance, has had a National Tourism Policy in place since 1991. Nevertheless, the document mentions nothing about China (Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of Tanzania, 1999). Mauritius has a document that discusses how to position and brand Mauritius in the world in general, covering issues including trade, investment and tourists. China is identified as an important trade partner (Government of Mauritius, 2015). However, nothing related to attracting Chinese tourists is specified in the governmental document. It is worth noting, though, that private actors such as Lux Hotel Group has strategically tapped into the Chinese market to compensate for the declines of European visitors to Mauritius after the global financial crisis in 2008 (Kromberg, 2014).

The most active African government in luring Chinese visitors appears to be South Africa. In fact, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Morocco are the only four African countries that have set up promotion agencies in China (Ibid.). Among these four countries, South Africa was the first to be awarded the ADS in 2003. China is identified by the South African tourism policy as one of the target markets due to the growth of China's middle class, whose

members might be able to afford travel to South Africa. In 2011, the opening of two new visa applications in China and the South African travel promotion campaign targeting China further boosted the number of Chinese tourists (Shankman & Ali, 2013).

One year after South Africa received the ADS, Zimbabwe followed suit. In the absence of foreign direct investment, tourism has been identified by the government of Zimbabwe as one of the areas in which it can generate much needed foreign currency. Also, in the face of Western-backed economic sanctions targeting President Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean government adopted a Look East Policy under which it seeks to boost its economy by engaging with Asian countries.[4]

The Victoria Falls is one of Zimbabwe's prime attractions. Some Chinese believe that the famous waterfalls are in South Africa, however, due to strong marketing by the South Africans.[5] According to the statistics available (Shankman & Ali, 2013), Zimbabwe received around 30,000 Chinese tourists in 2011, more than three times the 2007 figure. In 2015, Zimbabwe is expecting 50,000 Chinese arrivals. Zimbabwe's tourism bureau has a Chinese-language website that provides information about travelling in the country.[6] Despite reports about plans for a new online visa application system and Air Zimbabwe's offer of flights between China and Zimbabwe (Wang & Yuan, 2006; Xinhua News, 2013), these are not in place currently in 2015. At one stage, Air Zimbabwe did launch direct flights between Harare and Beijing, but they came to a halt due to operational challenges.[7]

Both Namibia and Morocco received the ADS in 2007. Since then, the Namibia Tourism Board has been active in luring Chinese tourists. Namibia participated in the 2009 Chinese International Travel Mart, the largest professional travel mart in Asia, as well as the 2010 Shanghai Expo Mart to try to raise the country's visibility (Chinese Website of Namibia Tourism Board, 2009). Morocco is the only country among the four that does not have a Chinese website to provide tourism information. Morocco planned to ease visa applications and to offer direct flights by Royal Air Maroc. However, like Zimbabwe's plans, Morocco's plans did not come to fruition in 2014 (Kromberg, 2014). Overall, South Africa appears to be

[4] Interview with Tichaona Chifamba, news director of Xinhua News Agency Zimbabwe on July 30, 2015.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Please see Chinese Website of Zimbabwe's Tourism Bureau, http://zimbabwetourism.cn.
[7] Interview with Tichaona Chifamba, news director of Xinhua News Agency Zimbabwe on July 30, 2015.

the most receptive country that is willing to and capable of promoting Chinese outbound tourism. In the following section, we look further into the case of South Africa.

The Case of South Africa

The South African government recognizes tourism's significance for fuelling economic growth. After South Africa obtained the ADS in 2003, however, arrivals from China to South Africa did not increase. In 2010, the South African Tourism China Office was set up.[8] The role of the China office is to conduct research on the Chinese market and to guide Chinese travel agencies to develop new and high-quality products and itineraries to satisfy the varied needs of Chinese consumers.

Since the China office came into being, Chinese visitations to South Africa grew with momentum. In 2012, China has become the 4th-largest overseas source market for South Africa. In 2013, Chinese arrivals, including those from Hong Kong, to South Africa reached 151,847, representing a 14.7% increase over 2012. In 2014, China also became a core market for South Africa along with the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and India.

Among the four African countries with a China office, South Africa's China office documents its marketing strategy most closely (South African Tourism, 2010). It has identified special "segments" of the Chinese population that it believes are most likely to visit South Africa. The China office provided us with a summarized statement during our research in 2015. The document clearly differentiates between short-term and medium-to-long-term targets. Short-term targets are jetsetters and worldly travellers with the highest probability to visit South Africa in the near future. Medium-to-long-term targets are middle-aged travellers who would normally travel with a spouse and children to exotic places.[9]

In cooperation with public relations companies in China, the China office has held a number of activities, not directed towards individual consumers, but towards travel agencies and their agents instead. Targeting travel agents is understandable, as most outbound tourism

[8] South African Tourism also has offices in cities such as Amsterdam, Mumbai, Sydney, Frankfurt, London, and New York.

[9] In the medium-to-long term, South African Tourism China Office also intends to reach out to Hong Kong, Macau as well as neighboring countries such as Japan and South Korea. The idea is to use China as a hub to extend the market. From an operational point of view, the strategy plan for China can serve as a benchmark for these neighboring markets, although there is still a need to tailor to the different conditions (e.g., cultural nuances) of neighboring countries.

conducted by Chinese visitors is through approved travel agents. Travel agents can serve as vehicles to disseminate information to interested travellers.

For instance, in 2012, a South African Travel Experts Competition was held in Beijing. In the first phase, travel agents took training courses, and after a test, they were granted the title of an "expert". In the second phase, travel agents designed travel itineraries for visiting South Africa.

As China has the largest online population in the world, and Chinese consumers heavily use the Internet when making travelling decisions (South African Tourism, 2010), the China office also held a contest on Weibo, a popular Chinese microblogging platform that enables travel agents to compete in promoting vacations to South Africa. The winning agents were awarded with free visits to South Africa (Luo & Lu, 2009: 202).

Apart from direct promotion in China, at the state level, both governments also tactically designated 2014 as "the Year of South Africa in China" and 2015 as "the Year of China in South Africa". This strategy is used to increase the communications and exchanges between China and South Africa. As the bilateral relationships in the aspects of politics, economics, art and culture are enhanced, it is expected that a heightened level of tourism, trade flow and investments between the two countries will be achieved.

Challenges for African Countries

While throughout the years there were efforts from both the South African and the Chinese governments to make visa application easier and more convenient, the new South African visa policy that came into place in 2015 is actually going to offset the efforts exerted before. The new visa policy is more stringent and imposes stricter immigration laws. This will negatively affect South Africa's travel and tourism competitiveness. The changing of institutions and policies at the governmental level, which might not intentionally aim to harm tourism, does have negative impacts on the attraction of foreign visits to South Africa. In fact, South Africa is not alone. Zimbabwe and Morocco, as previously noted, have also failed to ease visa application.

The inherent instability of most African countries in terms of safety and health conditions is detrimental to South Africa's as well as other African countries' efforts to attract Chinese visits. The Ebola outbreak, although it did not occur in all African countries, has tarnished the positive image of Africa that some tourism promotional campaigns seek to establish (Imminews247, 2015). The same is true for the terrorist attacks in Kenya and in Mali.

Negative reputations in the international community are detrimental for African countries politically and economically. Sustainable tourist destinations are hard to maintain in Africa. These macro-structural challenges are hindrances to attracting Chinese visitors.

Conclusion

Compared with scholars of tourism studies, IR scholars are relatively slow in exploring the linkage between Chinese tourism, foreign policy and soft-power diplomacy. In this paper, we have argued that the Chinese government uses outbound tourism to perform its perceived relationship with African countries; that is, Beijing aspires to be seen as a benign rising power that is willing to help weaker countries develop and establish harmonious ties. It is hard to separate the economic and cultural functions of outbound tourism, both of which reinforce each other, although not without limits. While we did not explore China's hard power in Africa, the reality is that soft power, as much as the hard power of economic exploitation and military build-up, has enabled China to extend its global influence.

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