Can News also be 'Made in China?'

Bisi Olawuyi

Department of Communication & Language Arts
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: bisi.olawuyi@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the growing influence of China in the world and the possibility of it dominating international news or prescribing a journalistic template that could suit the normative developmental challenges of Africa. Under the aegis of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Third World countries demanded a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). This was to challenge the journalistic philosophy of the West. Unfortunately, Third World countries were not able to realise the objectives of NWICO chiefly due to the Cold War politics of that period. However, the challenges of the 21st century have made the need to restructure global information architecture more urgent now than before. The position of this paper is that since Africa looks to China for economic sustainability, would it be out of place for the continent to also imbibe China's journalistic model as an alternative model to cater to the aspirations that led to the demand for new world information and communication order?

Keywords: News, Made-in-China, NWICO, Global information architecture, Africa.

Introduction
News, in international relations, is not merely the reportage of an event; it is much more than that. It is used as a weapon of psychological warfare to cast issues, events, and even people in a mould of what usually is a self-serving narrative concocted to manipulate behaviour. News, therefore, is an inherently and subtly loaded ideological concept that requires no casual reading to uncover its sub-text because news is much more than what can be 'read' at the superficial level. The real gist of a news report is

not in what is read, seen, or heard. Hence, an understanding of news requires that one has the cognitive flexibility to uncover its metanarrative. So, news transcends the plain projection of information that has come to be associated with media reportage; it is inbuilt with bias. At a "very simplistic level, Levasseur (n.d) defines media bias as "an unjustifiable favouritism" in the news coverage by the media. Accordingly, "when the media transmit biased news reports, those reports present viewers with an inaccurate, unbalanced, or unfair view of the world around them."

The media seduces the mind with its narratives which are deliberately nuanced to manufacture consent through slanted reportage. Also, Harcup and O'Neill (2017) reiterate that bias in media reportage is primarily associated with the ignorance of some journalists on what event counts as news. According to them, the response of journalists to providing definitive insights into what they consider to be news is a revelation of bewilderment that questions their credibility in the news production process. When some journalists were "…asked how they define news," they sometimes reply: "I know it when I see it." Pressed on why something has been deemed newsworthy, a typical response is: "because it just is!" (Brighton & Foy, cited in Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, para. 1). The implication of journalists' complete reliance on their *gut feeling* on what should pass for news is a lucid manifestation that is bereft of any scientific parameters for filtering what is and what is not news. It is imperative to note that whatever information is processed through such impulsive behaviour "arguably obscure as much as they reveal about news selection" (Schultz, cited in Harcup & O'Neill, 2017, para.1).

van Djik's (2008, p. 195) perspective of news as an ideological construct is foregrounded on the sociocognitive perspective, emphasising how underlying ideologies frame media contents, control more specific group attitudes, and how personal mental models of journalists about the news production process. The founder and president of the Media Research Centre, America's largest and most respected watchdog organisation, L. Brent Bozell III, reiterating the subjective parameters employed in the news selection process, describe the media as a *Weapon of Mass Distortion*, the title of a book that "documents exactly how the news media deliberately attempt to set the national agenda through their slanted coverage." In other words, the media employ images and discourse to shape how people make sense of the world (Omoera, 2014).

The ideological marker that shapes news as a discourse that furtively prescribes a pragmatic, but subjective view of reality, is also

reiterated by Susan Moeller in her introduction to the article entitled "Four Habits of International News Reporting."The author opens with an argument that seems to provide a nuanced perspective to George Gerbner's position that "we live in a world erected through the stories we tell." According to Moeller, "there's never just one story that can be told. Some conventions are followed, and following those conventions creates a certain journalistic authority: a narrative of events that presumes to be *the* narrative" (1999, p. 1). Chimamanda Adichie, perhaps, well informed about the 'single storyism' in her 2009 TED talk entitled "The Danger of a Single Story" cautions about reducing complex human beings and situations to a "single narrative" that fails to account for the merits in other perspectives. Single Storyism denies that virtues have vices (Brooks, 2016, para. 1) and that virtues do not have a vice. Against this background, the news is a performative discourse that intuitively reflects a point of view. Hence, "all news are views; that all editorial choice patterns in what and what not to make public (and in what proportion, with what emphasis, etc.) have an ideological basis and political dimension rooted in the structural characteristics of the medium" (Gerbner, 1964, p. 495).

News is not just about providing a daily diet of routine information on happenings that the media offer to satisfy their audience's information needs. At a more practical level, it is reflective of the privileging of institutional bias cloaked as an 'objective' (re) presentation of reality. News, therefore, is constructed to shape perceptions and manipulate cognitions to further the intent of its sponsor. William Peter Hamilton of the *Wall Street Journal* buttresses this when he says that "a newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatever to the public, which grants it no franchise. It is, therefore, affected by no public interest. It is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk …" (Peterson, 1956, p. 73). Inferentially, "the business of media is like all other businesses… whose primary function is creating profits for owners or stockholders" (Croteau, Hoynes, & Hoynes, 2006, p. 1). However, to fully subscribe to the media's performance to be gauged by such criteria as sales, advertising revenues, and profit is disturbing and equally worrisome because it undermines "the public's right to know" and "the public responsibility of the press" (Peterson, 1956, p. 73).

The bias in media narratives *is* indicative of the western ideological and philosophical influences, which starkly disregard the "reciprocal influences of the media and the political system" (Hallin &

Mancini, 1986, p. 9) in Africa—the basis for the media's less reflective role in society. The adoption of the journalistic style and performance of the West could suggest that their journalistic model may be inappropriate to serve the information needs of Africa. After all, it was for this reason that developing countries demanded NWICO. Hence, the continued search for an alternative media model. No doubt, Africa relies heavily on China for its economic sustenance. Is it not also possible that the continent emulates the journalistic principles of the *Red Dragon* in its search for a journalism model that would address the concerns that led to the demands of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)? Hence, the question is: Can news also be 'Made in China?'

Perspectives on News in International Communication

The conception of news in the coverage of international affairs is also not without its complexities. The reason for this is that there is a relationship between media coverage of foreign affairs and a country's foreign policy development. That said, Aday (2014, para.1) claims that "in the foreign policy domain, the press is far less likely to adequately fulfil its Fourth Estate function than it is in the domestic policy arena." Hence, the coverage of foreign affairs reflects the following: ethnocentric, elite-driven, uncritical, and episodic. The implicit slanted dimensions of news primarily inform the bipolar ideological viewpoint in demand for the NWICO (Meyer, 1988). To a large extent, these ideological standpoints reflect the thesis of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956, pp. 1-2) that the "press always takes on the form and colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the systems of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted." Consequently, journalistic ethos in the global North and South is defined by peculiar political culture—"the shared values and beliefs of a group or society regarding political relationships and public policy" (Swedlow, 2013). News, therefore, in international relations is conceived as either a commodity or social good, each reflecting intense philosophical and ideological orientations of the North and South, respectively (Meyer, 1988).

News as a Commodity. News as a commodity implies that news is an article produced for consumption by the public with the sole purpose of the media profiting from its production. The media, essentially, are business-oriented and profit-driven (McManus, 2006). Consequently, the

news media are in business producing and selling news. The philosophy of news as a commodity primarily reflects the market forces of demand and supply, which touch on news serving specific economic interests and cultural tastes. Righter cited in Meyer (1988), argues that the most concise description of news as a commodity mirrors the Western journalistic model that treats the news as merchandise. Thus, news stories are selected and distributed based on impact, exoticism, and the ability to entertain (Meyer, 1988). This perspective finds expression in the market economy, and the efficiency of such a market is through a system of a regular and reliable supply of information networks.

International news agencies such as Reuters, Agence France Presse (AFP), Associated Press (AP), and United Press International (UPI) emerged during the age of high imperialism by the mid and late 19th centuries. Their emergence was essentially to promote a particular economic interest and specific cultural tastes. Their growth received a boost due to the severe financial constraints the newspaper business faced in maintaining foreign correspondents, the prohibitive cost of the telegraph, and the employment of stringers across the globe. Thus, these agencies with the required financial scale were able to make up for the apparent deficiencies of the newspapers through client subscriptions. Reuters is reputed to have had the most significant impact on international news reporting because it supplied mainly commercial news to bankers, investors, and merchants. To increase its clientele base, Reuters diversified by embracing sensationalism, a brand of journalism that evolved, both in the US and England, for the urban masses. It became evident that "agencies which did not follow the popular trend of sensationalism soon went out of business." For instance, Wolff (Germany) became defunct while Havas transformed into AFP (France). Besides economic considerations serving as the primary motivation for the news agencies' adoption of the market-oriented philosophy, the pursuit of the national interest of their respective countries also provided the fulcrum for market-driven journalism. These agencies were compelled to source and package their news stories from a nationalist perspective to appeal to their consumers' preferences and demands. For instance, American news agencies reported foreign news to advance Washington's official position and interests (Meyer, 1988).

The underlying motivation for news agencies to profit and increase efficiency in selecting and distributing news has sustained the global trend of information as a commodity. For this reason, Africa and

other developing countries demanded: "… a new more just and more efficient world information and communication order" (MacBride, 1980, p. xx), which would confer respect and dignity to all men. The 'Americanization' of the news flow is an agenda by the United States to assert its socio-political hegemony by considerably influencing the global shift towards neoliberalism in mass media content.

News as a Social Good: the concept of news as a social good gained traction in the wake of the 20th-century campaign for decolonisation and political independence by developing countries. The theoretical basis upon which news is sourced and shared presupposes it to be a tool for rapid development, social engineering, and coordinated planning (Meyer, 1988). Proponents of this movement believe that systems of communication must be controlled and directed by the state. Therefore, news reports should reflect more on the activities of the government and issues of development. This type of news-gathering and dissemination procedure is also referred to as development journalism.

The principle of development journalism is hinged on in-depth and far-reaching news reports to educate the public about current national and global issues. Unlike the conventional, Western type of journalism that emphasises day-to-day news reporting, development journalism, on the contrary, focuses on constructive news reports on a long-term basis (Meyer, 1988; Folarin, 1998). As proposed by developing countries, this type of journalism attempts to reconstruct its image in a globalised world. Expectedly, developing countries expressed several criticisms about the adoption of development journalism. Notably, Western journalists have consistently registered their distaste for the concept of development journalism based on the premise that it is an indirect way of subordinating the media to the government's dictates--the very antithesis of press freedom. Merrill (1981) describes the proposal as altogether naïve and not newsworthy.

The criticism that the tenet of development journalism is an affront to press freedom, the cornerstone of Western media, was contended by Smith (1980). According to him, the adoption of the operational principles of development journalism does not undermine the standards of critical journalism despite possible government controls. Similarly, Meyer (1988) posits that the West misconstrues development journalism as a propaganda machine employed by the government to indoctrinate their citizens about their policies. Instead, it is a journalistic

principle that seeks to stimulate public discourse on issues affecting the less privileged members of society while providing them with appropriate information for improved living conditions. Therefore, news as a social good is conceived as anti-imperialist with the sole thrust to dislodge every trace of neo-colonialism. Indeed, the objective is to create a counter-journalistic style that will cater to the peculiar needs of developing countries.

News as a social resource aims to provide access to various people, determine the people's needs for development information and programming for these needs, support horizontal and vertical flows of information, and support cultural communication. Also, it seeks to raise the people's awareness and adoption of new methods that promote development, exploring and integrating the potentials of traditional and interpersonal networks into mass media development programming and activities, and mobilising resources for development programmes and progress (Meyer, 1988). These perspectives show the extreme partisanship in the definition of news in international communication and the complexities of forging a compromise. Interestingly, the Chinese media system is a 'dynamically balanced system' that carefully integrates the parallel libertarian media philosophy of the West and the development media perspectives of Africa. Therefore, the Chinese media could presumptively provide that alternative for Africa in its search for a journalistic model that addresses its peculiarity.

China: The World's Economic Powerhouse

It is incredible how China has dominated the world without conscious awareness of it. The influence of the country is so impregnable that its signature is almost on everything. Indeed, almost everything that people use globally is 'Made in China'—from Antarctica to Africa, Asia to Australia and Europe to the Americas. The unrivalled creative ingenuity of China is in almost all products consumed throughout the world. Instructively, China's economy "is heavily dependent on manufacturing and exports; its citizens consume only a fraction of all the goods made in the country, and the rest are exported to the US, Europe, and other markets." The country "makes so much stuff that if it suddenly decided to stop, most of the rest of the world would experience impossibly high demand for many "essentials" of modern life -- things like air conditioners, cell phones, and personal computers" (Mahapatra, 2013).

It is unarguable that "China has transformed itself—and the world economy with it" (*The Economist*, 2015, para. 4). The fact speaks for itself. China produces about 80% of the world's air-conditioners, 70% of its mobile phones, and 60% of its shoes. The white heat of China's ascent has forged supply chains that reach deep into South-East Asia. This "Factory Asia" now makes almost half the world's goods (*The Economist*, 2015, para. 1). Perhaps it is for these reasons that Kenneth Courtis, Vice Chairman for Asia's Goldman, Sachs & Co., claims that, "China is becoming a manufacturing superpower, and the momentum seems unstoppable"(Wang, 2006, p. 129). China, now, conjures the persona that can be described as the one to whom the Christians ascribe the creation as recorded in the gospel according to Saint John Chapter One verse Three thus: "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (King James Version). Likewise, since the fingerprint of China is almost on every material object, it is apposite also to say that 'China made all things, and without China was not anything made that was made.'

James Kyngle in *China Shakes the World: The Rise of a Hungry Nation* recalls Napoleon's warning about 200 years ago, perhaps to the rest of the world that "Let China sleep, for when she wakes, she will shake the world" (2006, p. 7). Unfortunately, China cannot sleep forever; she has awakened. And the effect of her being awake has dramatically altered the political economy of the world. China, indeed, is shaking the world! The meteoric ascent of China has been aptly referred to by Kyngle (2006, p. 230) as the "natural by-product of the world's most populous nation regaining what it sees as its rightful pre-eminent role in the world." The ingenuity of China at making *all things* pre-supposedly suggests that it has the boundless creative imprimatur to 'make' anything. China's ingenious craftsmanship in producing innovative products, possibly, could also be demonstrated in the evolution of a robust media system that could serve as a model to Africa given the shared historical antecedents, especially in the search for a new international information order. Given this background, therefore, could the inspiration that drives China's manufacturing feat that makes it the world's economic powerhouse also be a reference point in the provision of a journalistic model that has widespread appeal?

So, can News be 'Made in China?'

There are many sides to the China phenomenon. Aside from the incomparably manufacturing ingenuity that makes China the factory of the world, one perception that it struggles with is that of a producer of inferior, substandard, and fake products. Consequently, the popular perception of China is synonymous with something that is made not to last. The following example aptly reinforces the picture that the average Nigerian carries in the head about 'made in China' goods: a Chinese friend paid me a visit to my office. I introduced him to one of my friends, who is a renowned comedian. As soon as I introduced my Chinese guest to him, his perceptive response was: "I hope it lasts?" The referencing of "China as a pirate nation" irrespective of the exactness or otherwise of this stereotype, according to Pang (2008, p. 120) "is complicated by two other economic factors: China is the biggest target market for international companies, and China is capable of producing any kind of commodity. In other words, China is tied to today's global capitalism in all senses."

The allusion to the manufacturing feat of China in contextualising this discourse has nothing to do with the myth of Chinese piracy. It is also not a proposal for the uncritical and wholesale adoption of the journalistic ethos of China, which is allegedly mindless repression of press freedom. Instead, it is to appraise the philosophy that defines the Chinese media system and how it contributes most efficiently to the social development of the Chinese state. In other words, what are the defining attributes of the Chinese media system that Africa could emulate in fashioning out a media culture that could help in addressing its peculiar socio-economic needs? It is important to note that the "media system in China is a combination of different media philosophies and the result of the long history of Chinese civilisation" (Luo, 2015, p. 49). Africa and its ally, in the 1970s, while demanding equity in the global information flow, did not do so with 'clean hands.' Olawuyi (2020) underscored this fact in a study entitled "Image of Africa in selected Nigerian newspapers." Findings revealed that Nigerian newspapers are as guilty as their Western counterparts in the coverage of Africa. In other words, Nigerian media did not represent the continent in a way that is ideologically different from its Western counterparts. Hence, it is a case of a 'kettle calling pot black.' Consequently, Olawuyi's recommendations are as follows: the decolonisation of the journalism curriculum; a conceptual redefinition of news that departs philosophically from the western values that embrace sensationalism; and the adoption of news value criteria that places a premium on public interest above

corporate profit. This quest for an alternative journalistic framework makes the review of the Chinese media system necessary to see which aspects can be adopted or adapted as the case may be by the African media system.

What is it about the Chinese media system that provokes the question, though rhetorical thus: Can news also be 'Made in China?' The answer to this question lies in understanding China's peculiar normative media culture that makes it a model worthy of emulation for Africa. This analysis presupposes that two ideological media systems are juxtaposed. This comparative analysis is essential because it "makes it possible to notice things we did not notice and, therefore, had not conceptualised, and it also forces us to clarify the scope and applicability of the concepts we do employ." Indeed, "if the comparison can sensitise us to variation, it can also sensitise us to similarity, and that too can force us to think more clearly about how we might explain media systems" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 3). Of course, the only way to acknowledge the peculiarity of the Chinese media is to examine the structural and normative frameworks of their operations. The Chinese media system is one of the richest in the world. Unknown to many, it has transformed from a strict government-owned structure that embraces new business models, from the traditional press into new media and innovative forms of the news production process. The media in China, such as newspapers, magazines, radios, televisions, and news agencies, though government-owned and widely scattered, have a clear trend towards a new business model which involves private investors. It is against this backdrop that the 12th Five-Year plan outlines the steps to be taken to by the Chinese government to make the media more independent. However, the independence of the media is regulated by the combined forces of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the government, and capital, professional, individual and cultural. The synchronous interaction of these forces and how they influence the Chinese media system is explained by Luo (2015, p. 53) thus:

> It is people who generate all forces influencing media in China. Excluding Cultural Force, each force is produced by a specific group of people. In contrast, Cultural Force is produced by all people in Chinese culture and not from any particular group of people. The people join the CPC and become Party members who make the Party Force. The government does not function without officials working in it. Governmental officials and civil servants create

Governmental Forces. People who pay media want significant influence on obtaining their advertisement or sponsorship published in media, so media buyers are the people providing Capital Force. Professional Force is only possible when people working inside the media want to express their independent ideas or be heard clearly. Individual Force comes from individual people, in the form of isolated people or groups of people. On the contrary, it is common sense that the Cultural Force does not come from any specific group of people because cultural impact always comes from all the people living in China in collective awareness or unconsciousness.

The presence and interaction of these six forces insulate media in China from direct government censorship but are internally regulated. It is important to note that Chinese journalists are conscious of their social responsibility by ensuring that the invasion of private rights or disruption of vital social structures does not have a place in the media. While it may be true that the forces which influence the media system in China are not institutionalised in the African media landscape as distinctly expressed by Luo (2015), what is not debatable is that these forces are also present but inarticulately work at cross-purposes. The absence of such synergies deprives the African media of the "competitive-collaboration relationship", which "serves as a self-balancing mechanism" that is capable of being "politically appropriate, economically profitable and culturally positive" (Luo, 2015, pp. 65-66).

Moreover, the journalistic style and performance of the Chinese media evolved from an operational ethos of constructive journalism, a journalistic model that pursues, without pretension, the rejuvenation of the human dignity that the traditional or western media have subjected to the market forces of demand and supply. The concept of constructive journalism has a long history, and it is associated with development journalism. There is no consensus on the emergence of constructive journalism; however, the concept is related to positive psychology (Wasserman, 2014). Constructive journalism owes its origin to a growing awareness of traditional approaches' negative and emotional impact on both users and media practitioners. Constructive journalism, therefore, is not based on a distortion of events to fit into a particular framework. Instead, it is an approach that widens the journalistic practices of the news.

It ensures that news does become a narration of events and a source of helpful information to transform people's lives (Gyldensted, cited in Zhang and Matingwina, 2016).

The constructive journalism approach to news differs from the traditional approach in that the stories have a constructive peak and constructive ending. On the contrary, the traditional-western media approach focuses on negative and sensational issues (Moeller, 1999). A classic example of this is provided by Gyldensted (2011) when he notes that a famine will not gain the editorial attention of the media until human casualties are reported. In other words, it is a news story with a negative peak and a downbeat ending. By and large, constructive journalism contradicts the traditional negative valence by using an alternative news reporting technique of the 3:1 ratio which adopts three positive emotions to one negative emotion (Fredrickson, 2009).

It is pertinent to note that constructive journalism is solution-based journalism where reporters use various themes to understand problems, engage the people affected and officials to discuss possible solutions, and finally celebrate the achievements to inspire others in a similar situation. The good news approach, according to Hickman (2011), focuses solely on good intentions. This approach to journalism emphasises collective achievements while overlooking divisive issues (Gagliardone, 2013). As a result, the stories only highlight programmes or activities carried out to alleviate a problem without interrogating whether the initiatives are appropriate for solving the problem and its broader implications. It is worth noting that constructive journalism does not avoid controversial issues but engages the issues by finding solutions or inspiring people to find answers. Haagerup (2014) predicts that constructive journalism is the "next mega-trend" in journalism.

There are obviously, valid criticisms of constructive journalism. Gyldensted (2011) acknowledges that criticism of constructive journalism borders on the journalistic principle of objectivity. Critics argue that the approach encourages slanted and biased reporting. O'Sullivan (2004) posits that objectivity entails that journalists eschew personal prejudices, beliefs, and emotions in interpreting events. It is against this view that constructive journalism is framed as positive psychology or finding solutions. In strict adherence to objectivity, journalists interpret events without the colouring of their emotions or desires. For example, during a war or conflict, the journalist should give facts such as the number of people killed or affected without a deliberate effort to get

people to discuss possible solutions. The principle of objectivity is an essential cornerstone of journalism that deliberately avoids distortion of events. However, the adherence to the code of objectivity is not a guarantee that a journalist's subjectivity is not present (McKnight, 2001). Scholars base their argument on the observation that selecting the news and the style of reportage reflects the journalist or media house selection. However, an important point to note is that adopting this journalistic style of reporting news makes the media in China tremendously influential in shaping public opinion and Chinese politics (International Media Support, 2008).

Another consideration is the possible adoption of the journalistic model of the Chinese media system by Africa is its media management style. It is true that the Chinese media system is state-controlled but also funded through advertising. It is interesting to note, for example, that the largest source of funding for Chinese television has changed from government subsidy to commercial revenue. As government funding for television is less abundant, TV channels raise income on their own, and, consequently, they rely mainly on advertising revenue and sponsorship. From the mid-1990s to the present, CGTN, formerly CCTV has become almost totally dependent on commercial revenues. In 2000, CCTV was able to raise 5.5 billion Yuan from private sources (RMB) (US $662.65 million) while the government contribution was a mere 30 million Yuan (US $3.61 million) (Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies The Brookings .... https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/li_0 1.pdf. Indeed, CGTN pays more in taxes and philanthropic efforts than it receives in funding from the government. Today, the government provides only 0.5% of the total financing of CGTN's annual budgetary allocation. Given the sterling financial performance of the Chinese media, one cannot but ask that with the funding of government-owned media organisations in Nigeria, how come they cannot break even? A crucial question to ask is: What is it that the Chinese media are doing to be profitable through advertising revenue that government-owned media such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Voice of Nigeria (VON), and other state-owned broadcast media are not doing to be profitable despite massive government funding? This funding model is worth examining by the media in Africa, both private and government media organisations.

Moreover, the employment of staff at Chinese media organisations has changed from the "iron rice bowl" system to a

performance-based system. The "iron bowl" system implies that "no matter whether one works or not, one gets paid." But now, the "iron rice bowl" has been smashed and long disappeared as most lower- and middle-range staff members are employed and paid based on the quantity and quality of their output. For example, a CGTN reporter has to produce two news items each month at level A (broadcast on the main evening news), two items at level B (the second main news slot), and two at level C (outside prime time). If the reporter fails to meet the quotas over several months, he or she will lose his/her job. As a result, there is fierce competition among reporters to produce the best stories or features. On the contrary, journalists in government-owned media in Nigeria are civil servants whose employments are tenured. Hence, there is no performance-based job evaluation that ties an individual's contribution to the reward system. The "iron rice bowl" system has undermined their credibility, which also has a deleterious effect on the media's contribution to the country's social development. Undoubtedly, the media system in Africa could learn and adopt this performance-based system to recalibrate the practice of journalism in the continent.

The development of Chinese media in a market-oriented economy has given rise to a new breed of journalists who are very knowledgeable about modern media techniques. Some of them have learned from and emulated, Western media styles and work methods and rejected traditional conservative approaches. These journalists have become highly professional in developing media content and independent thinking to achieve their own goals and create new standards. The professionalisation of the Chinese media system manifests in developing a public service that is ethical and driven by the mechanics of journalistic self-regulation. Scholars from different perspectives see the conceptualisation of a profession. For instance, Wilensky, cited by Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 33), says a professional practice is "based on systematic knowledge or doctrine acquired only through long prescribed training." Collins, cited in Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 35), however, defines it as "occupations which organise themselves 'horizontally,' with a certain style of life, code of ethics, and self-conscious identity and barriers to outsides." No doubt, these two definitions hint at the different fundamentally contradistinctive rendering of what a profession is. While Wilensky's, cited in Hallin and Mancini (2004) theorisation of a profession is the acquisition of formal knowledge to function effectively in the execution of the practice. In other words, a professional is certified through formal learning. On the contrary,

Collins' cited in Hallin and Mancini (2004) understanding of a profession emphasises a uniformly prescribed ethical subscription that guides the conduct of members on the one hand and a form of identity that makes it difficult for non-initiates to gate-crash into, in another.

From the definitions discussed above, one can assume that Chinese journalists are professionals whose understanding of the job is the systematic acquisition of knowledge. However, journalism in Nigeria departs very sharply from this ideal because, according to Talabi and Ogundeji (2012, p. 1), "the practice of journalism in Nigeria has courted great controversies, especially concerning ethical regulation and adherence to professional precepts. Journalism is a profession that has the potential to reform society. However, in Nigeria, it is an "all-comers affair." because of the low entry requirements. Thus, for the media in Africa to contribute effectively to the social development of the continent, journalists have to acquire formal "professional" training, which plays a vital role in defining journalism as an occupation and social institution (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 33). Therefore, journalism in its current state lacks the requisite profile to chart the course for Africa's socio-political rejuvenation. Given the professionalisation of the Chinese media system and its unambiguous positive effect on its society, it could be that an alternative model to the western type of journalism that Africa seeks. Again, another reason why Africa could look to China for a redefinition of journalistic practice.

Besides, the probable reason behind the Chinese media system being an inspiration to Africa is the former's commitment to social responsibility, which is on "the public's right to know" and "the public responsibility to the press" (Siebert et al. 1956, p. 73). It is important to note that the booming market economy in China has undeniably made the media recognise the essence of serving the people and providing them with helpful information. The prevalence of stories that offer social and economic information such as stock prices, traffic updates, weather forecasts, and farm prices are justifications for this. Like their Chinese counterparts, the media in Africa are equally committed to development-oriented stories; sadly, the continent's socio-economic challenges contend with making the media helplessly give prominence to commercial news. For this reason, media owners are inclined like other businesses to make profits for their shareholders. African journalists should emulate their Chinese counterparts by setting agendas on socio-economic issues

because it enhances the citizens' capacity to make informed decisions to contribute to their societies effectively.

The Chinese government ensures that the media play an active, deliberate, and conscientious role in fostering the burgeoning China-Africa relations. The Beijing Action Plan, published as part of the 2006 FOCAC summit, identified many initiatives by the Chinese government to increase the presence and relevance of Chinese media in Africa. First is the increase in contact between the regions' respective news outlets to facilitate comprehensive and objective news coverage of the other side and encourage mutual understanding and friendship. Second, the advocacy for multilevel exchanges and cooperation between press authorities and media groups from China and African countries. Third, the encouragement of China and African countries to report more through their news media, including the provision of mutual assistance to each other's news agencies. Fourth, the hosting of workshops for African correspondents and invitation of African press authorities and media groups to China to exchange views, cover news, and explore means of furthering cooperation by the Chinese government. Finally, cooperation in the expansion of radio and television broadcasting, including Chinese officials helping African countries train their staff (FOCAC, 2006).

Unfortunately, while China has put structures in place to engineer its relationship with African countries through its media, it does not exist among African countries. One of the recommendations of the MacBride Commission is the establishment of a news agency that would facilitate South-South information exchange. The recommendation led to the founding of the Pan African News Agency (PANA) or PanaPress. The Pan African News Agency (PANA) was established as an African news agency on 20 July 1979 in Addis Ababa by the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU). The agency was relaunched by UNESCO in 1993 "to counter what African leaders decried as the negative, distorted coverage of the continent by western news organisation being beamed back to Africa and out to the rest of the world" (Cavanagh, 1989, p. 353). The PanaPress, however, could not effectively deliver on the mandate of its founding fathers because "like so many third-world efforts," the news agencies had to grapple with "serious financial and political constraints. The resolve to cling to life while trying glacially to improve its footing reflects a survival instinct inherent among many financially-impaired businesses, institutions, and governments in the do-

or-die environment so prevalent in much of post-colonial Africa" (Cavanagh, 1989, p. 353).

Suppose Pan-Africanism is "the acceptance of a oneness of all people of African descent and the commitment to the betterment of all people of African descent" (Ofuatey-Kodjoe, 1986, p.338). In that case, the media system in the continent has to be empowered and rejigged to bring about the fulfilment of this pivotal ideal. Francis Kaboneka supports this position by challenging the Pan African Movement at a conference in Kigali about the centrality of the media in the realisation of Pan Africanism. In his words: "African media has a key role in ensuring that people from the continent regain their Pan-African consciousness and a positive attitude about their continent"(Tashobya, 2018, para. 1). He added that "we should use our media to tell the true African story contrary to foreign narratives that portray Africa as a poor continent full of misfortunes and can only survive on Western aid" (Kaboneka, cited by Tashobya, 2018, para. 4). China's use of the media to mobilise support for the China-Africa relations could be a template for the media in the continent to initiate conversations "about consciousness, the ideological framework of Africa, solidarity and trade between African countries" (Olukoshi, cited in Tashobya, 2018).

The "Internet is a critical enabler of economic growth and opportunity. Globally, in both developed and developing countries, applications and services powered by the Internet have accelerated economic growth and created jobs" (Kende, 2017). The realisation of the enormous potential of the Internet led the Chinese government to the adoption of the "Internet Plus" action plan was launched on 5 July 2015 has as its objective the following: integration of mobile Internet, cloud computing, big data, and the Internet of Things with modern manufacturing, encourage the healthy development of e-commerce, industrial networks, and Internet banking, and help Internet companies increase their international presence to fuel economic growth. Disturbingly, "Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and most populous country, is a representative example of the challenges Africa faces with internet connectivity" (Okunoye, 2019, para. 2). Nigeria's Internet challenge is caused by the lack of a deliberate government policy on the Internet as a critical driver of socio-economic development as obtains in China.The potential for internet connectivity enables growth and development when carefully woven into broader political and socio-economic reforms (Okunoye, 2019). Instructively, African leaders

should be encouraged to toe the Chinese path by enunciating an internet policy necessary "in creating a new engine for economic growth" (Premier Li Keqiang, cited in Xinhua, 2015, para.4) for the continent.

Paradoxically, the media in China are commercialised without privatisation. In other words, the press "are BOTH advertising-supported and state-controlled." However, the economic reforms of the 1980s brought about independent media "which have separate media regulatory bodies" and "are no longer required to strictly follow journalistic guidelines set by the Chinese government" (en.m.wikipaedia.org). This peculiar media characteristic provides for the "expansion of market-oriented general interest urban media outlets, and an increase of business and finance related media", which is on the mantra that "news creates values", with "values" referring to social and, more importantly, monetary values" (Zhao, 2008, p. 11). The commercialisation of the state-owned Chinese media places the audience at the epicentre of the news production process by providing them with information that potentially impacts them. This reporting perspective is more inclined to the virtues of media consumption.

The media system in Africa comprises both government and privately-owned media. While the privately-owned media seem to thrive, state-run media are not profitable as expected despite massive government subvention. For instance, in Nigeria, Dogari, Shem, and Apuke (2018, p. 230), in a study entitled "Media Ownership, Funding, and Challenges: Implication for State-Owned Media Survival", established that government-owned media in Nigeria are currently in a deplorable state based on misappropriation of fund, shortage of staff, lack of modern/adequate equipment management, poor salary, inadequate funding and employment of non-professionals. These challenges have incapacitated the state-owned media to effectively contribute to the socio-political development of the Nigerian state because they lack the type of leadership that could mobilise citizens for national consensus. However, since the media system in Africa and China are somewhat alike, it is apposite to note that the Chinese mediascape could serve as a prototype for Africa in adopting a media management style that is profitable and contributes to society. The success of the commercial model of the Chinese media system, notwithstanding, Africa should exercise cautious optimism in the adoption of this model because it starkly demonstrates a "structural bias against the low social classes." The commercial model focuses on the

"consumerist angle in news reporting that has led to the neglect of the perspectives of workers and farmers." Media commercialisation is premised on the philosophy that "competition knows no person. It is bloody. Either you die or I die" (Zhao, 2008, p. 12).

A gross misconception about the media in China is that they are institutionally incapacitated to practice investigative journalism because, by design, they are to be their 'master's voice.' The adoption of the commercial model inevitably makes the media efficiently ill-equipped to provide that normative oversight function on the state and its apparatus. On the contrary, its media reforms committed to the principle of "power must be exercised under open sunlight." Through this, the government empowered the media to "change focus from investigating social problems only to also investigating public authorities." The style of reporting shifted reportage from party leaders who had mandated secretaries and journalists "to report dinner parties and banquets so that they could see it on television when they came home." One television programme that stood out due to its investigative impact was "Focus" (*Jiaodian Fangtan*). One of the acclaimed investigative reports of the TV programme was from Chang Jiang (Long River) in 1998, "when local authorities had built luxury residential areas at a price 15 times higher than ordinary buildings. The residential area was ready for sale when "Focus" discovered that there were no state authority permissions." In a swift reaction, the then Premier, Zhu Rongji, said: "even if these buildings were made of gold, they would have to be demolished"—and precisely that is what happened! No doubt, "Focus" became the epitome of journalism with Chinese characteristics. The TV programme received global commendation and admiration from the likes of the former United States Secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, because "people were surprised that Chinese media" could "feature such programmes" (Yungshen, 2008, p. 8).

Arising from the above, if Africa must develop, the media should itself be above board to bring leadership, both public and private, to account. One of the albatross of Africa's socioeconomic growth is corruption, and it must be dealt with decisively, too. The Chinese media system is a noble example for the media in Africa to emulate by ensuring that "the media should bring out issues into the open. People's lawful rights should be protected through a system of participation, expression, supervision and information" (Yungshen, 2008, p. 8). Nigeria currently ranks highest in the number of internet users, with over 111.6 million

internet users in Africa. The Nigerian Senate on Tuesday, 5 November 2019, re-introduced a bill entitled "Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations Bill 2019" (Mabika & Ogu, 2022, para. 1) that will regulate the use of social media in the country. Several reactions have greeted the Bill, which has passed the second reading, perhaps on its way to being passed. However, many Nigerians resisted the bill because they saw it as an encroachment on their fundamental rights and a restriction on freedom of expression.

One of the many illusions of the liberal democratic principle is the assumption that individuals' expression of their rights has no elastic limit. This thinking, fundamentally, drives the impression that social media is a democratised space that allows individuals to give full rein to their views without any restraint. Meanwhile, Peterson (1956, p. 77), in his treatise on "The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press", posits that "faith diminished in the optimistic notion that a virtually absolute freedom and the nature of man carried built-in correctives for the press." However, it is instructive to note that whoever gets to the media first owns the story, whether rightly or wrongly. This highly impregnable influence of the media to set agenda was succinctly underscored by Malcolm X thus: "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses" (Lorgulecscu, 2016, p. 101). With every freedom comes responsibility, but it is quite unfortunate that people have taken liberty for 'nonsense' in the era of social media. Therefore, an introduction of a regulatory framework should curtail such abuses with reasonable and humane regulation. In China, for example, WeChat group administrators are liable for misinformation posted by any group member. This regulation ensures that administrators monitor what people post and issue appropriate sanctions to erring members. In the case of Nigeria, the death penalty proposed by the National Assembly is too weighty and incommensurate with the alleged infractions that people could commit.

Conclusion
Whether China can make news does not implicate the misconception that the country is synonymous with anything fake, substandard, or inferior. However, the argument being advanced is that given the shared historical antecedents and similar socio-political challenges that Africa has with China, the continent, especially its media, could be "oriented toward

postmaterial values such as education, multiculturalism, and socio-economic equality" (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28), which the media system in China embodies. The media in Africa, in its current state, are incapable of achieving these values because they have not been able to resist the temptation of being enlisted in the service of narrow sectarian interests and instruments of power that justifies assaults on human dignity and aggravation of the inequalities which already exists in the society (M'Bow, 1980, p. xiii). In asking if the news can also be made in China—the manufacturing powerhouse of the world—the assumption is that the Chinese media system could presumptively provide an alternative journalistic framework to Western-type journalism, which feeds on sensationalism, elitism, and crass capitalism. What Africa truly needs is a kind of journalism that is philosophically and ideologically leaned towards a dispassionate review of our "social systems in their true relationship to the press" (Siebert et al., 1956, p. 1) to "foster uninterrupted dialogue between communities, cultures, individuals in a bid to promote equality of opportunities and promote two-exchanges" (M'Bow, 1980, p. xiv).

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