



# *Behind the perception barrier*

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*WHY ARE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES MISSING IN AFRICA- CHINA  
REPORTING?*



# Myself and my work

## About myself

November 2015 till now, Special Correspondent (a.k.a. stringer),  
Phoenix Television Hong Kong

[zizhu.zhang65@gmail.com](mailto:zizhu.zhang65@gmail.com)

## About Phoenix Satellite Television (Hong Kong)



Founded in 1996, a Hong Kong–based Mandarin-language television broadcaster owning six channels that serve Chinese speakers around the globe

Covering over 180 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, North America, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa

<http://www.ifeng.com/>

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this presentation are the presenter's own and do not reflect the views of Phoenix Television

# What are international reporters facing in the developing world?

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- ❖ Shrinking budgets, a world-wide phenomenon, plus decreasing number of foreign bureaus

<b>Year</b>	<b>Domestic bureaus</b>	<b>Foreign bureaus</b>
2010	32	53
2015	31	48

Note: Total domestic and foreign bureaus for CNN, Fox News and MSNBC.

Source: CNN, Fox News and MSNBC.

"State of the News Media 2016"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



# What are international reporters facing in the developing world?

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## ❖ Dictations by news priorities

“As current affairs coverage has declined, the only television outlet left for factual programming about Africa is on the news. So the kind of explanations and background context that would once have been contained in a 30 or 40 minute programme, if they happen at all, now have to be compressed into a two or three minute package. It also means that the nature of what is covered will be dictated by news priorities”.

-- **Suzanne Franks, quoted by The Guardian, January 2014**



# China-Africa reporting: Seeking the alternative?

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## ❖ Chinese media as an instrument to exert soft power

“Chinese media on the one hand, following instructions from the Central Propaganda Department, have been educating the public about the importance of building up soft power internationally and exporting the Chinese development model to Africa. This is in itself a way to mitigate grievances and to buffer cries for political reform at home”.

--Li & Rønning, 2013

## ❖ Constructive journalism as alternative to negative reporting: solution-focused

“As constructive journalism covers positive and solution-focused news formats, narratives, angles, and styles of debate, within classical reporting, the media report under this journalistic concept empowers the people and information can be used constructively while remaining accurate and critical where necessary”.

-- Zhang Y., 2014

# Private media - Liberal or “Pink”?

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- ❖ Who are we?
  - ❖ To Chinese journalist from state-owned media: media not so restricted by central censorship
  - ❖ To Chinese companies: a “westernized” outlet whose views are usually more negative than state-owned media
  - ❖ To some Chinese audience: media in “pink” colour – supporter to the views of the Chinese government under a private, liberal surface
- ❖ Who is “little pink”:

*“While many 50-centers may actually be government workers, and skew male, Little Pink members are known to be predominately young women, both in China and abroad, who genuinely believe that they have a sense of duty to guard their country against unwelcome opinions or criticism” --- Foreign Policy, August 2016*



# Institutional Environment

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## National level

State-owned vs. private, liberal vs. conservative

Contracting space for national reporting due to censorship

International reporting: Flag planting

Parachute journalism

## China-Africa reporting

The shared approach to stories with “Chinese perspectives” among Chinese media reporting on Africa

institutional restraints faced by different media outlets vary and determined by resources, audience’s interest and competitions among outlets

## International level

China vs. West, negative vs. positive

Media as an instrument for exerting soft power

Chinese journalism as a part of the retreat of the western-styled international journalism

Challenging while reconciling with each other



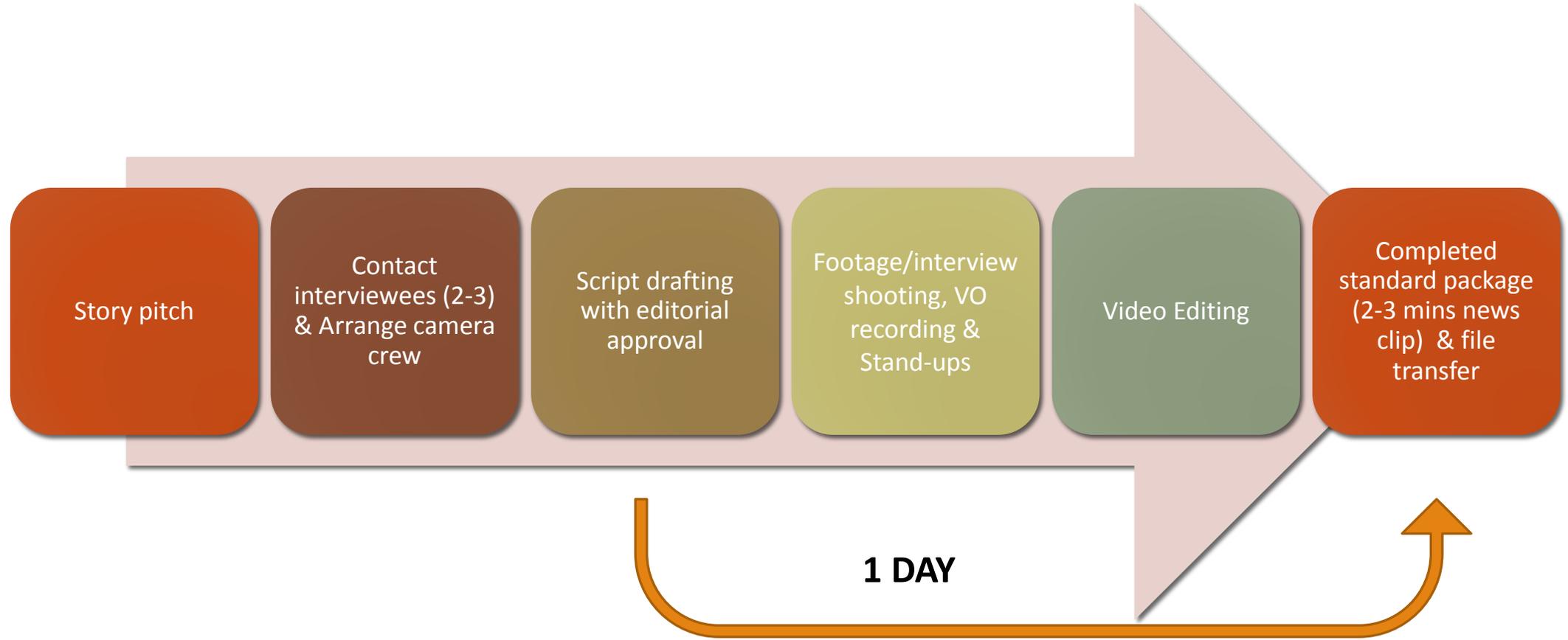
# The cost of the on-ground reporting

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# Behind the Screen

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# What could go wrong...

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- ❖ Pitch not approved – topic too localized, lack of “China perspective”
- ❖ No available footage/interview – too costly to travel outside duty station; no available footage on newswire; interviews and event being reported on cannot happen on the same day; interviewees unavailable;
- ❖ Logistic issues – miss out interview appointments due to transportation, change of schedule etc.



# What could then happen...

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- ❖ Opinions driven by geopolitics, representation of national interest is required
- ❖ When looking for interviewees, availability outweighs reliability
- ❖ Generalization of the context – instead of giving an introduction about the local context, generalize the focus of the issue so that any information received away from the scene can become relevant



# The shared limitation

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*“Pressing the journalists on why their reporting appears to omit critical elements has resulted in a variety of answers that suggest a combination of different factors: **why report the negative** if biased Western media are doing it already (a CCTV reporter); it would be **a waste of everyone’s time** since the editor would cut them out anyway (a People’s Daily correspondent and a Xinhua bureau chief); it would be **unethical to reveal confidential information from corporate sources** (a Xinhua correspondent); corporate pressure on the editor makes such reporting difficult, and maintaining **a good relationship** with them is important both for the paper and for the individual correspondents who need sources (correspondent for a market-oriented paper); there is **a lack of organizational support**, there is **not enough time and reader interest is limited** (correspondents across the full range of media). ”*

**-- Gagliardone I. & Pál N., 2016**



# Negative vs. Positive? Not a simple split

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*“Despite the extraordinary financial resources the Chinese government has channeled in developing its foreign media, this exceptional support seems to have not been enough to shield Chinese media from the chaotic transformation journalism is undergoing globally. **The retreat of the ‘traditional’ foreign correspondent is not only simply the result of shrinking budgets but also of a dramatic redefinition of how information is sourced, interpreted and conveyed to audiences. The entrance of Chinese media into Africa has to be understood as part of this crisis, rather than as separate from it, or as simply exploiting the difficulties encountered by other media”.***

*---- Gagliardone I. & Pál N., 2016*



# Reporting in Kenya: Case of the SGR

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## ❖ January 2015

- ❖ 中国铁路在非洲：中企为肯尼亚培训大量人才（Chinese railway in Africa: Chinese company trains local talents）
- ❖ 中国铁路在非洲：肯尼亚蒙内铁路2017年竣工（Chinese railway in Africa: Kenya's Mombasa-Nairobi Railway will be completed in 2017）
- ❖ 肯尼亚蒙内铁路削运输成本，创大量就业机会（Kenya's Mombasa-Nairobi Railway expected to cut transportation cost, creating job opportunities）
- ❖ 中国铁路在非洲：铁路穿国家公园，环保受挑战（Chinese railway in Africa: SGR cutting through national park, posting challenges to conservation）
- ❖ 中国铁路在非洲：语言障碍考验在非中资企业（Chinese railway in Africa: language barriers challenge Chinese enterprises in Africa）

## ❖ August 2015

- ❖ 14名中国工人在肯尼亚被打凸显当地就业问题（fourteen Chinese workers attacked in Kenya, highlighting local unemployment issue）

## ❖ October 2015

- ❖ 中企承建内马铁路动工，肯尼亚总统参加仪式（Uhuru Kenyatta attended the launch ceremony of the Chinese-built Nairobi-Naivasha railway）



# The attack against Chinese construction workers on 2nd August 2016

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Angry youth have attacked and injured 14 Chinese nationals at the Duka Moja railway construction site on the Narok-Maai Mahiu road in Narok County.

The victims have sought treatment at the Narok Referral Hospital following the Tuesday afternoon attack.

A journalist who was covering the event for a local television station was also attacked.

The more than 200 club- and sword-wielding youth descended on the workers, chanting and shouting.

Local youth have been demanding a share of the standard gauge railway construction jobs in the area.

Recently, more than 300 youth protested against a Chinese contractor at the Duka Moja trading centre demanding jobs but police dispersed them after they attempted to block the road.

- ❖ There is a perception that Chinese companies in Africa do not hire local workers
- ❖ The larger context: Chinese are involved in more large-scale infrastructure projects than investors from other countries and usually in areas where the job demand is high

# When we talk about reporting bias, what shall we do

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- ❖ Media incentives and rationality needs to be taken in to account under certain institutionalized environment
- ❖ Institutional and financial support for independent journalists will encourage reporting freedom
- ❖ Communication and collaboration across journalists from different platforms encourages mutual understanding