

Update on China in African media

As the Financial Times stops printing in South Africa, who is moving into the gap? China Daily's Africa edition, of course.

 By [Anton Harber](#) 10 Jul 2013

Could there be a neater symbolism: the pink lady of London, the voice of the private sector, retreats, and the voice of red Chinese interest in this continent moves into the gap?

The FT announced recently that they would stop their local print-run. China's biggest-English language daily which has produced an African edition in Kenya since December last year, announced that they will be printing 5,000 copies here and distributing through the same networks that until recently did the FT and still does the Times Media publications. They even hired the woman who represented the FT in Joburg, Rochelle Josiah.

The contrast is striking. The FT is forced for reasons of cost to shift readers onto their online subscription model. China Daily, however, has the state behind it, with massive resources to promote their interest here. The FT is the voice of business, while China Daily is the voice of the Chinese one-party government. The former is one of Fleet Street's finest, a quality that China Daily will find difficult to match.

It is not just a change of title, but a shift to a different model, and a different style of journalism.

Buying media to counter negative image

That creaking sound you hear is the global see-saw tilting eastwards. It comes as China is also buying into Independent News and Media SA, the country's second largest newspaper publisher, and has invested in TopTV, the rival to MultiChoice. China has spent billions increasing its television, news agency and newspaper presence throughout Africa, as part of its "soft diplomacy" strategy to counter their negative image in much of the local media.

At the China Daily Africa edition launch in Kenya, the paper's publisher and editor-in-chief, Zhu Ling, was quoted by the BBC saying he aims to explain "the relationship between China and the African continent.

"(It) is one of the most significant relationships in the world today," he said. "It is growing and complex and not always understood... We hope to set that straight."

Kenya Information Minister Samuel Poghiso was quoted by local media saying that the paper would provide a platform for better understanding between China and Africa.

Allegedly dodgy deal could lead to class action

While we are on the subject of Chinese media in Africa, it has been reported that the Star Times, the Chinese company which bought into TopTV, is being sued in Kenya for allegedly selling thousands of redundant decoders. The machines are due to become obsolete at the end of the month when Kenya does its digital switchover. The Kenyan High Court has cleared the way for a class action on behalf of more than 130,000 subscribers stuck with the worthless machines.

It was also claimed that as soon as the Ugandan authorities announced their switchover plans, they dropped the prices of these decoders significantly to draw more subscribers into their net. And, it is alleged, they ignored instructions from the Uganda Communications Commission to stop selling the machines.

I must put a large disclaimer on this story. It comes from [Jackal News](#), which claims to be Kenya's leading and popular news and gossip site. The piece appeared, I hastily add, as news rather than gossip, but I cannot swear by its integrity.

An interesting cautionary tale, nevertheless.

ABOUT ANTON HARBER

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