

China's International Television Broadcasting and the Spanish Speaking World

中国国际电视广播与西班牙语世界

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In recent years Chinese leaders have voiced their concern about existing negative perceptions of China abroad. To correct such non-positive views, public diplomacy and the affine term “soft power” have become prominent in Chinese foreign policy. One of the dimensions of public diplomacy in which Beijing has invested extensively to revert its current image is international broadcasting. This paper focuses on the case of CCTV-E, the television channel aimed at the Spanish speaking world. After a general overview of Chinese public diplomacy, I explore the reasons behind the current push for stronger and more professionalized media in China. I then analyse the origins and evolution of CCTV-E, as well as its programme line-up and content production routines. I conclude by discussing shortcomings and strengths of the current strategy to increase Chinese contents and perspectives in international communication and information flows. I argue that lack of clearly defined target audiences hinders effectiveness, but that concurrent efforts in content dissemination can have long-term effects on Latin American media environments.

近年来,中国领导人表达了对于海外对中国已存在的消极认知的担心。为了纠正这些非积极的观点,公共外交及其同源的“软实力”成为了中国外交政策中的突出的一环。公众外交中的一个方面,也是北京努力投入的,即通过国际电视广播改变形象。本文讨论的是CCTV—E——中央电视台面向西班牙语国家的电视频道的案例。在概括论述中国的公共外交之后,作者探讨了中国现今推动更加强大与专业的媒体的原因。之后作者分析了CCTV—E的源起与发展,以及它的线性节目制作与内容生产的程序。作者讨论并总结了在国际传播与信息流中增加关于中国的内容与观点的策略的优势与劣势,并认为缺乏明确的目标受众定位阻碍了传播效果,但同时内容传播上的努力对拉美媒介环境会产生长远影响。

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‘ Success depends not only on whose army wins, but also on whose story wins.’

Joseph S. Nye

‘ The soft and gentle overcome the hard and strong.’

Laozi

Between March and April 2007, for about two weeks, Li Changchun, member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), visited several Latin America countries. Shortly after his return to Beijing, preparations began for the launch of CCTV-E as an independent channel broadcasting 24-hours a day in Spanish to Latin American audiences. The official launch was on October 1, 2007. It is difficult to establish a clear cut cause-effect relation between the events, but it is arguable that both events fall along similarly strategic lines. Li, being Chairman of the Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization (Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhongyang Jingshenwenming Jian she Zhidao Weiyuanhui)—the *de facto* propaganda organ and by extension an ideological helmsman within the CPC—is credited as one of the masterminds behind the current period of international expansion of China’s state media, including China’s Central Television (CCTV). Some scholars have recently begun to discuss these media outreach strategies, but none specifically discusses foreign-language products other than English^[1]. This paper aims at making an initial contribution to the study of international broadcasting in Spanish and, more generally, to the rising phenomenon of using television content as a foreign policy tool^[2]. I make use of concepts from communication theory and international relations to explain why the use of international television broadcasting as an element of public diplomacy has become crucial to some countries, including China. After an initial elaboration on public diplomacy theory and on the evolution of international broadcasting, the paper turns to the case of CCTV-E to describe how the channel came about, and what stages it has gone through. I also analyse the channel’s programme round-down, the typology and contents of several shows. In the end I argue that lack of professionalism and political constraints hamper any efforts to compete globally. I also suggest that by clearly defining a target audience, be it political elites, opinion makers or the “general public”, and by tailoring content to their needs and expectations, CCTV-E’s impact could be exponentially increased and, in this way, better contribute to the overall long-term effort of presenting a “Chinese perspective” against hegemonic discourses in global information flows.

International Television Broadcasting as a Tool for Enhanced Public Diplomacy

Influencing the public and leaders of foreign nations, and winning over foreign public opinion are at the core of public diplomacy. These two simple but useful statements grasp the complexity of a concept that has grown to have multiple interpretations since its reintroduction into the vocabulary of foreign affairs’ officials in 1965 by Edward Gullion^[3]. Despite its infancy, public diplomacy has been redefined recurrently in the last 50 years. During the Cold War, public diplomacy was a tool exclusively available to nation states and, to the general public, it was tied to the concept of propaganda.^[4] For over three decades, the United States and the Soviet Union were the main *public diplomats* as they tried “to shape favourable public attitudes toward their respective rival ideologies.”^[5] In the 1980s and 1990s, the job of reaching out to an emerging global public opinion was no longer confined to the of-

fices of ministries of Foreign Affairs and Public Information. As new actors appeared on the international scene it became more difficult for states to monopolize the delivery of messages to their desired audiences. With the advent of the twenty-first century, some authors have already started to discuss the existence of a “new public diplomacy”,^[6] seen as moving “away from—to put it crudely—peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay, towards engaging with foreign audiences”^[7]. In a multi-player and multi-directional communication scenario the necessary tools for practice come from different fields, making the study of this *new public diplomacy* one that is very much multidisciplinary. Putting together a definition acceptable across disciplines is not an easy task, but two seem to have gained the approval of most. Tuch defines public diplomacy as “a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies”, while Frederick refers to it as “activities, directed abroad in the fields of information, education, and culture, whose objective is to influence a foreign government, by influencing its citizens.”^[8] In order to achieve their goals, public diplomacy practitioners have an array of strategies, which Cull has usefully classified into five dimensions: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy and international broadcasting. This paper deals with the latter, defined as “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by using the technologies of radio, television, and the Internet to engage with foreign publics.”^[9]

European countries were the first to embrace international broadcasting in the 1920s through short wave radio transmissions. The earliest regular radio services were carried out by Radio Nederland Wereldomroep and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)^[10]. International broadcasting services have always served foreign policy needs, but there has been an essential difference between, for example, the BBC World Service and Voice of America. As Wood holds, while “most international broadcasters take pride in the fact that they are the voice of their country, exemplified by station identification, Voice of America, Voice of Turkey...,” others like the BBC go “to some lengths to claim the opposite—that [they are] not the voice of Great Britain but the voice of the independent BBC.”^[11] This almost unique feature of the BBC has allowed it to maintain an appearance of distance from government interests which is seen as the reason why it has a larger audience than other broadcasters.^[12] Credibility is behind BBC’s success as much as untrustworthiness is behind the failure of others. In discussing the fine line between international broadcasting and propaganda, Price notes that most governments have been unable to overcome the view of international broadcasting “as an elegant term for a complex combination of state-sponsored news, information, and what was once with pride called propaganda.”^[13] As the case of the BBC shows, efficient international broadcasting (be it radio or television) can be reduced to an equation with three variables: credibility, audiences and resources. If solved it grants access to two key foreign policy tools, self-representation (constructing a nation’s image or brand),^[14] and framing events and issues on the global news and information stage; the latter being particularly useful since the appearance of 24-hour global news channels in the 1990s, such CNN International (CNNI).

A few years after its global launch, the U. S. -based network gained attention from scholars who debated about its ability to influence the media agenda and the (global) political agenda. The idea of a “CNN effect” has been as praised as it has been criticised, but even leaving aside the more contested claim of the effects on the political agenda, it is unde-

niable that it contributed to change the way in which the media agenda is created: it affected the selection of topics and content editorialisation.^[15] As Painter points out, CNN, and other Anglo-Saxon media outlets that followed, such as Sky News, Fox News, CNBC or BBC World, have for decades contributed to the creation of a single hegemonic global narrative on current affairs.^[16] The arrival of a counter-hegemonic narrative is linked to the appearance of Al Jazeera. The “CNN effect” is now being compared to an “Al Jazeera effect”, particularly in the Middle East, but there is an important difference between the two cases: whilst CNN is privately owned and largely out of the control of the United States government, Al Jazeera was launched and is funded by the Emirate of Qatar. Al Jazeera was quick to master the international broadcasting efficiency equation: it built a solid regional audience before going global; it has amassed considerable credibility, and it has been provided with sufficient resources to grow fast into a major actor of the international news production sector. The success of Al Jazeera in challenging the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon discourse (alongside the decline of radio usage) pushed some governments, including the Chinese, to shift international broadcasting efforts from radio to television, in order to *contribute* an own narrative on world events.^[17]

Finally, these expensive investments in foreign-language television services also need to be seen within the framework of new understandings of power. Power, “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want,” says Joseph Nye, comes in three ways: threats of coercion (*sticks*), inducement and payments (*carrots*), and attraction to make others want what one wants.^[18] The traditional notion of power—*hard power* in Nye’s terms—was linked to strong military capacity and powerful institutions (political or economic). The abilities of a state to coerce, induce and pay all belong to hard power, in opposition to *soft power*, which is achieved through attraction and co-option.^[19] Public diplomacy provides one set of tools to increase soft power; some nations have learnt the hard way that they can overcome certain hard power strategies. Of the most cited examples are the repeated communicational failures in post 9/11 U. S. .^[20] Ten years after the attacks, U. S. Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton told members of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee that America was “in an information war” and that the country was “losing that war.”^[21] Clinton’s message mostly referred to the increased influence of Arab media, but there were also references to the imbalance in terms of public outreach efforts between the U. S. and China. The realisation that several countries are becoming more competent than the U. S. in publicizing themselves abroad is nothing new in Washington.^[22] What is indeed new is that China is amongst the “competent communicators” that the U. S. administration perceives to be up against.

China’s *Go Out* Policy and the Mass Media

A guiding force behind China’s current pursue of soft power is the perception amongst Chinese elites that foreign public opinion is failing to understand China, and that the reason lays in the fact that non-Chinese media recurrently frame the country in negative terms. The official discourse of a peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*) or peaceful development (*heping fazhan*), and the desire to build a harmonious society (*hexie shehui*) clash with non-Chinese media depictions of systemic corruption, violations of human rights, unequal development, growing income gaps and high military spending. The peak of perceived media hostility to-

wards China occurred before the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, a delicately crafted event meant to mark the coming of age of a “new China”^[23]. The event, instead, highlighted China’s power disparities. China has undoubtedly amassed enough hard power as to be able to exercise the power of coercion and induction,^[24] but its soft power is not at par. Scholars who have examined China’s soft power have largely stressed the limitations and shortcomings of the current strategies; even if others have highlighted the effectiveness of certain policies, particularly in East and South-East Asia, Africa and Latin America.^[25] Kurlantzick has used the term charm offensive to describe the multiplicity of strategies and programmes that Beijing has implemented in order to increase its soft power. According to the author, the strategy is “charming” because it is using attraction, seduction and co-optation, but it is “offensive” because it has been launched at full speed with the hope to revert benefits in a relatively short period of time.^[26] This “charm offensive” is part of China’s *go out* (*zou chuqu*) policy, which is often only associated to foreign investment and resource acquisition. But in going out, China is not only investing in infrastructure, financial markets and natural reserves, it is also exporting its cultural industries, opening Confucius institutes, and sending large numbers of students and experts overseas.^[27] Current policy choices in China resemble, to an extent, those of Japan’s internationalization period (*kokusaika*) in the 1970s. Japan’s push overseas was met with negativity and distrust by its neighbours and its new allies. Japan lacked soft power in the 1970s; today it has plenty of it. In a forty-year time span, it has developed an attractiveness that not many countries can say to have. Part of the success derives from a smart use of public diplomacy. Today, China faces a somewhat similar situation, albeit of a different scale. There are elements in common in the paths chosen to change the *status quo* (the investment in academic and cultural exchanges, to name two), but also considerably different objectives. One of them being that China wants to be actively involved in the global dialogue that takes place in the sector of international news so it can offset existing narratives.

The roadmap that should lead China to being heard globally was outlined by Li Changchun in December 2008 at the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of CCTV. First, Li acknowledged China’s lack of influence over mainstream international media and asked for real efforts to revert the situation; second, he encouraged a true *go out* policy for the mass media, including CCTV’s international division and finally, he indicated the need for further professionalization of the information and communication sectors in China in order to become more competitive globally^[28]. Li argued that in order to “accelerate the go out process,” China needs to “strengthen and develop foreign language channels, expand into foreign television markets [and] promote the exports of television formats.” He went on to add that there is a need to “guarantee that our images and voices are heard all over the world, in every single household.” Li’s perspective, as the ultimate political figure in media relations and publicity/propaganda, seems to echo the concerns amongst the Chinese leadership about the overwhelming dominance of Western companies of the international news discourse and how this largely prevents China from having its own voice heard. Expanding international television broadcasting services has been one of the chosen strategies to, ultimately, achieving the goals put forward by Li.

China started broadcasting content to foreign audiences in 1992 when CCTV-4, a Chinese-language channel aimed at overseas Chinese communities, as well to residents in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, went on air. Current affairs programmes were the only feature of

the channel until 1998 when a thorough rebranding was carried out in order to include *Chinese culture* shows as well. Programmes about Taiwan were an essential feature of the channel since the very beginning, signalling the strong correlation between TV content and foreign policy interests. After 20 years CCTV-4 has evolved from a largely unprofessional channel, run by unskilled (communication-wise) officials to a full-scale channel with a diversified run-down of programmes and multiple regional versions. In September 2000, China inaugurated CCTV-9, a news and entertainment English-language channel. English was no newcomer to CCTV, as programmes from CCTV's domestic channels had been either subtitled or dubbed in the past. CCTV-9 started as a "Window onto China", that is, trying to show what China was experiencing at a time when little attention was being paid to its development. According to Zhao and Zhu, the authors of a comprehensive *History of CCTV*, the objectives of the channel at the time were: "promoting the excellence of Chinese culture, communicating the achievements of China's socialist construction, presenting China's principles and positions, and establishing a good image of socialist China."^[29] The English-language channel editorial line was slightly reoriented in 2004 in order to give it a "global perspective, to show the World from Chinese eyes" and thus the slogan changed from "Your Window on China" to "Your Window on China and the World"^[30]. In April 2010, CCTV-9 ceased to operate as an exclusively English-language channel and was split into separate Chinese and English documentary channels. Most of the old content and foreign policy goals were transferred to a new 24-hour news channel in English, CCTV News. More changes occurred in early 2011, when foreign news anchors and correspondents were hired in order to turn CCTV News into the "Al-Jazeera of Asia", according to CCTV officials. The slogan of the channel became, "CCTV News, Your Link to Asia".

The broadcasting of contents in other languages started in late 2003, with the launch of the third stage of an ambitious plan to have CCTV reach, in the long term, between 130 and 140 countries, that is, four-fifths of the world population^[31]. The first two languages chosen were French and Spanish, which shared the same channel for over three years until October 2007 when they became two independent stations, CCTV-E and CCTV-F. The development of a multi-language platform was further developed in 2010 with the addition of the Russian and Arabic Channels, CCTV-Русский and CCTV-العربية. In about a decade, CCTV International went from having one Chinese-language channel for overseas audiences, to relaying in six languages. China's strategy in international broadcasting was initially based on two keywords, *quantity* and *diversity*, but later expanded with a third, *quality*. In pursuing diversity, China has become the only country in the world that runs television channels in six different languages. The expansion in terms of quantity has not been met with satisfactory audience levels, although such a view is not openly accepted by CCTV officials.^[32] The next move has been to diversify CCTV's operations globally and increase its presence worldwide. When most international news organisations are scaling down their international presence, China is betting on a large expansion.^[33] As for quality, CCTV's weakest link, it is being tested on the newest channel, CCTV News. It is clearly the most challenging task so far as it does not only require resources, one of the three elements in the efficiency equation discussed earlier, but it brings in issues of credibility and connecting with audiences.

CCTV-E, the Testing Lab

CCTV started to recruit Spanish speakers for a project to broadcast in Spanish in 2003.^[34] For a period of six months, from late 2003 to mid-2004, Spanish-speakers did live interpretations of newscasts, live events and press conferences airing on CCTV-9.^[35] Some documentaries were subtitled, but attention was mostly placed on live events. Initially, the Spanish language service did not serve the purpose of exporting Chinese culture/values, but that of relaying in different languages as much of CCTV's politically sensitive content, such as relevant weekly press conferences. The testing period led to the creation of CCTV-E&F, a news and entertainment channel that relayed content in Spanish and French. Broadcasting hours alternated between the two languages at times that matched primetime in receiving areas: programmes in Spanish hoped to reach audiences in Latin America and French programmes, francophone Africa.^[36] The interest in these regions exceeded any interest in reaching European countries where French and Spanish are spoken. The crowded television markets in Spain, France or Switzerland seemed more out of reach than the still developing industry in Africa or the heavily Americanised sector in Latin America. The start of operations of CCTV-E&F appears to have responded to two objectives: portraying China as a "model of development", particularly in Africa,^[37] and counter-balancing the influence of the U. S. , notably Latin America. In interviews given shortly after the launch of CCTV-E&F, the director of the Spanish channel, Ye Lulu, said that the choice of Spanish had been based on the total number of speakers and the growing "interest in Hispanic culture in China."^[38]

Before 2004, approaching Latin American audiences had been a domain reserved to China Radio International (CRI) and to some magazines that were popular amongst left-wing movements. CRI arrived in Latin America in 1981 with the opening of a bureau in Mexico City. Seven years later the second one followed in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and, in 1999, the third office was opened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. News gathering in other countries was largely done, and still is, through embassy personnel, showing an understanding, amongst Chinese elites, of news production more as a task carried out by public information/publicity officers rather than journalists. CRI news-gathering bureaus in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil generated content for Chinese-language radio stations in China and were not broadcasting in the region. However, in 2006 CRI set itself the target of opening 100 overseas stations that would broadcast content produced in China to overseas audiences, both in Chinese and local languages. The completion of the project would allow China to have the second largest foreign radio service in the world only surpassed by the BBC, with 145 stations. The first of the stations was opened in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2006 and the second one was launched in Vientiane, Laos, in November.^[39] China's first overseas radio station in Latin America opened in December 2010, in Tijuana, Mexico; 48 stations had been launched before, mostly in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Latin America has also recently seen the opening of a CCTV television broadcasting centre in Sao Paulo, Brazil.^[40]

When it started operating, CCTV employed for its Spanish language television service 48 people, 20 of which were hired as foreign experts. The number of employees had grown to 125 (96 Chinese nationals and 29 foreign experts) in 2007 when CCTV-E was turned into an independent channel.^[41] A clear division of tasks and responsibilities between Chinese personnel and foreign workers has been in place from the beginning. The job of foreign

workers is limited to translating content from English to Spanish and, therefore, a good amount of them are not expected to have a background in communication studies, but in translation. For somebody working at the news desk of CCTV-E, the usual list of tasks includes translation, video re-editing and voice-overing. Foreign workers are not expected to produce stories, documentaries or programmes of their own. Topic selection, time allocation and ranking of items in news bulletins are tasks reserved to Chinese workers. In the case of the latter, a three tier system is in place, according to information provided by interviewees. Top management within CCTV-E has experience in bureaucratic positions both within the communications sector and outside. For example CCTV-E director, Ye Lulu, had worked for CCTV-9 as deputy content manager before joining the Spanish channel. The role at managerial level is more administrative than editorial. Content guidelines are supervised by senior staff, some of whom have served in diplomatic missions in Latin America, and whose command of Spanish and knowledge of party doctrine qualifies them to identify sensitive topics, as well as to use pertinent official jargon. Content-editors and supervisors work alongside programme directors, whose role is to select topics.^[42] The bottom tier includes young graduates, not from Schools of Journalism but mostly from Faculties of Spanish Language, Culture and Literature, with a decent command of Spanish and whose job is similar to that of foreign workers. They translate stories from English/Chinese and, seldom attend events on which they later report specifically for CCTV-E. Only Chinese nationals act as reporters.^[43] The lack of professionalism and previous experience in television of most employees is seen as a constraint in the development of the channel. Scholars who analysed CCTV-9 before the reforms in 2010 and 2011 highlighted poor quality content and amateurism as two important factors for low audiences.^[44] The case of CCTV-E, which has not gone through a similar process of professionalization, should be read in different terms. Not hiring people trained in journalism responds to the understanding of the station as a copycat channel, a replica of its English-language counterpart and not as a place open to creativity and specifically designed programming for Spanish speaking audiences. In this sense, CCTV's international channels follow rules and practices of domestic media, even though they are not. They have been operating in similar terms to other state-owned media outlets whose ultimate role is to *guide public opinion* (yulun daoxiang). However, guidance at home and guidance abroad surely do not respond to the same stimuli. In not allowing CCTV-E to produce content, there are signs of a lack of clearly defined goals for the station, starting by unclear guidelines on who to speak to.

The number of potential viewers and the evolution of the actual audience of China's international broadcasting are difficult to measure, but existing data shows that they have limited impact. Between 2004 when CCTV-E&F was launched and 2007, when broadcasting hours were expanded, viewership was low. Table 1 shows countries that, in late 2010, were able to receive the signal of CCTV and the total number of subscribers in each. The number of potential viewers of the Spanish channel—based on subscriptions for cable, satellite and IP-TV services—was 15.49 million. Despite being modestly low, it meant a considerable increase from an estimated 2.2 million in 2008.^[45] The vast majority of current subscribers are located in the United States, which on paper does not fall into the target area of the channel. There are also some other countries such as Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, where it is possible to tune into CCTV-E but because no subscription is required, they are probably not included in official counts.

Table 1 Number of subscribers to cable and satellite services relaying CCTV-E by country as of 2010

Country	Month/Year of availability	Number of subscribers
United States	10/2004	14,010,000
Cuba	10/2004	30,000
Chile	10/2005	3,000
Bolivia	02/2007	70,000
Mexico	06/2007	589,000
Panama	10/2007	26,000
Brazil	10/2007	4,000
Honduras	10/2008	65,800
Guyana	08/2009	1,100
Dutch Antilles	04/2010	3,000
Spain	10/2008	601,500
Poland	03/2009	100
Russia	03/2009	—
Romania	03/2009	83,071
	TOTAL	15,486,571

Source: <http://blog.cntv.cn/7089247—1110.html>

To overcome the limited reach of foreign-language programming, China has taken two different measures. It first decided to go into the sector of satellite-service providers and, more recently, it started to increase the availability of Chinese television content on the Internet. On October 1, 2004—the day CCTV-E&F went on air—China launched an overseas satellite platform, “The Great Wall Satellite TV Platform”, with over 20 channels, including the majority of CCTV’s channels (both domestic and international) but also some regional stations such as the popular Hunan TV, Beijing TV and Dragon TV.^[46] “Great Wall” was initially introduced to the American market, but has developed into different versions for different continents. The last localized package to be introduced in 2008, after the American, Canadian, European and Asian versions, was the Latin American one. The target audience of the “Great Wall” platform, which requires a monthly fee and carries mostly Chinese language channels, are Chinese overseas communities but it is hoped that the channel can attract non-ethnic Chinese audiences in the long term.^[47] For this same purpose, broadcasting online has been recently embraced by CCTV due to reduced transmission costs and unlimited amount of potential viewers. Content online is being channel through China Network Television (CNTV), the online division of CCTV, created in 2009. According to its website, CNTV wants to be a “globalized, multilingual and multi-terminal public webcast service platform.”^[48]

In their detailed review of CCTV’s strategy in the medium and long term, Zhao and Zhu fail to identify clear tangible objectives in terms of audience increase. They do cite the (unreached) goal of having CCTV’s signal reach “four fifths of the world’s population” by 2011

but do not elaborate any further on how to actually make people tune in to CCTV or who to expect to watch.^[49] This lack of an audience-specific strategy for each of the different channels has meant that none of the different changes that CCTV-E has gone through since 2004 has had any significant impact on viewers' attitudes. When on October 1, 2007 CCTV-E started operations, it was structured around three pillars: information, documentaries, and Chinese culture. These have remained intact since, even though time allocation, formats and specific programmes are periodically changed. About 39% of CCTV-E's air time is reserved to documentary programmes, 28% to television dramas, 22% to news and current affairs, and the remaining 11% is allocated to cultural and educational programmes. Figure 1 shows that, by far, documentaries take up the largest amount of time of CCTV-E's schedule as in most of the other foreign-language channels of CCTV. The selection of documentaries comes from English-language channels, either CCTV News or CCTV-9 Documentary. The department in charge of documentaries at CCTV-E has no direct choice over titles, and no production is done within the department. A simple look at examples of series broadcasted reveals a diversified list of topics. There are programmes dealing specifically with touristic destinations in China, with the history of the country, with remarkable achievements by Chinese scientists and other more general topics both about contemporary China and abroad. Documentaries at CCTV-E claim to be, "objective and truthful" and to present a Chinese perspective on current events. Combined on-air time for documentaries and cultural and educational programmes takes half of overall air time.

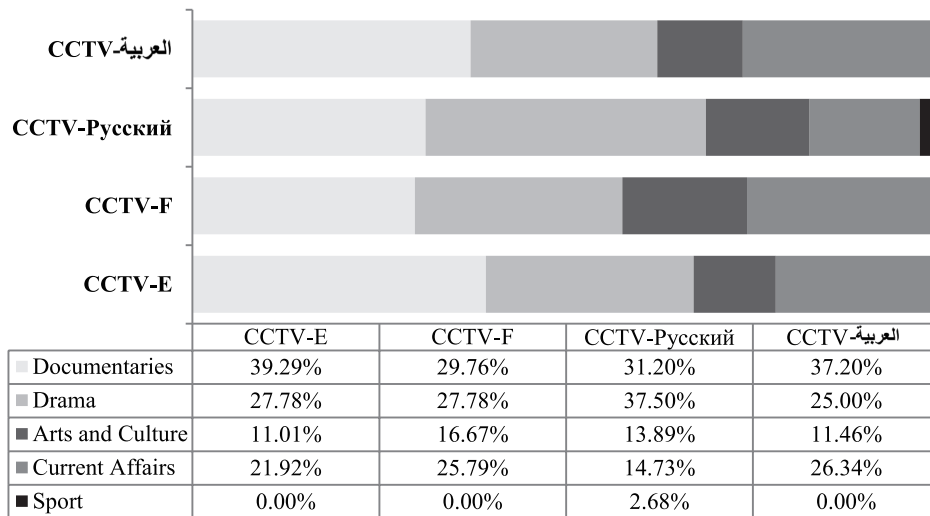


Figure 1 Time allocated to different types of programmes on CCTV's foreign language channels (2011)

Source: CNTV and data collected by the author

Television dramas come second in total allocated time, with two Chinese dramas broadcasted a day (multiple times) with Spanish subtitles. Latin America is considerably well known for its passionate *telenovelas* and its equally passionate followers. It seems coherent that fiction, a much softer approach than news and current affairs programmes, is given a role to play in winning *hearts and minds*. There is no literature available on the impact of

these shows in foreign audiences, but there are plenty of studies that discuss the construction of a normative China in television dramas through the selection of topics and plot development, as well as the supervisory role played by the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television, that has the ultimate word on content. The successful South Korean and Japanese experiences in exporting television dramas to overseas markets, including Latin America, reinforces the potential to create room for television content produced in China through getting foreign audiences used to Chinese television narratives. It has been argued that the so-called West would be not welcoming to television content produced in Asia, but, as Zhu, Keane and Bai argue the success of Korean companies “has impelled producers to re-examine the kinds of appeal that their cultural products have for transnational audiences.”^[50] For China, the interest of exploring TV dramas’ soft power potential goes beyond CCTV-E. Other broadcasters have engaged in projects that involve cooperation with companies in Spanish-speaking countries. In Spain, the Drama Centre of the Shanghai Media Group co-produced in 2004 *Qing xian Baseluona*, a drama that takes place in “trendy Barcelona” and in “vibrant Shanghai”. In Mexico, Televisa and CCTV signed an agreement to move from programme-exchanges to jointly producing a drama series set in nowadays China.

If dramas are the soft approach to changing perceptions on China amongst the general public, the more direct, but not necessarily more effective, approach to the goal of (re) shaping public opinion abroad are current affairs programmes. Approximately one fifth of CCTV-E’s air time is reserved to news shows.^[51] CCTV-E has two talk-shows, a business news bulletin and several editions of its main newscast, *Noticiero*. An analysis of news stories over two weeks of news shows revealed that stories related to Latin America/Spain accounted for less than 4%, compared to over 58% related to Asia. Events in which Chinese top-ranking officials take part prevail over any other type of story, making little contribution to efforts of getting rid of the image of international television broadcasting as a propaganda tool. In the case of CCTV-E there is a clear continuum between government sources and contents, as stories largely rely on official statements, public information news releases and official party documents.

Conclusions

China has made it clear that it wants to master public diplomacy as a necessary first step to improving its image abroad. The country’s unequal performance in terms of hard and soft power is being addressed by means of diverse instruments and tools. International television broadcasting tops the list in terms of investment, but the high costs of building a strong multi-lingual information system are not directly reverting in changes in public opinion abroad. Surveys show that China is still perceived negatively in several world regions.^[52] Chinese officials have blamed foreign media for their allegedly negative framing of China and thus hoped that the creation of a strong international television system could, in the long term, change prevailing narratives. However, the capacity of the country to influence foreign public opinion remains largely symbolical. In order for international broadcasting to become effective three elements have to be balanced: resources, audiences and credibility. China has invested heavily on developing its own system, including the Spanish-language channel, CCTV-E. However, the efficiency of public diplomacy drops dramatically when audiences re-

fuse to listen to messages. Power, particularly soft power, is based on attraction: the attraction of culture, values and ideas. Until Chinese media manage to convince their audiences that their messages are not exclusively those of the CPC, it seems unlikely that foreign publics will actively reach CCTV. Other issues that have been signalled as shortfalls for the success of China's international broadcasting efforts are amateurism in content production and inconsistent adaptation to the needs and requests of local audiences, both in terms of formats and narrative styles.

Polls reveal that the challenge to create more favourable views amongst foreign audiences is more evident in America and Europe, where many consider Chinese media as mouthpieces of the regime. Precisely because these areas are highly influential in the creation of global narratives on current affairs, CCTV seems to be in need to redesign part of its strategy to, not only retain the favourable views held by many in Africa and Latin America, but to actually influence opinion makers in countries such as Spain, the United Kingdom or France. The possibilities to make a difference might not lie exclusively on CCTV's international broadcasting efforts, but on finding ways to export and distribute content produced in China through local media outlets. The stigmatisation of CCTV as simple propaganda might take a considerable time to be erased. If results from the *go out* policy are expected to be achieved in the very long term, the current strategies might eventually pay off. Previous experiences suggest that after the initial investment, comes the improvement in quality and, finally, the ability to effectively send messages that have an impact on both the general public (usually through entertainment and culture) and opinion leaders. However, if the establishment of a counter-hegemonic discourse is expected to happen in the short-term, major changes are needed to redress existing inefficiencies.

Notes

- [1] See, for example, Jirik, "24-Hour Television News in the People's Republic of China" ; Sun, "Mission Impossible? Soft Power, Communication Capacity, and the Globalization of Chinese Media" ; Zhang, "Chinese State Media Going Global" ; and Shirk, "Changing Media, Changing Foreign Policy in China. "
- [2] China has the largest TV international broadcasting system in the World, but it has seldom been explored from an academic perspective. In Tanaka, "International Television Broadcasting in East Asia: Current Situation and Challenges" there is a brief discussion on international broadcasting in East Asian countries, but almost all existing research focuses on European and North-American television outlets. Some basic surveys are, Browne, *International Radio Broadcasting*; Cushion and Lewis, *The Rise of 24-Hour News Television*.
- [3] Cull, "Public Diplomacy," 31.
- [4] The term propaganda is no longer in use in most democracies, as it is generally understood in terms of non-strictly factual information created by not-so-democratic governments. The avoidance of the word is not shared by all countries. China, for example, still uses the term *xuanchuan*, starting with the "Department of Propaganda" (*Zhonggong Zhongyang Xuanchuan Bu*), which has, however, had its English-language name changed to Publicity Department.
- [5] Gilboa, "Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy," 59.
- [6] Both Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy*, and Seib, *Toward a New Public Diplomacy* elaborate on the concept.
- [7] Snow, "Rethinking Public Diplomacy," 11.
- [8] Tuch, *Communicating with the World*, 3; Frederick, *Global Communication and International Relations*, 229.

- [9] Cull, "Public Diplomacy," 34.
- [10] China's first radio broadcasts were aired from Yan'an under the supervision of Zhou Enlai in December 1940. The establishment of an actual radio broadcasting system did not occur until 1945. The Yan'an Xinhua Broadcasting Station (*Yan'an Xinhua Guangbo Diantai*) had a two-hour English service that reached parts of Europe, Russia and the U. S. , and had to rival with emissions from Nanjing. For a detailed review of the history of radio broadcasts in China see Chang, *Mass Media in China*, 22.
- [11] Wood, *History of International Broadcasting*, 22.
- [12] Kelley, "Between 'Take-offs' and 'Crash Landings'," 77.
- [13] Price, *Media and Sovereignty*, 200.
- [14] The mandate of public broadcasters often includes a reference to the need to promote, disseminate and export "national culture" or "national values" .
- [15] There is abundant research on the extent to which international news networks are capable (or not) of setting the political agenda. For this, see Edwards, *Mediapolitik*; Miller, *Media Pressure on Foreign Policy*, and Oppermann and Viehriig, *Issue Salience in International Politics*. Regarding the "CNN effect", Robinson, *The CNN Effect*; Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, and Cushion and Lewis, *The Rise of 24-Hour News Television* discuss its evolution of that influence, while Corman, Trethewey, and Goodhall, *Weapons of Mass Persuasion*, and Painter, *Counter-Hegemonic News: A Case Study of Al-Jazeera English and Telesur* address its consequences in terms of ideological and geographical representation.
- [16] It is worth noting that apart from BBC World aside, the first actors to break into the international television news market were private companies (SkyNews, Fox News, CNBC, Channel NewsAsia...) that managed to challenge the monopoly of nation-states to carry on the tasks of representation and issue-framing.
- [17] After the successful launch of Al Jazeera English in mid-2006, France 24 started its English-language channel at the end of the same year and Japan followed with NHK World in 2009. Previously running public-funded channels included Russia Today (launched in December 2005), Deutsche Welle (1998), Euronews (1993) and CCTV—9 (2000) .
- [18] Nye, *The Powers to Lead*, 94.
- [19] Nye, *Future of Power*.
- [20] Entman, *Projections of Power*.
- [21] The full text of the testimony given by Clinton can be found at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/03/157483.htm>.
- [22] U. S. Senator Richard G. Lugar has commissioned two reports on the issue, both presented to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. On 9 June 2010, "U. S. International Broadcasting: —Is Anybody Listening?—Keeping the U. S. Connected" (<http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/senate11cp111.html>), and on 15 February 2011 "Another U. S. Deficit —China and America— Public Diplomacy in the Age of the Internet" (<http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/senate11cp112.html>).
- [23] The issue of perceptions on China before and after the 2008 Olympic games has been addressed from multiple perspectives. See, for example, Yang, "Forced Harmony" ; Manzenreiter, "The Beijing Games in the Western Imagination of China" ; Peng, "Representation of China" ; Stone and Xiao, "Anointing a New Enemy" ; Scollon, "Generic Variability in News Stories in Chinese and English" ; Warlaumont, "U. S. Reporting on China: A New Look at an Old Issue. "
- [24] One can look at the Chinese economy, the world's second largest. China plays a central role in the network of economic interconnectedness, enough to influence decisions of others. China's power to coerce is also a concern to some, as they see Beijing's military capabilities increase every year, despite the "peaceful development" narrative.
- [25] For a general review, see Gill and Huang, "Sources and Limits of Chinese 'soft Power' " ; Cruz De Castro, "Confronting China's Charm Offensive in East Asia" ; Cho and Jeong, "China's Soft Power" ; Suzuki, "Chinese Soft Power, Insecurity Studies, Myopia and Fantasy" ; Wang, *Soft Power in China:*

- Public Diplomacy Through Communication*. Surveys by area, include Lee, “China’s Soft Power in East Asia” ; Fijałkowski, “China’s ‘soft Power’ in Africa?” ; and Ellis, “Chinese Soft Power in Latin America A Case Study.”
- [26] Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 37.
- [27] China’s public diplomacy has four principles: pragmatism, particularism, traditionalism and continuity. Its current policies are a *continuation* of a long history of public diplomacy, starting with people-to-people exchanges in the 1950s and advocacy programmes in ideologically affine countries. It is *traditional* and *particular* in that it employs practices that some consider outdated, and adapts practices with a ‘Chinese twist’. Finally, and most definitely, China’s public diplomacy is *pragmatic* because it adapts to the needs and objectives of the country even if it requires sacrifices in terms of values and ideas.
- [28] For a full transcript of Li’s speech, see http://news.china.com/zh_cn/news100/11038989/20081223/15248144.html.
- [29] Zhao, *Zhongyang Dianshitai Fazhan Shi [History of CCTV]*, 61.
- [30] *Ibid.*, 53.
- [31] Zhao, *Zhongyang Dianshitai Pinpai Zhanlüe [CCTV Branding Strategy]*, 160.
- [32] According to a CCTV International blog, the number of subscribers to international channels of CCTV was in 2010, 170.92 million people. <http://blog.cntv.cn/7089247—1087.html>. When discussing the audience of CCTV—9, Rawnsley, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power for the Chinese Century”, conceded that 90% of viewers lived in China, 4% were foreigners and that 80% of people were Chinese who wanted to improve their English proficiency.
- [33] The *South China Morning Post* reported in January 2009 that the government would invest 45 million yuan in Chinese state media (CCTV, Xinhua and *People’s Daily*) foreign ventures. For the full article, see Wu and Chen “Beijing in 45b Yuan Global Media Drive State Giants to Lead Image Campaign” in *South China Morning Post*, 13 January 2009, 1.
- [34] Large parts of this chapter are based on interviews with CCTV—E staff and former employees. Because CCTV employees are not allowed to give unauthorized interviews I have concealed their names.
- [35] This had been done previously on the occasion of the Spring Festival Gala which was dubbed into English for several years, and is still today broadcasted in multiple languages.
- [36] The Spanish content was relayed between 8am and 12pm Beijing time, which roughly equals to evening prime time in South America. Broadcasting hours were later extended.
- [37] Some documents refer to African markets as in need for educational programmes. (<http://blog.cntv.cn/7089247—1087.html>).
- [38] According to an interview in López, “Nuevo Canal de CCTV en español,” *China Hoy*, April 2004. Available online: <http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/hoy/2004/0404/15.htm>.
- [39] “For 65 years, a window to the world” in *China Daily*, 4 December 2006. Available online: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/home/2006—12/04/content_749162.htm.
- [40] CCTV has 7 broadcasting centres abroad in London, Washington, Moscow, Nairobi, Hong Kong, Dubai, and Sao Paulo. These news gathering and production centres serve the Chinese and English language channels, but they are built with capabilities to broadcast live from the studio and to feed locally produced content.
- [41] They came from Mexico, Spain, Peru, the U. S. , Colombia and Cuba. For more operational details of CCTV—E’s newsroom, see Díez, “La TV en Español ya Tiene Canal Propio en China,” *ABC*, 7 January 2008, 106.
- [42] Recently an editorial board constituted by representatives of each of the foreign-language channels has been created, but the exact mission of the board is unclear.
- [43] As for the dozen of news anchors and TV hosts, roughly 60% of are non-Chinese and 40% Chinese.
- [44] This has been mentioned by both Jirik, “Making News in the People’s Republic of China: The Case of CCTV—9” and Bakshi, “China’s Challenge to International Journalism,” 149.
- [45] Zhao, *Zhongyang Dianshitai Fazhan Shi [History of CCTV]*, 160.
- [46] The international commercialization of Chinese TV falls under the objective of taking content produced

- in China abroad in order to increase exposure of its cultural industries, but not exclusively. There is also a desire to reach overseas Chinese communities, who had been outside the reach of CPC's sponsored media "guidance" for years. Content from Taiwan and Hong Kong started to reach Europe, the U. S. and South-East Asia as early as 1979, according to Zhu, *Television in Post-reform China*, 228.
- [47] Zhao, *Zhongyang Dianshitai Pinpai Zhanlüe [CCTV Branding Strategy]*, 173.
- [48] The official website is <http://www.cntv.cn/>. There are several different versions of CNTV, some for domestic consumption (Tibetan, Mongolian and Korean) and some for international audiences (English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian). All different versions have video-on-demand services and some have live video streams.
- [49] Zhao, *Zhongyang Dianshitai Pinpai Zhanlüe [CCTV Branding Strategy]*, 319.
- [50] Zhu, Keane, and Bai, *TV Drama in China*, 16.
- [51] These have recently included the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the CPC or the latest developments in China's aerospace industry.
- [52] Gallup has polled on perceptions about China since the 1980s (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/1627/china.aspx>), while the BBC has done similar studies over the last decade in different countries ([http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCevals U. S. _Mar11_rpt. pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCevals_U.S._Mar11_rpt.pdf)).

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