
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Localisation between Negotiating Forces: A Case Study of a Chinese Radio Station in the United States

Sheng Zou

Stanford University, US
zsaaron.bj@gmail.com

During the past decade, Chinese state-owned media have accelerated their pace of overseas development to establish their international presence. In their worldwide expansion in the service of the government's political and diplomatic initiatives, these media outlets attempt to connect with and rise in the global media market by borrowing experiences from their Western competitors. This article revisits the Western model of media localisation and examines how the strategic components in Western media's localisation practices are absent in Chinese media's applications, where tensions and incongruities exist between the headquarters and the local production team. By looking closely at the operations of a US-based studio jointly run by the Chinese international broadcaster China Radio International and its local partner, the article further analyses the negotiation between propaganda-oriented logic and market-driven logic as two major driving forces behind Chinese media's worldwide expansion, and how the contradiction and disjuncture between the two affects the media outlets' localisation practices and outcomes.

Keywords: Chinese media; international communication; overseas Chinese audience; localisation strategies; transnational media production; radio

Introduction

Since the 1970s, a shift in late capitalism from mass production to globalised flexible accumulation (Harvey, 1989) has been calling forth new patterns of production and consumption that promoted the deterritorialised mobility and flexibility of labour, commodities, ideas and capital on a global scale. In the media industry, the shift ushered in a wave of global media expansion by dint of market-specific localisation strategies. US-based global media giants, spearheading such novel exploration, were historically situated at the centre of both the literature on localisation and the discourse on media globalisation. Riding on the global tide of liberalisation and deregulation, these media conglomerates successfully entered the markets of non-Western countries.

Earlier explorations of media localisation generally shared several common premises. Firstly, the localisation processes were usually dominated by Western companies and targeted at audiences in non-Western, often 'peripheral', countries. Secondly, they took place mostly

in capitalist economies characterised by free markets; thus, media products from Western companies were subject to relatively few institutional barriers when entering new markets. Thirdly, the ideologies and values carried by the Western media giants were often considered appealing across the world, which facilitated local reception.

Unlike previous inquiries, this article concentrates on media localisation unfolding in the opposite direction, where a non-Western, non-commercial media outlet attempts to enter highly developed Western markets.

In recent years, the term localisation found its way into an increasing amount of literature on Chinese media's worldwide expansion (Sun, 2006; Hu & Guan, 2011; Liu, 2013). Localisation could be conceptualised as a phase of the globalisation process that is characterised by adaptation to diverse local conditions (Li & Cheong, 2017).

Modelled on Western media transnationals' strategies, Chinese media's localisation practices, nonetheless, are loaded with non-Western ideologies. As their operations extend into such developed countries as the United States, this non-Western contra-flow encounters a drastically different institutional environment, which gives rise to different dynamics of localisation. Although state-owned media's global expansion has received growing attention in China, a predominant portion of this research was conducted at the macro level, lacking empirical data and micro-level scrutiny of concrete localisation processes. Drawing on ethnographic observation and interviews, this article takes a closer look at the localisation practices of the giant Chinese state-owned broadcaster, China Radio International (CRI), in the United States, revealing the distinctive characteristics of this unique localisation process.

Chinese media's ambitious 'going-out' project

Emerging as the world's second largest economy, China has drastically altered its relationship to the Western status quo on different fronts (Straubhaar, 2010). In recent years, the discussion on enhancing soft power and cultural influence has gained much traction in China; and the 'media going out' project for state-owned media has continued to gather momentum. In 2009, the government decided to boost this initiative by announcing around \$6 billion in funding support (Hu and Ji 2012). This initiative aimed to 'counteract negative prejudices by amplifying China's voice overseas', and 'to promote China's own global media conglomerates to enable them to compete with their Western counterparts' (ibid, 33). The overseas development of Chinese state-owned media has deepened against the backdrop of commercialisation and market-driven reforms of media institutions, although such a transformation was predominately 'state-led' (Chan, 2003). On the one hand, state-owned media have been experimenting with corporatised commercial operations and borrowing experiences from Western transnational media giants. On the other hand, they are still subject to the salient ideological control and the dominant imperative of propaganda, with their efforts in international broadcasting subsidised to a considerable extent by the state.

In existing research on Chinese media's efforts in international communication, the emphasis – on the macro level – has been placed on the transformation and development of mainstream media against the backdrop of cultural system reform, digitization and marketisation, such as medias' embrace of new technologies and multimedia platforms, their adoption of industry-oriented operation and management, as well as their expansion in overseas markets (Hu & Guan, 2011). Major concerns include the number of languages broadcast, global coverage, the extent of content production, the number of employees and foreign franchises, the multiplicity of media platforms, and the models of market entry (Cheng & Wang, 2011; He, 2009; Hu & Guan, 2011). However, the growth of foreign franchises and international media coverage is an insufficient indicator of the quality of media operations; inadequate attention has been paid to market earnings and influence, reputation and reception. In other words, relatively scarce data existed to indicate the actual outcome and audience response.

On the micro-level, many researchers have examined the format, content and other dimensions of media products, raising issues that hinder effective intercultural communication, such as the use of non-native expressions, inaccurate translations and the propagandistic style of presentation (Ma, 2011). Programme format and content is believed to be vital to facilitating effective international communication by Chinese TV stations (Li, 2012). Another issue with the 'media going-out' initiative, as Xin (2010) observes, is the comparatively unattractive content produced on a daily basis. In general, Chinese state-owned media have been devoting enormous resources to the construction of facilities, channels and platforms, whereas less attention has been placed on the establishment of brand identities, credibility, reputation and influence.

Admittedly, there are challenges and barriers to the globalising endeavour of Chinese media, such as their relative weaknesses in media technology, their comparatively narrow media channels, the globally-established hegemony of Western languages and the view of Chinese media as a party mouthpiece promoted by the Western press (Sun, 2006; Sun, 2015). Some of these challenges, such as the technological/logistical ones, will be surmountable with more investment but more structural difficulties are harder to overcome. In addition to technological/logistical limitations and external structural constraints, this paper argues that the most immediate endogenous issues lie at tactical and ideological levels in relation to the question of localisation. As overseas audiences –including but not restricted to the Chinese diaspora – do not necessarily share the same preferences as domestic audiences in China, localising media production is of great significance for Chinese mainstream media.

It is instructive to compare Chinese media's localisation practices with those of the Western model to reveal challenges yet to be addressed. The intention of this comparison is by no means to suggest that the Western model is superior, rather that the Western model is one that fits in with those market rules underlying the localisation of global media. For Chinese media to compete in the global media market, mere corporatisation is not enough; strategic components need to be re-examined.

Revisiting localisation of media production: A western model

The dialectic of localisation and globalisation is best captured by the term 'glocalization', which speaks to the process through which globalisation is realised in concrete and particular local forms (Robertson, 1992). The localisation of media production, first explored by US-based media giants, exhibits several primary strategic characteristics.

First, localisation is predominately an audience-oriented post-Fordist operation aligned with neoliberalism and consumerism, aiming to meet the specific desires of discrete subsets of consumers. Nickelodeon, for instance, launched stand-alone national channels, such as Nick UK, Nick Australia and Nick New Zealand, with fully localised operations and productions to increase the relevance of its programming to local audiences (Chalaby, 2002). It also devised various ways to connect with young people locally, such as soliciting mail and artworks from the audience, establishing educational facilities for activities, hosting competitions and award shows, and launching country-specific or regional websites. (Lustyik, 2010). MTV constitutes another example that caters to local youth's needs for fashion and recreation. Its well-crafted localisation strategies, particularly in Asia and Latin America, were based on knowledge of the social, cultural and linguistic conditions that shaped local audience reception.

Secondly, sophisticated localisation strategies are often characterised by cultural hybridity (Canclini, 1995; Kraidy, 2005). Broad as it is, the term cultural hybridity is crucial to effective media localisation. Nowadays hybrid media products which serve to promote global media brands among the local audience are highly visible. The sophistication of localisation is often reflected in the mastery of adaptation and hybridization. One notable example is Star TV's

far-reaching localisation in India, especially *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, the Indian adaptation of the show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* The show adeptly embeds traditional cultural elements within an international programme format, which reflects a balance between tradition and modernity while promoting such values as individualism, the open market and democracy (Mitra, 2012). Initially catering to the audience's needs through hybridization, adapted programmes gradually reshape the audience's preferences (Levitt, 1986; Fung, 2006). Hybridization is salient in various culturally specific adaptations of popular Western programme genres, such as singing competitions, reality shows, game shows and talk shows.

Thirdly, despite the decentralising trend of localisation practices through outsourcing and joint ventures, the unity and consistency of these global media brands often remain uncompromised. Localised versions often seek to retain coherence with the original version while enhancing the media brand directly or indirectly. MTV's global expansion has been secured, to a great extent, by effective management that understands its core branding values. The numerous localised channels under MTV are highly independent in hiring staff, producing programmes and hosting events. Nonetheless, through effective management, it has ensured that the local channels are loyal to the core brand image as a whole. In the numerous shows and galas it co-sponsors with local media partners, it makes sure that the planning of such events reflects MTV's distinct style and flavour (Fung, 2006). MTV's global brand identity is thus highly discernible in localised programming.

Last but not least, effective localisation also leads to standardisation of production norms and practices, which guarantees the consistent quality of localised programming. Although the 'creative aspects' of localised media production embrace the value of cultural diversity, local industrial practices increasingly converge with standardised global norms in planning, training, production, marketing and distribution (Pathania-Jain, 2006). For instance, to oversee licensing, the American media group Sesame Workshop, formerly the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), established an International Division that issued several licensing policies to ensure that foreign versions of 'Sesame Street' were commercial-free and of high quality. Furthermore, alterations to the series have to be approved and supervised by local educational experts working in concert with the Workshop (Moran, 2006). The Workshop also made sure that the local staff received proper training that familiarised them with production guidelines and objectives; it even participated in the hiring process of some senior staff members. These measures entail close connection and coordination between headquarters and the local production team.

Localisation practices of a Chinese state-owned radio

The market-driven localisation practices of Western media giants promulgated Western modernity and compatible values worldwide whilst facilitating the convergence between local and global markets. However, less attention has been given to the emerging localisation operations of non-commercial and non-Western media outlets such as Chinese state-owned media. Closely influenced by government policies, their localisation was not set in motion by market forces. Gradually, this non-Western contra-flow has entered Western countries such as the United States. This article seeks to examine this localisation and capture its distinctive dynamics. Unlike previous Chinese research characterised by macro-level scrutiny, this article features a micro-level examination of the localisation operations of a Chinese state-owned international broadcaster – China Radio International (CRI) – in the United States. Much of the existing literature on the 'media going-out' project concentrates predominantly on Xinhua News Agency and CCTV, while this paper sheds light on the less-studied radio broadcaster. It attempts to examine how CRI's localisation has been carried out in the United States; how different driving forces, such as nation-states/governments and capital/market, interact

with each other in this process; and how the interactions between such forces affect the outcome of its localisation practices.

Broadcasting internationally in dozens of languages and dialects, CRI has launched numerous overseas radio service branches, correspondent bureaux and regional stations. Since 2005, CRI has been actively seeking international development, which gained increasing momentum in recent years, especially after the implementation of the 'media going-out' project. As Sun (2015) observes, Chinese media, in their attempts at overseas expansion, often seek to rely on 'vehicles' that carry messages on their behalf. Sometimes, the vehicle is the international wing of state-owned or non-state owned Chinese media; at other times, it could be foreign media that cover China. In particular, Chinese-language media 'operated by and targeting diasporic Chinese communities outside China are regarded as a crucial intermediary and a key node in global communication' (ibid, 410). CRI's strategy of international development is generally in line with this observation. Initially, CRI purchased slots on foreign radio stations to air its own pre-packaged programmes. Then, it began to undertake localised media production in partnership with media companies overseas. In some regions, it leased entire radio frequencies or established branches occupying stand-alone frequencies. In this process, CRI sought friendly local resources and partners as 'vehicles' to deliver its message to an overseas audience.

As part of its location practices, CRI has a studio in the United States jointly run with a local Chinese-language media company, hereafter anonymously referred to as 'XYZ'. Staffed primarily by the employees of XYZ, the studio, with its distinct name and logo, houses a radio station and a TV station, which broadcast in Mandarin and target the Chinese diaspora in the United States. The studio occupies a separate production area within the local media company. A 2015 Reuters report marked the local partner station as one of the 'covert' stations which allegedly obscured CRI's involvement (Qing & Jiffman, 2015), although this allegation was denied by the local station and contested by Chinese media (*Global Times*, 2015). The ethnography for this research was conducted in 2012, prior to the release of the Reuters report; based on the participant observation that took place then, the collaboration was not hidden on either side, but publicly acknowledged. The staff at both CRI and XYZ openly talked about their collaboration and their joint studio. Although no advance agreement about anonymity was made with the local station, due to the sensitive nature of the aforementioned report, the researcher had decided to anonymise the local station for its own protection.

Participant observation conducted in 2012 at XYZ lasted three months. It enabled the researcher to witness first hand and understand in detail how media production unfolded at the studio, including how news articles were written and programmes made; how media staff carried out their work; how XYZ managed the studio and other operations; and how it cooperated with CRI. The researcher also came into regular contact with about ten staff members and acquired knowledge about media production processes. More broadly, the researcher gained exposure to the ethnic media landscape in the local community, which helped to make sense of the ways in which the studio functioned. To complement this ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews were conducted at various research venues. The principal interviewees were the division directors and staff at CRI headquarters in China (anonymously named as A, B and C), and staff at the US-based studio (anonymously named as D, E and F).

Localisation in practice: Four critical gaps

As discussed above, sophisticated localisation often comprises of four significant strategic components – engagement with audiences, hybridization of global and local elements, the unity of brand identity, and consistency in production quality. In CRI's efforts to localise in

the United States, however, these strategic components were largely missing. Based on results from this study, its localisation practices were marked instead by tension and incongruity between headquarters and the local production team. The following discussion identifies four major aspects of this tension and incongruity.

Weak awareness of the overseas audience

The overseas audience for Chinese media, as Wu (2001) summarises, primarily consists of three categories – namely, the native audience of the ‘mainstream society’, which speaks a foreign language; overseas Chinese immigrants whose native language is Chinese; and Chinese expats such as representatives of the Chinese government and employees of Chinese businesses and organisations. The attempt to meet the demands of each of these disparate audiences is admittedly a daunting task.

CRI’s localised radio station aired Mandarin Chinese programmes that were produced in China as well as in the local community, offering news information on both fronts. In addition to current events, the programming also included commentary, music and entertainment programmes and talk shows. However, due to inadequate awareness of the overseas audience’s preferences, CRI was unable to tailor its programming to meet its overseas audience’s needs. Specifically, rather than customise its domestic programming for any particular market, CRI headquarters produced one set of programmes to be broadcast in different countries. According to a division director (Interviewee C) at headquarters in Beijing, CRI domestically produced and selectively broadcast about a dozen Chinese language programmes – contingent upon the available time slots – in different major cities around the world. Moreover, the domestic production team based the programming on little more than speculation about the overseas audience’s preferences, as CRI had not established a comprehensive mechanism through which to interact with and collect feedback from the overseas audiences, especially in developed countries such as the United States.

According to the division director (Interviewee C), CRI headquarters increasingly expected the local production team to deliver programmes that were more localised. However, the local production team was subject to numerous constraints which impeded its ability to meet audience expectations.

Firstly, it was relatively difficult for the local production team to keep track of its audience’s reception preferences. Due to the fact that ethnic radio stations are mostly local and small-scale, it is not easy to obtain accurate ratings data for many of them (Matsaganis, Katz, & Ball-Rokeach, 2010). For many ethnic media outlets, a thorough measurement and analysis of their audiences tends to be cost-prohibitive. Furthermore, in terms of attracting advertisers, it is not helpful if ratings yielded by such analyses turn out to be low. According to the staff of XYZ, they had yet to obtain measurements of the listenership from major ratings companies, but the listenership was probably limited because of weak radio transmission as well as the radio station’s relatively low coverage rate (Interviewee E). Furthermore, there were often few participating callers during some of the programmes’ call-in sessions (Interviewee D).

Secondly, programming failed to meet the particular needs of the audience adequately, in terms of the kind of information that the audience needed or wanted to hear. Although the local production team received emails and calls from the audience, such feedback was not carefully scrutinised, and the team made few, if any, adjustments based upon it (Interviewee F). Localised media production was also characterised by a lack of proper planning and preparation. For instance, the media content was mostly aggregated from news websites and edited by staff members based on their personal choices and the availability of online resources.

Thirdly, as CRI’s joint venture, the studio was subject to tacit (self-) censorship, although such censorship was not as explicitly conducted as that at its headquarters. A staff member

at headquarters said the domestic team received regular instructions and guidelines regarding what to report, and how to report it. Headquarters likely communicated this general principle – censorship of both style and content – to its partner station in implicit as well as explicit ways. In interviews, staff members in the US-based studio claimed to be aware of such self-censorship. Hard news and commentary programmes were produced almost entirely by staff members who were immigrants from the Chinese mainland. Most of the news content focused on the coverage of the mainland and was often selected from mainstream Chinese news sources, mostly state-owned media. Moreover, staff members understood that they were to avoid sensitive words or topics such as homosexuality and prostitution in the selection of news materials.

Self-censorship sometimes constrained the diversity and professionalism of the programming. Inattention to the local context limited the studio's ability to satisfy the local audience's need for professional, open and relatively objective news. Moreover, the programme's content, format and style were not tailored to the particular character of the diaspora community.

Disjuncture in production standards

There were notable differences between CRI headquarters and the local production team in terms of their organisational structure, staff composition and media production techniques, and these differences led to marked discrepancies in the quality of the programming that each outlet produced.

Generally, CRI's domestic production team was more organised; the domestic production team was characterised by clearly delineated job responsibilities and a professionally orchestrated media production system. CRI headquarters featured a media production team that was exclusively engaged in producing Chinese-language programmes for overseas Chinese audiences. Based on different responsibilities and specialisations, the team was further divided into groups that oversaw different programmes. Each programme was supervised by a producer and supported by a team of reporters and editors. Topics and outlines took shape in consultation with producers, editors and reporters; the producers also reviewed and revised the finished scripts and reports, and held regular meetings in which they discussed story ideas (Interviewee B).

At headquarters, professional media production routines, multi-level reviewing processes and a robust tech support team helped to ensure the quality of audio recording, editing and broadcasting. Moreover, the headquarters surpassed the local production team in staff development, its staff comprising of college graduates who had majored in relevant fields and professionals with substantial work experience. As a result, the domestic (Beijing) team produced substantially more original news stories than the local production team.

In connection with its efforts to localise in the United States, CRI headquarters adopted a highly decentralised management model that assigned a high level of autonomy to the local production team managed by XYZ. As another division director (Interviewee B) from headquarters noted, the local production team was not subject to domestic standards of news production and organisational management. These 'double standards' reduced the headquarters' connection with and control over the local production team, in ways that had a pronounced effect on production quality.

By the time the participant observation was conducted, CRI headquarters had dispatched only two administrative staff members to their studio, and neither of these staff members was directly involved in localised media production. Almost all of the staff responsible for localised media production came from XYZ; the local team usually produced its own programmes independently of the domestic team.

Like most local ethnic media organisations, however, XYZ was understaffed. XYZ managed multiple media platforms, including radio stations, a magazine, a newspaper and a TV station. But its small teams – about a dozen employees worked in news production, for example – usually had to support more than one platform, and thus, inevitably, took on an excessive workload. This phenomenon has been widely observed in ethnic media organisations, in which staff are obliged to work long hours for relatively low salaries (Browne, 2005). On the one hand, ethnic media is not a popular career choice, and this can make hiring difficult. On the other hand, as economic enterprises, ethnic media have to consider the costs and benefits of their operations. In short, staff members in the studio were often under tremendous pressure, and they were obliged to handle multiple tasks and play several roles, ‘Many hosts manage to record programmes for several hours a day. They are sometimes also required to write articles or to complete other tasks, so basically they don’t have much time to prepare for the programming. As a result, the quality of broadcasting could be affected’ (Interviewee D). However, quality issues often received insufficient attention due to a general lack of producers, reviewers or supervisors at multiple levels who could have provided oversight and feedback.

Not only was the staff obliged to deal with a heavy workload, but many of them also lacked professional training or experience in media production compared with their counterparts at headquarters. As Matsaganis, Katz and Ball-Rokeach (2010) observe, staff in ethnic media usually come from various backgrounds and bring to their jobs different motivations, inclinations and sensibilities. Some end up in ethnic media because they find it difficult to acquire the skills necessary for other jobs, or because they find that there is little demand for the skills they possess in the job market of their settlement country. Zhou, Chen and Cai (2006) note that the staff’s lack of professionalism affects their ability to do the job, and as a result, news reporting, translation and localised production can suffer.

Observations of XYZ generally confirmed these findings about ethnic media organisations. As a result of such constraints, the studio’s news production team relied heavily upon secondary resources, and it often conducted its duties in a hasty and unprofessional manner.

In the name of efficiency, the editors were not allowed much time to glean valuable news from the available pool of information. Nor did they have time to edit such information carefully. Moreover, the materials were usually prepared and submitted by editors one or two days prior to broadcast. The timeliness of the news broadcasting was thus not guaranteed.

Further, the original news reporting was under-produced at the local level, with the local staff acting more as editors and hosts than as reporters. Interviews, if needed, were usually coordinated by two senior staff members:

More often than not, they may recruit interviewees through interpersonal connections. For instance, they may invite some acquaintances they occasionally meet to be guests on the shows. The interview arrangement is often contingent on the availability of the accessible interviewees. (Interviewee D)

This observation reflects the difficulty that ethnic media staff members then faced in attempting to gain access to first-hand news sources; they had a significantly harder time than their counterparts in mainstream media. This difficulty further restricted the scope of news production, which in turn reinforced the team’s reliance on secondary sources.

Disparity in goal orientation

The earlier localisation practices of US-based media conglomerates took advantage of a global wave of liberalisation and deregulation. When entering the overseas market, they not only facilitated the convergence of local and the global markets, but also provided local

production teams with standardised norms and guidelines governing localisation operations. Local production teams thus remained consistent with the headquarters in their goals, values, agenda and mode of operation. However, due to the differences between the respective systems in which CRI and XYZ operated, the two media organisations diverged in their goals and demands.

As a state-owned media outlet whose international broadcasting is heavily subsidised, CRI's goal is to serve the state's project of soft power construction and public diplomacy. As a public radio station, its chief emphasis is not on economic returns from overseas markets, and its radio service for overseas audiences is generally less lucrative and less commercialised. As a staff member pointed out, the non-profit mode of operation might render the radio station less sensitive to the actual outcome of its broadcasting, 'Though the programmes are broadcast overseas through local channels, we don't know how they are received. Besides, the programming seems to lack a specific focus, as it is very diverse in scope, even including a programme that teaches Mandarin Chinese' (Interviewee A).

Compared to CRI, local partners such as XYZ are usually market players with highly commercial operations. As an economic enterprise, XYZ is obliged to focus intensely upon profit acquisition to ensure its survival in the face of often fierce market competition.

In an increasingly competitive ethnic media landscape, one key challenge that local Chinese-language media outlets face is the difficulty of maintaining a balance between professional standards and commercial demands. Advertising typically constitutes a major source of revenue for ethnic media outlets. As the circulation of ethnic media products is generally limited, with many sold or promoted at low prices, if not free of charge, revenue from news production is seldom lucrative. Thus, ethnic media outlets might be compelled to shift attention away from their audience and toward advertisers.

In addition to regular advertising, another common profit-seeking operation is the hosting of commercial events. Almost all Chinese-language media outlets, including the most popular and influential, regularly host a myriad of events, ranging from concerts and competitions to street fairs and exhibitions. Through such activities, media outlets seek to derive revenue from ticket sales or booth rentals. The events that XYZ hosted annually included street fairs, cultural activities and festival celebrations. Though such events may well have proven commercially beneficial to XYZ, they can also exert a profound effect upon its news production. Many of the media production staff were required to organise such events – from sending invitations and making promo videos to receiving guests and hosting the event. During particularly large events, only a handful of staff members remained in the newsrooms. Furthermore, promotional videos and advertisements for such events on the radio channel occupied slots that could otherwise have been devoted to regular programming. Reporters were also sent to cover and promote such activities, sometimes at the risk of neglecting or overshadowing other important news events. This initiative undermined the quality of news production, as news values gave way to commercial incentives.

In addition to emphasis on advertising and commercial events, XYZ also valued its relationship with business partners, such as CRI, that provided support for its operations. According to the studio staff, as XYZ's cooperation with CRI deepened, the financial underpinning it gained increased; after the launch of the studio, the partnership gained in strength, with CRI pledging to continue funding the localised media operation. To maintain this partnership, XYZ was obliged to coordinate with and cater to the demands of CRI and its preferred angle of news reporting. In general, XYZ prioritised the hosting of commercial events and the maintaining of cooperative relationships with media partners, because these constituted vital sources of revenue.

Inconsistency in brand identities

When applying localisation strategies in overseas markets Western media conglomerates much emphasise the importance of both managing local production and adapting media content to better suit local markets, whilst ensuring that their core brand identity and values remain uncompromised.

However, in this case, the consistency of the brand identity was not reflected in the localised media production. The studio had its distinct name and logo, without any obvious connection to CRI's brand identity. Due to the headquarters' lack of direct participation in the localisation practices, many staff members in the studio were unfamiliar with CRI's style of programming. The hybrid approach to media production was absent and notable disparities existed between domestically produced programmes and localised ones.

Firstly, as a public radio station, CRI has to limit the extent of commercials in its programming. In comparison, the local radio station is a highly commercial operation. Commercials and promos were frequent between programmes. Moreover, the domestically produced and the localised programmes were characterised by obvious differences in their angles, concerns and choices of topics. Moreover, the hosts' style and use of language were also markedly different. The hosts of domestic programmes were generally more professionally trained, but the way they talked to the audience sounded relatively formal and rigid. In the localised programmes, the hosts' style of expression better aligned with the preferences of the local audience; however, the localised programmes often appeared to be less organised. These two sets of programmes were both aired on the same channel, without any transition or linkage. In general, the studio did not establish a coherent and recognisable brand in the overseas market. This lack of connection between CRI and the local studio respecting its brand image might have been intentional, if the aim was to influence an audience in a subtle and non-obtrusive way so as not to emphasise CRI's identity as a state-owned broadcaster. Nonetheless, to attain sophisticated localisation may require the broadcaster to construct a coherent, hybrid and new brand identity rather than juxtaposing two inconsistent brand images.

Negotiating forces, divergent logics

According to Chalaby (2005), international communication has undergone three stages of development: internationalisation, globalisation and transnationalisation. Lu and Shi (2013) argue that the three corresponding driving forces in these stages are, respectively, nation-state/government, capital/market and citizens/individuals. A sender-receiver relation gradually shifted from a sender-centric paradigm to a receiver-oriented one. Cultural globalisation and hybridity have gradually replaced cultural imperialism as a primary conceptual framework. Despite the diachronic development of international communication paradigms, these three driving forces co-exist and negotiate with one another, and this has profound implications for actors in international communication processes.

In the case study above, the nation-state/government – which motivates CRI – and the capital/market – which motivates XYZ – constitute the two dominant forces within the localisation process. These two forces negotiate and interact with two corresponding logics – namely, propaganda logic and market logic – and in so doing give rise to tension and disjuncture in localisation operations. Zhao (1998) analyses the development of Chinese domestic media as a dichotomy between political and economic imperatives, in which media operate between these two forces and strive to maintain a delicate balance. I argue that the tension between these two imperatives also plays out in the global expansion of Chinese media.

Two divergent logics and their characteristics

With nation-states/governments as major actors, international communication often carries political meanings, whether overt or covert. In early theoretical accounts of international communication, propaganda logic is especially prevalent, and it is a paradigm that is characterised by ideological struggles, nationalism and media imperialism (Lu & Shi, 2013).

Although the term 'propaganda' has negative connotations in the West, this is not necessarily the case in China. When it comes to the 'media going-out' project, the logic of propaganda serves as a major driving force, and it comes with its own advantages. Firstly, because it has the support of the government, it ensures ample funding and resources that are beneficial to media production. This support, in turn, guarantees that the media operations continue to be in accord with the state's goal of soft power construction. Secondly, propaganda logic places relatively more emphasis on public interest, social responsibility and the promotion of public virtues. Programming under such logic usually has significant educational value, which is absent in many of its commercial counterparts.

However, this logic also brings with it a number of disadvantages. For one, programming governed by propaganda logic follows a hierarchical one-way communication model that is sender-centric and prioritises political demands. It inevitably entails some degree of censorship. For another, bureaucratic and hierarchical management structure renders the media less responsive to an audience's demands. The administrative hierarchy also hinders communication between different units of media production, thereby greatly reducing the synergy between them.

Unlike propaganda logic, market logic is predicated upon capital flows and the optimal allocation of resources. An exemplary case involves Western media giants' localisation in overseas markets against the backdrop of liberalisation and deregulation. Western transnational corporations, mainly driven by commercial rather than political imperatives, began in the 1980s to play a more significant role in international communication. Along with deepening globalisation and the widespread application of satellite and digital technologies, free flows of capital contributed substantially to the development of the global media landscape. This market logic attaches more importance to financial returns than it does to political gains, and, in indirect ways, it promotes the values of neoliberalism and consumerism.

Market logic has some noteworthy merits. First, market logic-oriented media outlets are more responsive to the audience's needs. Secondly, under market logic, news reporting is both timely and relatively pluralistic. Thirdly, in terms of management and operations, market logic requires media outlets to flatten organisational structures in order to maximise efficiency. It also pushes the media into establishing an appealing brand image.

However, market logic also has several major weaknesses. On the one hand, it reduces the audience to a set of exploitable consumers, and it is often indifferent to the public interest. In extreme cases, media outlets may abandon professional standards, value judgements and social responsibility in the effort to maximise profits, and this, in turn, can lead to the erosion of their credibility. On the other hand, based on cost-benefit calculations, media outlets may pay disproportionate attention to financial gains from revenue-generating activities, and this can divert resources away from media production and, in turn, negatively affect its quality.

Propaganda logic and market logic – driven by nation-states/governments and market/capital, respectively – present distinct sets of imperatives, and these lead to several tensions when the two logics come into conflict. The contradiction and disjuncture between them are evident in the case under examination.

Interaction and negotiation between the two logics

One key localisation strategy that CRI adopts is to cooperate with overseas Chinese-language media to construct platforms for the airing of both domestically produced and localised programmes. However, due to the divergence between ownership and institutional environment, CRI and its local partners in overseas markets, such as XYZ, are driven by different modes of management and by divergent operational logics. In the case of CRI's US-based studio, propaganda logic and market logic intersected, enhancing and constraining each other in myriad ways.

Firstly, in the negotiation between the two logics, the audience only played a negligible part, and the gap between media production and audience expectation widened. As mentioned above, proximity to the audience constitutes one of the most salient advantages of market logic; however, these advantages were compromised by propaganda logic in the case under discussion. When CRI headquarters pumped adequate funding into the studio's regular operations, there was less pressure on the local production team to compete with other media outlets for ratings. In other words, the studio's reliance upon its audience decreased, and so, correspondingly, did its attention to its audience.

Furthermore, the local production team was subject to self-censorship so that it did not go against CRI's editorial principles. Self-censorship propelled the team from balanced reporting toward ideologically slanted news coverage, and this affected the objectivity as well as the diversity of the content. Market logic's advantage in encouraging pluralistic news content was thus constrained by propaganda logic that entailed media censorship and prioritization of the sender's demand. Propaganda logic was even more dominant in domestically produced programmes broadcast to the local audience in the United States. The selection of news material was almost uniformly determined by considerations of a political nature, as well as by the extent to which they advanced the Chinese government's propaganda campaign. The communication process was thus linear and hierarchical, in which the sender imposed its values upon a local audience whose preferences might have differed from those of the sender.

Secondly, when the two logics either reinforced, or came into conflict with, each other, it generated a tension that often jeopardised the synergy between headquarters and the local production team – particularly in terms of production quality. On the one hand, in order to secure financial support, the local production team was cautious in managing its relationship with headquarters. When reporting to headquarters as a subordinate franchise, it often highlighted its achievements and played down the problems it faced – an instance of profit-driven market logic seeking to satisfy bureaucratic propaganda logic. In a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure, this could undermine the efficacy of communication between headquarters and the local production team. On the other hand, the headquarters adopted a 'double standard' for local production. The double standard, or the phrase *nei wai you bie* – translated by Brady (2003, 14) as 'treat insiders and outsiders differently' – is often invoked as a principle in international broadcasting by Chinese media outlets (Lian, 2016). It refers to the idea that domestic communication and international communication should be managed differently. Central to this idea is the attempt of media outlets to tailor their content to their target audience's reception habits. However, this idea was misconceived and misused in the case under discussion, because it led not to the adaptation of the programming to the needs of the local audience, but to relaxed quality control at the local level. Due to a misused double standard in media production, the advantage of propaganda logic in concentrating resources to ensure quality programming was absent at the local level. The norms and standards that the local production team followed thus failed to match those maintained by the headquarters, and this further widened the quality gap between domestic and localised programming.

The market logic's weakness in focusing excessively upon financial gains was manifest in XYZ's operations, and the cost-benefit calculations shifted the media company's attention away from media production toward commercial activities, thus affecting the quality of the localised programming.

Thirdly, because they followed two divergent logics, headquarters and the local production team prioritised different goals. As a Chinese state-owned media outlet, CRI's goal is to promote the state's image and influence abroad. However, for its local partner XYZ, the primary goal is to seek profits in order to survive in a highly competitive market environment. XYZ's dual identity, both as CRI's partner and as a local ethnic media outlet, enables it to seek funding and support from various sources. As mentioned above, market logic pushed media organisations towards more lucrative business operations, thus diminishing media production resources in order to increase their financial gains. The significance of advertising, commercial events and public relations outweighed the importance of the local audience. Such phenomena were attributable to structural factors innate to the ethnic enclave economy (Zhou, Chen & Cai, 2006). Moreover, the weakness of propaganda logic in neglecting the economic outcomes of localisation further estranged headquarters from the local production team.

Lastly but not least, the two negotiating logics and the tensions between them gave rise to the disjunction and incongruity between the brand identities of CRI and the local studio. Their respective sets of programmes, lacking intrinsic unity and conveying different messages to the audience, did not make for a coherent package. As mentioned above, the domestic and the local teams differed greatly in production standards, staff composition and goal orientation, all of which led to a sharp distinction between their respective programming in terms of their content, quality and style. For instance, the domestic team followed a relatively professional media production routine, but the style of their programmes was less responsive to the audience's preferences; the local production team was closer to the audience, but their neglect of professionalism failed to meet the audience's expectations of quality. The dual-track programming reveals that CRI has yet to master the strategy of hybridization, an approach that is adeptly employed by established transnational media companies. It also points to CRI's lack of attention to the local audience, as it failed to adapt domestic programming to the local context. Thus, propaganda logic's advantage in securing resources for media production was not effectively combined with the strength of market logic in attending to the audience's preferences.

Conclusion

This article set out to examine Chinese media's localisation overseas to complement the existing literature, currently heavily focused on Western media. It captures the dynamics of a different localisation process of a Chinese state-owned international radio broadcaster. Through a case study, it reveals how the limitations and compromises of two intersecting logics – propaganda and market logics – constrain and inhibit the outcome of localisation.

To improve their localisation operations, Chinese state-owned media need to respond to the increasingly salient role of local audiences; tighten the connections between headquarters and the local production team; better master the art of hybridization in media production; and make full use of media platforms in order to establish appealing brand identities. This paper echoes Keane's (2016) observation that Chinese producers, investors and practitioners are still 'deficient in knowledge of international markets and audience perceptions' (13), but this can change and is gradually changing. Moreover, the two negotiating logics should be properly harnessed so that their respective merits can be brought fully into play and their weaknesses circumvented.

CRI, like other Chinese state-owned media, has been aware of the need to embrace the global market and to distinguish international broadcasting from domestic broadcasting. However, the question remains, how to properly put this idea into practice, for instance, how to manage localised media production in a different yet effective way. To enhance the synergy between CRI and its local partners, the interaction between propaganda logic and market logics should be optimised. Experiences could be drawn from successful partnership models of public radio broadcasting. The public-oriented elements of propaganda logic should be retained whereas one-way indoctrination should be avoided. Meanwhile, the public-oriented approach could be utilised to rectify the local production team's overly commercialised modes of operation.

On a deeper level, this raises a relevant question: should Chinese media try to change the rest of the world, or rather be changed by the rest of the world when they are 'going abroad'? The answer is probably both. On the one hand, with China being an emerging power in the global media landscape, Chinese media have more potential to extend their influence abroad and play stronger roles. On the other, to enter the global market and become competitive players, Chinese media have to first play by the established rules and adapt their ways of programming to the global market demands or trends. To maintain a proper balance between the two is central to Chinese media's international development.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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