

**Information and Emotion:
Challenges and Opportunities for Political Communication
in China-US Relations**

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Abstract

National and transnational news media continue to be the most important source of information for most people about foreign affairs. The paper reviews findings on research on the foreign affairs news and its impact. Challenges to political communication at the individual, organizational and system level in both countries are discussed. Analysis of TV news in the U.S. shows considerable variation across the networks in visibility and tone of reporting on China, whereas CCTV reporting on the U.S. over the same period, from January 2010 to June 2011, was on balance negative. A review of front page reporting in China's market oriented vs. party owned newspapers in two cities during the week of President Obama's inaugural revealed that the market-newspapers provided more favorable front page coverage.

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As a source of information about foreign countries, cultures and political leaders, personal contact via travel comes a far second to the media. People are more dependent on the news media for information about things that are far from their personal experience. Citizens' greater "need for orientation" in times of crisis and on issues pertaining to foreign affairs has been found to be a strong predictor of media use and effects on opinions.¹

Television news has been shown to be more important than the press in influencing U.S. public opinion about foreign countries.² Even U.S. entertainment television such as the Oprah Winfrey show has influenced viewers' opinions about international affairs and domestic politics.³ Research on the brain and cognitive processing also shows that the use of engaging visuals on TV strengthens political learning.⁴ Research also suggests that the more coverage a nation receives on television the more likely respondents are to think it is vital to US interests, and the more negative coverage it receives the more likely respondents are to have negative opinions about the country.⁵ In recent years there is also compelling evidence that information in the media provides the critical link between public opinion and foreign policy.⁶

Research on the news agenda has long established an array of influences on media content. A seminal study on the images of foreign countries in the *New York Times*, conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s, when public relations firms began to go international, found that among those countries that signed contracts with public relations firms, all improved their image in the news stories printed in this esteemed newspaper; the only country that did not improve in the news was the one that did not sign a contract with a PR firm. Instead, that country's image became more negative, based on a content analysis of news using an interrupted time-series design.⁷

¹ Weaver 1980.

² Semetko et al. 1992; Wanta and Hu 1993.

³ Baum and Jamison 2006.

⁴ Graber 2001.

⁵ Wanta et al. 2004.

⁶ Soroka 2003, Kono 2008.

⁷ Mannheim and Albritton 1984.

Although public relations firms have long been hired by governments in an attempt to influence opinion in countries around the world, the concept of public diplomacy has more recently come to describe the efforts of governments everywhere to influence citizens in other countries. The initial concept of public diplomacy refers to state-driven activities such as scholarly exchanges, cultural events, and state-supported broadcasting to foreign audiences. Over the past decade, the concept of new public diplomacy has developed which refers to activities that are beyond state actors and can be a more fluid concept in the context of the new media environment. According to the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy, this new public diplomacy offers a new perspective:

This view aims to capture the emerging trends in international relations where a range of non-state actors with some standing in world politics – supranational organizations, sub-national actors, non-governmental organizations, and (in the view of some) even private companies – communicate and engage meaningfully with foreign publics and thereby develop and promote public diplomacy policies and practices of their own. Advocates of the new public diplomacy point to the democratization of information through new media and communication technology as a new force that has greatly empowered non-state actors and elevated their role and legitimacy in international politics. As a result, a new public diplomacy is seen as taking place in a system of mutually beneficial relations that is no longer state-centric but composed of multiple actors and networks, operating in a fluid global environment of new issues and contexts. (http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/about/what_is_pd).

In what follows, I discuss the challenges and opportunities for international political actors in the practice of public diplomacy⁸, to attempt to influence public opinion through the news media, based on content analysis of the visibility and valance of reporting on each country in the leading TV news channels. Before discussing the content analysis, I briefly discuss the challenges that start with the individual and move to the news organization and the media system.

Challenges and Contexts

Political scientists have long debated how best to define and measure political knowledge or sophistication.⁹ Behind much of this debate has been the assumption that “emotion is a stronger influence on the unsophisticated or that sophisticated citizens are less susceptible to emotional whims,” though recent

⁸ Cull 2008, 2009.

⁹ Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lupia and McCubbins 1998, 2000; Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder, & Rich, 2000; Graber 2001, 2005.

research reveals that “high sophisticates, the citizens most valued for their greater political knowledge interest, and attention, tend to be more emotionally engaged with politics.”¹⁰ These new findings do not overcome the problem, however, that people can be misinformed. According to Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schweider & Rich (2000): “People hold inaccurate factual beliefs, and do so confidently. The problem, then, at least with respect to attitudes about public policy, is not that people simply lack information, but that they firmly hold the wrong information—and use it to form preferences.”¹¹ And this problem is likely to be exacerbated in today’s more polarized political climate in the U.S., with more new media outlets encouraging even more selective perception and exposure to one’s own partisan viewpoints.¹²

In China, in addition to the challenges faced by anti-establishment activists, challenges similar to those described in the U.S. probably also exist at the individual level. Much has been written about the state, the market and the media in China and how it may, and may not, be changing.¹³ Two recently published studies shed light on the impact of the press and television, respectively, on attitudes towards the U.S. in China. One study suggests that the rise of market-oriented newspapers actually pressured the more traditional party newspapers to change content that, in the case of the *People’s Daily* and the *Beijing Evening News*, resulted in a more negative portrayal of the U.S. between 1999 and 2003.¹⁴ Another study utilized a two-city survey to assess use of different media sources and evaluations of the U.S. and concluded that attitudes toward U.S. foreign policy “can be clearly distinguished from evaluations of American political institutions and socioeconomic achievements”, and also reveal that “Chinese urban residents do not become pro-American from the usage of alternative media sources” that were beyond the control of the Chinese Communist Party.”¹⁵

With philanthropy funding the comparatively small public service broadcasting that exists in the U.S., the system stands in contrast to much of the rest of the world’s established democracies as it is almost entirely market oriented and funded by advertising and subscription, with strong competition among several news networks and cable channels, almost all main networks currently available to households with basic cable or satellite. American news organizations’ strong claims to be a fourth estate or watchdog, though challenged especially in times of war and crisis, stand in stark contrast to China’s CCTV which is an arm of the state. CCTV provides the official view of the most important news of the day alongside other market-oriented newspapers and broadcasting which are heavily controlled by the state.

¹⁰ Miller 2011:579; 593.

¹¹ Kuklinski et al. 2000: 792.

¹² Baum and Groeling 2008.

¹³ Zhao 1998; Wu 2000; Stockmann forthcoming.

¹⁴ Stockmann 2011:268.

¹⁵ Shi, Lu and Aldrich 2011.

Findings

A content analysis of news on the five networks in the U.S. from January 2010 to June 2011, an 18-month period, shows how varied the news is on China across the networks. The timeline in Table 1 shows few occasions when all the channels were covering China at the same level of visibility.

While the overall level of visibility is relatively low, as a percentage of foreign affairs coverage, it fluctuates independently with one organization taking the initiative to report more heavily on China than another.¹⁶

Visibility for the most part remains below 5%, with few exceptions. Table 2 shows that while the European Union as an institution or aggregation of states remains below 5% throughout, individual EU countries and the U.S. are much more visible. The U.S. is above 10% most of the time.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

CCTV news was also analyzed for the tone of coverage toward the U.S., EU and Chinese actors as positive, negative or no clear rating. The balance ratio shows the proportion of positive news minus negative news.

On CCTV, news about U.S. actors was on balance negative, -24.7 over the course of 2010 based on 255 actors and -26.1 over the first half of 2011 based on 161 actors. This compares with a much more visible and favorable presentation of China actors in CCTV: a balance ratio of 59.4 in 2010 based on 7969 actors and 50.9 in 2011 based on 2813 actors.

Table 3 about here

The U.S. networks were quite varied in the tone with which they reported on China, but it is worth noting that negativity in reporting on all actors is the norm. There were no positive balance ratios. It is striking to see the variation across the U.S. channels in both the range of visibility and tone of reporting on China.

Fox news was the most consistently negative in its reporting on China actors with a balance ratio of -37 in 2010 and -21.4 in the first half of 2011. CNN went from most negative in 2010, -42, to neutral or 0 in the first half of 2011. NBC was less negative than Fox or CNN in 2010, -17, and also neutral or 0 in 2011. CBS was very slightly negative, -2, in 2010 and much more negative in the first half of

¹⁶ An analysis of topics also showed considerable variation across channels. See Semetko, Kolmer and Schatz 2011.

2011, -31.6. Finally, ABC, at the opposite end of the continuum from Fox, was favorable in 2010, 25.0, and continued to be favorable but somewhat less so, 14.3, in reporting on China actors in 2011.

Going from most negative in 2010 to most favorable, the channels were CNN, Fox, NBC, CBS and ABC. In 2011 they were: CBS, Fox, CNN and NBC, and ABC. All this points to the somewhat surprising finding that U.S. network news organizations continue to compete against one another with original content that varies considerably in terms of visibility and tone.

Table 4 about here

Examples of front pages from market-oriented and party newspapers during the week of the inauguration of President Obama, in January 2009, reveal the more colorful and engaging way in which the market-oriented newspapers reported on that global event. Front pages are displayed in Table 5.

Conclusion

Public diplomacy efforts by governments have long aimed to diminish the framing of the nation as a threat by emphasizing the common goals and favorable outcomes. In "Smart Power Needs Smart Public Diplomacy," Harvard's Joseph Nye argues that the "evolution of public diplomacy from one-way communications to a two-way dialogue treats publics as co-creators of meaning and communication."

"The new public diplomacy," he argues, is no longer only about strategic messaging and promotion campaigns, "it is also about building relationships with civil-society actors in other countries and facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad."¹⁷ The new public diplomacy involves a joint process of message development through which the political communication of threat is diminished.

Both China and the US have embarked upon new public diplomacy efforts in 2009, including growing the number of exchanges and new media channels. In 2009, President Obama and President Hu launched new public diplomacy initiatives in an effort to build stronger relationships between people and diminish the negative and threatening images and opinions.

¹⁷ Nye 2011.

Recent efforts in U.S. public diplomacy was to promote greater people-to-people contact:

“Recognizing the long-term consequences of such an imbalance, as well as the ever- increasing role that China plays in our bilateral relationship, the Obama Administration launched in November 2009 the “100,000 Strong Initiative.” Citing the exchange disparity, and noting that 600 times more Chinese students study English than Americans study Mandarin, the Administration called for a bold step forward to increase the number of students going to China from 14,000 to 25,000 a year for at least four years. This ambitious program is estimated by the State Department to total some \$68 million. Unlike other U.S. government exchanges, however, the “100K” is intended to be financed solely through private-sector donations. To date, such contributions have been minimal, reaching far less than \$5 million.”¹⁸ By the 2009-10 academic year, China sent more than 130,000 students to the U.S., an increase of more than 30% over the previous year, putting China ahead of India as the number one “sending” nation.¹⁹

Other initiatives include China’s launch of language and culture institutes, Confucius Institutes, in the U.S. and around the world, with some 70 in the U.S. since the first one was opened at the University of Maryland in 2005. Because the U.S. had only a handful of American Cultural Centers around China and each was an independent entity, this year the U.S. took a cue from China’s successful efforts and called for U.S. universities with existing partnerships in China to apply for funds to launch American Cultural Centers in China. These centers will be integrated into the campuses of Chinese universities and schools, and the program should be rolled out in October.

In both countries, foreign affairs issues are often presented in domestic news as threatening the interests of the home country. The challenges for communicating to citizens via the very different ideologically constrained media environments in the U.S. and China show no sign of diminishing.

¹⁸ Committee on Foreign Relations 2011:13.

¹⁹ Committee on Foreign Relations 2012:12.

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Table 1

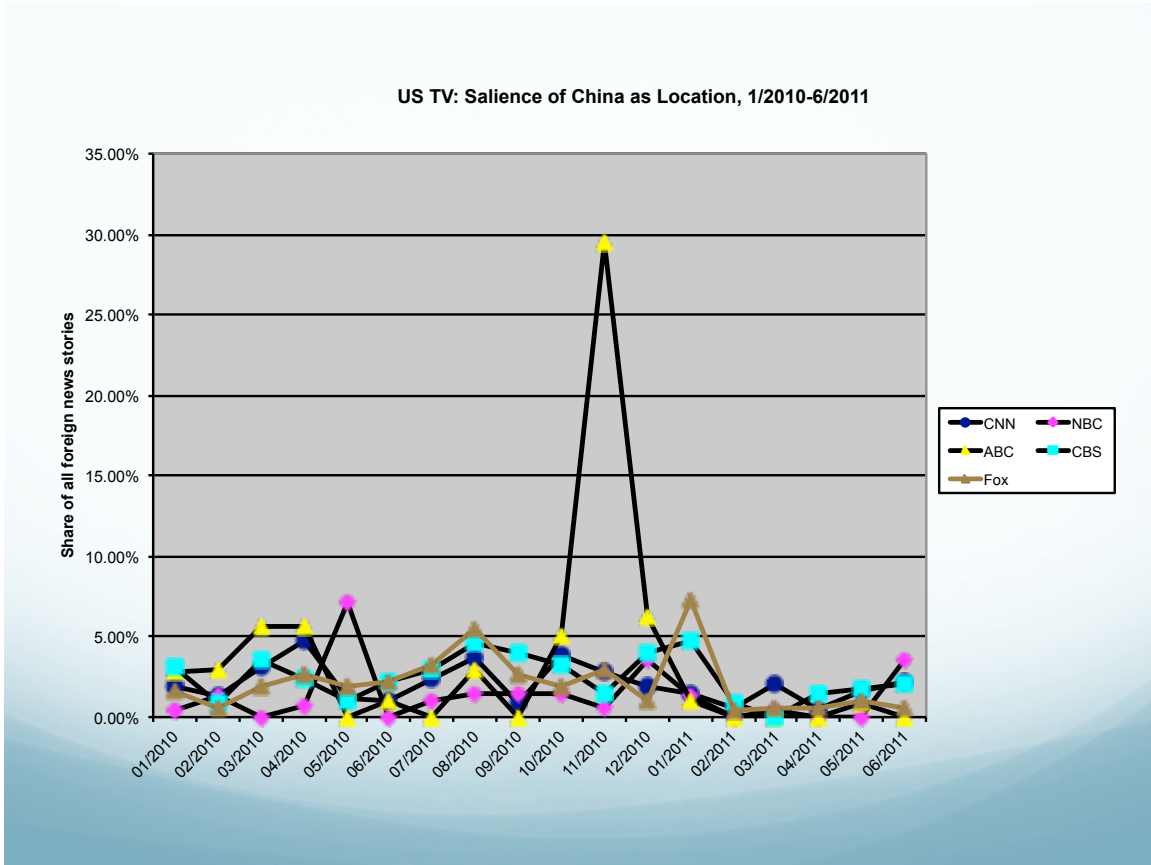


Table 2

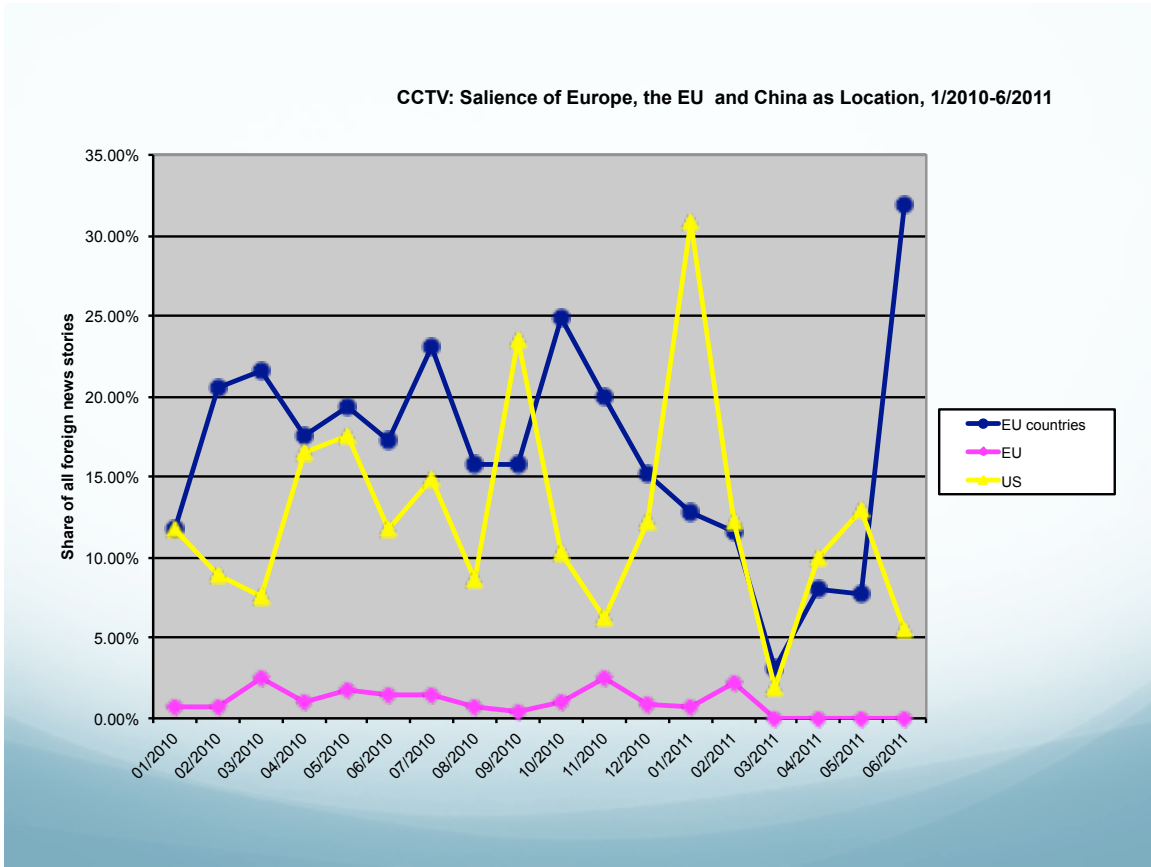


Table 3

CCTV 2010-2011

	Tone of coverage			2010 N	2010 Balance	2011 N	2011 Balance
	negative	no clear rating	positive				
EU	25	54.2	20.8	24	-4.2	12	16.6
US	47.1	30.6	22.4	255	-24.7	161	-26.1
China	6.3	27.9	65.7	7969	59.4	2813	50.9
other	23.1	27.1	49.7	3392	26.6	1098	-21.7
Total	12.1	27.8	60	11640	47.9	4084	28.3

CCTV 2011

	Tone of coverage		
	negative	no clear rating	positive
EU		83.3	16.6
US	43.5	39.1	17.4
China	5.7	37.6	56.7
other	38.8	43.9	17.2
Total	16.1	39.5	44.9

Table 4

Tone of the evaluations of actors from the EU, US and China in U.S. TV news programs, with balance ratios 2010

	Actors	Negative	No rating	Positive	Total	N	2010 Balance	2011 Balance	2011 N
CNN	EU	17.9	78.6	3.6	100	28	-14	0	3
	US	29.1	58.7	12.2	100	2377	-17	-13.3	497
	CHINA	52.9	36.2	10.9	100	221	-42	0	67
	Other	42.7	47.8	9.5	100	6626	-33	-41.4	2583
	Total	39.4	50.4	10.2	100	9252	-29	-36.0	3150
FOX	EU	50	50	0	100	2	0	-50.0	2
	US	41.1	46.5	12.5	100	6532	-29	-36.2	3066
	CHINA	43.9	48.8	7.3	100	41	-37	-21.4	28
	Other	64.4	27.3	8.2	100	1602	-56	-67.6	1051
	Total	45.7	42.7	11.6	100	8177	-34	-44.1	4147
NBC	EU	0	50	50	100	2	0	0	0
	US	41.9	34.2	23.9	100	4941	-18	-20.1	2146
	CHINA	50	16.7	33.3	100	24	-17	0	10
	Other	62.9	21.7	15.3	100	1559	-48	-49.8	872
	Total	46.9	31.2	21.9	100	6526	-25	-29.1	3028
ABC	EU	0	100	0	100	1	0	0	0
	US	44	34.9	21.2	100	4672	-23	-19.4	2145
	CHINA	27.5	20.3	52.2	100	69	25	14.3	7
	Other	56	25.4	18.6	100	1364	-37	-44.9	724
	Total	46.5	32.6	20.1	100	6106	-26	-25.7	2876
CBS	EU	0	0	1	100	1	0	0	0
	US	45.8	31	23.2	100	4711	-23	-26.5	2140
	CHINA	42.9	11.9	45.2	100	42	-2	-31.6	19
	Other	61.8	22	16.2	100	1540	-46	-58.2	925
	Total	49.7	28.7	21.7	100	6294	-28	-36.1	3084

Table 5

Compare of the front page between the Southern Metropolis Daily and the China Youth Daily (Jan. 21)



Compare of the front page between the New Capital and the Beijing Youth Daily (Jan. 21)

新京报

2008年1月21日 星期一 第11222号

火车票预售期调为10天

包括所有动车组、临客,预售开始时间从早9时改为晚7时

国庆阅兵将展示新武器

中国第六次发表国防白皮书,30年来国防费基本数据首次公布

感动社区人物揭晓

北京揭晓感动社区的获得者,包括10人,包括“天耀”、“天耀”、“天耀”

奥巴马宣誓就职

奥巴马在华盛顿宣誓就职,成为美国第44任总统

京网可查车险理赔记录

车主上网可查最近1年内车险理赔记录,为打击骗保行为

购买火车票遭“套号”诈骗

北京接到多起类似报警,湖南铁警立案,记者暗访“订票”过程

两部门要求禁收提车费

公安部、交通部要求,禁止收取提车费

持刀闹宿舍砍7前同事

北京一男子持刀闹宿舍,砍伤7前同事

▲A1-A2 北京新闻 ▲A3-A4 北京新闻 ▲A5-A6 北京新闻 ▲A7-A8 北京新闻 ▲A9-A10 北京新闻

北京青年报

BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

2008年1月21日 星期一 第11222号

国庆阅兵将展示新武器

奥巴马宣誓就职

中国核导弹在平时不会瞄准任何国家

我国今后每年发布法治建设年度报告

养老保险转移接续实施办法即将出台

国家基本药物将会实行较高报销比例

北京车险理赔记录昨起实现网上查询

湖南人禽流感患者昨死亡

中航油前总裁陈久霖出狱回国

公安部助理郑少东被调查

两部门要求禁收提车费

持刀闹宿舍砍7前同事

今日要事	A1
北京新闻	A1-A2
北京新闻	A3-A4
北京新闻	A5-A6
北京新闻	A7-A8
北京新闻	A9-A10
北京新闻	A11-A12
北京新闻	A13-A14
北京新闻	A15-A16
北京新闻	A17-A18
北京新闻	A19-A20
北京新闻	A21-A22
北京新闻	A23-A24
北京新闻	A25-A26
北京新闻	A27-A28
北京新闻	A29-A30
北京新闻	A31-A32
北京新闻	A33-A34
北京新闻	A35-A36
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北京新闻	A39-A40
北京新闻	A41-A42
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北京新闻	A49-A50
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北京新闻	A91-A92
北京新闻	A93-A94
北京新闻	A95-A96
北京新闻	A97-A98
北京新闻	A99-A100