

Foreign or Chinese? Reconfiguring the Symbolic Space of Chinese Media

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While we already know about the Chinese Party-state's ambition to expand its mediasphere globally, we know less about the shape that this expansion has assumed, and the pathways that have been pursued to facilitate it. This article addresses these questions by discussing the changing definitions of "domestic" and "foreign" media, as well as examining the reconfiguration of symbolic spaces within which China is reported. The article first gives a detailed account of the so-called Andrea Yu affair, which, as will become clear, embodies the complex and dynamic processes by which the symbolic spaces of China-reporting are being reconfigured as a result of China's going-global project. This is followed by an outline of a number of pathways that the Chinese state media have taken in recent years. Finally, the paper considers the tensions and complexities in China's efforts to go global, paying particular attention to the interplay of geographical, political, and ideological factors.

Keywords: China, state media, foreign media, foreign correspondent, symbolic space, deterritorialization

In recent years, especially since the Beijing Olympics in 2008, there has been a prevalent feeling among Chinese policy think tanks and the population in general that although China's global influence in the domains of politics, economics, and international relations has grown exponentially, the international community's understanding and knowledge of China is limited, biased, and inaccurate (Hu & Ji, 2012; Wang, 2008). Therefore, projecting an image of China that is objective, truthful, and three-dimensional is seen to be not only necessary but also urgent (Yang, 2011). China's much-touted "going out" or "going global" project is primarily intended to "gradually change China's image in the international society from negative to neutral to positive" (Wang, 2008, p. 269).

In its policy statements aimed at improving and managing international impressions of itself, China often uses words such as "overseas" (*haiwai* or *guowai*), "abroad" (*jingwai*), "international" (*guoji*), and "foreign" (*waiguo*) to describe global media outside the People's Republic of China (PRC). Until about a decade and a half ago, it was indeed possible to say that journalistic reporting on China usually took

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place in one of three symbolic spaces. The first is the Chinese media that are produced and circulated inside China. This consists of state-funded media outlets as well as the commercial sector, which is also subject to state control and regulation. The second is the space of Chinese-language media outlets operated by diasporic Chinese communities that are usually described as “ethnic community media” by the multicultural mainstream of their host nation (be it the United States, Canada, Australia, or European countries). The third is the “foreign media” (*waimei*)—that is, non-Chinese, international-language media—whose coverage of China is mostly produced by foreign correspondents based in China. This foreign media community is a heterogeneous mix comprising nations that have wildly differentiated ideological, historical, and cultural relations with China.²

However, in recent years, the distinction between these symbolic spaces seems to have become increasingly blurry, sometimes deliberately. This is evidenced in the growing tendency for the Chinese Party-state to actively manipulate the definitional boundary between various symbolic spheres such as media from *guonei* (inside China), *guowai* (outside China), and *haiwai huaren* (overseas China). Because citing the foreign media’s praise or endorsement of China is felt to carry more weight than “blowing one’s own trumpet,” increasingly we see instances where favorable comments from China-funded diasporic media are quoted as views from “foreign media.” In the meantime, “state media” continues to be used as a label to describe a sector of the Chinese media that is owned, funded, produced, and controlled by the Chinese government and its propaganda department, and which promulgates the Party-state’s official views and perspectives at various levels. What is more, in the eyes of concerned foreign reporters, China’s “state media,” to use the words of a foreign journalist, “has begun popping up in places around the world,” and there is no sign that it intends to stop (McKenzie, 2012).

The former phenomenon—China’s manipulative use of a distinction between “inside China” and “outside China”—evokes the notion of territoriality; the latter phenomenon—the foreign media’s use of the term *state media*—refers to the ideological and political nature of the Chinese media and their relationship to the Party-state. In both cases there seems to be either a deliberate conflation between various symbolic spaces, or an unwitting confusion of what each of the symbolic spaces is constituted by. And in both cases this conflation or confusion is largely a consequence of the Chinese media’s going-global initiatives. While we already know about the Chinese Party-state’s ambitions in the global expansion of its mediasphere (Brady, 2009; Cook, 2013; Farah & Mosher, 2010; Hu & Ji, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Shambaugh, 2013; Sun, 2010; Y. Zhao, 2008, 2013; Zhu, 2012), we know little about what shape and form this expansion has assumed and what pathways have been pursued to facilitate this expansion. And we know even less about how this process of expansion is reordering the symbolic space of reporting on China.

This article addresses these questions by discussing how the definitions of domestic media and foreign media have changed, and how these changes are reconfiguring the symbolic spaces in which China is reported. The intention of this article is to describe the dubious nature of “the foreign,” and to clarify

² Throughout this article, I often use the term *foreign* from a Chinese point of view, to refer to non-Chinese people, media, and practices. I do this rather than use a term such as *non-Chinese* in order to capture many idiomatic expressions such as the “foreign correspondent.”

China's definition of "domestic" versus "foreign," with a view to making sense of the shifting and expanding landscape of the Chinese media. To update our knowledge is crucial if we want to fully understand the challenges and opportunities facing China's going-global agenda in the age of increasing mediatization, digitalization, and economic globalization. The article first gives a detailed account of the so-called Andrea Yu affair, which, as will become clear, embodies the complex and dynamic processes by which the symbolic spaces of China-reporting are being reconfigured as a result of China's going-global project. This is followed by an outline of a number of pathways that the Chinese state media have taken in recent years in order to "go global." Then, building on these discussions, the article further outlines the tensions and complexities in China's efforts to go global, paying particular attention to the interplay of geographical, political, and ideological factors.

The Chinese government's desire to control the direction and tenor of how China is reported in news media is hampered by three major stumbling blocks: the Chinese state media do not have a license to operate directly in foreign countries; there is widespread skepticism—even distrust—regarding the credibility of Chinese state propaganda among foreign publics; and China's relationship with foreign correspondents working within China is marked by a structural antagonism (Zhang, 2008). To tackle the first of these problems, China needs a third party that has the appearance of autonomy from the Chinese government to carry its content. To solve the second problem, the content of the state media, as carried by media platforms outside China, needs to appear to be independent of Chinese control. And to get around the third problem, China needs to find ways of cultivating more China-friendly foreign correspondents. To some extent, the case of the Andrea Yu affair serves as an example of how China is trying to overcome all three of these difficulties.

Who Is Andrea Yu?

Few foreign reporters covering the recent 18th Party Congress in Beijing in November 2012 would have missed the so-called Andrea Yu affair. Andrea Yu, a Caucasian-looking young woman identified herself as an Australian reporter, and unlike most foreign reporters, she was called to answer questions, more than once, at the press conferences held at the Great Hall of the People. It turned out that Andrea Yu's maiden name was Andrea Hodgkinson, and that she had recently married a person of Chinese origin. Despite the fact that she impressed both the Chinese officials and foreign correspondents by fielding her questions in fluent Chinese and English, her questions to the Chinese officials were dismissively described by Western reporters as "softball."

With her youthful, exotic look and friendly questions, Yu had become the darling of China's state media. She appeared in the Chinese Communist Party's official flagship *People's Daily*, as well as on state national television, gracing CCTV's news bulletins as the face of the foreign correspondent who says favorable things about China. Her public appearances came with the side effect of making her a celebrity. Immediately, questions went around the foreign correspondents community in China, encapsulated in an article posted on Australia Network News simply entitled "Who Is Andrea Yu?" The article describes the CAMG (China-Australia Media Group) Andrea Yu worked for as "Melbourne based and Beijing funded," and raises the question whether Andrea Yu is an "innocent journalist or a cover girl" (Australia Network News, 2012). When these mystified journalists dug deeper into Yu's background and the organization she worked

for, they discovered more complex linkages between Australia-based media and China's state media. Yu claimed to be working for a media organization called [Global CAMG Media](#), but it turned out that this organization, though based in Melbourne, is in fact a partner of [China Radio International](#) (CRI), the Chinese state's external propaganda radio broadcaster. Owned by Australian citizen and former PRC national Tommy Jiang, CAMG was previously known as Austar International Media Group (AIMG). For 17 years after its first incarnation as Chinese-language radio station 3CW in Melbourne, AIMG grew to be a media conglomerate consisting of Chinese-language radio stations in major Australian cities (except Sydney); several Chinese-language periodicals, weeklies, and newspapers; and a range of businesses and services in the field of cultural exchange and other areas. Tommy Jiang's association with Chinese state media emerged in more recent years, with the start of his collaboration with CRI in 2007 being the most important milestone in his empire-building. Having worked very hard to gain the Chinese government's trust and appreciation of his competence, Jiang's enterprise has grown exponentially, riding on China's "going out" initiative and soft power push through international media expansion.

The unraveling of the mystery surrounding Andrea Yu was largely credited to Stephen McDonell, an Australian correspondent based in China. McDonell had a chance to interview Andrea Yu for eight minutes just after Yu's impressive performance at the press conference. Representing the Australia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and well known for his penchant for asking tough questions, McDonell put it to Yu that she was "disingenuous" for posing as an independent foreign journalist while in fact working indirectly for the Chinese state media, and questioned her integrity and capacity to ask tough questions by suggesting that she was letting herself be the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party. McDonell's exposé on ABC radio was explosive. Overnight, the 18th Party Congress was no longer the center of attention for foreign correspondents, for they had found the "real story" behind the political facade of harmony.

However, Yu had also become the woman that other foreign correspondents loved to hate. McDonell's interview was promptly circulated among the international media community in China, and within a short time, the Andrea Yu affair had been reported in a wide range of Western media outlets, including Australian media such as the *Sun-Herald*, as well as *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The International Herald Tribune*, and *The New York Times* in the United States, as well as the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong—not to mention a large number of independent blogging and investigative news websites, including Australia's Crikey (McKenzie, 2012). From this, we can see that while there is a softening of the boundary between Chinese state media and diasporic Chinese media, the boundary between Chinese media and mainstream foreign media may be set to become more pronounced.

The intensity of the furor in the Western media triggered by a couple of innocuous questions from an inexperienced journalist at official Chinese press conferences is indeed worth exploring. It seems that Andrea Yu touched on a raw nerve with some foreign correspondents. Her attempt to pass herself off as an independent foreign reporter while in fact working for a subsidiary of China's state media was, in the eyes of many foreign correspondents, an act of professional treason. But beneath this sense of professional contempt lies also a palpable yet indeterminate sense of anxiety and fear regarding the purity and cohesiveness of the foreign correspondent cohort. Now, with the likelihood of more reporters like

Andrea Yu on the horizon posing as “one of us,” one can no longer assume that the foreign correspondent is an ideologically and professionally cohesive identity.

This sense of anxiety and fear is best encapsulated in the barrage of questions that Stephen McDonnell fired at a defensive and somewhat flustered Andrea Yu:

McDonnell: You could say that it's as if the Chinese government has brought you up here, as a sort of friendly journalist to essentially ask itself questions that it likes about its own performance. . . . In the long run, do you think that this will be more the way things will happen, that the Chinese government will be . . . [setting up] companies like yours all over the world to present itself in the way it wants to? . . . But is it real journalism, what you are doing? . . . You don't feel though, potentially, that you're being used by the Chinese government to show that there's something going on that really isn't happening? (ABC Radio, 2012)

Fellow Australian reporter William McKenzie's response to the Andrea Yu affair was nothing short of sensational. He observed that the “whole murky apparatus is not just eerily Orwellian, it is also quite unprecedented” (McKenzie, 2012, para. 1). McKenzie seemed eager to distance himself from the likes of Andrea Yu, and his analysis of the Andrea Yu affair for independent Australian online new-media outlet Crikey could well be taken as a declaration of his own professional objectivity—even though his employer was none other than Chinese state media organization CRI, the juggernaut that was also affiliated with [Global CAMG Media](#), for which Andrea Yu worked.

What the Chinese propaganda machine stood to gain from Andrea Yu in terms of impression management was counteracted by two losses. First, she unwittingly blew her own cover as an independent foreign correspondent; she revealed herself to be in fact a reporter for a close affiliate of China's state media. Second, she drew the attention of international media to CAMG's spurious claim to be a foreign media organization. Whereas it had previously existed in relative obscurity under the radar of mainstream Western media, CAMG, together with its ownership, affiliations, and modus operandi, was now under scrutiny and investigation. What was uncovered was a shadowy picture that seemed to fulfill the worst fears of foreign correspondents and the media organizations that hired them. When Andrea Yu became the cover girl on the *Oriental Beijing Weekly*, the identity of the magazine itself also came under closer scrutiny. It turned out that *Oriental Beijing Weekly* is the Australian edition of *Beijing Youth Weekly*. And, in turn, *Beijing Youth Weekly* is a subsidiary of *Beijing Youth Daily*, which is the flagship paper of the Beijing Communist Youth League.

To the international community, Tommy Jiang, who owns the *Oriental Beijing Weekly* and CAMG in general, refers to himself as a mere “businessman.”³ He explained his collaboration with China in pragmatic, “why not” terms—Australia is not giving him much support to grow its ethnic media, whereas China wants to forge links with international media entities at whatever cost. In other words, China's

³ I had a number of conversations with Tommy Jiang in 2010 and 2011 about his business ambitions and his partnership with CRI.

transnational capital flowing westward has provided much-needed oxygen to the thriving of diasporic Chinese media enterprises such as CAMG and many other similar enterprises across the world. However, Jiang insists on his autonomy and independence. While he is keen to maintain the rhetoric of a neutral, nonpolitical stance to the international community, he is not concerned about—and is, in fact, proud of—his association with China’s state media. He knows that in return for getting a slice of the largesse—both in terms of funding and program content—of the Chinese state media, overseas Chinese entrepreneurs of course need to publicly pledge their patriotic allegiance to the motherland. His status as an overseas Chinese now living in a foreign country but a loyal supporter of the motherland carries an ideological message that the domestic media are keen to push. In recent years, examples of overseas Chinese communities’ allegiance to China have been regularly cited. They have become “stock-in-trade” for the Chinese government in shoring up legitimacy among domestic audiences. Jiang was among 38 patriotic overseas Chinese from 21 countries who were invited to participate in the 18th Congress, and given this, it is not surprising that Andrea Yu, as an employee of one of his media organizations in Melbourne, received preferential treatment from Chinese officials at the press conference. However, while Jiang’s high profile in the 18th Party Congress made him one of the most favored overseas Chinese in the eyes of the Chinese government, his identity as an independent overseas media entrepreneur had become increasingly untenable.

In an interview for CRI and its new-media subsidiary, China International Broadcasting Network (CIBN), Tommy Jiang likened his partnership with CRI to an ideal “international marriage”:

Since we have entered this “international marriage,” CRI has become our most reliable headquarters, supplying us with regular material, data, and interviews. For instance, during the 18th Party Congress we were able to relay the ideas and recommendations put forward by Congress delegates to mainstream Australian audiences, as well as to Chinese nationals now living in Australia. This ensures the most accurate transmission of the voice from the motherland. (China Radio International, 2013)

Forging as many “international marriages” such as this as possible has become the priority of China’s going-global project. CRI/CIBN’s host Zhang Yi, in response to Tommy Jiang’s pledge of allegiance, confirms that building alliances with Chinese-language media outside China is part and parcel of China’s strategy of courting collaboration, and are a perfect example of China’s deployment of “smart power” (*qiao shi li*), because “both in content and in form, such partnerships are highly innovative and original” (China Radio International, 2013). The smartness of this marriage becomes even more obvious when we note that Jiang can come across to China’s domestic audiences as a patriotic overseas Chinese eager to support China, whereas his employee Andrea Yu can appear to be a China-friendly foreign reporter. Both of these are valuable in giving domestic audiences in China the impression of the nation’s growing popularity on the international stage.

Reconfiguring the Chinese Mediasphere

The Andrea Yu affair and the international media’s responses to it are instructive to recount at length here, because Andrea Yu is not an isolated case. In fact, the emergence of such figures that are

dubious culturally and politically in the Chinese media landscape signals a new direction in China's attempt to improve the environment of public opinion. Behind the Andrea Yu affair lie a few important developments in China's strategy of expanding its global influence. So far, the global expansion of Chinese media has followed four main pathways. These pathways, to a considerable extent, have been pursued to tackle a graduated degree of challenges and obstacles facing the Chinese government and its impression-improvement project.

The first and the most direct pathway involves China's key state media players—CCTV, Xinhua, and CRI—setting up offices offshore. Xinhua's recent initiative in sub-Saharan Africa is a good example. Its increased presence in Africa is manifold, including setting up regional bureaus, developing news content targeting African audiences, sharing media content with African media, and providing journalistic training for African media practitioners and technical support to media organizations. With Nairobi as the regional center, Xinhua runs the Africa Regional Bureau, complete with 18 local bureaus in sub-Saharan Africa (Xin, 2009). CCTV's offshore operations are equally wide reaching. As of now, CCTV has three major global offices in Beijing, Washington, DC, and Nairobi, and more than 70 bureaus in addition to these. CCTV's Washington bureau alone employs more than 100 staff, producing both Chinese- and English-language programs, and hiring non-Chinese, independent journalists and consultants who are prepared to adhere to the "party line" (Nelson, 2013). In these as well as many other countries outside China, Xinhua has in recent years also taken to hiring local, non-Chinese reporters (Y. Wu, 2012), making it difficult to tell, at a glance, whether these reporters are "Chinese" or "foreign." As with Xinhua, CCTV's and CRI's content appearing in English and many other languages, together with their media presence in these non-Western countries, is a deliberate effort to counteract the West-dominated hegemony in terms of representing China.

The second pathway involves these key state media players signing formal content deals with the state or commercial media of foreign countries, mainly in Asia, Africa, and to a lesser extent South America. These tend to be countries that are non-Western, non-liberal democratic states, and that have a strong state media presence under an authoritarian, in some cases former Communist, regime. Usually lacking correspondents to report on China, these countries rely on international news services for coverage of China (Cook, 2013). In the language of cold war international relations, and according to its attendant geopolitical imagination of the world outside China, many of these countries are the "Third World countries" of Latin America and Africa—developing countries that in many cases are China's "friends." These countries tend to adopt non-American or even anti-American perspectives and are interested in sourcing cheap and often free news content. Xinhua, China's official news agency, for example, has in recent years, signed content deals with Cuba, Mongolia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Turkey, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe, resulting in Xinhua becoming a leading source of news in these countries (Fish & Dokoupil, 2010). Many of these developing nations tend to be attracted to the "Beijing Consensus"—the "China Model" of economic development—which combines authoritarian government with a market economy, as an alternative to the United States' model of market economy and democratic government (S. Zhao, 2011). They also appreciate the assistance China gives to their national state media in the form of technical and infrastructural support, professional training, and exchange of journalists and media content (Gagliardone, Repnikova, & Stremmlau, 2010). Although too early to tell, preliminary research in Africa is pointing tentatively toward the emergence of a Chinese "news-gathering paradigm that stands in

stark contrast to the West's traditional view of the media" (Farah & Mosher, 2010). There are also signs of more positive coverage of China globally as a result of its closer engagement in Africa (Brady, 2009; Kurlantzick, 2011; Wasserman, 2011). Indeed, in many respects this kind of partnership with overseas organizations is a much more direct and effective way of reaching audiences abroad.

The third pathway involves partnerships with media organizations in countries that do not permit the state Chinese media to operate directly within their borders, and that require a third party functioning as a broker. This broker can be an overseas entrepreneur of the targeted country, or an international overseas Chinese media tycoon from elsewhere. The landmark reciprocal programming agreement between CCTV and cable and satellite news channel Sky News Australia is but one recent example. According to this agreement, Sky News is being broadcast in China, while English-language programs such as CCTV's *Dialogue* program is being broadcast in Australia on a regular basis for the first time (Xinhua, 2010a). Indeed, CCTV has made significant inroads into many other global nodes.

Tommy Jiang, the managing director of Global CAMG discussed earlier, is based in Melbourne, but he has subsidiaries registered in New Zealand, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. And because CRI cannot secure a license to operate directly offshore, CAMG has become the key player in relaying CRI content to Australia and other nations such as these. Consider Jiang's business in Thailand, for example. On the surface, this looks like a two-way joint venture between an Australia-based global media company and a local Thai business tycoon, Kobsak Chinawongwattana, who own 59% and 41% of the venture, respectively. However, the Thai partner's chief executive officer, Sakon Chiembangchong, confirmed that the partnership was in effect using Thailand as a strategic media hub for China to export entertainment and news as well as other kinds of media content to the region, giving it a pivotal role in expanding China's reach within Southeast Asia (Thongtep, 2011).

While the first three pathways target the mainstream audience of a given foreign country, the fourth pathway targets diasporic Chinese readers and viewers. By partnering with overseas Chinese media organizations via myriad *modi operandi*, many state-run media outlets, including television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and online media, have either quietly made their way into the diasporic Chinese-language mediasphere, or have taken on a distinct local look despite their largely mainland media content. The development and transformation of the Chinese-language diasporic media scene over the past two decades has indeed been profound. Those countries that have a long-established Chinese-language media scene (Sun, 2005) also happen to be the most favored destinations for outbound migration from China, dating from the early 19th century to the present, with Chinese communities being among the most established "ethnic" identities in relation to mainstream society. The diasporic Chinese communities in these countries have for a long time been well served by Chinese business organizations, Chinese-language schools, and Chinese-language media. As early as the 1960s, *Sing Tao Daily* in Hong Kong recognized the potential for developing markets outside Hong Kong, and subsequently set up offices in select cities in North America, Australia, and Europe. While *Sing Tao Daily* is a media conglomerate extending its influence from Hong Kong outward, *World Journal* represented the overseas expansion of the Taiwan-based United Daily News Group, which began establishing offices across North America in the mid-1970s. Diasporic Chinese media were segmented according to place of origin: migrants from Taiwan read the *World Journal*, while those from Hong Kong read *Sing Tao Daily*. Readership was also internally

differentiated along socioeconomic lines. For example, although both *Sing Tao Daily* and *Ming Pao* were based in Hong Kong and both were available in North America, the latter was considered to be close to an elitist newspaper catering to middle-class business people, many of them young, well-educated professionals and executives with relatively high incomes (So & Lee, 1995). However, despite these internal differences, it is safe to say that for decades prior to the arrival of PRC migrants en masse, these Chinese-language media outlets maintained a guarded, if not hostile, distance from Communist China. This media sector is often considered part of the transnational Chinese mediasphere, which, until up to two decades ago, had actively sought to maintain an independent position in relation to China (Sun, 2013). Initially existing mainly in European and English-speaking countries of the West, this sector has been seen as a key site in the formation of a diasporic public sphere, which, though not rejecting its links with China, nevertheless wanted to decenter China in an attempt to carve out an alternative space of being Chinese (Ong & Nonini, 1997).

Given the mostly hostile attitude of foreign correspondents from these countries, the Chinese Party-state's efforts to harness ethnic Chinese communities and their media enterprises as a platform to access overseas Chinese audiences—and, through them, mainstream audiences within those countries—seems a logical approach to take. It has been China's hope that overseas Chinese media would bridge the chasm between China and the West, help China to promote its culture and values, and lobby for Chinese political and economic interests in the host countries. "To borrow someone else's vessel to go to sea" (*jie chuan chu hai*) is a metaphor that is often evoked by Chinese policy makers to encapsulate the role of overseas Chinese media and organizations in China's going-global efforts.

For existing Chinese-language media in these countries, the arrival of large numbers of Chinese-speaking migrants from the PRC in recent decades has not only injected a much-needed boost into their dwindling audiences, but it has also brought a range of resources and skills that were desperately needed to revive a declining media environment. Many Hong Kong—and Taiwan-based media outlets were in effect driven out of the market by the new and growing presence of Chinese-language media outlets owned and operated by migrants from the PRC (Brady, 2009). In some cases, it has been a matter of diasporic Chinese community organizations and business entities adopting proactive measures in order to seek out opportunities from China. Cash strapped and looking for ways to expand their media business, these enterprises have seen potential in establishing new partnerships with mainland Chinese media. For example, the *African Oriental Post* (*Feizhou Huaqiao Zhoubao*), Botswana's first Chinese-language weekly, is the result of a partnership with the *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party in China. Established in 2009, the publication of the *African Oriental Post* was widely reported in Botswana's local press, and was touted as the first Chinese-language outlet in southern Africa (Martinsen, 2009). The paper's masthead prominently displays both *African Oriental Post* and *People's Daily*, allowing the *People's Daily* to make inroads into the diasporic Chinese mediasphere. In other cases, especially in recent years, the Chinese state media have actively identified willing collaborators outside China which are operated by PRC migrants and which also present themselves as credible and competitive businesses. Rainbow TV (RTV) Australia, the first Mandarin broadcasting corporation in Sydney, has partnerships with many provincial and regional television broadcasters in China. Apart from informing Mandarin-speaking audiences in Sydney about the Australian government's policies, the station lends itself as a platform for

the Chinese government and migrants to remain in lockstep with the political activities of the motherland, including the annual celebration of the founding of the PRC.

In recent years, young Mandarin-speaking PRC students, in addition to those post-Tiananmen PRC students who became permanent residents in a number of countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, have profoundly altered the demographic, cultural, and ideological makeup of the Chinese migrant population, superseding, both in number and influence, the older generations of Cantonese- and dialect-speaking Chinese migrants. These earlier migrants not only tend to have different consumption habits and higher spending power than their predecessors, but they also bring with them a closer allegiance to the political and ideological values of the PRC.

In many cases, the Mandarin-speaking market created by PRC migrants is too big for existing diasporic Chinese media businesses to ignore. For example, TVB, a Hong Kong-based provider of Chinese television, has been a major broadcaster, producer, and international distributor of television in the Chinese-speaking world since the 1970s (Curtin, 2007; Wong, 2009). Once catering to a predominantly Cantonese-speaking audience, TVB now provides content from mainland China as well as from the Cantonese-speaking world. In 2012, TVBC was established by three investors: TVB, China Media Capital (CMC), and Shanghai Media Group (SMG). While TVB sees this development as extending its business footprint to the mainland Chinese market, SMG—being the second most influential television station in China—also sees this joint venture as an important step in constructing international platforms for China's media content (TVBI Company Limited, 2012).

In North America, the development of the Chinese-language television scene is equally telling. On the surface, what look like independent overseas Chinese providers may, upon closer scrutiny, reveal complex and close connections with China. For example, Great Wall TV Platform was launched in North America in 2004, and it now carries an enormous volume of program content from China's national and provincial channels, as well as having now pushed into the Asian region (Wong, 2009). It is estimated that the network also controls about 75% of Chinese-language television stations in North America (Zhu, 2009). Great Wall TV is a news satellite service under the auspices of the China International TV Corp, which in turn is a subsidiary of CCTV (Zhu, 2009, p. 229). In 2010, Great Wall TV also marked its debut in Asia by launching its package to Chinese-speaking residents in Singapore (Xinhua, 2010b).

In the last decade or so, the landscape of overseas Chinese-language media has changed dramatically due to the emergence of media enterprises operated by migrants from the PRC. Apart from global Chinese newspaper chains such as the *Sing Tao Daily*, many locally launched newspapers in major cities with sizable Chinese populations are either owned and run by migrants from the PRC, or are remotely controlled and managed by editors who, having gained foreign citizenship, now reside in China. These recent developments are reflected in a number of changes in the content of Chinese-language dailies, weeklies, and magazines. First, there has been a gradual increase in news and information about China. Major Chinese-language newspapers are dedicated to Chinese news and current affairs, including Chinese regional and local news. Second, there is also a growing focus on news and information that is either from PRC sources or from a PRC perspective (Sun, Yue, Sinclair, & Gao, 2011). This has resulted in a curious situation whereby it is increasingly difficult to tell where the space of China's state media starts

and where the diasporic media space ends. There are, of course, important exceptions, including, for example, the *Epoch Times* and New Tang Dynasty TV (NTDTV), both alleged to be associated with and backed by the Falun Gong, whose news content is perceived to be anti-Chinese (Wong, 2009, p. 208).

China's strategies and initiatives are in many ways innovative and have taken a pragmatic, piecemeal, and country- or region-specific approach. They are by no means limited to the four pathways outlined above. In fact, one can predict with some degree of certainty that new pathways will be pursued in the future to further expand the global presence of Chinese media. In addition, as this outline suggests so far, various pathways often intersect and overlap to reshape and reconfigure the symbolic space of Chinese media. Furthermore, while some pathways have proven to be more effective than others, they by no means can claim to have "conquered" the symbolic space of the entire world. For example, although China considers both Hong Kong and Taiwan to be part of China, the Chinese government's capacity to control, censor, and influence the media of these two places had been limited. Perennial stories of top-down censorship and threats of losing journalistic independence in Hong Kong and Taiwan go hand in hand with counternarratives of the local media's defiance of China's attempts at control (Cook, 2013), reminding the PRC of the obstacles it faces on its own doorstep.

Tensions and Complexities: Further Discussion

So far, we can see clearly that the Chinese state media have become more global in terms of geographic scale. On the one hand, this has involved a process of decentralizing China's state media spatially—so much so that it is safe to say that state-mandated media content is now increasingly diffused and deterritorialized, and is carried to its diverse destinations by sometimes willing, sometimes unwitting, partners. In comparison with earlier going-global initiatives from CRI, CCTV, and Xinhua, which aimed for live, centrifugal transmission of Chinese media content using multiplatform, multilingual, and multimodal means (Sun, 2010), recent developments have aimed at a more seamless interface with local and independent media, and have the prospect of reaching mainstream as well as overseas Chinese communities, with more locality-specific content. In these countries and regions, promulgation of China's official views and opinions through the direct insertion of media content is a more commonly deployed strategy than attempts to improve foreign coverage of China. There are also examples where local governments exercise self-censorship over their own journalists who are critical of China (Cook, 2013).

On the other hand, in terms of discursive position and perspective, many of the globally circulated representations of China have become more Chinese, that is, more aligned with the perspective of the Chinese government, therefore resulting in a more centralized imaginary of China. China's going-global initiative is informed by a strong desire to expand the size of the symbolic space of China-reporting that is "objective" and "balanced," from a PRC point of view, and to reduce the size of the symbolic space that is "biased against" and unfavorable toward China. This desire to beat the West at its own game seems both logical and understandable, given that Western media have operated both transnationally and transterritorially for centuries, and their decentralizing and centralizing strategies have been crucial in achieving and maintaining global dominance. As a result of this domination, the Western media now have louder voices than their non-Western counterparts in terms of influencing world opinion.

“The West” here refers to the liberal democracies of North America, Western Europe, New Zealand, and Australia. Usually endowed with dual public and commercial sectors, with long-established policies in relation to foreign media ownership, content, and practices, these are the most difficult symbolic spaces for the Chinese media to penetrate. So far, the impenetrability of Western media and the impossibility of bringing foreign correspondents “on board” remains the biggest obstacle in China’s impression-management exercise. To get around this obstacle, the Chinese government manages foreign media by adopting both cajoling and coercive measures.⁴ On the whole, however, it wants to appear increasingly open and transparent. Between 1981 and the present, the State Council of the People’s Republic of China has issued three regulatory policies regarding foreign correspondents in China. The resulting relaxation of the rules means that foreign reporters can now conduct investigations without being accompanied by Chinese organizations and individuals. Furthermore, foreign journalists can hire Chinese assistants through agencies (Guo, 2009). In hopes of cultivating a more “friendly” relationship with foreign correspondents in China, the PRC has adopted the government spokesperson system, and now regularly and frequently invites foreign correspondents to press conferences; whether they get to ask questions is another matter. As Stephen McDonnell himself admits, “The Chinese government has become much more friendly to us now. They hold press conferences regularly; in fact, more often than we care to go. And they are very patient when we ask them questions. Even though you know they are only feeding you the Party line, you have got to admit they are very patient” (S. McDonnell, personal communication, August 8, 2012).

However, what is not widely understood in China is that Western journalists are trained not to trust the government (including their own government), and that even when they are reporting on their own countries they tend to look for conflict rather than good news. Stephen McDonnell’s question to Andrea Yu—“but is it journalism, what you are doing?”—inadvertently highlights the fact that one country’s journalism may be another country’s propaganda. To McDonnell and his colleagues, objectivity is the hallmark of real journalism and a principle that must inform their news gathering, selection, and writing.⁵ His interrogation of Andrea Yu drives home the fact that what stands in the way of China’s global

⁴ Indeed, some might say that Bloomberg’s recent experience in China demonstrates that the Western media do not always present themselves as a monolithic opposition to China. Bloomberg published a story about the wealth of the families of Chinese leaders. China retaliated by blocking Bloomberg’s website and forcing its operations in China to suffer. To avoid further damage, Bloomberg decided not to pursue further investigations, and Michael Forsythe, the reporter involved, resigned from Bloomberg to join *The New York Times* (Haughney, 2014).

⁵ There is not enough space here to delve into the complex question of objectivity, which is the focus of much media and communication scholarship. For an account of the political economy of journalism and objectivity in the U.S. context, see, for example, McChesney (2004). For a discussion of objectivity as a professional ideal, see, for example, Allan (2004). It suffices to say here that I do not want to suggest that news in the Western media is necessarily objective, or more objective than in the Chinese media. Rather, I suggest that news media in the West routinely adopts the canon, ritual, or protocol of objective reporting. I am grateful for one of the reviewers for suggesting the need to consider how Western journalists’ work and China’s perception of what they do in China is shaped by their practice of “objective” reporting.

expansion is not just a number of territorial obstacles, but more importantly, a plethora of political and ideological differences. Viewed in this light, the political usefulness of Andrea Yu lies in the fact that she embodies the almost-impenetrable media in the West. If she had looked less “Western”—say, African or South Asian—or if she had represented a non-Western media organization, she may not have generated quite so much publicity in both the Chinese and the Western media.

Many foreign correspondents in China come from wealthy nations. And given that China has been playing a crucial role in the economy, foreign policy, and domestic politics of these countries, it is not surprising that considerable resources and staffing have been invested in generating firsthand reporting of China. Furthermore, these correspondents see themselves as bastions of free speech, freedom of information, individual rights, and liberty, whereas they see China as an authoritarian Communist propaganda state. They consider it their duty to maintain an alternative—to the Chinese or pro-Chinese—symbolic space for representing China. In terms of the number of countries represented by these foreign correspondents, it is small indeed. However, their influence in shaping the image of China is global, given that the content they generated is accessed not only by the publics of their own countries, but also by the social and cultural elites of many other, non-Western nations around the world. And it is precisely the West’s “biased” and “negative” representation of China that has engendered among Chinese policy makers and the Chinese people a sense of injustice in the first place, motivating China to shift its impression-management project into a higher gear. Thus, China’s efforts to go global are as much about improving its impression management as about challenging a global communication order that is dominated by the West. In the words of policy makers, China needs to reclaim the “discursive right” to tell its own stories, rather than let the West monopolize the global narrative of China.

This account of the development of the Chinese media also makes it clear that the lines separating the symbolic spaces of foreign media, diasporic Chinese media, and Chinese media have become increasingly porous. And this tendency seems bound to continue and intensify, highlighting an important strategy that warrants further investigation. The emergence of figures like Andrea Yu is testimony to the Chinese media’s intention and capacity to expand and operate transnationally—that is, in the gap between various symbolic spaces within different countries. While this clearly signals a two-pronged strategy of territorial expansion and manipulation of boundaries, these two directions are not always in harmony. To expand their sphere of influence, the Chinese government has made every effort possible to exploit the processes of digitalization and globalization, and in doing so, turning mobility to its advantage. However, while a distinct, yet permeable, boundary between various symbolic spaces may assist the Chinese government in expanding its sphere of influence, the possible spilling of media content across boundaries in other cases could cause damage to China’s image. This is mainly because China’s attempts to improve foreign public opinion do not always sit comfortably with the objectives and *modi operandi* of its domestic propaganda exercise. We have, for example, seen instances in which the Chinese government finds itself on the back foot precisely due to its failure to effectively quarantine the flow of media content between different symbolic spaces, thereby letting the “wrong” media material fall into the hands of unintended audiences. For example, in 2011, the Chinese media launched a sustained media campaign to publicize the Chinese government’s all-out efforts to rescue Chinese citizens from Libya during the civil war that ousted Mu`ammar Gadhafi. The campaign was intended to instill patriotism, nationalism, and faith in the leadership of the Communist Party among domestic and diasporic Chinese

communities. However, the campaign sent a somewhat different message to the West, anxiously watching China's rise. Many Western media commentators, for example, took China's efforts in Libya as a demonstration that China was becoming more ambitious, even aggressive, on the international stage.

The Chinese authorities' inability to control the flow of media content is also evidenced in their difficulty in keeping any unfavorable reporting of China within domestic borders. In the aftermath of the high-speed train crash in Wenzhou in May 2011, the authorities ordered Chinese media not to send reporters to the scene, not to report too frequently, and not to link the story to high-speed rail development (C. Wu, 2012). The foreign media, in contrast, were not only interested in determining motives, elucidating causes, and predicting the consequences and significance of the crash, but they were equally interested in assessing the implications of the state media's censorship of the accident. The lack of transparency in the domestic media's coverage of the train crash, compounded by the international media's close scrutiny of the situation, ensured that the incident was not only a disaster resulting in the loss of lives, but also a political disaster from the point of view of impression management.

Future Directions

This discussion has concerned itself with a number of questions: How does the Chinese government and its media negotiate with various foreign media entities, interest groups, and individuals in order to project a Chinese vision of who "we" are? What kind of decentralizing activities and initiatives does the Chinese government engage in, and how do these activities contribute to the centralizing of a Chinese vision? Even though it has raised more questions than it can adequately address, the discussion highlights a few spaces to watch in future investigation. We now know that the boundary between what is Chinese and what is "foreign" is increasingly permeable, mobile, and subject to negotiation. This requires us to pay attention to the ongoing and constantly changing politics of boundaries as this plays out for various parties, whether it be the Chinese government, foreign governments and their media, or diasporic Chinese individuals and enterprises. More specifically, it involves tracking the partnerships—however qualified or negotiated they may be—between different media institutions both inside and outside China. It also involves mapping the emerging and shifting overlap between hitherto discrete symbolic spaces, with the purpose of revealing both the expanding sphere of influence of Chinese state media and the possible shrinkage of diasporic and foreign media's capacity to project voices that are independent of China. Finally, in view of the obstacles posed by the Western media to China's going-global efforts, we may do well to follow China's actions closely, to see what strategies they adopt to reduce, if not remove, these obstacles and differences. Equipped with this mid-range lens, we may be in a better position to capture a clear picture of the fluid and fast-changing media landscape brought about by China's ambitions for expansion.

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