Representing China by the Australian Public Broadcaster: Evolving or Stereotyped

Xiufang Li (Leah)
Macquarie University
g_xfli@yahoo.com.cn

Xiufang Li (Leah), is a PhD Candidate, Dept. of Media, Music and Culture, Macquarie University.

Abstract

This article reviews the historical baggage between China and Australia, contemporary Sino-Australian relations, and the global but Western-oriented media agenda. It concludes that dynamic world politics and the emerging global media agenda necessitate the study of the Australian media representation of current China. The study attempts to investigate the framework within which China’s 21st century images have been constructed by the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) television network. By drawing on image and power theories, the study maintains that China’s images in Australia consist of five layers: military, economic, cultural, environmental and political. It examines the valence and the visibility of the media framework regarding these dimensions. In particular, it focuses on what kinds of cultural frames are constructed by the ABC in the light of media framing theory. The findings show that the images of China projected by the ABC continue to be influenced by historical baggage, and respond consistently to the global media agenda dominated by the United States, even though the ABC tries to present the full picture of China. Qualitative content analysis is employed, and the ABC current affairs program Foreign Correspondent is used to provide the data resources. The reasons for choosing this program by the ABC, and the time frame from 2005 to 2008 are discussed.

Keywords

National Image, Image Theory, Media Framing Theory, Current Affairs, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Introduction

During the current phase of globalization, the relationship between Australia and China has improved. Economic ties, cultural exchange, interpersonal contact, and the highlighted significance of Sino-Australian relations by the two nations’ leaderships have reached a
higher level. The global financial crisis starting in early September 2008 further affirms the economic reliance between China and Australia. The competition for resources, the strategic differences, the different social systems and ideologies, and the historical baggage, however, may set back the bilateral relationship. The present global dynamic contexts and the historical stereotypes inform the re-interpretation of China in Australia.

Media as a crucial image-shaper plays a significant role in international affairs. By setting agendas and framing reports, it serves to shape public attitudes towards issues and events. Research shows that there is a global agenda set by Western media giants. Hence, this paper will investigate the contemporary projection of China’s image in the 21st century with special references to the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) current affairs program Foreign Correspondent.

1. National Image

National Image and its Significance

Kunczik (1997) defines national image as the cognitive perceptions that an individual holds of a named country towards its people and the state. It can be “the climate of opinion formed by collective expressions of perceptions and judgements of a country by its overseas publics” (Wang, 2008).

The role of national image in international relations derives from the doctrine in social science that human beings’ cognitive perceptions will determine their behaviour: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Tomas, 1928, p.572). Accordingly, image engaged with a set of thoughts and ideas can govern people’s behaviour (Boulding, 1956). Decision-makers tend to be unaware that they are living in a world of constructed reality, and subsequently decisions are made based on misconceptions and distorted images. It then leads to misunderstanding, conflict and crisis between countries (Kunczik, 1997; Whitehead, 1987). How a nation is perceived can be either an asset or a debt. Positive image encourages mutual trust, foreign investment, tourism, education, and other kinds of cooperation. Negative reputation, however, discourages cooperation, and can raise instability and confrontation (Kunczik, 1997). Alexander and Levin (2005) maintain that the perceptions of group relations can induce the strategic responses. They assert that the image that a nation has of another depends on structural features of interstate relations: goal compatibility, relative power, and relative cultural status. The assessments of them will define the views of other nations, such as ally, enemy, dependent, barbarian, or imperialist. This, in turn, can raise
potential relations: cooperation, attack/conflict, control/exploitation, potential invader, or sabotage. Therefore, the value of national image study lies in the fact that the justification that a country holds of another will affect its policies toward the other, and will bring about multi-layered international responses. In addition, national image should be studied in a historical perspective. The historical factors, such as stereotypes and prejudices about a country and its people, and their bilateral relations in the past, are passed on through generations, which in the end will influence the conception of national image (Kunczik, 1997; Wang, 2000).

**Multi-dimensionality of National Image**

A country’s image is manifested in multiple ways. This study draws the conclusion that the research of China’s image in Australia covers five dimensions: military, economic, cultural, political and environmental. This notion is in accordance with power and image theories.

Nye (2004) states that power is the capability to influence the behaviors of others in a way desired by the source. He notes that in the information age power can be classified into soft power and hard power. Soft power refers to achieve what the source wants through attraction, while hard power relies on coercion. Military, economic, and cultural capability are the primary sources of power in the contemporary world.

Nye’s power theory is consistent with Alexander and Levin’s concept. In their study of Lebanese perceptions of US and US-Lebanese relations in 2005, relative power is associated with economic power, relative status is clarified as cultural status, and goal compatibility is tested by asking respondents about their feelings of the “war on terrorism”. That is to say, the question selected to verify goal compatibility varies according to country of study and can be measured in relation to salient foreign affairs. As the environment is the hot topic on the global agenda, and the key issue paid high attention by Australian and Chinese authorities, it can be employed to identify the goal compatibility between the two countries. For instance, Australia and China are fighting global warming together with other countries by curbing energy use and reducing carbon emissions (Taylor, 2009). The Australian China Environment Development Program that commenced in July 2007 aims at supporting and improving policy development in China in the sphere of environmental protection and natural resources management (Australian Government, 2007). Meanwhile, there are fundamental differences between China and Australia with regard to political institutions, human rights and democracy, which may cause mutual distrust. Accordingly, politics is another important aspect to identify the goal capability. Therefore, the images of China in Australia should be examined in five facets: military, economic, cultural, political and environmental.
2. Media Framing Theory

Media frames mean the “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (Gitlin, 2003, p.7). Media framing involves all the activities in the production of media products (Gamson & Modigliani, as cited in Choi, 2006). It can consist of the construction and the interpretation of media frames.

Framing effect refers to “one in which salient attributes of a message (its organization, selection of content, or thematic structure) render particular thoughts applicable, resulting in their activation and use in evaluations” (Price et al. as cited in Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Media practitioners generally reframe events or rejuvenate stories by highlighting different attributes or different stages of them (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). During this process, evaluation, selection, or alteration of original materials, and even deception occurs. By framing, media helps to identify problems, raise moral assessment, examine causes or recommend solutions (Entman, 1993), but can cause misinterpretation of a complicated world. Media framing theory further suggests that news is the reconstruction of information. It is gathered and distributed for the purposes of “political communication, trade and pleasure, and directed in its generic form by technology, scientism and the development of mass media markets” (Boyd-Barrett and Rantenen, 1998, p.1). Consequently, media reports can raise public support for or disagreement with affairs.

A wide range of studies show that the media shapes public impressions of a country by framing. The effects exerted by the media on people’s conceptions are on account of their reliance on the media for information and on personal experience. In reality, the public rely more on media for world affairs than other issues. It is primarily attributed to the narrow access to complex world events, and the lack of motivation to search for first-hand materials of global events. Most scholars assert that the media can be the strongest international image former (Chitty 2007; Choi 2006; Kunczik 1997; Tunstall 1970; Galtung & Ruge 1965). Exposure to media coverage is linked with public interest in foreign countries (Saleem, 2007; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003; Manheim & Albritton, 1983). To which extent country A receives reports in country B, and how country A is portrayed by the media in country B can enhance favorable or unfavorable reputation of country A that is perceived by people in country B (Wanta, 2004). Biased or unbalanced reports of a named country, for example, can result in the misperceptions of it (Perry 1987). Hence, media representations of a country can affect public opinions, transnational personal contact, and the
practices of cross-national activities (Bartels; Manheim; Peffley & Hurwitz, as cited in Brewer et al., 2003).

3. Imaging China in Australia

The Australian image of China was not uniform in the 20th century. It oscillated between “friendliness” and “hostility” from the mid 19th century to the 20th century (Strahan, 1996, p.2). Such that, in the 21st century the image becomes more “complex, ambiguous and contradictory” (White, 1999, p.74).

Strahan (1996) documents the Australian perceptions of China from the mid 19th to the 1990s. China was perceived as Yellow Peril in the mid 19th century, indicating a threat to Australia. Red Menace was constantly used to describe China as a brutal, subversive force looming over Australia and Asia from the 1930s to the 1960s, endangering peace and civilization. The images of China in Australia became more rounded in the next two decades. Australians interpreted China with economic opportunities in the 1980s rather than economic threat (Dawkins, 1990). The positive imagery, however, was shattered by the Tiananmen Square Tragedy in 1989. The old stereotypes of China and anti-communism revived. In short, there was no single pattern in the 1990s (Strahan, 1996). White (1999) illustrates that most Australians viewed China in relation to their tourism interests, and as a vital export market and a rising political power, but failed to acknowledge its contribution to global knowledge and progress. On the other hand, the cruel, alien and authoritarian China was regularly presented in the Australian media.

In the 21st century, the international arena is undergoing faster changes. A “pragmatic and commercialized” but “constructive and friendly” bilateral relationship (White, 1999), and the Australian policy of multiculturalism may have contributed to the positive Australian views of China (Kendall, 2005). Nevertheless, the historical myths and the current fear of China are likely to exert some side effects. China’s emergence has induced a new threat concept. The pessimists term China’s foreign policy as a “smile strategy” (Dick & Chanlett-Avery, 2006, p.2), suspecting whether it will behave as a responsible major power (Zoellick, 2006; Waldron, 2005; Foot, 2001; Gill, 2001). The uncertainty of China’s long-term ambitions and the wariness of whether there are sinister motives behind its “peaceful development” are widespread. Critics are concerned that China’s rising has positioned it far ahead of Australia and may lead to an asymmetrical relationship. The inhuman, greedy, omnipotent and mysterious dragon is persistent in the depiction of the contemporaneous China (Matt, 2008). It may turn out to be a “fire-breather” (Zoellick, 2006). China’s trade surplus, currency
manipulation, loss of Western jobs to cheap labor in China, deplorable product quality, environmental pollution, abuse of dissidents, stringent internet censorship, freedom of Tibet, and Tiananmen Massacre shadow are at the top of Western media agenda (Ford, 2007).

Simultaneously, the process of concentration, deregulation, privatization and commercialization undertaken by global media industries during globalization is reducing the diversity of news, and reinforces the governance of Western media on the global media frames. News is collected and disseminated by a small group of powerful agencies that act globally (Boyd-Barrett & Rantenen, 1998). The big news agencies, such as Reuters with the United Kingdom, AFP (Agence France-Press) with France, and AP (Associated Press) and WTN (World Television News) with the United States, enjoy a leading status to supply news products and set the global news agenda (Boyd-Barrett, 1998). The global television news is led by international outlets such as CNN, Fox News Channel, the BBC and Al Jazeera (White, 2004.). These global entities, however, concentrate highly on Western events, basically coverage of America and Europe, and some even are “distinctly American” (White, 2004). Tunaoglu (2004) finds that there is a common global media agenda, characterized by the West. He explains that America and Western Europe are the main actors of the global agenda, and the Western news agencies, Reuters, AFP, AP and UPI, are the creators of that. As a result, international news coverage is becoming narrower rather than wider (White, 2004). According to this tendency, the study assumes that the Australian media frames of China will be linked with the global but Western-oriented media frames. Dynamic world politics, the assimilating global media arena and historical baggage demand a new examination of how the Australian media represents China.

4. Research Design
This study will explore how the image of China is constructed by the Australian media in the 21st century with regard to the five aspects of image. It will determine whether the projection is influenced by historical stereotypes and responses to the global media arena. Episodes of Foreign Correspondent broadcast by the ABC are used to provide the data resources, and qualitative content analysis is employed.

4.1 The ABC and Foreign Correspondent
There are several kinds of television services in Australia: commercial television services, national television services, community television services, and subscription (pay) television services. Unlike the other stations, the ABC broadcasts Australia wide, and is not restricted to particular cities or paid subscriptions. Funded by the Australian government, they are
provided by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). The ABC’s national free-to-air analogue service is available to over 98 percent of the Australian population, and its three digital free-to-air channels to over 96 percent. SBS reaches 95 percent of Australians through its analogue service, and 80 percent through its digital service (Australian government, Australian communications and media authority, 2006).

In practice, SBS and the ABC serve separate missions for Australian society. The SBS Corporation Charter states that it aims to display Australia’s multicultural society, communicating ethnic communities’ voices, and enhancing the awareness of the importance of diversified cultures to Australian society. By contrast, the ABC bears the responsibility for contributing to “a sense of national identity” (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008). In the light of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1983 Act - Sect 6, the ABC performs as a window for Australians and non-Australians to understand Australian domestic affairs and Australian views on international issues. Furthermore, the ABC gets more connection with the Australian government (Inglis, 2006). It historically functioned as a “political institution” – “a forum for discussion and controversy” with respect to information, and a publicity channel for politicians to reach their constituents that was not controlled by commercial interests (Davis, 1987, p.6). Thus, the ABC is more preferable than SBS to study the Australian mainstream media’s projection of China.

*Foreign Correspondent* produced by the ABC is presented as Australia’s “leading international current affairs program since 1992”. It specializes in covering and investigating major international stories that foreign governments dislike. It has won many international and Australian awards, and is broadcasted worldwide by over 20 international networks. All information is notified on its homepage. Additionally, the credibility of the program is likely to be enhanced by the fact that *Foreign Correspondent* falls into the genre of current affairs. The genre belongs to factual TV, which aims at exposing the truth by operating within the policies governing news reporting, and journalistic traditions (Hill, 2007, P4). Therefore, this program is used to analyze how the Australian media portray China.

**4.2 Methodology**

“Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18). All research is somehow related to content analysis if it is identified as a way to classify texts into various categories (Krajewsk, 2002). Accordingly, the sampled documentaries, a total of 22,
are structured into five broad themes: military, economic, cultural, political and environmental. The category depends on the headline and the opening sequence of each tape.

The time frame is set from 2005 to 2008 in accordance with the convenience sampling approach. Krippendorff (2004) notes that this sampling method rests on an accessible body of text. The study will be considered as a case study, and so does not mean to generalize the outcome in a statistical manner. In this case, validity outweighs reliability. This is because higher reliability by different coders or researchers may suggest a shared bias in data processing (Ratcliff, 2006).

In terms of national image study, two points deserve our attention: visibility and valence. Visibility means the amount of media coverage that the objects receive; valence shows the degree to which the content reflects either favorably or unfavorably on the objects (Manheim & Albritton, 1983). In this study, episode valence refers to the valence of the whole story, which can be positive, negative, or neutral. It indicates the reporters’ inclinations to the whole storyline. The study will examine the visibility and the valence of every dimension. Each episode is a research unit.

My analysis of the episode structure reveals a shared pattern. The journalists mostly present during the opening and the closing sequences. The introduction of a show briefs on the theme, and creates conflicts to stimulate viewers’ curiosity to watch. The ending accompanied by the journalists’ voiceover tries to encourage audiences to think about the issues reported in the shows. At least two or three sub-stories are composed within the body of one episode with no less than two or three interviewees. Thus, the valence relevant to the journalists’ stance can be observed based on the headline, the responses of interviewees, and particularly the ending. The criteria governing the amount of time allocated to interviewees will be used to justify the ambiguous situations. Supposing that two interviewees hold negative opinions, and one is neutral or positive, it will determine the whole as negative. If only two people are interviewed, one positive/neutral and one negative, the overall preference will be decided by the amount of time interviewees are given to reply. Certainly, the quality of interviewees’ reply will also be taken into account. If you click on the title of an episode listed in the tables below, you will be linked to its webpage with the video and the transcript.
5. Findings

Finding 1

*Foreign Correspondent* casts more light on the cultural aspect of China, accounting for 41%, followed by those concerning politics, economy, environment and military. That is to say, the visibility of the Chinese culture ranks first and politics comes second. See Table 1 for the figures. Is the Chinese culture really of such high news value, or, is there something hidden reason for this attention? Finding 4 will deal with this puzzle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Number of Episodes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 2, half of the topics are covered negatively, while the positive together with the neutral views share the other half. The study would like to go further by exploring in which context the topics about China can elicit a favorable sentiment. This will be discussed in Finding 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valence</th>
<th>Number of Episodes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding 2

The reporters hold a neutral position towards the Chinese culture and economy, but negative towards China’s environment and politics. There are no episodes dealing directly with the military issue, though *Taiwan Dire Strait* that narrates the former Taiwan President Chen’s struggle for Taiwan’s independence connotes China’s military might. The episode contains quite a few scenes of Chinese soldiers and Chinese military shows, implying the capability
and the aggressiveness of the Chinese military. Meanwhile, the “overall valence” arising from the “separate valence” for each tape outlines the reporters’ views of China’s multifaceted image. Details are shown from Table 3 to Table 7.

Table 3: Cultural Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of the Episode</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Separate Valence</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21/06/2005</td>
<td>Taiwan - Pulling Power</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/07/2005</td>
<td>Beijing's Heritage</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/08/2005</td>
<td>The Great Wall Marathon</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/04/2006</td>
<td>Another Sun - China</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/5/2006</td>
<td>Running Dogs</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/6/2006</td>
<td>Painting Village</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/5/2007</td>
<td>China Architecture</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19/08/2008</td>
<td>Monkey Returns</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/09/2008</td>
<td>Sex &amp; the City</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Economic Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of the Episode</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Separate Valence</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20/06/2006</td>
<td>Cars Eating China</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/7/2007</td>
<td>China's African Takeover</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/08/2007</td>
<td>China's Winds of Change</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/04/2008</td>
<td>Racquet Town</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Environmental Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of the Episode</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Separate Valence</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20/05/2008</td>
<td>Damming the Three Gorges</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/04/2007</td>
<td>China – Siberian Tigers</td>
<td>FS</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Political Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of the Episode</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Separate Valence</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 7: Military Dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of the Episode</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Separate Valence</th>
<th>Overall Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding 3

Nearly all the episodes with positive attributes are in the format of a postcard. The exception of longer coverage with a positive tone comes to China Winds of Change and Another Sun. Both of them deal with business cooperation and interpersonal associations between China and Australia. By contrast, negative reports definitely get more time and space.

Items on Foreign Correspondent have either a feature story format or a postcard format. A feature story format that has strong journalism in it is related to substantial issues, and lasts roughly 20 minutes. A postcard format, however, is inclined to be light or humorous, with subject matters of lifestyle or art. It is usually scheduled at the end of the program with a duration of no more than 10 minutes. Clearly, the format implies the degree of importance of the items. Items in a feature story format are coded as ‘FS’, and items in postcard format are coded as ‘P’.

Taiwan-Pulling Power, the Great Wall Marathon, and Monkey Returns introducing the Chinese culture are postcards with an affirmative justification. Painting Village and Racquet Town are postcards as well, portrayed neutrally. Another Sun documents the fruitful experiences of Australians in China, and China’s Winds of Change exemplifies the successful business cooperation between the Australian company, Roaring Forties, and Chinese companies in the Chinese market. Both are presented with a favorable light in a feature story format. The remaining episodes which are engaged with Chinese politics and environment are
Finding 4
Finding 1 shows that the ABC journalists pay more attention to the Chinese culture than the other aspects. But is this really the case? This section focuses on the cultural category. It examines what kinds of frames are projected about China in the cultural sense. The outcome reveals that the cultural dimension can interweave with other dimensions. The beginning sequence introduces one topic but the body can engage with more themes, or change to another. It, therefore, concludes that the cultural topics serve as an umbrella under which more significant inputs, particularly political issues, can be raised.

Frame 1 The rich culture as one part of world treasures
China is well acknowledged as a country with a diverse cultural heritage and a long history over four thousand years. Pulling Power introduces a martial art called Ying Dao Gong. It is believed to be good for health and men’s sexual life. Monkey Returns centers on the permanent values and popularity of the Chinese film that derives from Journey to the West, one of China’s most treasured pieces of literature. The Great Wall is honored as “one of the world’s great landmarks”, and for the Chinese it is “a symbol of national unity and pride”, anchored by Taylor in The Great Wall Marathon.

Frame 2 Cultural heritage and ordinary Chinese people’s interests threatened by new developers and political authorities
Beijing Heritage details that China’s historical treasures like courtyard houses have been demolished to build the new Beijing. It suggests that new developers and political authorities who initiate planning should be blamed for that. The reporter begins that “Since Mao and the Communist Party seized power in Beijing ... A myriad of architectural and historical treasures are now gone…”, and ends that “Today money speaks louder than Mao…The every glorious past seems to have no place in the future” (Taylor, 2005).

Frame 3 The cultural differences between China and the West
Another Sun explores the cultural uniqueness of China differentiated from the West based on the stories of Australians in China. Shyan Dye holds that race goers in Hong Kong are there for making money, while in Australia people love the horses and in turn love the business. Jason Yat-Sen Li is surprised that bosses can have close friendships with their workmates in China, and putting on a seatbelt is likely to offend the Chinese drivers. China Architecture
compares the understandings of public place and private place in the Western and Chinese
design of architecture. *Running Dogs* illustrates the changing attitude of Chinese towards
dogs from that of “pests” to “pets”. Even as “pets”, some Chinese regard dogs as “surrogate
children”, while others as disposable “toys” (Taylor, 2006).

**Frame 4 The transformed values held by youth colliding with the old, and the contribution of
Western values to China’s modernization**

*Sex & the City*, *Running Dogs*, and *China Architecture* manifest the new values in the minds
of the young Chinese. Reportedly, the affluent society and the more affluent life have
cultivated the young middle-class. They lead a new lifestyle similar to the West. The
constructive role of the West during China’s modernization and integration to the world is
justified by the reporters.

*Sex & the City* attempts to typify the notion that the young female generation pays more
attention to career, casual fun and sex. They no longer rush into marriage to produce babies as
the Chinese women did from the 1950s to the early 80s. *Running Dogs* compares the attitudes
of the young and the old on dogs. The young Chinese embrace the great companionship of
dogs as a new lifestyle rather than having children, while for the old Chinese it is because of
the loneliness of having just one child. In *China Architecture*, Zhu Pei (2007), representing
the younger generation of Chinese architects, expresses his desire to explore China’s
urbanization by borrowing “the Western way of working” and “the idea of precision” to
architectural design. The old generation of architects, such as Professor Alfred Peng,
however, makes the criticism that Western design is not appropriate for Beijing. Facing this
dilemma, the journalist lastly claims that “without foreign influence, that [China’s
modernization] would have been unthinkable” (Sommerville, 2007).

**Frame 5 The new phenomena of fast art relying on cheap labor**

*Painting Village* narrates that China’s production line technique has stretched out to the field
of art. A village named Dafen in Guangdong province, famous for the copying of
masterpieces, has supplied the demanding international market. Most of the works are done
by talented young painters who are paid poorly.

**Summary and Discussion**

With regard to the various agendas set for China, *Foreign Correspondent* holds a balanced
view on Chinese culture and the economy. However, there is a negative view towards China’s
treatment of the environment, and a similar view towards its politics. The coverage suggests
traces of historical stereotypes, and is consistent with the global media agenda dominated by the West.

Firstly, in accordance with the specific analysis of the cultural aspect, journalists assert the progressive side of China, such as the rich culture and the transformation of social values that is open to Western ideas. Therefore, White’s statement (1999, p.74) that “China and the Chinese people have been misread in Australia and its complex culture and civilization have been trivialized through myth and imagination” is not necessarily supported.

Secondly, the program continues to focus on another side of China, a speedily modernizing country with a number of social instabilities that can burden itself and the world. The preservation of conventional culture is under stress, and ordinary citizens’ interests and legal rights are not guaranteed. Though the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the Cultural Revolution and the Mao era seemingly recede into history, the reporters indirectly connect them with the present-day China. Examples are shown in Beijing Heritage, Sex & the City and Running Dogs.

Thirdly, the dimension of culture weighs more heavily than politics, economy, environment and military. Themes involved with culture are mostly used to raise critical insight into Chinese politics. Just three out of nine episodes completely concentrate on culture. More are detailed in Finding 3. Compared with the argument that politics and business rank first in the Australian media portrayal of China in the early 21st century (Wang, as cited in Liu & Chen, 2005), this finding goes deeper. In addition, an unpleasant image of the Chinese government is formulated, which is short sighted and greedy for economic benefits.

Fourthly, the historical stereotypes continue to play a role in journalistic framing. The new China threat concept, which dates back to the old China threat perception in the mid 19th century and the Mao era, is disseminated by journalists in the contemporary era. Though the correspondents recognize the common ground shared by Australians and Chinese, the “Other” image remains visible. Maher (2006) mentions in Another Sun: “We Westerners have been grappling with China for centuries, trying to read it, trying to engage it, trying to contain it and trying to profit from it. Unlike Europe and the United States, in China there are few cultural or linguistic touchstones for most of the Australians we’re about to meet’. The outcome echoes White’s prediction (1999, p.74-75) that Australians perceive China with a “remarkable degree of continuity with earlier image” and a new image of the “Other” is being formed.
Fifthly, the assumption, based on the association between globalization and news discussed above, that the Australian media representation of China will reflect the Western-oriented global media agenda is encouraged. For instance, the heated topics, China’s human rights issue (exemplified in Beijing’s Heritage, One Child Policy, The Day the Schools Fell Down, and Foul Play), the controversy of Tibet Freedom (manifested in After the Dalai Lama), and internet censorship (shown in The Great Firewall of China), are broadcast by Foreign Correspondent. In addition, China’s Africa Takeover displays the influential status of China in Africa, questioning whether it is exploiting or helping the African countries. Dire Strait deals with the independence of Taiwan. Environmental pollution is documented as well, displayed in Damming the Three Gorges, and Siberian Tigers. The theme of China as a world factory and its development reliant on cheap labor is illustrated in Painting Village and Racquet Town.

To sum up, the ABC Foreign Correspondent’s representation of China is evolving and stereotyped as well. It tries to picture the developing China from a variety of facets, but continues to be influenced by the historical baggage and the global media agenda. The results to some extent are in agreement with the previous findings that negative news and negative stereotypes dominate stories about China in Western media (Lee; Loo; Mastro & Greenberg; Pittam & Mackay, as cited in Liu & Chen, 2005). It reflects the fact that Canberra regards the emergence of China as a set of challenges and opportunities (Australian Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, 2005, 2006). Further research is highly recommended into what precise frames are constructed in the remaining categories: military, economic, political and environmental; whether there are myths inherent in the audio-visual texts; and how the myths are embedded in order to communicate messages. Another comparative study of Foreign Correspondent’s coverage of Western countries, particularly the United States, will allow us to understand if the media coverage of China is intentionally biased, or if it is just due to the innate nature of media. In addition, a study of the other Australian public broadcaster, SBS and the Australian mainstream print media’s representation of China will help to provide a wider, more complete view.

References
ABC Foreign Correspondent. Retrieved 19th January, 2009, from

http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/about.htm


http://www.acedp-partnership.org/


Received 18th January, 2008. from


Retrieved 18th December, 2008, from
http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/9/2/4/7/pages92479/p92479-1.php


Ford, P. (September 12, 2007). Beyond food and toys, China struggles with its global reputation: From climate change to Darfur, public opinion polls reveal a global unease with the growing superpower [Electronic Version]. The Christian Science Monitor from


