

The Globalization of Chinese News Programs: A Country of Origin Perspective

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Abstract

This study employed theoretical constructs from country-of-origin and cultural proximity literatures to explain US audience's perceptions of Chinese news programs and contents. Our study used an online questionnaire survey method to collect data from 236 students at a large public US university. Linear regression analyses found that cultural proximity was an important predictor. However, perceived animosity was not found to be a significant predictor of US audience's viewing behaviors of news programs and contents from China. Theoretical implications of country-of-origin constructs were discussed to better predict audience viewing behaviors of foreign news contents. Practical implications for the globalization of Chinese news programs were discussed.

Keywords: Country of Origin, Animosity, Cultural Proximity, Chinese News Programs, China, Soft Power

Introduction

With the rapid growth of Chinese economy and political power in the past decades (Brown, Cote, Lynn-Jones, & Miller, 2000; Jacques, 2009), the Chinese government has begun to employ what Joseph Nye, a Harvard professor, calls "soft power" to enter the world stage (Shenkar, 2005). Nye (2004) defined soft power as a form of national power on the basis of its cultural and ideational attractiveness to allow a nation to legitimately exert its political and cultural influence to achieve its strategic imperatives. Servaes (2012) situated this concept within the

communication field and associates soft power with media communication, public relations, and public opinion. Following the same vein, examples of culture soft power range from movies, music, language, and other communication contents (Lee, 2011). This term also becomes the most frequently used phrase among Chinese political leaders to “meet domestic needs and increasing international challenges (Li, 2009, p. 1). Using culturally rich media contents to demonstrate a country’s “soft power” was found in Hollywood export of cultural products and the emerging Bollywood industry in India (Thussu, 2013). Employing a similar strategy, the Chinese government also redefines the function and nature of film industry as part of its soft power (Su, 2010). The term, *Chinawood*, has been proposed to increase China’s soft power (Su, 2010). Similarly, the recent launch of several new international news channels (e.g., *CNC World*) and the expansion of China Radio International are some noteworthy attempts by government-controlled media institutions to present China as an emerging global player in the culture industry. However, unlike the relatively undeterred worldwide acceptance of Chinese-made products, the consumptions of cultural products, including news programs and contents, involve more complicated and interwoven historical and cultural factors in consumer decision-making processes. In this research, we derived from the international communication and country-of-origin literatures to examine critical factors determining the diffusion of Chinese news programs and contents in the US. Using the exploratory study of US audience as an example, we intend to explain how country-of-origin theoretical constructs can be applied to predict audience viewing behaviors of foreign media contents in general and foreign news contents in particular to account for the globalization of Chinese news programs.

Understanding audience’s viewing behaviors of international media contents has become a central issue for international communication research in the face of audience fragmentation and media globalization (Barker, 1997, 1999; Seibe, 2012). In the past, international communication scholars have often focused on the direction of international television program flow and its subsequent impacts (Barker, 1997, 1999; Chen, 2004; Cooper-Chen, 1999; Elasmr,

2003; Morris, 2002; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003; Straubhaar, Fuentes-Bautista, Abram, McCormick, Campbell, & Inagaski, 2003). At a macro level, existing research on international television content flows has focused on the impact of international trade in media products by examining macro-level variables such as cultural identity, content diversity, government regulations, media system ownership, and unintended social changes (Barker, 1999; Elasmr, 2003; Elasmr & Bennett, 2003; Hamilton, 2000; Morris, 2002; Seib, 2012). Some studies have further explored the direction of trade flows, concluding that international television programs generally move from economically advanced and culturally dominant countries to developing or less developed countries (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000; Chung, 2005).

However, adding to the ample literature on these macro-level determinants, international communication researchers have begun to examine the role of audience in explaining the phenomenon (Barker, 1997; Youmans, 2012). Barker (1997) argued that the audience takes an active role in the selection and interpretation of imported media contents. Youmans (2012) explored whether public preference affects local CATV systems if content distributors transmit *Al Jazeera English*. The growing emphasis on the role of the audience in making their own media consumption decision demonstrates a drastic paradigm shift to an audience-centric model to understand this important phenomenon. However, despite the importance of international television contents, empirical research about factors influencing audience's behaviors has received little attention (Cooper-Chen, 1999; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008).

Due to the scarcity of empirical studies in the international communication area, our study borrows from marketing and consumer behavior literature to better understand audience's behaviors related to imported media contents, and particularly, international news programs. Our study combines the frequently used concept of cultural proximity in international communication research (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Straubhaar, 2003; Straubhaar et al., 2003) with the country-of-origin literature to explain how an audience perceives China and how these perceptions affect the decision to watch Chinese news programs and contents. We situate the cultural proximity construct within the country-

of-origin theory to explain the dynamic interactions between the approaches in predicting audience's media consumption behaviors. Additionally, we include an important country-of-origin concept, *animosity* (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998; Gürhan-Canlı & Maheswari, 2000), to examine the effects of international tensions and political hostility toward a foreign country on audience's behaviors. Our study uses cultural proximity and country of origin/perceived animosity constructs as two main variables to account for viewers' behaviors related to new programs and contents from China.

Soft Power and China as an Emerging Global Player

Since its economic reform and modernization during the 1980s and 1990s, China has increased its political and economic power (Brown et al., 2000). With its growth rate in double-digits over three decades, China's GDP has now surpassed Japan as the world's second largest economy (2010). China competes with Japan and the US in terms of its economic and political presence in East and Southeast Asia (Medeiros et al., 2008). Not content with limiting its growing influence to Asia only, Chinese government has aggressively pursued its soft power in the international arena (Li, 2009). As its former party chief and President, Hu Jintao, announced at the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting in 2006: "The increase in our nation's international status and influence will have to be demonstrated in hard power such as the economy, science and technology, and defense, as well as in soft power such as culture" (Ma, cited in Li, 2009, p. 23).

Chinese leaders have viewed mass media as a critical component of exerting China's soft power as a global player. Since 1990s, Chinese media companies have expanded overseas. Some noteworthy examples include the expansion to the US by *Xinming Evening News* and *Xinmin International Company* (Li & Sligo, 2012). Extensive analyses have also led Chinese analysts to conclude the dominant influence of Western mass media as a practice of soft power around the world (Li, 2009). Yao (2007) and Li (2008) found that 50 Western international media corporations control 90% of the world communication market. The US controls 75% of television programs in the world. Four major news organizations, *Agence*

France-Presse, Reuters, United Press International, and Associated Press, generated 80% of new stories around the world per day (Li, 2009, p. 27). In particular, the above-mentioned imbalance of information flow, as well as the pervasive influence of Western cultural hegemony, prompts China to develop its own English-speaking news media outlets as “a cultural offensive” to reach out to the world (Li, 2009, p. 34). In 2009, as much as \$8.79 billion US dollars have been invested in the top four media in China, e.g., *Xinhua News Agency, Central China Television (CCTV), China Radio International, and China Daily*, to enhance their global expansion (Li & Sligo, 2012; Shambaugh, 2013). In 2010, China launched its English language news channel (*CNC World*, abbreviated from *China Xinhua News Network Corporation*), broadcast through various multi-platforms ranging from cable television, satellite, mobile phone, and the Internet (2010, July 2). *CNC World* is positioned as “a new international broadcaster for a new perspective” and has presence in more than 60 countries and regions, including Canada, Hong-Kong, Macao, New Zealand, sub-Saharan Africa, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and the United States (*CNC World*, 2014). *CNC World* began broadcasting on July 1, 2009, and became fully operational to offer 24-hour programming in 2010 (Shambaugh, 2013).

Extended from the state-owned CCTV conglomerate, *CCTV-America* was launched for the US audience, with a mission statement of providing “English-speaking viewers everywhere a different way to see the world by simply covering more of it” (*CCTV America*, 2014a). With its line-up of Western anchors, reporters, and correspondents, *CCTV-America* tailors its programs to cover business (e.g., *Biz Asia America*), cultural affairs (e.g., *The Heat*), and programs with regional focus (e.g., *Americas Now*) (*CCTV-America*, 2014b). Presently, its program line-up is limited to the above shows that are broadcast multiple times a week. However, a new weekly current affairs and cultural magazine show, *Full Frame*, was recently introduced to discuss cultural dialogue and creativity, and human interest story-telling (*CCTV-America*, 2015).

However, whether U.S audiences will choose to watch news programs and contents from China to enable the exertion of Chinese soft power still depends on many factors. The experience of *Al Jazeera English*

(*AJE*) in the US may help foresee these problems. Seib (2012) reported cultural sensibilities and its image as a media outlet with its editorial independence have been affecting *AJE*'s successful entry into the US market. Tarnished by US audience's perceptions of Arab states with terrorism after 9/11, several cable and satellite distributors have refused to transmit its programs (Seib, 2012). Despite the marketing campaigns and the recruitments of renowned Western journalists to enhance the channel's credibility among Western audience (Seib, 2012), the effectiveness of these efforts is yet to be assessed.

The same problems are likely to become a hurdle of *CCTV-America* and other Chinese media in the US. Nathan and Scobell (2012) pointed out human right violations are likely to affect China's efforts to build up soft power resources. The imprisonment of 2010 Nobel Prize winner, Liu Xiaobo, and news about China's Internet censorship practices often cast doubt on the editorial independence of these news media in the US. According to PEW research on global attitudes (2012), while the majority (65%) of Americans in the survey views China-US relations as good, 68% of them do not believe China to be trustworthy and 48% are concerned about China's human rights issues. Therefore, despite its rich cultural heritage as a major source of soft power, the negative country image of China is likely to affect whether US audiences will watch these news programs and contents. As former Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, observed, "China's political system is not attractive and they have no attractiveness as a model. China has little soft power (cited in Shambaugh, 2013, p. 207). Chinese scholars have also observed that soft power is a weak link in China's emerging comprehensive power due to her country image (Li, 2009).

Although most international communication research has mainly focused on the negative societal and cultural impacts of foreign-imported media contents (Barker, 1999; Malek & Kavoori, 2000; Ginneken, 1998), our study digresses from the dominant paradigm in current international communication research and examines the decision-making process of the audience by focusing on their country-of-origin perceptions of China and their viewing behaviors.

Cultural Proximity Construct

International communication scholars have examined the diffusion of imported media contents through a number of different theoretical lenses. Commonly found concepts in the existing literature range from media imperialism (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000; Morris, 2002; Olson, 1999), culture imperialism (Elasmar, 2003), cultural transparency (Olson, 1999), to cultural linguistic markets (Sinclair, 1996, 2004). A principal approach used to understand international demand for media products, however, has been the cultural proximity construct (Straubhaar, 1991, 2003; Straubhaar et al., 2003). La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) applied cultural proximity to explain cross-national preference of imported cultural products in Latin America. Their study explained the effect of cultural proximity on the flow of *telenovelas* beyond linguistic-cultural markets to a global market (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005).

Cultural proximity was defined as “the tendency to prefer media products from one’s own culture or the most similar possible culture” (Straubhaar, 2003, p. 85). Webster and Phalen (1997) applied this concept to understand audience viewing behaviors, arguing that the decision-making of the audience will be affected by both macro-level factors (e.g., program availability) and micro-level factors (e.g., consumer needs and preference). Frequently used in international communication research, cultural proximity was conceptually defined as cultural affinity and similarity by various multi-national studies, to study if perceived cultural proximity can influence audiences’ attitudes toward imported television programs (La Pastina & Staubhaar, 2005; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003). Traditionally, cultural proximity is observed to be closely related to audience’s linguistic and cultural background (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008).

This concept has been applied to understand the diffusion of global media contents in international communication literature. For example, Straubhaar (1991) employed cultural proximity to explain the diffusion of television production within Latin America and other parts of the world. While recent theoretical development of this concept has led to the proposition of multiple proximities (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005),

it does not address situations in which cultural proximity factors may be influenced by international rivalries or hostilities such as those between some Latin American countries or between US and China. Intuitively, a higher level of cultural proximity perceptions seems to predict more favorable attitudes toward the media contents produced by that country. However, only a few empirical studies have been conducted to assess the relationship. Ksiazek and Webster (2008) analyzed Arbitron's data among English and Spanish-speaking Hispanics in Houston, Texas. Their study confirmed that linguistic preference, a sub-dimension of cultural proximity, is the most powerful predictor of audience behaviors.

Therefore, derived from past cultural proximity research in international television program flow, our study hypothesizes that perceived cultural proximity with a foreign country where the program contents is originated will influence the viewing behaviors of news programs and contents carrying that country's nomenclature.

RH1: The higher the perceived cultural proximity with China, the more likely that US audiences will watch Chinese news programs and contents.

Country-of-Origin Research and Perceived Animosity Construct

Like other consumer decision-making process, the consumption of media programs and contents will be affected by other factors. Marketing and consumer behavior researchers have studied country-of-origin as a variable that influences consumer acceptance of non-media products (Al-Sulaiti & Baker, 1997; Cerviño, Sánchez, & Cubillo, 2005; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswarn, 2000; Maheswarn, 1994; Phau & Frendergast, 2000; Reiersen, 1966). Over 300 articles published on the country-of-origin effect conclude that the effects occur at the early stage of product adoption and are used by consumers as a heuristic to assess the overall value of a product from a specific country (Cedrola & Battaglia, 2013). Because English-speaking news programs and contents produced by China is a new entrant into the US media market, and because audience's overall country-of-origin assessment can affect their decision to watch these news programs, we therefore reasoned that

country-of-origin is likely to influence consumer-viewing decisions of media products from China.

Moreover, country-of-origin literature places the cultural proximity construct in a larger and international context by explaining how audience's perceptions function as a heuristic in determining their selection of imported products and services. From an international perspective, cultural proximity bears much resemblance to that of country-of-origin perceptions, in that both are based on people's attitudes and beliefs about a specific country. For example, Roth and Romeo (1992) argued that there is a relationship between people's perceptions of a country's culture, politics, economy, and their evaluation of products (e.g., television programs) made in that country. In other words, people are more likely to have negative feelings toward news programs and contents from a country with unfavorable country-of-origin cues.

Because country-of-origin and cultural proximity have been found to be important factors explaining the popularity of imported goods, our study applies these concepts to examine if perceived animosity as a country-of-origin cue also plays a role in audience's decision to watch news programs and contents developed in a specific country (i.e., *CCTV-America*). While race and ethnicity of the audience are likely to be a moderating variable, the majority of country-of-origin research did not examine their roles. According to Klein et al. (1998), perceived animosity is defined as "the remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events" (p. 90). Their empirical study of Chinese consumers' willingness to purchase Japanese products found consumer acceptance was affected by the military and economic rivalry (i.e., economic and war animosity) between the two nations.

This exploratory study builds upon Straubhaar's (1991, 2003) and Klein et al.'s (1998) work. Specifically, it examines how animosity as a country-of-origin cue interacts with cultural proximity to predict audience viewing behaviors' media contents from a culturally proximate country that is perceived to be politically hostile.

Despite China's growing influence in international trade, conflicting practices in politics, human rights, and religion continue to affect China's global image among US audiences. Recent disputes over China's new air defense identification zone in the East China Sea further tarnish China's image as a peace-loving country (Park, 2013). Therefore, we employed this most commonly used operationalization of the country-of-origin construct: perceived animosity (Klein et al., 1998). This variable is likely to explain why and how US audiences respond to Chinese news programs and contents.

Unlike the consumption of products, the media selection decision is likely to be affected by audience's perceptions of cultural, linguistic similarities, as well as their affinity toward that country. In a recent Pew Survey (September 2013), the majority of Americans surveyed (64%) do not believe the US can trust China. Another Pew Global Attitude Survey (March 2013) also showed that China is perceived to be a threat (82% of the participants), while only 13% perceive otherwise. Furthermore, over 52% of Americans do not have a favorable perception (Gallup Pool, 2013/February; Pew Global Attitudes Project Poll, 2013/March). Therefore, we speculated that a high level of perceived animosity among US audiences is likely to affect the viewing news programs and contents from China.

RH2: The higher the perceived animosity with China, the less likely US audiences will watch Chinese news programs and contents.

Research Method

This study seeks to understand the factors that predict audience acceptance of news programs and contents from a specific country. We look specifically at the relationships between country-of-origin, level of hostility toward that country-of-origin, and perceived cultural proximity. As an exploratory study, we conveniently recruited 236 students who are specialized in communications and journalism because of their familiarity with media-related topics to complete an online survey for extra credits. Of these students, 41.9% (N=99) were male, while 58.1% (N=137) were female. Ranging from 18 to 59 years old, the average age of

the participants was 23.96 years old (SD=7.35, Median=22.0). These students were conveniently recruited from a large Hispanic-dominant public university in the Southwestern US.

The survey instrument consists of four sections. Twenty seven-point semantic differential scales were used to measure participants' country-of-origin and cultural proximity perceptions of China and were factor-analyzed into: (1) animosity perceptions about China (adapted from Klein et al., 1998) and (2) cultural proximity perceptions about China (adapted from Straubhaar, 2003). Four five-point Likert statements measured participants' viewing behaviors regarding Chinese news programs and contents. Finally, we measured participants' demographic (i.e., gender, age, and academic major).

Instrumentation and Reliability Coefficients

The survey instrument consisted of selected multi-item scales to measure: (1) animosity perceptions about China (three seven-point semantic differential statements) ($\alpha=.78$) (Klein et al., 1998); (2) cultural proximity perceptions about China (two seven-point semantic differential statements) ($\alpha=.66$) (Straubhaar, 2003); (3) viewing behaviors of Chinese news program and content (four five-point Likert statements) ($\alpha=.76$); (4) demographics. Table 1 on the next page provides an overview of scales, means, standard deviations, composite scores, and reliability coefficients.

Table 1: *Variables in the Study*

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Cultural Proximity ^a (Cronbach's alpha=.66) | | |
| Far away from my country (1)—Close to my country (7) | 1.74 | 1.32 |
| Culturally different from my country (1)—Culturally similar to my country (7) | 1.91 | 1.35 |
| Composite Index | 1.82 | 1.15 |
| Animosity ^b (Cronbach's alpha=.78) | | |
| Not likeable (1)--Likeable (7) | 4.42 | 1.49 |
| Not trustworthy (1)--Trustworthy (7) | 3.96 | 1.51 |
| Hostile (1)--Friendly (7) | 4.01 | 1.52 |
| Composite Index | 4.13 | 1.25 |
| Viewing behaviors ^c (Cronbach's alpha=.76) | | |
| I have watched the channel in the past. | 1.92 | .98 |
| I prefer this news channel over others (such as BBC, NHK, or Al Jazeera English) | 2.39 | .96 |
| I will tell my friends about CCTV-America. | 2.15 | .96 |
| It will be my main source of world news. | 2.50 | 1.03 |
| Composite Index | 2.16 | .80 |

Note:

^aThe instrument is composed of two 1-7 semantic differential scales.

^bThe instrument is composed of three 1-7 semantic differential scales.

^cThe instrument is composed of three 1-7 semantic differential scales.

Findings

To summarize, while participants viewed China as economically developed (Mean=4.85, SD=1.71) and important in international politics (Mean=5.53, SD=1.55), they also viewed China as low in labor costs (Mean=2.23, SD=1.51), a dictatorial government (Mean=2.63, SD=1.49), worst in press freedom (Mean=3.08, SD=1.43), and violating human rights (Mean=2.97, SD=1.50). Overall, participants feel that China has a low level of cultural proximity (compared with the US) (Mean=1.82, SD=1.15) and tilts toward a medium level of perceived animosity (Mean=4.13, SD=1.25).

The above cultural proximity composite index is based on the average of two cultural proximity items from the Principal Component Analysis using Varimax rotation. Similarly, the perceived animosity composite is based on averaging three animosity statements using the same exploratory factor analysis procedure. Four items that measure audience's viewing behaviors are also composited into a viewing behavior index for the regression analysis reported below.

In terms of how perceived cultural proximity with China affects US audience's viewing behaviors of Chinese news programs and contents, our linear regression analysis found that cultural proximity composite significantly predicts participants' viewing behaviors of Chinese news programs and contents ($\beta=.28, p<.01$) (Model 1). RH1 was supported. The positive β coefficient means that the higher the cultural proximity with China, the more likely US audiences will watch Chinese news programs and contents. Furthermore, perceived animosity with China was not found to be a significant predictor of participants' viewing behaviors ($\beta=.11, p>.05$). Therefore, RH2 was not supported.

Because audience's viewing behavior is a composite score and might not show various aspects of this variable, we further examined different aspects of viewing behaviors such as previous viewing experience (Model 2), preference over other foreign news channels in the US (Model 3), making reference to other friends (Model 4), and use *CCTV-America* as a main source of world news (Model 5). Cultural

proximity perceptions with China continue to be a significant predictor in terms of if they have watched *CCTV-America* ($\beta = -.02, p < .05$), preference over other foreign news channels ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), making reference to other friends ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), and using it as a main source of world news ($\beta = .16, p < .01$). Perceived animosity remained to be a non-significant factor, except in whether participants consider *CCTV-America* as main source of world news ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) (Table 2). The positive β coefficient means the less the animosity level, the more likely they will believe Chinese news programs to be impartial, credible, and the less likely they will be to watch the programs.

According to Mansfield and Helms (1982), a multicollinearity test should be executed before conducting a regression analysis procedure. The variance inflation factors (VIF) procedure was used to assess the potential multicollinearity problem in the regression models. Our results showed that the computed VIF did not surpass the threshold of 5 (Bernstein, 2001). Therefore, our initial analysis indicated that multicollinearity was not a problem for the linear regression analyses. Table 2 on the next page summarizes these analyses:

Table 2: Linear Regression Analyses

| <i>Linear Regression Tests</i> | β | <i>Hypothesis Result</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------------------|
| Model 1: F=6.20, df=2/181, p=.000<.05*** | | |
| Viewing Behaviors of Chinese News Programs and Contents (R=.25, R ² =.06, Durbin-Watson=1.85) | | |
| Cultural Proximity | .28** | H1: Supported |
| Perceived Animosity | .11 | H2: Not Supported |
| Model 2: F=3.35, df=2/166, p=.04<.05* | | |
| Previous Viewing Experience (R=.20, R ² =.04, Durbin-Watson=2.15) | | |
| Cultural Proximity | -.02* | H1: Supported |
| Perceived Animosity | -.00 | H2: Not Supported |
| Model 3: F=4.45, df=2/144, p=.01<.05* | | |
| Preference over Other Foreign News Channels (R=.24, R ² =.06, Durbin-Watson=1.74) | | |
| Cultural Proximity | .23** | H1: Supported |
| Perceived Animosity | .07 | H2: Not Supported |
| Model 4: F=3.69, df=2/158, p=.03<.05* | | |
| Referring to Other Friends (R=.21, R ² =.05, Durbin-Watson=1.80) | | |
| Cultural Proximity | .18* | H1: Supported |
| Perceived Animosity | .10 | H2: Not Supported |
| Model 5: F=4.28, df=2/152, p=.02<.05* | | |
| Use as a Main Source of World News (R=.23, R ² =.05, Durbin-Watson=1.71) | | |
| Cultural Proximity | .16* | H1: Supported |
| Perceived Animosity | .16* | H2: Supported |

Note: a*** represents $p < .001$; ** represents $p < .01$, * represents $p < .05$

Discussion and Conclusions

Findings from our study supported the close relationships among US audience's country-of-origin (animosity) perception (RH2), cultural

proximity perception (RH1), and viewing behaviors of Chinese news programs and contents. A perception of cultural proximity about China was found to be a powerful predictor in explaining the audience's viewing behaviors of Chinese news programs and contents. This finding corresponds to the close relationship between culture and media content consumption (See Movius, 2002 for a review of various approaches). This study confirms the importance of audience in understanding the impacts of culture and media globalization by empirically investigating audience-level variables such as perceptions, attitudes, and viewing behaviors. Our findings also raised some important theoretical questions about the applicability of dominant international communication models when studying the exchange of media/cultural products between US and China that are two competing superpowers.

The theoretical model tested in this empirical study integrated the country-of-origin (i.e., animosity) perception construct into the existing international communication literature to better predict audience's behavior in choosing foreign media/cultural products. The merger of both international communication and marketing literatures has allowed researchers of media/cultural product exchange to situate their research within a larger context and by shifting their focus on audience's decision-making process. As demonstrated in this empirical study, US audience's country-of-origin (animosity) perception continues to predict whether they will watch Chinese news programs and contents as their main source of world news. Our findings have concurred with studies published in the past 30 years examining the effects of country-of-origin perception on product evaluation, branding, and international marketing (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). The statistically significant findings in how Chinese news programs and contents are assessed by US viewers are important to understand the process of selecting media/cultural products from a controversial country like China.

Although perceived animosity with China does not seem to affect US audience's viewing and referral behaviors, this assessment criterion clearly affects whether US audiences think Chinese news programs and contents carry the credible quality to become their daily source of world news. Furthermore, it is likely that the perceptions of animosity are

situational and responsive to news events (such as geo-political tensions or China's own human rights violations). Our study is contradictory with Klein et al.'s conclusion (1998), in that they claimed that animosity did not influence people's product judgment and evaluation in their *Animosity Model of Foreign Product Purchase*. Our empirical findings demonstrated that animosity perception had strong influence on US audience's judgment of cultural products like Chinese news programs and contents. It is likely that consuming news media contents constitute a unique consumer behavior scenario. To be more specific, while attitudes towards China-made products will be less likely to be influenced by animosity toward China, its effect on audience's attitude toward Chinese news programs and contents can be a different story. In other words, while purchasing a Chinese-made computer is considered to be acceptable for many US consumers, watching Chinese news programs and contents is likely to lead to negative attitudes among consumers who are aware of China's practices of censorship and media control. Our findings therefore add to Klein et al.'s (1998) study on consumer product evaluation when they argued that animosity, as a macro-level sociological construct, did not seem to affect Chinese consumers' judgment of Japanese products, in spite of the tension between these two countries. We argue that it is likely that US audience's assesses attributes of tangible products differently from those of media/cultural products. Chinese scholars like Mingjiang Li (2009) have confirmed the problems with China's exertion of her soft power because of the overall negative country images internationally.

Our findings confirmed the importance of cultural proximity in affecting audience's viewing behaviors of Chinese news programs and contents. Similar to what international communication scholars have claimed, an audience is more likely to watch media programs and contents from a country culturally similar to their own (Cooper-Chen, 1999; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Straubhaar, 2003; Straubhaar et al., 2003). Straubhaar, Fuentes, Giraud, and Campbell (2002) identified a new type of cultural proximity on the basis of migration, international trade patterns, and geography. This type of cultural proximity affects audience's affinity for media products from local, national, and regional

sources. The multiplicity of cultural proximity indicates this construct should be explored in greater detail to understand its impacts.

After a brief and non-systematic analysis of program contents at *CCTV-America*, most program contents are localized to better cater to the taste of American audiences. The majority anchors and correspondents are non-Chinese. Among six anchors, only Mr Philip Yin is of Chinese origin, based on his surname. His background however suggests that he is likely to be Chinese-American. All of the four correspondents at *CCTV-America* are Westerners. Program contents at *CCTV-America* are mainly global business (*Global Business*) and cultural and current affairs (*American Now*, *The Heat*, and *Full Frame*). The only news-related program is *CCTV News* which, as its name suggests, covers news that US audiences would be interested in. The strong tendency to localize its program contents and staff suggests that the success of *CCTV-America* is likely to depend on how American audiences perceive China as a country, rather than on program-level variables such as camera angles, news topics, program types, anchors, and correspondents, among others. As a result, the country-of-origin variables are suitable to explore and explain the relationships between audience perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and country as a brand in determining media consumption behaviors.

As our empirical data demonstrate, the globalization of Chinese news programs and contents to enter the US market depends on how the audience perceives its media contents. As an exertion of China's soft power in the world, the justifications to invest millions of dollars in the already competitive world news market encounter many challenges. The lack of cultural proximity and existing perceived animosity among the US audience is likely to affect how successful this new venture is going to be. For media managers who are considering the US market, the findings of this study suggest that an audience's perception that a country is hostile will affect their viewing behaviors of news programs and contents from that country. This exploratory study provides some preliminary explanations about this phenomenon from an audience perspective.

The geo-political situation between US and China that provided the context for this study can easily find its replicates in China and Taiwan, China and Japan, Japan and Korea, India and Pakistan, and many other countries hostile to each other. Although cultural proximity (Straubhaar, 1991, 2003) emphasizes the importance of culture in facilitating the diffusion of international television programs, the model failed to address the effects of past and current historical and political influences on audience's attitudes and willingness to consume these media/cultural products imported from a hostile country.

In conclusion, positive images of China will not only contribute to the popularity of Chinese-made news programs, but also her soft power in international diplomacy. In spite of China's growing economic and political prowess, how China's neighbors and partners perceive this country is likely to influence the success of her soft power (Lu, 2011; Li, 2009; Nathan & Scobell, 2012; Scott, 2008). Kim's (2010) empirical study on China's soft power crisis in South Korea suggest consumers' nationalism is likely to render a country's soft power campaign less effective. Therefore, effective strategies should be developed as part of the marketing campaign to promote Chinese country image as well as news channels in the US

Limitations

Several limitations should be taken into account in evaluating the results reported in this exploratory study. First, a convenience sample of college students in the US has limited the generalizability of these findings to all television viewers in the US. Furthermore, a tilt toward college students has made the findings of the present study more appropriate to future research focusing on college student population in the same age cluster. In addition, a non-random sample also fails to provide a representative cross-sectional population, which has limited the generalizability of our findings to all US audiences. Furthermore, the limited knowledge about the presence of Chinese news channels in the US among non-communication majors also prevents generalization to the wider college population in the US. Future studies should focus on participants' race, ethnicity, and migrant experiences to see if these

variables play any moderating role in explaining the relationships as reported in this study.

Second, we only studied the effects of animosity and cultural proximity perceptions on viewing behaviors of news programs and contents from China. Program genres have not been studied and should be considered for future study. Content analysis or textual analysis methods of program contents at *CCTV-America* are likely to provide useful data to understand the relationship between cultural proximity, animosity, and audience behaviors. Triangulation of these quantitative and qualitative data will be beneficial to understanding audience behaviors. For example, while Chinese variety shows, political talk shows, or news programs may not be comparable to its US counterparts, their cultural series and travel programs have been enjoying positive perception for many US viewers to demonstrate China's soft power. Therefore, genre proximity (La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005) should be integrated into the present theoretical model to examine its effects on audience's behavior.

In spite of the above limitations, this exploratory research has contributed to our initial understanding of audience's viewing behaviors of Chinese news programs and contents. The proposed model may be used or modified to study other media/cultural products. Furthermore, the animosity construct was introduced and assessed along with the dominant cultural proximity paradigm. Findings for this study have theoretical implications to explain factors influencing cross-border television program diffusions between countries.

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