Original Article

Entertainment media, cultural power, and post-globalization: The case of China's international media expansion and the discourse of soft power

Terry Flew
Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Abstract
The concept of soft power has been highly influential in recent years, both as a concept to inform understanding of the cultural dimensions of international relations and as providing a practical guide to state investment in the international expansion of both news and entertainment media. One of the places where it has been most influential has been China, where is has been used to support the international expansion of China Central Television and the growth of Chinese entertainment media conglomerates. It is argued in this article, however, that the concept rests upon a weak understanding of the cultural dimensions of power and upon the transmission model of communication. As a result, there has tended to be a distributional bias in investing in cultural diplomacy and relatively little attention has been given to how audiences actually engage with international media content. Applied to the Chinese case, it is argued that support for entertainment media is more likely to support the aspirations of the Chinese government than news media, although news is likely to be prioritized for political reasons. At a more conceptual level, discussion of national soft power strategies and their relation to global media points to the need for new approaches in global media and communication studies, that could be termed post-globalization, that can address strengths and weaknesses in both critical political economy and media globalization approaches, and recognize the continuing centrality of nation states to the structuring of global media flows across territorial boundaries.

Corresponding author:
Terry Flew, Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology, z2-202, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, QLD 4059, Australia.
Email: t.flew@qut.edu.au

Soft power—proliferating uses and confusing definitions

One of the features of recent debates surrounding soft power and cultural diplomacy is that, as use of the term "soft power" has increased, there has been a blurring of specifics surrounding the definition of the term. The most influential definition of soft power remains that proposed by the Harvard University International Relations Theorist Joseph S Nye, which defined soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" (Nye, 2004, p. x) and the associated "ability to shape the preferences of others" (Nye, 2004, p. 5). In his earliest book addressing the topic, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, published in 1990, Nye sought to distinguish the command power associated with economic and military power from the co-optive or "soft" power of "setting the agenda and determining the framework of a debate" (Nye, 1990, p. 32). Nye (2011, p. 84) has argued that the soft power of a country rests upon three pillars:

1. Culture (in places where it is attractive to others);
2. Political values (when these live up to them at home and abroad);
3. Foreign policies (when others see these as legitimate and having moral authority).

The parentheses that surround each of these terms are important, since they indicate the relational dimension of each concept. They are the conditions which determine "whether potential soft power resources translate into the behavior of attraction that can influence others toward favorable outcomes" (Nye, 2011, p. 84); Nye (2011) emphasizes that "with soft power, what the target thinks is particularly important, and the targets matter as much as the agents. Attraction and persuasion are socially constructed. Soft power is a dance that requires partners" (p. 84).

Nye originally intended the concept of soft power for an elite American audience, particularly key US foreign policy decision-makers. In particular, *Bound to Lead* was intended as a response to pessimistic accounts of the future of US' power in the world, such as Paul Kennedy's (1990) *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. An important factor behind the subsequent growth has been the take-up of the concept in the People's Republic of China, to be discussed in more detail below. But the term also entered into a more popular vernacular. There can be little doubt about the take-up of the term. Using Google nGram, we can see that there was a period of steady growth in the circulation of the term between 1990 and 2000 and then a take-off in the term's use after 2000, with the term appearing in six times as many publications in 2008 as it did in 2000 (Figure 1).

While the discussion in the 1990s was largely one emanating from within the United States and the international relations circles with which Nye was primarily associated, the concept took off globally in the 2000s and was increasingly being used across a range of academic disciplines. In communication studies, Daya Thussu's (2010) *International Communication: A Reader* included an excerpt from Nye on soft power, while authors such as Colin Sparks critically assessed the theory of soft power and its relationship to cultural imperialism (Sparks, 2012) and international broadcasting (Sparks, 2016). A recent special issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, edited by Ien Ang, Raj Isar, and Philip Mar (2015), has sought to apply a cultural studies perspective to debates around cultural diplomacy, drawing upon prior contributions from cultural studies such as Iwabuchi (2002) and Clarke (2014), among others.

But the main place where discussion of soft power has taken off has been China. The official discourses will be discussed below, but there are many other indicators of the extent to which soft power has become an important topic of academic debate, reflective of China's commitment to
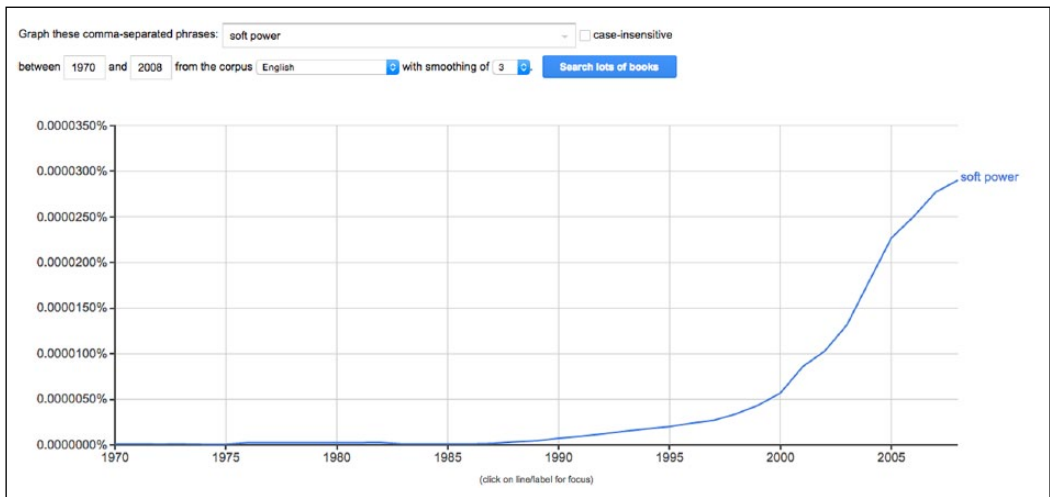
Figure 1. Uses of the term "Soft Power" on Google Ngram.
Source: Google Ngram (2015).

advancing its cultural soft power globally. Xie (2015) found that a search on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)—the world's largest digital collection of Chinese language journal articles—for articles with "soft power" in the title generated 1777 entries since 2000. She also observed that there were up to 50 university centers and government think tanks in China devoted to the study of public diplomacy and soft power, most of which had been established after 2000.

Soft power has also become an important topic for popular literature as well as various indicators developed by think tanks. The Institute for Government prepared a Soft Power Index in 2010 that ranked 26 nations across six categories of soft power and 27 performance indicators (McClory, 2011). The performance metrics used included the following:

1. *Culture*. The level of inbound tourism, international reach of state-sponsored media, number of foreign correspondents in the country, international use of national language, and number of winter and summer Olympic gold medals;
2. *Diplomacy*. Foreign aid as the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), the number of languages spoken by the head of government, strictness of visa requirements, ranking of the national "brand," and the number of dedicated cultural missions abroad;
3. *Government*. Position on the United Nations (UN) Human Development index, position on the World Bank Good Governance index, position on the Freedom House index of political freedom and liberty, measures of trust in the government, and measures of personal life satisfaction;
4. *Education*. The number of universities in The Times Higher Education top 200, the number of foreign students studying at a nation's universities, and the number of "think tanks" in a country;
5. *Business/innovation*. The number of international patents as a percentage of GDP, business competitiveness as measured by the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness index, the level of corruption as measured by Transparency International, innovation index

: Soft power index results

Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
1	France	1.64	14	Norway	0.99
1	UK	1.64	15	Japan	0.97
3	USA	1.57	16	Italy	0.81
4	Germany	1.44	17	China	0.80
5	Switzerland	1.39	18	Israel	0.78
6	Sweden	1.33	19	Korea	0.73
7	Denmark	1.21	20	South Africa	0.69
8	Australia	1.16	20	Brazil	0.69
9	Finland	1.13	22	Mexico	0.61
10	Netherlands	1.08	23	India	0.60
11	Spain	1.05	24	UAE	0.56
12	Canada	1.04	25	Turkey	0.50
13	Singapore	1.01	26	Russia	0.45

Figure 2. Rankings from the Institute for Government's Soft Power Index, 2010.
Source: McClory (2011, p. 20).

as measured by the Boston Consulting Group, and foreign investment as a percentage of total capital investment;

6. *Subjective measures.* The quality of high and popular cultural outputs, the quality of national food and drink, relative international appeal of national celebrities, the perceived quality of the national airline, the reputation of a nation's embassies, and the perceived global effectiveness of its national head of government.

This is a very expansive set of metrics to attempt to measure a nation's relative soft power. It also tends to favor long-established European powers. In the Institute for Government's Soft Power Index, the United Kingdom and France tie for first rank, followed by the United States, Germany, and Switzerland. China is ranked #17, India #23, and Russia #26 (Figure 2).

The notable feature of such lists is partly who features at the top—primarily European nations, particularly the United Kingdom—and also who features at the bottom. In particular, the methodologies used seem to place China in an unusually low position vis-à-vis not only major countries but also ones with less apparent claims to international influence. The index developed by the London-based public relations firm Portland Communication in collaboration with Facebook ("Power: Softly Does It," 2015) is even more notable in this regard (Figure 3). This soft power index found the United Kingdom at the top, followed by Germany, the United States, and France; incredibly, China is at the bottom of the list of 30 countries, below Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Greece, the Czech Republic, Turkey, and Mexico.

In a recent overview of the relationship of soft power to cultural policy, Ang et al. (2015) observe that a lack of clarity around uses of the term arise in part out of how cultural diplomacy as an intentionally driven governmental practice in other parts of the world is conflated with cultural relations, "which tend to be driven by ideals rather than interests and … practiced largely by non-state actors" (p. 365). The relationship between state and non-state actors is one source of potential conceptual confusion surrounding the term. The Institute for Government Soft Power Index discussed above blurs measures that are clearly the result of decisions made by national governments (e.g. level of foreign aid and number of international cultural missions) with those that the government itself has little bearing upon (e.g. appeal of celebrities and perceived quality of national food

Figure 3. Rankings from Portland/Facebook Soft Power Index, 2015.
Source: "Power: Softly Does It" (2015).

and drink). If we focus upon the specifically *cultural* dimensions of soft power, we also find other important distinctions that were needed to be made. Does a nation derive international cultural influence from its news and information-based media, for instance, or its entertainment media? Are its cultural outputs primarily the product of commercially based media and creative industries, or is there a central role played by the government in promoting cultural exports? Is a nation best known for its "high" culture or its popular culture? And how do we know whether there is influence deriving from such cultural artifacts, let alone anything equating to power? Nye (2011) has

himself referred to how "wide usage has sometimes meant misuse of the concept as a synonym for anything other than military force" (p. 81).

Soft power debates in China

There is little doubt that the place where Joseph Nye's soft power thesis has come to have its greatest influence is China. The Chinese scholar Wang Huning, who served as Deputy Director of the Policy Research Office of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) under Jiang Zemin and was appointed to the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee under Hu Jintao, wrote in 1993 that "if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it … It does not have to use its hard power which is expensive and less efficient" (quoted in Glaser & Murphy, 2009, p. 12). The importance of cultural soft power was flagged in various speeches by Hu Jintao, such as his address to a joint session of the Australian Federal Parliament, where he observed that "the Chinese culture belongs not only to the Chinese but to the whole world" (Hu, 2003). At the same time, Hu also expressed concern that "the overall strength of China's culture and its international influence is not commensurate with China's international status" (quoted in Keane & Zhao, 2014, p. 167). Soft power has also been important under Xi Jinping's leadership. In a December 2014 speech titled "Enhance China's Cultural Soft Power," Xi (2014) proposed that

> To strengthen our cultural soft power, we should disseminate the values of modern China … More work should be done to refine and explain our ideas, and extend the platform for overseas publicity, so as to make our culture known through international communication and dissemination. (p. 179)

Soft power initiatives are important elements of a nation's *public diplomacy*, or how a nation engages and communicates with foreign publics and thus promoting of national interests in international arenas; Cull (2008, pp. 32–35) has divided the practice of public diplomacy into the following five elements:

1. *Listening*. Collecting information on international opinions, whether by legal or covert means that is spying and intelligence gathering;
2. *Advocacy*. Promoting particular policies, ideas or interests to foreign publics, typically through one's own embassies in other countries;
3. *Cultural diplomacy*. Promoting a nation's cultural resources overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad;
4. *Exchange diplomacy*. Promoting reciprocal exchanges of people with other nations, for example, as students;
5. *International broadcasting*. The use of news bureaus, radio and television broadcasting, and Internet communication to engage with foreign publics.

If we put aside spying and intelligence gathering, we can identify a number of areas where China has been active across all of these aspects of public diplomacy in recent years including the following:

- Hosting major international events such as the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo in 2010;

- Promoting international graduate student and researcher exchanges through the China Scholarships Council and other educational initiatives;
- Investing in the international expansion of Confucius Institutes to teach Chinese language and culture (Flew & Hartig, 2014);
- Developing foreign language services for China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International CRI), and the Xinhua News Agency as well as investing in the international expansion of these services (Gorfinkel, Joffe, van Staden, & Wu, 2014; Huang, 2012; Xin, 2012);
- Promotion of co-production arrangements in entertainment media such as films, TV programs, and online games; to capture expertise from other parts of the world; and gain better access to international markets.

Soft power has acquired influence in China in part because it proposes a strategy for expanding international influence without the application of military force. It is consistent with the aspirations of Chinese leaders since 2003 to promote China's "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development" to Great Power status, and thus neutralize the "China threat" discourse that exists elsewhere in the world (Hartig, 2015, pp. 21–23). It is also consistent with ancient Chinese teachings such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, particularly the notion that "Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence" (Sawyer & Sawyer, 1993, p. 161). Glaser and Murphy (2009) observed that soft power initiatives in China are primarily seen as cultural in their orientation and sit alongside political, diplomatic, and military activities rather than being subsumed within them (pp. 10–14). From this perspective, the strategy of "going global" that has been pursued for Chinese media and cultural institutions since 2006 looks not only to enhance Chinese soft power internationally but also to reverse the cultural trade deficit that China faces internationally, by bolstering exports in its media, cultural, and creative industries.

China's approach to public diplomacy is relatively distinct in several key respects. International broadcasting has a particular importance in its cultural diplomacy strategies, with CCTV International finding itself at the heart of strategies to use public diplomacy to improve the image of China internationally. Gary Rawnsley (2015) has noted that "with communications … right at the heart of China's policy-making machinery (an achievement matched by few states), broadcasters were instructed to be more proactive in their conduct of public diplomacy on behalf of the nation and its international interests" (p. 277). Yet there are difficulties for China in accruing prestige in international broadcasting, as CCTV is clearly embedded in the heart of the Chinese party-state, and the prestige that accrues to an entity such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for being government-funded yet structurally independent from the British state does not come to CCTV.

There is also the important distinction that exists in China between news and information media on one hand and entertainment media and the creative industries, on the other. Entertainment is much more open to private capital investment than news, and in the context of China's strategy of "going out" (*zou chūqù*), there are much greater opportunities for Chinese direct investment in overseas entertainment media, the involvement of foreign media companies in producing entertainment media content in China, and co-production arrangements. I will argue that the field of media and communications, as well as cultural studies, has a great deal to contribute to contemporary debates about the role of entertainment media in Chinese strategies to enhance international influence and build cultural soft power.

From soft power to cultural power: restating the communication dimensions of cultural diplomacy

Soft power is thus linked to cultural diplomacy. Cull (2008) has defined cultural diplomacy as a subset of public diplomacy, which involves "an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad … cultural diplomacy has meant a country's policy to facilitate the export of examples of its culture" (p. 33). Otmazgin (2007) has observed that in relation to soft power as an international relations strategy, "culture is seen as a means of public relations and a method of strengthening a country's influence" (p. 76). Holden (2013) argues that there are a "hierarchy of strategic aims" around cultural diplomacy and soft power, that range from increasing familiarity and awareness of a county to creating positive perceptions and encouraging further engagement (e.g. tourism, study abroad, and buying its products) to influencing people's behavior and "getting companies to invest, encouraging public support for your country's positions and convincing politicians to turn to it as an ally" (Holden, 2013, p. 22).

At the same time, there exists considerable conceptual confusion around the cultural dimensions of soft power and particularly around how these cultural dimensions are defined and understood. It is typically seen as an adjunct to public diplomacy and the acquisition of power by non-military means—which entails a very broad definition of the term "soft," along the lines of using the concept as "a synonym for anything other than military force" (Nye, 2011, p. 81)—or as a conduit for behavioral influence and attitudinal change. From the perspectives of communications and cultural studies, the way that "culture" is being used in these discourses of soft power and cultural diplomacy sounds similar to what is known as the *transmission model of communication*, where "the communication of these images, ideas and values, packaged in distinct cultural products, is a linear, one-way process, in which the receiving end (i.e. the target foreign audience) simply absorbs the messages contained in these products" (Ang et al., 2015, p. 374).

Not surprisingly, what can be found to be missing from transmission-based accounts is consideration of reception, or the processes through which audiences derive meaning and pleasure from such cultural forms, particularly when such relationships are viewed in a transnational and cross-cultural perspective. There thus tends to be a *distributional bias* in research on media and soft power, where evidence of reach is taken to be synonymous with influence. For instance, the proposition that CCTV claims to cover "98 per cent of the world … with 45 million subscribers outside China" (cited in Zhang, 2011, p. 63) is a nebulous figure, since it tells us nothing about the composition of that audience or how regularly they engage with the site. Indeed, Zhang's (2011) survey, undertaken in 2009, found that the majority of online users of the CCTV-9 site (as CCTV International was previously known) were Chinese themselves, with 43% being Chinese who accessed the site from within China.

Culture is also being understood in terms of its products or artifacts, as "a thing … consisting of content—images, ideas and values—that is readily presentable" (Ang et al., 2015, p. 374). This reinforces the tendency to view the transmission of such cultural forms into other countries as an end in itself, with far less attention being given to questions of engagement with these cultural forms in other countries. There is also the confusing question of whether any of this distributional activity is generating changes in power. Insofar as a concept of power is explicitly articulated in soft power debates, it is typically understood in relational and behavioral terms: the ability of actor A to influence the behavior of actor B (Lukes, 2005). The structural dimensions of power or the "power to decide how things shall be done [and] the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other,

relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises" (Strange, 1994, pp. 24–25) and the relationship of media as a cultural institution to such power relations are only implicitly considered.

The other question about power that hangs over the soft power discourse, from a communications perspective, is the extent to which power resides with producers, distributors, or audiences. Clarke (2014) has proposed that

> There are four categories of actor who can be regarded as making meaning with cultural products in this context, and who can therefore be described both as cultural producers and cultural consumers: namely, policy-makers themselves; institutions and individuals charged with implementing cultural diplomacy policy … cultural practitioners; and, finally, individuals engaging with cultural products which are produced for or used in cultural diplomacy. (p. 8)

Rawnsley (2015) has also observed that

> there is no guarantee that the audience for international programming will decode the meaning of messages in a way the source would prefer, since interpretation occurs according to the prevailing cultural, social and political beliefs, attitudes and norms among individual audience members. (p. 280)

In communications and cultural studies, what emerges is what is known as the *active audience* debate or the extent to which dominant messages are successfully encoded by their senders and influence receiver behavior in desired ways or where the audience as decoders have interpretative power over such messages, choosing how to generate meaning and preferred readings of these messages. Gibson (2007) has observed that, from its beginnings in 1960s Britain,

> the field of Cultural Studies has perpetually oscillated between an emphasis on "power" in terms of the imposition of ideology through culture, on the one hand, and "agency" in terms of the relatively freedom of the consumer, on the other. (p. 167)

These tensions and contradictions take even stronger forms in the age of digital networks and social media, as users are content producers as well as consumers, and can actively share interpretations of mainstream media messages through multiple online *fora*.

The closest analogy to theories of soft power in global communications has been theories of media and cultural imperialism. As developed by Herbert Schiller (1976, 1991), Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2014), and many others, cultural imperialism was defined as

> the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system. (Schiller, 1976, p. 9)

The parallels between Nye's concept of soft power and Schiller's conception of cultural imperialism are striking, particularly in the manner in which they identify exposure to another country's media content as serving to shape the values, beliefs, and ideas of people in the recipient culture. The critical difference is that whereas Nye identifies exposure to American culture as a positive influence in world affairs, Schiller and others view it negatively, as a force that mitigates against more organic and locally based notions of cultural sovereignty.

There is also a lack of clarity around governmental and popular dimensions of soft power. There is a conflation of cultural diplomacy, or intentionally driven governmental practice in other parts

of the world, with cultural relations, "which tend to be driven by ideals rather than interests and … practiced largely by non-state actors" (Ang et al., 2015, p. 365). Hollywood's global success derives from the perceived distance of its cultural products from the US government; but cultural diplomacy initiatives typically rely upon the government for funding and patronage, as seen, for example, with the proliferation of state-sponsored international broadcasting services in recent years (Sparks, 2016). Similarly, the international influence of the BBC as an international broadcaster derives from its combination of being government-funded—and hence not dependent upon corporate advertising and sponsorship—but perceived to be independent of the British government of the day. The differing relationships between the state and civil society organizations between nation states is one of the important areas of distinction in comparative studies of soft power and cultural diplomacy.

In order to better comprehend the issues that such strategies are raising and ground them in perspectives influences by communication and cultural studies, I would argue the need to let go of the term "soft power" and think instead about *cultural power*. By referring to cultural power rather than soft power, the specificity of the cultural dimensions of public and cultural diplomacy strategies can be better understood, as well as their relationship to political and economic power, rather than using "soft power" as a catch-all category for a largely undifferentiated set of non-military approaches to acquiring international influence, from student scholarships to international broadcasting. It connects the concept to wider debates around the relationship of culture to government (Bennett, 1998; Yùdice, 2003); nation branding and the projection of national cultures globally (Kornberger, 2010; Mihelj, 2011); and the struggle for competitive advantage for national, cultural, and creative industries in the global creative economy (Flew, 2012; Lee & Lim, 2014).

It also draws out more clearly what we may mean by power in such frameworks. Insofar as the exercise of cultural power refers to the capacity to influence the thinking and thus the behavior of others, whether around matters of cultural consumption or international alliances, it opens up the capacity to think in terms of relational power, rather than simply thinking in terms of the distribution of content around the world. As soft power ultimately derives from a communications framework, it also enables analysis to take questions of transnational communication flows and cross-cultural reception more seriously and to better apprehend the limits of cultural power as it is exercised through cultural diplomacy strategies such as those involving global media.

Cultural power and public diplomacy: some international comparisons

The critical question for strategies of soft power and cultural diplomacy, as they sit within a suite of wider public diplomacy initiatives, is how they straddle the relationship between traditional government-to-government diplomacy and the plethora of cross-national and cross-cultural exchanges that occur between people using popular media. They point to a role for the government acting not only as a patron in order to initiate such communications flows, but distancing itself from the production and reception of media messages themselves. In the case of Hollywood film and television industry, the perceived desire to entertain mass audiences by avoiding overt political messaging is a part of the global appeal of such content, even if one finds considerable links between the big US entertainment conglomerates and government agencies such as the US State Department and the US Department of Commerce if one digs not far below the surface (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, & Wang, 2005). With the BBC, another globally admired flagship of

soft power through international broadcasting, the hard-won structural independence of the BBC from the UK government has earned it a strong reputation as an exemplar of public service media and a beacon of independent journalism, even if, again, closer observers of the BBC in practice would detect constant political influences swirling around its strategic orientation and its day-to-day strategies (Steemers, 2016).

A simple way of viewing these two cases would be to see the United States as occupying the "entertainment" and "commercial" strand of cultural power, and the United Kingdom the "information" and "state-led" strand, based on the cases of Global Hollywood and BBC World. But this would be misleading in understanding the cultural influence of both nations. The United Kingdom is as famous for its entertainment media as its news and information media and for its commercial popular culture as much as its state-sponsored "high" culture: James Bond, Harry Potter, One Direction, Adele, the English Premier League, and *Top Gear* are all inextricably parts of the British cultural "brand" as it is projected to the rest of the world. The BBC straddles the high/popular culture divide in interesting ways: on a global scale, it may be BBC World, leading documentaries, and investigative journalism; but it is also the home of *Strictly Come Dancing, Doctor Who*, and *Top Gear*.

In the case of the United States, its news outlets remain global leaders—even if, as Tunstall (2008) has argued, their ascendancy was shaken considerably by the experience of how they mis-reported the Iraq War—and the United States has a central place in the arts, drama, dance, and theater, as well as the prestige attached to its museums, galleries, and libraries. Moreover, like the United Kingdom, its most prestigious educational institutions trade on values of history, tradition, and the dissemination over time of "high" cultural values that have great appeal to globally mobile higher education students from around the world (Marginson, 2013).

Both the United States and the United Kingdom present problematic exemplars for China in developing cultural power strategies. The wave of co-productions that Chinese film companies are now engaging in with the major Hollywood producers point to important strategic alliances being formed, where China is able to capture the technical know-how and tacit knowledge of audience desires that exists in the world's most powerful screen-based industries, in exchange for capital investment and privileged access to the large Chinese domestic market. But the risk on the Chinese side is that what results are generic global blockbusters such as *Fast & Furious 7*, which generate global box office revenues and enhance the economic standing of Chinese media and creative industries do little to advance aspirations to make Chinese culture better known to the world through global media. In the field of global news and information, CCTV is available in many parts of the world and in multiple languages, but struggles to get significant audience reach even among the Chinese diaspora, due in part to the difficulties it faces in establishing its structural independence from the government when contrasted to the leaders in international news broadcasting such as the BBC and CNN.

Two very different case studies in cultural diplomacy and global media are Russia and India, which arguably occupy two ends of the spectrum between state-led and information-based approaches and commercially driven and entertainment-based ones. The state-funded Russia Today (RT) TV network, which was established in 2005 with content directed to audiences outside the Russian Federation, has gained a surprising degree of international reach and influence relative to its size. It has done so by being explicitly positioned as an alternative to news services such as CNN and the BBC, offering what it describes as a "Russian perspective" on global events. Russian President Vladimir Putin described the function of RT as being to "try to break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on

the global information streams," observing that "the channel is funded by the government, so it cannot help but reflect the Russian government's official position on the events in our country and in the rest of the world one way or another" (Fisher, 2013). In 2014, RT has 21 bureaux in 16 nations and it has acquired a distinctive niche in international news broadcasting, particularly as an outlet where various alleged Western conspiracies can reliably receive a hearing and with a small but significant audience in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, among those who view such conspiracies as either true or at least warranting a discussion (Rawnsley, 2015).

If Russia represents one end of the soft power spectrum in relation to international media, then India provides perhaps the sharpest point of contrast. While there is some coverage of international events on Indian private 24-hour news channels, its primary state broadcaster, Doordarshan, is largely unavailable outside of India. By contrast, Indian entertainment media have rapidly expanded its global reach and "Bollywood" has become one of the world's leading centers of film production and global popular culture. The proliferation of satellite TV channels in India after 1990 greatly expanded the domestic market for Indian popular films and these films have also established strong popularity not only among the large South Asian diaspora worldwide, but in regions such as Africa and the Middle East. A key factor in the regional success of Bollywood cinema is its promotion of family and community-oriented values, which are seen as relatively "safe" among Muslim audiences in the Middle East and South Asia, when compared to Hollywood cinema (Thussu, 2014).

The two nations that most directly influence China's decision-makers in their thinking about cultural soft power strategies are Japan and South Korea. Japan was the leader in Asia in promoting a distinctive national identity in the Asian region through its commercial popular cultural products (Iwabuchi, 2015). From the 1970s onwards, there was a focus on cultural diplomacy initiatives that could soften anti-Japanese sentiment and promote better international understanding of Japan through cultural exchange. While educational exchange programs and traditional culture were components of this cultural diplomacy, the growing international popularity of Japanese films, TV shows, animation, and popular music gave an important impetus to such initiatives, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1990s were perhaps the high points of Japanese popular cultural influence in the Asian region, as *anime* (animated films), *manga* (comic books or graphic novels), and video games associated with Sony and Nintendo became global cultural phenomena. Japanese popular culture became a central part of the identity of the fast-growing Asian middle-class youth culture (Chua, 2012; Iwabuchi, 2002).

The 2000s saw new initiatives to promote Japanese culture, around the concepts of "Cool Japan," "Gross National Cool," and "pop culture diplomacy," which "sought to capitalize on the popularity of Japanese media culture in global markets … and promote the rise of Japan as a global cultural superpower" (Iwabuchi, 2015, p. 422; c.f. Yasumoto, 2014). But the Japanese case possesses some distinctive structural weaknesses when compared with other East Asian nations. One is a historic underinvestment in the arts and culture by governments, who have often seen the arts and culture as either primarily market-driven, investing public funds in cultural heritage rather than in contemporary forms of cultural production (Kawashima, 2014; Kobayashi, 2014). Moreover, there continue to be difficulties in accessing the Chinese market, as historical anti-Japanese sentiment is overlaid upon contemporary geo-political tensions, such as control over the islands of the South China Sea.

South Korea is in many respects the most influential model for cultural power and cultural diplomacy in the Asian region, and particularly in China. The popularity of Korean films, TV dramas, video games, and popular music has been referred to as the "Korean Wave" (*hallyu*), facilitated by the preparedness of governments to approach cultural development as a form of industry

policy, the commitment to high-speed broadband infrastructure, and the promotion of cultural exports. The establishment of the Korean Creative Content Agency (KOCCA) in 2008 has promoted investment in Korean cultural and creative industries and intensified commitments to promoting "Brand Korea" globally. (Hong, 2014).

In terms of its own cultural power strategies, as noted earlier, China has invested heavily in international expansion in both news and information media and entertainment media. Its "soft power" strategies aim to enhance Chinese influence and the standing of China in both the major media markets of North America and Europe and in the developing world. It has done so with a perception that China's image is a strategically important component of the country's continued modernization, and an awareness that its relative lack of presence in global media content flows contributes to a negative perception of china internationally. In contrast to a country such as Russia, or indeed to its earlier Maoist history, China does not expand its international media presence primarily as part of an "information war" with the West. Rather, as Rawnsley has argued, China has long possessed "an abiding faith in the ability of international broadcasting to shape the global conversation about China … the intangibles of public diplomacy can be converted via communication and international broadcasting into tangible foreign policy benefits (Rawnsley, 2015, pp. 274–275).

The strengths that it brings to such a field include the capacity for large-scale investments in state-of-the-art facilities and in big-budget productions, the large domestic market, the potential to reach the global Chinese diaspora, the ability to capture tacit knowledge and soft skills through collaborations and co-production agreements, a tech-savvy population with high aspirations, and the growing global strength of the Chinese Internet firms. Its challenges include the absence of arm's length relationships to the state in terms of media and cultural content, the very different audience expectations of Chinese domestic audiences and international audiences, the danger of co-productions not appearing to be particularly "Chinese" in terms of content and themes, and the challenge of balancing commercial imperatives with aspirations to a greater degree of global cultural influence.

The issues that arise for entertainment media and the creative industries differ from those for the news and information services of CCTV International. News in China is unambiguously managed by the state and CCTV is a state-run entity that is close to the center of governmental power. Foreigners are not permitted to establish alternative news services within China and while CCTV has developed significant international partnerships with other news services, Beijing will always retain significant influence over what news services are developed and the content of those news services.

Conclusion: post-globalization?

In this article, I have sought to make two key arguments. First, I have argued that while the concept of soft power has had a substantial influence in thinking about the cultural and communications dimensions of international relations, the term itself is over-extended and at risk of becoming a synonym for all state-led activities in the international realm that do not involve military force. Insofar as the concept of soft power draws upon communication and cultural studies, particularly in terms of how it understands cultural influence and the relationship between exposure to ideas and cognitive processes, it has generally worked with models derived from the mid-20th century mass communications theory. Little consideration is given to contemporary debates about the active audience or relational power that derive from cultural studies or to rethinking the transmission model of communication that once dominated the field, which has been the subject of extensive critique form within communication studies since the 1970s.

At the same time, there can be little doubt that soft power concepts have had considerable, and probably growing, influence upon public diplomacy initiatives in many parts of the world, with China being at the forefront of the take-up of soft power policy discourses. An important policy conclusion to be derived from the overly expansive way in which soft power is being used in contemporary cultural diplomacy debates and the lack of attention to key concepts such as culture and power is a risk distributional bias in policy measures that are based upon such soft power discourses. The risk of expanding initiatives in fields such as international broadcasting and film co-productions with little attention being given to reception contexts of cross-cultural communications is that nation states will be committing significant resources to these cultural initiatives to little tangible effect, as has arguably been occurring with the international expansion of CCTV services by the Chinese government over the last decade, at least in the advanced industrial nations.

The second set of conclusions relate to debates about the nation state in an era of media globalization. Clearly the expansion of international broadcasting and other media services around the world has been enabled by the global communication technologies of cable, satellite, and the Internet. But the fact that nation states have been so keen to invest in such forms of media-driven cultural diplomacy over the last decade suggests that global media and communication studies may be premature in considering the nation state to be of declining influence in the world (Flew, Iosifidis, & Steemers, 2016). It is now generally acknowledged that media and cultural consumption is strongly shaped by contexts of local and national reception as well as by the availability of content from around the world, so that "most people experience identity with regard to media … as a series of cultural geographical levels from local to global" (Straubhaar, 2014, p. 22). Similarly, we also need to acknowledge that nation states are active agents in shaping the global media landscape, both in terms of what content is made available to national citizens and in terms of seeking to promote their own national content in global mediascapes.

The academic literature on media globalization has often see the rise of global media networks and the declining power of nation states as complementary processes, particularly as the internet makes media content less territorially bound and as national populations become more culturally diverse and cosmopolitan (Beck, 2005; Castells, 2009; Howard, 2011). This is clearly complicated by the Chinese case, where the government is working with highly capitalized media and entertainment conglomerates to develop "national champions" that are not only successful in global media markets, but which are using such platforms to promote media content that "reinforces the national discourse of Chinese identity" (Ho & Fung, 2016, p. 118) and distributes such content internationally. In this respect, then, global media may look more like the world of competing hegemonic powers as the critical political economists have long suggested, rather than the more benign models presented in media globalization theories (Boyd-Barrett, 2014).

Critical political economists have always seen political, economic, and cultural powers as mutually reinforcing, with the dominant metropolitan centers dominating both the ownership of media industries and the global flows of media content and promoting content flows that are viewed as reinforcing media and cultural imperialism (Hardy, 2015). But this would lose sight of important counter-insights from globalization theorists, such as the significance of discontinuity and disjuncture between these forms of power (Appadurai, 1990; Tomlinson, 1999), that media and cultural globalization is not simply a one-way flow from "the West to the rest," and that the specificities of cultural power require close attention. The findings of this article, and particularly the case of the international expansion of Chinese media, suggest that we need to incorporate insights from both paradigms. The power and active agency of nation states in shaping media globalization need to be explicitly acknowledged, but we also need to be clear that the capacity for international distribution

to equate to cultural power is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. In the current context, soft power discourses have been part of the ongoing process of media globalization, but they have also been subject to the distributional fallacy, not least because they have adopted a transmission model of global communication and a static and limited account of the relational dimensions of content reception and cultural power.

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Author biography

Terry Flew is Professor of Media and Communication in the Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Brisbane, Australia. He is a Chief Investigator with the Digital Media Reserach Centre at QUT.