

A Global ABC?

*A study of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's
soft power in Indonesia and China 2007 – 2010*

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ABSTRACT

In 2009, Australian Broadcasting Corporation Managing Director Mark Scott put forward a contentious proposal to develop ‘a global ABC’, establishing the ABC as a leading international broadcasting presence. This thesis seeks to reflect on the plausibility of Scott’s vision, which was inspired by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s foreign policy strategy. It analyses to what extent the ABC’s international services, Radio Australia and Australia Network television, have been able to function as effective tools of Australian public diplomacy and soft power in Asia during the term of the Rudd government, from 2007 – 2010.

This thesis argues that the ABC faces significant challenges to realising its policy aims in two key international territories, Indonesia and China. It provides innovative interpretive framing analysis of interviews with six senior ABC managers and four Asian media studies academics, together with government and corporate document research, to determine how Radio Australia and Australia Network’s achievements and problems have been perceived by key strategic communications actors and analysts.

Four dominant frames were identified, through which the effectiveness of the ABC’s international services is investigated: political independence, resource dependence, colonialism and engagement. This analysis suggests that while there are a number of existing and emerging opportunities for the ABC to act as a vehicle of Australian soft power in Asia, Radio Australia and Australia Network have to date been largely unable to function as effective tools of public diplomacy due to a number of financial, political, cultural and regulatory constraints.

This thesis concludes that unless funding is increased, the ABC's independence from both the federal and foreign governments is strengthened, and relevant, targeted programming is developed in key markets, the ABC's international services may soon be outcompeted on the international broadcasting stage.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

I further certify that all human research in this study was conducted in strict accordance with the Human Ethics protocol approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Sydney (Reference Number 04-2010 AH 00025).

Signed:

Date:

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INTRODUCTION

Reflecting Australia to the world, without conflicting commercial objectives, requires credibility, a track record of effective engagement, and an ability to be diplomatically deft... In my view, the mission can only be delivered by your ABC.

Mark Scott, 2009¹

A Global ABC

In November 2009, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Managing Director, Mark Scott, put forward a surprising proposal for 'a global ABC'. Scott's blueprint, a four-stage plan for establishing Australia as a leading international broadcasting presence, envisaged the consolidation and expansion of ABC operations in Asia and the Pacific, along with new services in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and finally in Europe and North America. The proposal called for a substantial funding increase for the ABC's international arms, Radio Australia and Australia Network television, as well as the synthesis of these services into one unified "soft diplomacy"² brand, available across all platforms to audiences anytime, anywhere. In doing so, Scott urged a significant re-evaluation of Australia's role in international governance:

From our isolated corner of the globe, Australia has never been more connected to all that is happening elsewhere. Conversations in New York, in Copenhagen, in Peshawar have never had a greater impact on our lives. And as never before, we have wanted to have our voices heard, to be recognised at the table. As a nation, we feel we have a contribution to make.³

¹ Scott, Mark (2009), 'A Global ABC: Soft Diplomacy and the World of International Broadcasting', *Bruce Allen Memorial Lecture 2009* [online]. Available: http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/documents/Bruce%20Allen%20Lecture_91109.pdf [Accessed 14 January 2010].

² Scott (2009).

³ Scott (2009).

A Global ABC met strong public opposition, with commentators questioning whether such a dramatic international expansion is really within the ABC's mandate as an independent, taxpayer-funded, national broadcaster (see Beecher, 2009; Quinn, 2009; Wilson, 2009). As this research has discovered, Scott's proposal was inspired by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's desire for Australia to cement its position as a regional leader and global middle power, and Rudd's willingness for the ABC to adopt an increased role in such foreign policy activities.⁴ However, with Rudd gone, the plan does not definitively fit the new federal government's policy agenda. It is also unclear how the financially challenged ABC can compete with well-funded, long-established international brands like BBC World and CNN, and niche, local media outlets.

This thesis seeks to reflect on the plausibility of Scott's proposal by analysing the current public diplomacy role of Radio Australia and Australia Network. The former has a Charter mandate to "...encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs",⁵ while the latter is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as an official tool of Australian diplomacy. However, the federal government's investment in international broadcasting has attracted little geo-political analysis until recently, with almost no critical assessment of its social and cultural impacts.

Therefore, this thesis will investigate the question:

To what extent have the ABC's international services been able to function as effective tools of Australian public diplomacy in Asia?

⁴ Scott (2009).

⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (1983a), *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 – Section 6 – Charter of the Corporation* [online]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/ABCcharter.htm/> [Accessed 10 March 2010].

This study is timely for three reasons. First, the importance of a nation's public diplomacy presence, also known as its "soft power",⁶ is currently being realised by politicians, policymakers and scholars internationally – evidenced by a marked recent increase in the establishment of official public diplomacy programs worldwide and a fast expanding field of scholarly literature. To date, however, the subject has attracted little attention at home.⁷ Given the increasing competition that Australia faces in the public diplomacy field, the analysis this research offers is long overdue.

Second, it is a matter of critical importance for the ABC's strategic planning. At the time of his speech, Mark Scott commissioned an inquiry by the Lowy Institute think tank into Australia's international broadcasting and public diplomacy presence. That study was taking place at the same time as this thesis research, with its results released only weeks before the completion of this project. Unsurprisingly, its report draws similar conclusions, including the recognition that a lack of consistent financial and political support significantly constricts the ability of the ABC's international services to compete with their competitors in key broadcast markets.⁸

Yet this study addresses important concerns that the Lowy Institute does not, by providing a media studies based, geo-political analysis of the ABC's role in Asia via a qualitative, interview-based case study. This research also questions the Lowy

⁶ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. (2004), *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: PublicAffairs.

⁷ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), *Australia's public diplomacy: building our image* [online]. Available: http://www.apf.gov.au/senate/committee/fadt_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/public_diplomacy/report/report.pdf [Accessed 7 March 2010], pp. 1; 17.

⁸ O'Keeffe, Annmaree and Oliver, Alex (2010), *International Broadcasting and its Contribution to Public Diplomacy* [online]. Available: <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1385> [Accessed 14 September 2010].

Institute's sanguine assessment of Australia's political importance in the Asian region and its uncritical view of both the ABC's legacy of colonialism and its current programming and content, including online activities.

Third, this study comes at a crucial moment in the ABC's relationship with government and the life of its international services. On one hand, Radio Australia is struggling financially, with the service's operating budget currently lower than it was in 1988-89.⁹ On the other, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is in the midst of deciding whether it will renew the ABC's current Australia Network contract, which expires in August 2011, or go to tender, allowing the possibility of a commercial takeover.¹⁰ Both services are operating in a crowded marketplace that is set to become even more competitive in the next few years.¹¹ In the face of such pressure and uncertainty, the ABC has a unique opportunity to re-evaluate the roles and functions of its international services and establish a clearer strategic direction for its future efforts as a vehicle of Australian public diplomacy. The strategic communications analysis this study provides could help to inform such an assessment.

The case of the ABC

This thesis will address the above concerns by examining ABC activities in two of Australia's key regional partners, Indonesia and China. Indonesia is one of Australia's closest neighbours, home to the world's largest Muslim population, and receives the

⁹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 60.

¹⁰ Scott, Mark (2010), personal interview with the author, 28 July 2010.

¹¹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), pp. 25 – 27.

largest proportion of Australian foreign aid, totalling \$452.5 million in 2009.¹² China is the world's largest exporter of goods, the world's second largest economy, and Australia's largest trading partner, with total trade between the two nations in 2009 valued at \$85.1 billion.¹³ The Australian federal government's 2009 Defence White Paper identified the continued development and stability of both countries as critical to Australia's interests and security in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁴ The ABC has similarly identified Indonesia and China as two of its most important broadcast markets,¹⁵ a claim evidenced by the diversity of channels through which audiences in these countries can access Radio Australia and Australia Network, including shortwave radio, satellite radio and television, local radio and television rebroadcasters and live streaming online.

This research will also limit the scope of inquiry to the first term of the Rudd/Gillard Labor government (2007 – 2010), in order to ensure that the cases can be discussed in sufficient detail. This period is of interest, given the synthesis of attitudes towards regional engagement, public diplomacy and international broadcasting expressed by the government and the ABC during this time.¹⁶

¹² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2010a), *Indonesia Country Brief* [online]. Available: http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/indonesia/indonesia_brief.html [Accessed 30 September 2010].

¹³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2010b), *China Country Brief* [online]. Available: http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china_brief.html [Accessed 30 September 2010].

¹⁴ Department of Defence (2009), *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* [online]. Available: http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/defence_white_paper_2009.pdf [Accessed 24 April 2010], pp. 42; 95.

¹⁵ Scott (2010).

¹⁶ Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (2009), *Strengthening our National Broadcasters* [online]. Available: http://www.dbcde.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/112192/Strengthening_our_National_Broadcasters_web.pdf [Accessed 24 April 2010], p. 14.

Methodology

Central to my analysis is prominent North American political science scholar Joseph Nye's theory of soft power. Nye asserts that in the post-Cold War era, international power is increasingly based on a country's ability to "set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express"¹⁷. This means using 'soft' resources such as cultural exchange, political values and foreign policies to influence the attitudes and behaviours of other countries' populations, rather than traditional 'hard' capabilities such as military might and economic initiatives. While the importance of hard power to a nation's influence will never disappear, Nye argues that in a world characterised by globalising trends – such as moves towards economic interdependence and a transnational information-based economy – and problems requiring global solutions – like climate change and terrorism – military force alone will not be an adequate solution, and soft power will become "more important in the mix"¹⁸.

Nye's theory considers media organisations as central to a nation's daily exercise of soft power and public diplomacy. Media are simultaneously instruments of a nation's culture, embodiments of its values and communicators of its policies. This thesis casts the ABC as a potentially key source of Australian soft power and therefore a critical component of its public diplomacy program. However, as the next chapter will demonstrate, Nye and others have found it difficult to measure the effectiveness of media organisations as sources of soft power or tools of public diplomacy. While audience figures indicate exposure, they do not measure political, social and cultural

¹⁷ Nye, Joseph S. Jr. (1990), *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, p. 31.

¹⁸ Nye (2004), p. 30.

impacts. My evaluation of the ABC's international services therefore required a considerable amount of original research.

In order to develop an understanding of Radio Australia and Australia Network's recent achievements, problems and challenges in Indonesia and China, I conducted interviews with key strategic communications actors involved in ABC operation and analysis: six senior ABC managers and four academic specialists in Asian political and media research. Thirty to ninety minute semi-structured face-to-face interviews were held with ABC Managing Director Mark Scott, Director ABC International Murray Green, Australia Network Chief Executive Officer Bruce Dover, Radio Australia Chief Executive Officer (2010 – present) Mike McCluskey, former Radio Australia Chief Executive Officer (2007 – 2010) and current Senior Editor Hanh Tran and ABC International Online Executive Producer Damien Dempsey.

I also interviewed the head of International Communication at Macquarie University, Professor Naren Chitty, in person, while Dr Alison Broinowski, Visiting Fellow in the faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University in Canberra; Prakash Mirchandani, Visiting Fellow at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra and former Executive Producer of Australia Television International; and Dr Kalinga Seneviratne, the head of the Asian Media and Information Centre in Singapore, all consented to interviews via email.

Repeated requests for interviews with representatives from the government departments responsible for Radio Australia (the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy) and the Australia Network (the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) were declined. In order to fill in these gaps, detailed document research was conducted, focusing on key government and

corporate documents including budget estimates, annual reports, white papers, departmental inquiries, funding submissions and foreign policy addresses.

I then interpreted this data using frame analysis. According to Robert Entman, to frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”.¹⁹ In the context of this research, frame analysis is an ideal method for identifying and exploring the different ways in which public diplomacy effectiveness in the international broadcasting environment can be measured.

My approach to frame analysis is based upon the frequently-cited method developed by leading political science researchers Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman,²⁰ and involved two steps. First, it was necessary to identify an existing set of frames for understanding the effectiveness of international broadcasters as tools of public diplomacy. While there is no standard set of frames in this area of research upon which this thesis can draw, the review of recent and relevant academic literature presented in the following chapter helped to identify the main ways in which previous studies have evaluated the impact of a broadcaster’s soft power presence. Together, these approaches formed a set of four “culturally available frames”:²¹ political independence, resource dependence, colonialism and engagement.

¹⁹ Entman, Robert M. (1993), ‘Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm’, *Journal of Communication*, no. 43, p. 52.

²⁰ Chong, Dennis and Druckman, James N. (2007), ‘Framing Theory’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 10, pp. 103 – 126.

²¹ Gamson, William A. and Modigliani, Andre (1987), ‘The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action’, *Research in Political Sociology*, vol. 3, p. 144.

Second, it was important to determine whether these frames could be applied to the contemporary ABC. The transcripts of each interview were closely analysed to identify the presence or absence of each of the existing frames in the beliefs and attitudes expressed by the respondents. A “dictionary of words and phrases that indicated the presence of each of these frames”²² was developed – for example, references to the ABC’s editorial integrity or the impact of censorship on Radio Australia and Australia Network’s ability to control its programming signified the political independence frame. It was also necessary to look for any new, oppositional or anomalous interpretations of these frames in the interview responses – a variety of which were discovered, and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Combined with additional material gained from document research, the four frames identified in the interview transcripts constitute a comprehensive framework for discussing and evaluating the effectiveness of the ABC’s international services as tools of Australian public diplomacy. As will be discussed in the next chapter, they were remarkably similar to the criteria identified in the Lowy Institute’s report.

Research aims and chapter breakdown

This thesis has three aims:

- to provide a review of how academic literature has to date understood the relationship between Australia’s public broadcaster, its international broadcast presence and the construction and communication of Australian interests, values and perspectives on the world stage;

²² Chong and Druckman (2007) p. 107.

- to develop an original framework for analysing the effectiveness of this soft power relationship in the contemporary environment;
- and to apply this framework to a case study of the ABC's international services in Indonesia and China from 2007 – 2010.

Chapter One, the literature review, explores the theoretical framework upon which this project's original research is based. It first develops a detailed understanding of the project's two key theoretical concepts, soft power and public diplomacy. It then canvasses a history of the ABC's international services and the development of their engagement in the Asian region. Finally, it draws on public service media and international broadcasting theory to identify the four culturally available frames of soft power within the international broadcasting environment that will structure my interview and document analysis.

Chapters Two and Three present the results of my original research into the ABC's soft power efforts in Indonesia and China. Chapter Two explores ABC International's objectives and operations in terms of two interdependent frames, political independence and resource dependence, while Chapter Three examines the research question through the opposing frames of colonialism and engagement. Together, these chapters discuss and analyse the perceptions of both ABC managers and academic commentators on a range of issues including editorial independence, regional relationships and regulation; funding constraints and resource creativity; regional development and neo-colonialism; and cultural relevance, online media and user engagement.

The conclusion to the thesis reflects upon these research findings and their implications for a global ABC. I will argue that Radio Australia and Australia

Network face three major obstacles in their efforts to be effective tools of Australian public diplomacy: funding, independence, and relevance. A number of important opportunities for the ABC's international services will also be identified.

The following chapter will draw together scholarly research spanning the fields of strategic communications, international relations, public broadcasting, international communication and framing theory in a comprehensive literature review.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

While much has been written specifically about soft power, public diplomacy and public service media, scholarly literature has seldom explored their intersection in the role of state-funded international broadcasting. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of Radio Australia and Australia Network as instruments of soft power and public diplomacy, it is first necessary to explore how these concepts are related, and how they have been interpreted in the Australian public service and international broadcasting contexts to date. Second, I will investigate the development of the ABC's international services as forms of public diplomacy and their challenges in engaging Asian audiences. Finally, I will outline how framing theory can be used to identify the four major existing frames for evaluating the operation of soft power within the international broadcasting environment: political independence, resource dependence, colonialism and engagement.

Soft power and public diplomacy in the information age

Soft power

As an international relations scholar at Harvard University and an international security advisor to the Clinton administration, Joseph Nye's ideas on power in the post-Cold War era have strongly influenced strategic communications thinking and foreign policy in the United States and beyond since the early 1990s. Demonstrating a shift from the traditional geo-political understanding of power, Nye argues that:

...the sources of power are, in general, moving away from the emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. In assessing international power today, factors such as technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more important, whereas geography, population, and raw materials are becoming less important.²³

For Nye, a nation's investment in developing influential cultural resources like literature, art or television, its commitment to ideological values like democratic government, environmental protection or economic liberalism, and its membership of global or regional institutions like the United Nations, the North American Free Trade Agreement or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation all have the potential to attract the interest and admiration of other nations, promoting their reproduction. Soft power can "set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express"²⁴ without the risks inherent in military intervention. This is not to suggest that hard power has become irrelevant, but rather that power is increasingly contextual; in order to build a profile, maintain support and contribute to global affairs, both hard and soft power resources are required.

Nye officially coined the term 'soft power' in 1990, yet the concept has precursors in older international relations and strategic communications thought: E. H. Carr's inclusion of a "power over opinion" in his typology of international power alongside military force and economic capability,²⁵ Arnold Wolfers' "milieu goals", which aim to shape the conditions of a nation's surrounding region, focusing on stability, mutual

²³ Nye (1990), p. 29

²⁴ Nye (1990), p. 31

²⁵ Carr, Edward Hallett and Cox, Michael (2001 [1939]), *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An introduction to the study of international relations*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

understanding and the establishment of shared values;²⁶ and Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz's "second face of power",²⁷ which focuses on a nation's ability to set the regional or global agenda in accordance with its own interests, preferences and goals.

In the twenty-first century, where Nye notes that "information is power, and modern information technology is spreading information more widely than ever before in history",²⁸ the media plays an increasingly central role in influencing foreign audiences. Nye advocates a role for both state-funded and commercial media, but warns against the unmitigated privatisation of soft power:

Some skeptics have concluded that Americans should accept the inevitable, and let market forces take care of the presentation of their culture and image to foreigners. Why pour money into the Voice of America when CNN, MSNBC, or Fox can do the work for free? But such a conclusion is too facile. Market forces portray only the profitable mass dimensions of American culture, thus reinforcing foreign images of the United States as a one-dimensional country.²⁹

Nye's advocacy of state-funded media as a foreign policy strategy can similarly be applied to Australia, suggesting that the ABC, whose charter requires its representation of Australia's culture and image to be free from political or commercial pressure, should play a leading role in the administration of the nation's soft power in Asia. As this chapter will go on to demonstrate, such an expectation has been central to the development of the contemporary ABC and many of the struggles it has faced along the way.

²⁶ Wolfers, Arnold (1962), *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, p. 73.

²⁷ Bachrach, Peter and Baratz, Morton S. (1962), 'Two Faces of Power', *The American Political Science Review*, no. 56, pp. 947 – 952.

²⁸ Nye (2004), p. 1.

²⁹ Nye (2004), p. 113.

Assessing the soft power theory

While Nye's theory of soft power has been influential in both academic and policy circles, it also has its critics. One of the most common criticisms of soft power is that it is, in the words of British historian Niall Ferguson, "too soft",³⁰ suggesting that a nation's cultural resources, like movies or music, are unlikely to translate into tangible value shifts overseas. Yet it is clear that popular culture can have a significant impact: a survey of Radio Australia's listeners in the 1990s found that broadcasts about the abolition of the White Australia policy, freedom of religion, the teaching of Indonesian in Australian schools and Australia's aid to the region improved the attitudes of Indonesian audiences to Australia.³¹ A more recent survey in Kenya, Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey found that 80 per cent of respondents said that the BBC made them think more positively about the United Kingdom than any other British institution, including foreign aid.³²

Another criticism of the soft power theory concerns its focus on influencing foreign publics instead of their leaders. The realist school of international relations thought considers decision-making power as belonging exclusively to the state, rather than its people (see Layne, 2010). Nye, however, champions the public diplomacy focus of reaching mass audiences in order to eventually have a greater impact on their leaders. He acknowledges that soft power does not always "translate into realised power in the

³⁰ Ferguson, Niall (2003), 'Think Again: Power', *Foreign Policy* [online]. Available: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2003/01/01/think_again_power [Accessed 3 April 2010].

³¹ Duncan, Macgregor, Leigh, Andrew and Madden, David (2005), 'Changing the Channel in Asia', *The Diplomat*, vol. 4, no. 4, p. 34.

³² Thomson, Mark (2010), 'Nation Speaking Peace unto Nation: The BBC's Global Mission', *Chatham House* [online]. Available: http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/16574_110510thompson.pdf [Accessed 25 September 2010], pp. 6 – 7.

sense of achieving desired outcomes”³³, but “works indirectly by shaping the environment for policy, and sometimes take years to produce the desired outcomes”.³⁴ As such, the administration of soft power resources must be viewed as a long-term exercise, where an ongoing commitment and demonstrable credibility are fundamental to success. This is particularly relevant in the field of international broadcasting, where commitment and credibility are essential to a broadcaster’s ability to establish a strong relationship with its audiences.³⁵ Indeed, as the next chapter will suggest, one of the ABC’s strengths in both Indonesia and China is longevity; Radio Australia’s Indonesian service commenced in 1942, with its Mandarin and Cantonese services both starting in 1943.³⁶

The third criticism of Nye’s soft power thesis is that its impact is almost always impossible to accurately assess. While the size of a nation’s military or the strength of its currency can be clearly and regularly quantified, it is both difficult and costly to measure a nation’s soft power reserves, or evaluate the effectiveness of the public diplomacy activities that put such power to use.³⁷ Nye offers no solution to this quandary, conceding that “attraction often has a diffuse effect, creating general influence rather than producing an easily observable specific action”.³⁸ Indeed, beyond the previously mentioned BBC survey, few studies have attempted to measure the impact of soft power resources; such attempts have been described as “a forester

³³ Nye (2004), p. 34.

³⁴ Nye (2004), p. 99.

³⁵ O’Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 58.

³⁶ Radio Australia (2009), *Celebrating 70 Years*, Melbourne: Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

³⁷ Walt, Stephen M. (2010), ‘Soft Power and the Future of the University’, *Foreign Policy* [online]. Available: http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/01/19/joe_nye_was_right [Accessed 24 July 2010].

³⁸ Nye (2004), p. 16.

running out every morning to see how far his trees have grown overnight”.³⁹ Most have tended to focus solely on revealing global perceptions of the United States in the context of the ‘war on terror’ rather than producing a more nuanced understanding of how soft power resources attract and persuade on the world stage (see The Chicago Council on World Affairs, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2010; Powers and El Gody, 2010). The original research into Radio Australia and Australia Network in Indonesia and China presented in the following chapters aims to move beyond this North American understanding of soft power to develop a new framework for evaluating the effects of international broadcasting in the Asia-Pacific region.

Public diplomacy

While traditional diplomacy – official activities targeted at influencing foreign governments and opinion leaders – has long been considered central to a nation’s ability to negotiate towards desired political outcomes, the emergence of public diplomacy has been more recent. The term was first used by legal scholar Edmund Gullion in 1965 to describe the persuasive information, cultural and exchange functions of the United States Information Agency.⁴⁰

Public diplomacy focuses on communicating directly with foreign publics and aims to “bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and

³⁹ Cull, Nicholas J. (2009a), ‘Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past’, *CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy*, USC Centre of Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School [online]. Available: <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/publications/perspectives/CPDPerspectivesLessons.pdf> [Accessed 24 April 2010], p. 43.

⁴⁰ Cull, Nicholas J. (2009b), ‘Public Diplomacy Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phrase’. In: Snow and Taylor (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, p. 21.

culture, as well as its national goals and policies”.⁴¹ In the contemporary era, populations can no longer be considered mass audiences; it is now accepted, particularly in democratic societies, that public opinion can and does shape the policies, decisions and conduct of governments.⁴²

The practice of public diplomacy is fast becoming central to the global foreign policy environment. Federal governments worldwide, from the United States and China to smaller nations like Australia and even Fiji have established dedicated public diplomacy departments, with international broadcasters increasingly called upon to contribute to such activities. Public diplomacy is also gaining traction in the Asia-Pacific via major regional forums such as the Association of South East Asian Nations, whose recent adoption of a *Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint* that focuses on enhancing the wellbeing and welfare of its member states through grassroots cultural programs fundamentally alters its status as an exclusively political and economic body.⁴³

Some scholars discount the legitimacy of such public diplomacy efforts, likening their focus on engaging mass publics to that of propaganda (see Welch, 1999; Vincent, 2007). Indeed, the line between public diplomacy and propaganda is often blurred by international broadcasters such as the Voice of America, whose charter requires it to both serve “the long-range interests of the United States” and be a “consistently

⁴¹ Tuch, Hans N. (1990), *Communicating With the World: US Public Diplomacy Overseas*, New York: St Martin's Press, p. 3.

⁴² Glassgold, Stacy M. (2007), *Public Diplomacy: The Evolution of Literature*, University of Southern California [online]. Available: http://uspublicdiplomacy.org/pdfs/Stacy_Literature.pdf [Accessed 3 April 2010], p. 11.

⁴³ Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2009), *ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint* [online]. Available: <http://www.aseansec.org/5187-19.pdf> [Accessed 24 August 2010].

reliable and authoritative source of news”,⁴⁴ or the Chinese state-run broadcaster CCTV, whose allegiance to the Office for Foreign Propaganda is more evident.⁴⁵ Throughout its history Radio Australia has faced similar claims, particularly throughout the 1950s and 1960s as the service struggled to establish its independence from government.⁴⁶ Yet leading public diplomacy scholar Jan Melissen argues that “throwing money at self-advertising campaigns in countries with a sceptical public opinion is based on a gross-underestimation of assertive postmodern publics”.⁴⁷ In the contemporary era, where audiences are more media-savvy than ever before, he argues, propaganda will be seen for what it is, and only campaigns that encourage engagement and establish trust will have a chance of success.

What is key, then, to effective public diplomacy is credibility – without which “no amount of information holds persuasive weight”.⁴⁸ This is especially important for international broadcasters such as the ABC, who will not necessarily enjoy an automatic reputation of independence and impartiality overseas as they do at home. Furthermore, credibility is particularly central to the ABC’s quest for audiences in countries like Indonesia and China, where authoritarian political environments and highly regulated media markets have often denied access to free and balanced information.

⁴⁴ Voice of America (1976), *The VOA Charter* [online]. Available: <http://www.voanews.com/english/about-us/> [Accessed 24 July 2010].

⁴⁵ Brady, Anne-Marie (2008), *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 9.

⁴⁶ O’Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 49.

⁴⁷ Melissen, Jan (ed.) (2007), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Zaharna, R. S. (2006), ‘The U.S. Credibility Deficit’, *Foreign Policy in Focus* [online]. Available: http://www.fpif.org/articles/the_us_credibility_deficit [Accessed 7 March 2010].

It is important here to note the interconnectedness of soft power and public diplomacy in both theory and practice. This thesis understands public diplomacy as the “practical manifestation” of a nation’s soft power resources.⁴⁹ Without developing its soft power instruments, a nation like Australia will be unable to effectively conduct public diplomacy activities. Without a functioning public diplomacy program, soft power will lie dormant and decline, perhaps irreparably.

Soft power and public diplomacy in the Australian context

As noted recently by international communication scholar Naren Chitty, there has to date been very little Australian research into either soft power or public diplomacy,⁵⁰ and even less research that engages in any depth or detail with questions around the role of media organisations in Australia’s public diplomacy program. Besides Chitty’s survey of why this gap in the field exists, we can look to Alison Broinowski’s ongoing exploration of changing Asian perceptions of Australian politics, policy and media (see Broinowski 1982; 1992; 2003; 2004); Rosaleen Smyth’s study of the failure of Australia Television as a public diplomacy vehicle in Asia in the mid-1990s,⁵¹ and Prakash Mirchandani’s recent work on how new media technologies can enhance the Australian public diplomacy space, including a short reflection on the potential of Mark Scott’s proposal for ‘a global ABC’.⁵² In these works, each scholar

⁴⁹ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), p. 16.

⁵⁰ Chitty, Naren (2009), ‘Australian Public Diplomacy’. In: Snow and Taylor (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, p. 314.

⁵¹ Smyth, Rosaleen (1995), ‘Managing Australia’s Image in Asia’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 223 - 236.

⁵² Mirchandani, Prakash (2010a), ‘Reporting War, Waging Peace: The Impact of New Media Technologies’, *Strategic and Defence Studies Centre* [online]. Available: <http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sdsc/> [Accessed 29 June 2010].

comes to much the same conclusion – that to date, attempts at establishing a sophisticated Australian public diplomacy presence in Asia have been consistently thwarted by political, economic and cultural obstacles. I have conducted interviews with Broinowski, Chitty and Mirchandani in order to further unpack their critical analyses of the ABC’s contemporary credibility, significance and impact in Indonesia and China.

As noted in the introduction, Annmaree O’Keeffe and Alex Oliver of the Lowy Institute were conducting a geo-political study into international broadcasting and public diplomacy presence at the same time as this research was taking place. Their report offers an important and long overdue contribution to debates about the ABC’s role in Australia’s public diplomacy program, and the broader effectiveness of this program on the world stage. Through extensive field research into international public broadcasting in eleven countries across Asia, Europe and North America, O’Keeffe and Oliver develop their own criteria for effective public diplomacy broadcasting – independence and credibility, financial security, legislative protection, strategic direction, and longevity – which they then apply to the contemporary ABC.⁵³ Their report assesses Radio Australia and Australia Network’s region-wide achievements, ultimately drawing many similar conclusions to my own study.

Yet their work also has gaps that my research aims to fill, particularly through my strategic focus on Indonesia and China and the localised political, economic and cultural obstacles that the ABC faces in these markets. This thesis interrogates the validity of the Lowy Institute report’s claims about Australia’s political importance in the Asia-Pacific region and the ABC’s ability to maintain independence from the

⁵³ O’Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 40.

federal government of the day. Importantly, it also examines a subject O’Keeffe and Oliver neglect – the impact of the Corporation’s colonial past on Radio Australia and Australia Network’s contemporary work culture, programming and content, and how these factors affect the ABC’s capacity to engage and influence Asian audiences.

Beyond scholarly work, the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy have recently sparked growing interest within Australia’s policy community, culminating in the Australian Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee’s 2007 report *Australia’s Public Diplomacy: Building our Image*. In light of recent international attention, that inquiry sought to review Australia’s public diplomacy presence, evaluate its effectiveness and recommend a path for the future development of the nation’s soft power program. Its findings concur with Naren Chitty’s observation that to this point, the Australian public diplomacy landscape is notable only for its emptiness:

During the course of this inquiry, the committee learnt first-hand of the lack of interest in public diplomacy and the confusion surrounding its meaning... Clearly, public diplomacy is not a term commonly used or understood in Australia. Furthermore, and of some concern, it would seem that Australia is not actively involved in the international conversation about public diplomacy.⁵⁴

Unlike many respondents, the ABC submitted a lengthy document to the Committee, explaining in detail the contribution of Radio Australia, Australia Network and the ABC’s International Partnerships unit (now International Projects).⁵⁵ In addition,

⁵⁴ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), p. 30.

⁵⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2007), *Submission by ABC to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia’s public diplomacy* [online]. Available: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/fadt_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/public_diplomacy/submissions/sub22.pdf [Accessed 24 April 2010].

three representatives from the ABC – including Murray Green, who has been interviewed for this project – attended the Committee to discuss their submission further.⁵⁶ The Committee’s final report, however, only briefly reflects upon the ABC’s role in Australia’s public diplomacy program, noting the consistently low funding of Radio Australia before dedicating vastly more discussion to the involvement of the Australian Sports Commission and Museums Australia.

Furthermore, despite setting out a blueprint for a root and branch overhaul of Australia’s public diplomacy program, none of the report’s twenty recommendations refer specifically to the ABC or acknowledge the future importance of Radio Australia or Australia Network to this presence. This is in conflict with the report’s analysis of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s public diplomacy budget, which reveals that in 2005/06, Australia Network was by far its single biggest expense, costing \$18.6 million out of an overall \$23.5 million.⁵⁷

The Committee’s report concludes that despite the best efforts of the diverse departments and agencies that contribute to Australia’s public diplomacy presence in Asia and beyond – from the ABC and AusAID to the Australian International Cultural Council – the program is being run “on a shoestring”,⁵⁸ and a far more significant effort is required to “project and establish a positive image of Australia in a fiercely contested international space”.⁵⁹ Additionally, the report suggests that a significant increase in both the measurement and analysis of the impact of Australia’s public

⁵⁶ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007b), *Official Committee Hansard – Nature and conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy*, 14 March 2007 [online]. Available: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S10035.pdf> [Accessed 7 March 2010].

⁵⁷ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), p. 187.

⁵⁸ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), p. 188.

⁵⁹ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), p. 185.

diplomacy program is urgently required if the nation hopes to develop any long-term, effective, targeted soft power presence.⁶⁰ Through its investigation into the ABC's recent activities in Indonesia and China, this research aims to help fill that gap.

The ABC in Asia

Radio Australia

The first incarnation of Australia's shortwave international radio service, Australia Calling, was a propaganda service owned and operated by the federal government's Department of Information.⁶¹ Founded in 1939 with the primary function of wartime broadcasting "to Australian servicemen overseas, as well as to the major Allied powers and to Germany",⁶² Australia Calling was not renamed Radio Australia until the war ended in 1945, and was only incorporated into the ABC with the purpose of reaching Australia's neighbours in Southeast Asia and the Pacific in 1950.⁶³

In the post-war and then Cold War years, Radio Australia operated openly as "an instrument of foreign policy, indeed of Australian propaganda".⁶⁴ The service's eminent biographer, Errol Hodge, notes that Radio Australia has "always been subjected to numerous pressures and influences which ensure that its outlook is inevitably Western, Australian and fairly closely aligned with that of the government

⁶⁰ Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007), p. 73.

⁶¹ Hodge, Errol (1995), *Radio Wars: Truth, Propaganda and the Struggle for Radio Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, p. viii.

⁶² Browne, Donald R. (1978), 'International Broadcasting to Asia'. In: Lent, John A. (ed.) *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television*, London: Heinemann Educational Books (Asia) Limited, p. 318.

⁶³ Radio Australia (2009).

⁶⁴ Hodge (1995), p. 226.

of the day”.⁶⁵ These pressures ranged from the ongoing external influence of the Department of Foreign Affairs, to complex internal disputes over the service’s selection of staff and target nations, the motives behind its English language-learning programs and promotional activities, and occasions of politically motivated self-censorship.⁶⁶

Despite these issues, Radio Australia attracted consistently high audiences and support around Asia and the Pacific throughout this period. The service was broadcast widely across the region in eleven languages, with the Indonesian and Chinese services among the most popular due to the strict authoritarian regimes in place in both countries. In 1979, at the height of its success, Radio Australia received 183,000 letters of feedback and support from audiences in the People’s Republic of China.⁶⁷ By 1982, five million of the service’s ‘English for You’ language-learning booklets had been distributed across Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.⁶⁸ Multiple surveys further named Radio Australia the most popular international radio service in the world and the most quoted radio news source in Southeast Asia.⁶⁹

Interestingly, for the first four decades of its life there was no statutory basis for the existence of Australia’s international radio service.⁷⁰ Unlike the BBC, the original Australian Broadcasting Commission Act of 1932 made no reference to the representation of national culture, values and policies beyond Australia’s shores.

⁶⁵ Hodge (1995), p. 7.

⁶⁶ Hodge (1995), p. 226.

⁶⁷ Radio Australia (2009).

⁶⁸ Radio Australia (2009).

⁶⁹ Radio Australia (2009).

⁷⁰ Jackson, Kim (2000), ‘The Role and Funding of Radio Australia’, *Parliamentary Library of Australia* [online]. Available: http://www.apf.gov.au/library/intguide/sp/radio_australia.htm [Accessed 24 July 2010].

Indeed, such a public diplomacy prerogative was not codified until the creation of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1983, with a charter requiring it to:

...transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will: encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs; and enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs.⁷¹

This legislative recognition, however, raised new questions for Radio Australia. A challenging contradiction between two key charter requirements emerged: could the service simultaneously function as an effective tool of public diplomacy and maintain complete independence from the federal government? In Indonesia, the worsening political relations between Canberra and Jakarta over Indonesia's invasion of East Timor amplified the service's difficulty in resolving this contradiction; Radio Australia's broadcasts were increasingly seen as Australia trying to "wash the dirty linen of the neighbours before an audience of millions".⁷² As a result, the service's Indonesian correspondent was expelled from Jakarta in 1980, not returning until 1991.⁷³ Since this time, very little specific information has emerged about the influence or impact of Radio Australia in Indonesia; there is similarly little recent evidence of its role and function in China.

⁷¹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (1983a).

⁷² Hodge (1995), p. 2.

⁷³ Hodge, Errol (1991), 'The Impact of the ABC on Australian-Indonesian Relations Since Timor', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 45, no. 1, p. 109.

Australia Network

The ABC's second public diplomacy effort, and Australia's first attempt at an international television service, Australia Television International (ATV), emerged in 1993. The brainchild of then Chairman Mark Armstrong and Managing Director David Hill, ATV was designed to "heighten Australia's presence in the region"⁷⁴ while still maintaining the ABC's trademark independence and credibility.

ATV began transmitting English-language programs from Darwin through Indonesia's Palapa satellite in February 1993. According to Rosaleen Smyth, the service aimed to project a distinctively Australian "interpretation of events into the middle and upper class living rooms of Asia in competition with CNN, Star TV and the BBC".⁷⁵ However, despite its success in meeting non-commercial objectives – reportedly becoming the most valued international television service in the Asian region amongst Australian expatriates and foreign leaders alike in only one year⁷⁶ – numerous scholars have noted that ATV struggled financially (see Smyth 1995; Atkins 2002; Inglis 2006). Brown and Althaus report that in its first two years of operation, ATV accumulated a loss of \$7.5 million and was only kept afloat by a transfer of \$2.5 million from the ABC's core appropriation.⁷⁷ The problem was twofold: the service was significantly underfunded, and its attempts to obtain additional commercial revenue through advertising and sponsorship were largely unsuccessful.

⁷⁴ Inglis, Kenneth Stanley (2006), *Whose ABC? The Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1983 - 2006*, Melbourne: Black Inc, p. 286.

⁷⁵ Smyth (1995), p. 235.

⁷⁶ Inglis (2006), p. 310.

⁷⁷ Brown, Allan and Althaus, Catherine (1996), 'Public Service Broadcasting in Australia', *Journal of Media Economics*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 44.

Despite these troubles, the service was retained; even without specific legislative protection, a 1995 Senate inquiry found that ATV's status as a core ABC function, fulfilling its second charter requirement, meant that it deserved ongoing government support.⁷⁸ The 1995/96 budget therefore provided a further \$12.6 million for ATV over the following three years, with an intention to review its status again in 1997/98.⁷⁹ Yet even with this injection of funds, ATV's difficulties did not subside, particularly when Howard government cutbacks forced the ABC to hand ATV to the Seven Network in 1998.⁸⁰

It was only upon its return to the ABC in 2001, following three years of troubled management at Seven, that the newly rebranded ABC Asia Pacific service finally received some stability, via the establishment of a five-year, \$90 million contract from the Department of Foreign Affairs.⁸¹ According to media analyst Mark Day, this guaranteed support allowed ABC Asia Pacific to present a "soft diplomacy window into Australia designed to showcase our nation and its perspectives".⁸² Its growing popularity among expatriates, travellers and locals alike led to the renewal of the ABC's management of the service in late 2005 and its relaunch in 2006 as the Australia Network.

⁷⁸ Brown and Althaus (1996), p. 44.

⁷⁹ Brown and Althaus (1996), p. 44.

⁸⁰ Inglis (2006), p. 557.

⁸¹ Inglis (2006), p. 556.

⁸² Mark Day quoted in Inglis (2006), pp. 556 – 557.

The challenges of the multichannel media environment

Although little has been written on the challenges facing Radio Australia and Australia Network in the twenty-first century, the existing literature on the ABC's broader experience during the late 1990s and beyond suggests that the political and industrial playing fields are now more complex than ever, with key financial and political constraints significantly affecting the extent to which the ABC is able to function effectively at home, let alone in Asia.

In *Death Struggle*, ABC journalist Quentin Dempster argues that the most notable constraint on the effective operation of the ABC has always been funding. While the ABC has faced repeated budget cuts from governments of all political persuasions since the Fraser Coalition took office in 1976, the 1990s was a particularly damaging decade for the ABC. Significant cuts were made early in the decade, when \$120 million was cut from the annual appropriations by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments.⁸³ A further 10 per cent, equating to approximately \$55 million, was cut in the Howard government's first budget of 1997/98, despite repeated election promises that existing levels of funding would be retained.⁸⁴ Over the ten-year period from 1988/89 to 1998/99, total ABC funding declined by over 20 per cent.⁸⁵

Such a determined disengagement from the national broadcaster throughout this period was a clear consequence of ongoing political struggles between federal governments and ABC management. Pressure from government to offer a "value for

⁸³ Dempster, Quentin (2000), *Death Struggle: how political malice and boardroom power plays are killing the ABC*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, p. xv.

⁸⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Media Room (1996), *ABC Budget Cut and Review of Functions* [online]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s1407348.htm> [Accessed 24 August 2010].

⁸⁵ Allan Brown quoted in Dempster (2000), p. 340.

money”⁸⁶ service that could compete with Australia’s well-funded commercial players led to the increasing corporatisation of the ABC, particularly under pragmatic Managing Director David Hill, who recognised that if the ABC was to survive financially it would have to consistently prove its worth via the realisation of ratings targets and other quantifiable measures.⁸⁷ However, as a public institution, the ABC was also subject to “the constraints of public sector reductions, the addition of functions such as the SBS at political whim, the difficulties of restructuring with a fluctuating income and instability at the top as governments appoint – and then remove – ABC boards”.⁸⁸ This tension between the ABC’s dependence upon the government for its funding and its responsibility to hold that government to account – a tension the next chapter will argue still exists today – was brought into sharp focus.

Other major industrial changes throughout this period impacted on Radio Australia: resource cuts and restructuring reduced the service’s staff from 144 to 69;⁸⁹ the 1997 Mansfield Report recommended a charter revision that would remove international broadcasting from the ABC’s core functions;⁹⁰ and the ABC’s transmitters at the Cox Peninsula near Darwin – Radio Australia’s primary means of reaching its audiences throughout Indochina, Malaysia and Thailand – were abandoned and leased by the government to an evangelical broadcaster from the United Kingdom.⁹¹ Some of this pressure came from inside the ABC, including the apparent willingness of then Managing Director Brian Johns to surrender Radio Australia in order to save its domestic services, as recommended by the Mansfield Report:

⁸⁶ Davis, Glyn (1988), *Breaking Up the ABC*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, p. 14.

⁸⁷ Davis (1988), p. 33.

⁸⁸ Davis (1988), p. 6.

⁸⁹ Dempster (2000), p. 260.

⁹⁰ Mansfield, Bob (1997), *The Challenge of a Better ABC*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

⁹¹ Dempster (2000), p. 260.

I have to agree that in the context of the already announced budget cuts, the ABC must do everything it can to protect its domestic services. The future of Radio Australia needs to be seriously considered in light of the report's recommendations.⁹²

Against all such odds, Radio Australia did survive, ultimately as a result of strong domestic and international public support. A 1997 Senate inquiry into the proposed closure of both Radio Australia and ATV received more than 2200 submissions, with all but three supporting the continuation of both services.⁹³ A surprise intervention by then Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer was also influential in the government's final decision to continue funding services in English and Tok Pisin to the Pacific and Papua New Guinea.⁹⁴ Much of the damage, however, was already done, with the ABC forced to find money from within its general allocation for the continuation of its Indonesian, Chinese and other Southeast Asian services. The events of 1997/98 also reignited debate about the long-standing contradictions within the ABC's charter, with Dempster noting that "the government's decisions on RA specifying the services to be provided raised questions about the independence of the ABC in determining its output".⁹⁵

Since the 1997 cutbacks, governments of both persuasions have been kinder to the ABC and its international services. In 2000, the Howard government responded to increasing instability in the Asia-Pacific region – particularly in Indonesia, following East Timor's declaration of independence in 1999 – by providing Radio Australia with an extra \$9 million over three years with which it could lease transmission time

⁹² Brian Johns quoted in Dempster (2000), p. 270.

⁹³ Dempster (2000), p. 279.

⁹⁴ Dempster (2000), p. 273; 279.

⁹⁵ Dempster (2000), p. 280.

at the Cox Peninsula and recommence shortwave broadcasts across Southeast Asia.⁹⁶ Howard further increased the ABC's budget in 2006 via a new funding agreement worth an extra \$88.2 million over three years,⁹⁷ and the Rudd Labor government pledged its support soon after taking office, with its 2009/10 budget giving the Corporation a \$167 million boost.⁹⁸

It is not clear, however, that these funding increases have actually assisted Radio Australia's recovery. In Indonesia, for example, the service's weekly audience in 1997 regularly exceeded 2.3 million listeners; by 2009, this figure had fallen to 0.7 million.⁹⁹ Across the entire region, Radio Australia's monthly audience is currently just 2.7 million, while Australia Network reaches around 7 million viewers.¹⁰⁰

While this thesis acknowledges that such audience figures only provide a limited measurement of a broadcaster's effectiveness as a tool of public diplomacy, they do allow for a useful comparison between key regional competitors. As such, Chapter Four will examine Radio Australia and Australia Network's current audience share and reach in greater detail, alongside a discussion of the more sophisticated criteria by which we can evaluate the ABC's recent soft power impact in Indonesia and China. These criteria, described here as frames, and the theoretical basis for their formulation are outlined below.

⁹⁶ Dempster (2000), p. 283 – 284.

⁹⁷ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Media Room (2006), *Budget 2006-07* [online]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s1634610.htm> [Accessed 12 June 2010].

⁹⁸ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Media Room (2009), *ABC Funding Boost 2009 – 2012* [online]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2568522.htm> [Accessed 17 May 2010].

⁹⁹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 52 – 53.

¹⁰⁰ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 62.

Framing soft power in international broadcasting

Frame analysis was first developed by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974 and has become popular a method of understanding how individuals differently perceive and define their shared experiences of society (see Tuchman, 1978; Iyengar, 1991; Gamson, 1992 and others). Frames, argued Goffman, are “definitions of a situation... built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them”.¹⁰¹ Whether consciously or not, we all employ frames to interpret the events of the social world. Similarly, our attitudes towards and beliefs about the way in which society functions are guided by a set of existing, commonly invoked interpretive frames, influenced by our shared cultural contexts.

Goffman’s method has famously been used to analyse and compare media representations, but has not conventionally been employed to guide strategic communications research. This thesis draws upon Entman’s more recent interpretation of framing as a method of “selection and salience”,¹⁰² arguing that it is possible to identify common analytical themes in the definitions, interpretations, evaluations and recommendations put forward by interview respondents to communicate their perceptions of the effectiveness of Radio Australia and the Australia Network as tools of Australian public diplomacy in Asia. I propose that the interview cohort for this research – both the managerial staff that steer the ABC’s international services and the academics who analyse these operations – share ways of interpreting the ABC’s objectives and achievements.

¹⁰¹ Goffman, Erving (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 10 – 11.

¹⁰² Entman (1993), p. 52.

As this chapter has already noted, there have until recently been few studies on the potency of international broadcasting as a tool of public diplomacy; meaning that there is no standard set of frames upon which this project can draw to evaluate the recent effectiveness of the ABC in Indonesia and China. We can, however, look to the wider literature on public service media and international broadcasting – particularly research focused on the contemporary Asian environment – in order to identify four “culturally available frames” that have been used by scholars to conceptualise, describe and measure the impact of soft power resources in the international broadcasting sphere.

I have already discussed the ABC’s relationship with government and audiences in terms of the first two commonly occurring frames, political independence and resource dependence. Both frames were present in the Lowy Institute’s key criteria for successful international broadcasting, and have been recurring themes throughout this chapter’s discussion of the ABC’s engagement in Asia to date. However, in line with my specific focus on the complex political and cultural relationships between the ABC and its Indonesian and Chinese audiences, I have also used two frames that the Lowy Institute report did not address: colonialism and engagement. The diverse ways in which these frames were employed and interpreted by my interviewees will be more fully explored in Chapter Three, but the scholarly significance of these concepts can be unpacked here first.

As Browne notes in his history of international broadcasting to Asia, many broadcasters were for years little more than vehicles of colonialism, with services like Radio Holland, Radio France International and the BBC originally established to keep

citizens in far-flung colonies “in touch with life in the homeland”.¹⁰³ Such a heritage continues to influence many broadcasters today through their regional development and education strategies. Indeed, the ABC’s long-standing commitment to English language-learning and its more recent establishment of ABC International Projects, which provides training and mentoring, specialist advice and technical support to emerging broadcasters in developing nations across Asia and the Pacific, could be seen as a modern reinterpretation of the traditional colonial mission – with possible negative consequences for its appeal to audiences.

The post-colonial era has also brought with it a significant shift in international broadcasting practice worldwide. Tunstall argues that the proliferation of local, regional and national media across Asia and the Pacific has irreversibly changed the game for international broadcasters, particularly as these domestic services are able to appeal to the language preferences, cultural backgrounds and political persuasions of local audiences in ways that Western media organisations cannot.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, audiences in countries such as Indonesia and China have proven to be “more active and critical, their responses more complex and reflective, and their cultural values more resistant to manipulation and invasion” than many critical media theorists have assumed.¹⁰⁵ For services like Radio Australia and Australia Network, this has meant that audience engagement, rather than mass broadcasting, has become key to the exercise of effective public diplomacy.

¹⁰³ Browne (1978), p. 318.

¹⁰⁴ Tunstall, Jeremy (2010), ‘Anglo-American, Global, and Euro-American Media Versus Media Nationalism’. In: Thussu, Daya Kishan (ed.) *International Communication: A Reader*, New York: Routledge, p. 244.

¹⁰⁵ Tomlinson, John (1991), *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 49 – 50.

An important element of this engagement is the ability to connect with audiences on the platform of their choice, at the time of their choice and in the location of their choice. Nicholas Cull argues that shortwave radio is no longer a universal solution, and that international broadcasters will increasingly need to “respond creatively to the new world and guard against preserving old practices and approaches for their own sakes”.¹⁰⁶ With the spread of new media technologies across Asia – it is expected that by 2012, Asian web surfers, including at least 490 million Chinese, will outnumber North Americans three to one¹⁰⁷ – so too has the concept of trust been transformed dramatically. While shortwave radio stations or satellite television channels may once have been a local community’s only link to the outside world, it can now be “an individual, a website, a network, a blog, an Internet TV channel”¹⁰⁸ that people turn to for their daily dose of information, education and entertainment. Yet a brief exploration of the online presence of the ABC’s international services suggests that Radio Australia and Australia Network are currently lacking opportunities for this kind of dialogue with their target audiences, leaving both services at a crossroads between the old international broadcasting model of colonialism, and the new public diplomacy paradigm of engagement.

Chapter Three will return to this struggle between colonialism and engagement. The next chapter, however, will explore the political independence and resource dependence frames in more detail.

¹⁰⁶ Cull (2009a), p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Mirchandani (2010a), p. 20.

¹⁰⁸ Mirchandani (2010a), p. 16.

CHAPTER TWO

Political independence versus resource dependence

This chapter explores the first set of frames we can use to evaluate the recent effectiveness of Radio Australia and Australia Network as tools of Australian public diplomacy in Indonesia and China. As discussed in the previous chapter's literature review, the ABC faces a challenging tension between the independence from government that its charter requires, and its dependence on this same government for financial security and strategic stability. Political independence has been established as the cornerstone of both successful international broadcasting¹⁰⁹ and effective public diplomacy strategies,¹¹⁰ yet it is also clear that adequate and consistent funding is fundamental to a broadcaster's ability to produce international services. How successfully, then, do the ABC's international services balance these competing demands?

Interviewees for this project identified three different constraints on the ABC's political independence: editorial independence, regional relationships and national media regulation and censorship. It was also demonstrated that limited funding has, in recent years, placed significant restrictions on the ABC's ability to function as a tool of Australian public diplomacy. However despite the implications of this resource dependence, interviewees provided new ideas about how these constraints can be overcome through institutional creativity and regional collaborations, resulting in an unexpected, positive interpretation of that frame.

¹⁰⁹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 32.

¹¹⁰ Melissen (2007), p. 7.

Editorial independence

Editorial independence is directly linked to the credibility of international news and information services.¹¹¹ One of the most significant challenges that the ABC's international services face as vehicles of Australian public diplomacy is maintaining editorial independence from the Australian federal government. Radio Australia is required in Section 8 of the ABC Act to "maintain the independence and integrity of the Corporation" and "ensure that the gathering and presentation by the Corporation of news and information is accurate and impartial according to the recognised standards of journalism";¹¹² while the DFAT contract for Australia Network calls for it to provide a "credible, reliable and independent voice" in the Asia-Pacific region.¹¹³ By its nature, however, public diplomacy involves the presentation and advocacy of the nation's interests, values and perspectives on the world stage – positions which are at any given time defined by the government of the day, and often inherently political.

According to Murray Green, Director of the ABC's International division, Radio Australia and Australia Network approach the challenge of editorial independence by seeking an alignment with "the broad interests and priorities, particularly in terms of the international broadcasting endeavour, of the Australian government".¹¹⁴ By this, Green does not refer to partisan political interests or control of editorial content, but to the nation's long-term strategic goals, such as the development and stability of

¹¹¹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 32.

¹¹² Australian Broadcasting Corporation (1983b), *Australian Broadcasting Act 1983 – Section 8 – Duties of the Board* [online]. Available: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/ComLaw/Legislation/ActCompilation1.nsf/all/search/2E7F5179D6598E8DCA2574730019A00B> [Accessed 7 October 2010], p. 6.

¹¹³ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 58.

¹¹⁴ Green, Murray (2010), personal interview with the author, 23 June 2010.

Australia's immediate neighbourhood, participation in a range of bilateral and multilateral agreements and institutions, and a commitment to human rights. He admits that such alignment is not always easy, given that as governments change, so too do foreign policy priorities. Green argues, though, that it is the role of Radio Australia and Australia Network to rise above these inconsistencies and to take decisions that encourage a nonpartisan "awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs".¹¹⁵ This is of particular importance in countries like Indonesia and China where local media freedom has often been suppressed, making an international broadcaster's editorial independence and impartiality crucial to its survival. For Australia Network CEO Bruce Dover, this means the service should be willing to present a "warts and all" view of Australia,¹¹⁶ whether through information, such as impartial news and current affairs reporting on race relations in Australia;¹¹⁷ education, like the English language-learning podcasts which encourage users to become familiar with Australian values, culture and society as they practice their English skills;¹¹⁸ or entertainment, for example the controversial dramatic film *Lantana*.¹¹⁹

Managing Director Mark Scott says that the ABC's editorial integrity is strong because unlike its commercial competitors, it has no objective in countries like Indonesia or China other than to be an independent public broadcaster:

¹¹⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (1983a).

¹¹⁶ Dover, Bruce (2010), personal interview with the author, 23 June 2010.

¹¹⁷ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Asia Pacific News (2010), *Race Relations* [online]. Available: <http://abcasiapacificnews.com/tags.htm?tag=race-relations> [Accessed 3 October 2010].

¹¹⁸ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2010a), *Australia Network Learning English* [online]. Available: <http://australiannetwork.com/learningenglish/> [Accessed 3 October 2010].

¹¹⁹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2010b), *Australia Network TV Schedule* [online]. Available: http://australiannetwork.com/guide/ep_00179968.htm [Accessed 3 October 2010].

It's not like we're walking in, taking off our ABC hats and trying to get a partnership in this, or a film distribution deal here, or trying to get our DVDs in, or trying to build a theme park... There's no other media organisation in Australia that can say that.¹²⁰

While a recent survey shows that Australia Network was the highest-ranked state-funded television service among popular channels viewed in eight Asian cities including Jakarta in 2009,¹²¹ no empirical data was made available to this researcher demonstrating Indonesian or Chinese audience recognition of ABC independence. Some interviewees made reference to anecdotal evidence in listener comments received by Radio Australia during its 70th birthday celebrations in 2009; for example, the manager of Radio Maraghita, one of the ABC's partner stations in the Indonesian province of Bandung, noted that over the years "Radio Australia has become a point of reference about anything taking place in Indonesia", particularly throughout the Suharto years when Indonesian radio stations were forbidden from producing and broadcasting their own independent news bulletins.¹²²

Yet it is also clear that the development of a strong relationship with the government of the day – while potentially a threat to editorial independence – is highly beneficial to promoting the public diplomacy capacities of the ABC's international services. Speaking prior to the mid-2010 change in Labor leadership, Bruce Dover remarked "there's no doubt that Rudd probably gets it [public diplomacy] more than most, because he does have a very strong foreign policy vision".¹²³ Indeed, as a former diplomat and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd entered office in

¹²⁰ Scott (2010).

¹²¹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 58.

¹²² Alibasa, Fitriadi (2009), *Celebrating 70 Years* [online]. Available: <http://blogs.radioaustralia.net.au/70/english/fitriadi-alibasah-radio-maraghita-bandung-indonesia/> [Accessed 12 September 2010].

¹²³ Dover (2010).

2007 promising a renewed focus on Australian foreign policy and public diplomacy, particularly in the neighbouring Asian region. In his keynote address to the East Asia Forum in March 2008, Rudd announced his intention for Australia to “play its part in shaping the region’s future” and to “engage with the great new global dynamics of the Asia-Pacific century”.¹²⁴ His government’s 2009 Defence White Paper further declared Indonesia and China as two key nations whose ongoing stability is crucial to Australia’s twenty-first century strategic outlook.¹²⁵

Those policy priorities have been mirrored at the ABC. Mark Scott confirmed that in Radio Australia and Australia Network’s quest to represent Australia to the Asia-Pacific region, there are “no more important countries” than China and Indonesia, along with the rising power of India.¹²⁶ Scott also confirmed that discussions had taken place between himself and Rudd in the lead up to the delivery of his speech *A Global ABC*; with this pitch for expansion in Asia and beyond partly inspired by questions from Rudd as to what might be possible if the ABC was funded to a similar level as its G20 competitors.¹²⁷ Rudd further made his support for the ABC increasing its engagement in the region public, reporting in a 2009 public broadcasting discussion paper that “the ABC can play an important role in strengthening Australia’s cultural, commercial and social links in key Asia-Pacific markets, particularly in projecting Australian perspectives and values”.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Rudd, Kevin (2008a), ‘It’s Time to Build an Asia Pacific Community’, *Asia Society AustralAsia Centre* [online]. Available: http://www.asiasociety.org.au/speeches/speeches_current/Kevin_Rudd_04jun08.pdf [Accessed 24 March 2010].

¹²⁵ Department of Defence (2009), pp. 42; 95.

¹²⁶ Scott (2010).

¹²⁷ Scott (2010).

¹²⁸ Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (2009), p.

Political and economic events over the last year, however, have demonstrated that this relationship between the ABC and the federal government is inherently unstable. Just as the impact of the global financial crisis on the federal budget has meant that the ABC's international services were overlooked in the latest triennial funding agreement, as this chapter will later discuss, the change in Labor leadership in Canberra has left both Radio Australia and Australia Network unsure as to what the future holds. While former Radio Australia CEO and current Senior Editor Hanh Tran thinks it is too early to tell how different the Gillard Labor government's approach to foreign policy will be to that of its predecessor, initial reports indicate that Rudd's vision of Australia leading a new Asia-Pacific community has been all but abandoned.¹²⁹ The subsequent appointment of Kevin Rudd as Australia's new Minister for Foreign Affairs in a Labor minority government further complicates matters.

According to Tran, where Mark Scott's proposal sits in the Gillard government, or whether it will return to the agenda at all is now "anyone's guess",¹³⁰ particularly given the absence of any discussion of Australian broadcasting, public diplomacy or even foreign policy in the 2010 election campaign. Unfortunately for Radio Australia and Australia Network, he feels that "a lot of the momentum for building a stronger international service has been lost".¹³¹

¹²⁹ Hartcher, Peter (2010), 'Gillard rejects Rudd's Asia vision', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 2010 [online]. Available: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/gillard-rejects-rudds-asia-vision-20100704-zvxx.html> [Accessed 12 September 2010].

¹³⁰ Tran, Hanh (2010), personal interview with author, 7 July 2010.

¹³¹ Tran (2010).

The impact of regional relationships

Another key aspect of the ABC's struggle to preserve its political independence is the impact of Australia's foreign policy relationships on international perceptions of the nation and its values. While foreign policy is primarily a form of hard power, the academic commentators interviewed for this project all argued that such relationships have an inevitable and significant impact on the ABC's ability to develop and maintain an independent, credible and effective soft power presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite identifying a number of sectors in which Australia's ongoing contribution to the region has resulted in a positive public diplomacy perception in Indonesia and China, including education, tourism and mineral resource exports, there was a consensus among the academic interviewees that Australia has a considerable foreign policy problem in Asia that, by little more than association, is likely to influence audience perceptions of the ABC's international services. A number of recent regional issues were raised, including recent attacks on Indian students in Melbourne, the Rudd government's retreat from legislating an emissions trading scheme, and new immigration policies designed to stem the flow of asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

According to Alison Broinowski, however, Australia's foreign policy problem is also long-term. Warnings against travel to Indonesia, for example, have for years deterred Australian students, researchers, artists and performers from contributing to the Indonesian economy and showcasing Australian arts and cultural talent, creating an impression of Australia in Indonesia that is "just the reverse of what a public

diplomacy program seeks to do”.¹³² Despite Kevin Rudd’s clear affinity for China, similar problems exist there as well. Naren Chitty notes that there have been a number of key points of foreign policy difference between the Australian and Chinese governments in recent years, including the Dalai Lama and problems in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.¹³³ Of particular concern have been a number of comments made by Rudd during his prime ministership, such as his wide-ranging reprimand of the Chinese government in a 2008 address at Beijing University:

There are still many problems in China – problems of poverty, problems of uneven development, problems of pollution, problems of broader human rights... The global community looks forward to China fully participating in all the institutions of the global rules-based order.¹³⁴

Rudd’s highly publicised alleged comments regarding the tactics of China’s top officials at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009 were also problematic: “Those Chinese fuckers are trying to rat-fuck us”.¹³⁵ The impact of such political indiscretions on Australia’s public diplomacy presence is undeniably significant, because national reputation management is central to the successful exercise of soft power, and gaffes like Rudd’s promote the impression that Australia is “not sufficiently interested” in its reputation in the region.¹³⁶ While the ABC’s international services may in some instances be able to counteract these messages, as Radio Australia did successfully in Indonesia in the 1990s by broadcasting programs

¹³² Broinowski, Alison (2010), personal interview with the author, 19 July 2010.

¹³³ Chitty, Naren (2010), personal interview with the author, 16 June 2010.

¹³⁴ Rudd, Kevin (2008b), ‘Beijing University Speech by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’, *The Australian*, 9 April 2008 [online]. Available: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/kevin-rudds-speech-at-beijing-uni/story-e6frg6n6-1111116015758> [Accessed 12 July 2010].

¹³⁵ Kevin Rudd quoted in Marr, David (2010), ‘Power Trip: The Political Journey of Kevin Rudd’, *Quarterly Essay*, no. 38, Melbourne: Black Inc., p. 1.

¹³⁶ Broinowski (2010).

on the abolition of the White Australia policy and other contentious issues, it is clear that such perceptions are often difficult to shake. In his address to the Australian parliament in early 2010, for example, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhuyonho remarked:

The most persistent problem in our relations is the persistence of age-old stereotypes – misleading, simplistic mental caricature that depicts the other side in a bad light... in Indonesia, there are people who remain afflicted with Australia-phobia.¹³⁷

As will be discussed in the resource dependence section of this chapter, such comments are of particular concern due to the current lack of financial or political support being offered by the federal government to the ABC to dispel negative perceptions and improve upon regional relationships.

Regulation and censorship

A third challenge to the ABC's ability to deliver an independent public diplomacy presence in Asia is the prevalence of media regulation and censorship. A number of ABC managers raised this as the most significant constraint that Radio Australia and Australia Network face in the region, as these controls are particularly difficult to negotiate or overcome. The progressive deregulation of Indonesia's media sector as a result of significant constitutional reforms in the late 1990s has left it with a

¹³⁷ Yudhuyonho, Susilo Bambang (2010), 'Address by the President of Indonesia to Parliament', *Hansard, House of Representatives*, 10 March 2010 [online]. Available: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/rep/dailys/dr100310.pdf> [Accessed 24 September 2010], p. 2139.

dramatically changed and surprisingly liberal mediascape.¹³⁸ The dual issues of regulation and censorship, however, are especially pertinent in China.

According to Mark Scott, the most critical barrier for the ABC in China is Australia Network's inability thus far to secure 'landing rights' on the mainland.¹³⁹ Landing rights are essential for any international broadcaster hoping to build a profile and audience in China, as they secure state sanction for carriage on a national satellite service such as SinoSat and provide rebroadcast opportunities in provinces around the country.¹⁴⁰ They do not guarantee a national audience – landing rights usually only give broadcasters access to three, four and five star hotels and diplomatic compounds only. However, given that a number of Australia Network's major foreign competitors including the BBC and CNN have had this permission for close to a decade, if the ABC hopes to gain official access to China's more than 400 million television sets,¹⁴¹ landing rights are an essential step. Scott noted in our interview that the ABC's negotiations over landing rights are ongoing, however recent reports suggest that China's broadcasting regulator, the State Administrator of Radio, Film and Television, has launched a crackdown on foreign media gaining access to Chinese audiences via satellite, including a temporary refusal of any new licence applications.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Kitley, Philip (2001), 'After the Bans: Modelling Indonesian Communications for the Future'. In: Lloyd, Grayson and Smith, Shannon L. (eds.), *Indonesia Today, Challenges of History*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, p. 256.

¹³⁹ Scott (2010).

¹⁴⁰ Ventani, Pietro (2005), 'Sex and the City (and China's media crackdown)', *Asia Times Online*, 27 August 2005 [online]. Available: <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/GH27Ad02.html> [Accessed 12 July].

¹⁴¹ British Broadcasting Corporation News (2005), *China Curbs Foreign TV Channels*, 4 August 2005 [online]. Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4744987.stm> [Accessed 12 July 2010].

¹⁴² British Broadcasting Corporation News (2005).

Beyond the official access that landing rights facilitate, Bruce Dover reported that Australia Network can be seen unofficially in some parts of China – including the fast-growing cities of Guangzhou and Chongqing – via the Filipino satellite Dream TV, whose footprint spills into southern, eastern and central China.¹⁴³ Apart from such opportunities, the ABC must contend with the Chinese government’s ability to censor content that is seen to compromise the “security, honour, and interests of the motherland”.¹⁴⁴ According to Damien Dempsey, ABC International Online’s Executive Producer, such a requirement often proves difficult for the ABC to manage:

There’s always that careful kind of game – that careful emphasis that needs to be placed on maintaining our values as an independent and authoritative supplier of news and information content, but at the same time being aware of the kind of cultural and social sensitivities that may exist in a place like China.¹⁴⁵

Dempsey said that finding such a balance is particularly difficult online, where the Chinese government has recently increased its monitoring and regulation through Golden Shield, a national surveillance project that uses speech and face recognition, closed-circuit television, smart cards, credit records and sophisticated Internet surveillance technologies to investigate and prosecute alleged cyberdissidents.¹⁴⁶ For Radio Australia and Australia Network, this tight regulation has led to periodic website shutdowns, such as following the publication of news stories marking the

¹⁴³ Dover (2010).

¹⁴⁴ Council on Foreign Relations (2010), *Media Censorship in China* [online]. Available: http://www.cfr.org/publication/11515/media_censorship_in_china.html [Accessed 28 June 2010].

¹⁴⁵ Dempsey, Damien (2010), personal interview with the author, 8 July 2010.

¹⁴⁶ Walton, Greg (2001), *China's Golden Shield: corporations and the development of surveillance technology in the People's Republic of China*, International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development [online]. Available: http://www.dd-rd.ca/site/_PDF/publications/globalization/CGS_ENG.PDF [Accessed 3 October], p. 5.

twentieth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests. While Dempsey suggests that this is not an uncommon experience for international broadcasters in China, such censorship can have serious consequences: “you get into deep shit if you do the wrong thing – they just switch you off”.¹⁴⁷ In a market where the ABC’s presence is already limited, this is a danger that is almost impossible to overcome – particularly when doing “the wrong thing” can be as simple as striving to maintain an independent and impartial regional voice.

Funding constraints

Further complicating these considerable challenges to its independence is the ABC’s responsibility to negotiate a funding package with the federal government every three years. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ABC’s international services have long been critically underfunded. A survey of their current budgets, however, further demonstrates the significant resource constraints that Radio Australia and Australia Network, as well as Australia’s broader public diplomacy program, have faced in recent years.

Radio Australia CEO Mike McCluskey reports that the service’s budget currently sits at just under \$10 million per year, including all programming, infrastructure, transmission and marketing costs.¹⁴⁸ This figure is drawn from the ABC’s 2010/11 federal appropriation of \$956.071 million, which is administered by the Department

¹⁴⁷ Dempsey (2010).

¹⁴⁸ McCluskey, Mike (2010), personal interview with the author, 6 July 2010.

of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.¹⁴⁹ According to figures obtained by the Lowy Institute, Radio Australia's budget has not changed over the past three years;¹⁵⁰ Hanh Tran similarly indicates that it will not grow at least until the next triennial funding agreement is reached in 2012.¹⁵¹ Such stagnation in the face of recent overall ABC budget increases suggests that Radio Australia is not a high federal priority in comparison to the Corporation's domestic services.

Conversely, Australia Network receives a substantial proportion of DFAT's public diplomacy budget; in recent years, this contract has accounted for up to 79 per cent of the department's total public diplomacy expenditure.¹⁵² Throughout the period of the Rudd government, Australia Network's budget allocation has increased from \$18.831 million in 2008/09 to \$19.354 million in 2010/11, while the Department's overall public diplomacy spend has decreased dramatically, from \$112.129 million in 2008/09 to \$28.830 million in 2010/11.¹⁵³ Yet as with Radio Australia, forward estimates indicate that Australia Network's funding will now stabilise for at least the next three years. As this chapter will later discuss, such stagnation is increasingly problematic in the face of significant increases in investment from Australia Network's major competitors in the Asia-Pacific region.

¹⁴⁹ Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (2008; 2010), *Budget Statements* [online]. Available:

http://www.dbcde.gov.au/about_us/governance_and_administration/budget

[Accessed 12 July 2010], pp. 62; 60.

¹⁵⁰ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 54.

¹⁵¹ Tran (2010).

¹⁵² Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (2007a), p. 188.

¹⁵³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2008; 2010c), *Portfolio Budget Statements* [online]. Available:

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/dept/budget/index.html> [Accessed 12 July 2010], pp. 38; 32.

Although it has no separate online division, the ABC's international online services are funded separately to their radio and television counterparts. Damien Dempsey receives approximately \$400,000 each year from the ABC's overall allocation to maintain websites for Radio Australia, Australia Network and ABC International Projects, as well as manage a number of social media networks, podcast programs and mobile technology developments.¹⁵⁴ Dempsey says that this budget is extremely tight in comparison to the ABC's total annual appropriation, and feels that given the increasing popularity of online media in markets like China, "there is a case to be made about how we prioritise".¹⁵⁵ He does, however, acknowledge that any increases to the International division's budget would inevitably mean cuts to domestic services, a decision that would be difficult to justify to Australian taxpayers.¹⁵⁶

While the ABC's latest triennial funding agreement (2009 – 2012) secured a significant increase of \$167 million over three years to the Corporation's overall grant, it was a poor outcome for the international services. The ABC's submission for this round of funding was not made public as in previous years, but interviewees have indicated that it proposed a number of significant international projects that were ultimately not funded.

The ABC's submission to DBCDE's 2008 broadcasting review outlines some of these proposals: high-frequency Radio Australia transmission and programming to Burma and North Korea, the extension of Australia Network's transmission to the Middle East, a dedicated children's television channel in the Asia-Pacific, and the multi-

¹⁵⁴ Dempsey (2010).

¹⁵⁵ Dempsey (2010).

¹⁵⁶ Dempsey (2010).

platform delivery of English language-learning content in key regional markets.¹⁵⁷ The extra funds that the ABC received were earmarked specifically for new domestic projects including a digital children's channel (ABC3), local drama production and new regional broadband hubs.¹⁵⁸ Any new international initiatives now have to be funded within existing service allocations – for example, Radio Australia was only able to launch its Burmese service in November 2009 by diverting funds from other areas, leaving its budget of less than \$10 million now stretched across eight different language services. ABC managers cite the global financial crisis as a major factor in the government's response to the 2009 funding submission: Bruce Dover suggests that after the Rudd government's fiscal stimulus program and other ongoing financial obligations are taken into account, there simply is “not a lot of money left in the tin” for increases to international broadcasting.¹⁵⁹

Yet while world economic shifts do inevitably influence national strategic planning, there are evident contradictions between the Rudd government's rhetoric about the value of public diplomacy, and the financial security it has provided initiatives in this area. In its first budget in 2008/09, the Rudd government did increase Australia's public diplomacy expenditure from \$79.468 million to \$112.129 million.¹⁶⁰ Included in this allocation was a modest \$94,000 increase in funding for Australia Network, as well as a considerable contribution to the development of Australia's presence at the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. Since that first year in office, however, Labor funding

¹⁵⁷ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2008a), *Australian Broadcasting Corporation submission to Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Discussion Paper 'ABC and SBS: Towards a digital future'* [online]. Available:

http://www.dbcde.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/107332/main_submission_Australian_Broadcasting_Corporation.pdf [Accessed 10 March 2010], p. 16.

¹⁵⁸ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Media Room (2009).

¹⁵⁹ Dover (2010).

¹⁶⁰ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2008), p. 38.

for public diplomacy has been cut substantially to \$60.214 million in 2009/10 and \$28.830 million in 2010/11, with forward estimates indicating that until at least 2013/14, this figure will be further reduced to less than \$24 million each year.¹⁶¹ Factoring in the steady investment in Australia Network already outlined, this leaves less than \$5 million per year for the remainder of Australia's official public diplomacy program.¹⁶²

Australia Network CEO Bruce Dover works closely with DFAT's public diplomacy unit, and says he believes that it has acknowledged its recent underspend in this area, particularly in comparison to other countries within the G20 such as Britain, Germany and France.¹⁶³ Dover further notes that the Gillard government is currently preparing its official response to the 2007 Senate Committee report on public diplomacy, and that this response will guide the way in which services like Radio Australia and Australia Network are funded into the future.

Australia Network's future as DFAT's leading vehicle of Australian public diplomacy, however, is uncertain, with the ABC's current five-year contract due to expire in August 2011. At the time this thesis was completed, DFAT had not yet announced whether it planned to renew the ABC's contract for the service or to seek tender applications from other potential operators. Such cyclical uncertainty over the management, production and identity of Australia's international television service is

¹⁶¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2010), p. 32.

¹⁶² Note that these figures refer only to items listed as 'Public information services and public diplomacy' in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade budget statements, in 2010/11 comprising Australia Network and the International Relations Grants Program. The Australia Awards scholarship program and other agencies such as AusAID are funded separately.

¹⁶³ Dover (2010).

“pretty ridiculous”,¹⁶⁴ according to Bruce Dover, and makes the delivery of a consistent Australian public diplomacy presence difficult, particularly among the fierce competition.

In his pitch for a global ABC, Mark Scott noted that in 2009 alone, German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle launched an English-language service promoting European arts, culture, business and politics to Asia; the Chinese government announced an \$8 billion international media program involving CCTV, Xinhua News Agency and the People’s Daily; Japanese public broadcaster NHK relaunched its English-language news channel covering Japanese and international affairs with a focus on the Asia-Pacific; and French public broadcaster France 24 announced a new English-language television channel in Asia alongside its present French-language channel.¹⁶⁵ Other recent developments include a UK£70 million boost to the BBC World Service over the three years from 2008 – 2011, with a renewed focus on reaching Southeast Asian audiences; and plans for Al Jazeera to add ten new international bureaux to its current 69.¹⁶⁶

These new, well-funded international developments represent only a small percentage of the ABC’s competition in the region. As the next chapter will explore, it is increasingly local, provincial and national media providers – such as Indonesia’s state-owned television network TVRI, whose annual operating budget equates to more than \$66 million – that Radio Australia and Australia Network must attempt to match.

¹⁶⁴ Dover (2010).

¹⁶⁵ Scott (2009).

¹⁶⁶ O’Keefe and Oliver (2010), pp. 25 – 26.

Creativity and collaboration

Despite the constraints of limited and inconsistent funding, all ABC managers interviewed were eager to make clear that successful international broadcasting also depends on how efficiently, effectively and creatively these resources are employed. These responses suggest a challenge to the dominant frames of political independence and resource dependence that this chapter has so far explored.

It was emphasised, for example, that although the ABC's most recent annual report lists the International division's current staff strength as 144 full-time equivalents¹⁶⁷ – the same figure that Radio Australia alone employed before the 1997 funding cuts forced it to more than halve its workforce¹⁶⁸ – this does not necessarily present a full and accurate picture of the human resources that Radio Australia and Australia Network are able to draw upon. In addition to its team of eight in Melbourne and three dedicated Jakarta-based staff, Radio Australia has a network of part-time and casual “stringers” who act as the service's “eyes and ears” in Indonesia.¹⁶⁹ Similarly in China, Australia Network can call on its staff based in Sydney, the ABC's Beijing-based foreign correspondent Stephen McDonnell, and its own Chinese correspondent, Tom Iggulden, for regular reporting. It is the long-term presence of these dedicated local staff, according to Murray Green, that demonstrates the ABC's commitment to the Asia-Pacific region and enhances the ability of Radio Australia and Australia Network to present a credible and relevant service to local audiences.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2009), *ABC Annual Report 2009* [online]. Available: http://www.abc.net.au/corp/annual_reports/ar09/ [Accessed 14 August 2010], p. 207.

¹⁶⁸ Dempster (2000), p. 281.

¹⁶⁹ Tran (2010).

¹⁷⁰ Green (2010).

Mike McCluskey similarly argued that limited funding should be viewed as a creative challenge rather than a constraint. In a fast-changing field with increasingly fragmented audiences and unprecedented competition, he feels it is more important than ever to “make the content using whatever resources we can, to be flexible, adaptable and change with the times”¹⁷¹ – whether this means persisting with shortwave broadcasts in rural Indonesia, or exploring new opportunities for 3G and 4G mobile devices. Hanh Tran said that Radio Australia has a strong record of such flexibility, recalling how the service was forced to rebuild its programming and embrace new technologies in order to reconnect with its audiences following the “near death experience” of 1997:

...we started to set up websites for all our language services; we started to travel the region talking to FM owners and anyone across the countries who would allow us to set up shop and start transmitting in FM. Now, our FM retransmission networks are our most valuable assets in terms of radio.¹⁷²

Several academic interviewees also proposed ideas about how the ABC may be able to overcome some of its resourcing issues in China and Indonesia. Naren Chitty argued that while the ABC may not be able to compete with local media giants like CCTV – particularly given its reported \$6.6 billion annual operating budget¹⁷³ – it does have the opportunity to develop co-productions or partnerships with popular local providers.¹⁷⁴ Kalinga Seneviratne suggested that Radio Australia could follow the example of European networks like Deutsche Welle and Radio Netherlands and

¹⁷¹ McCluskey (2010).

¹⁷² Tran (2010).

¹⁷³ The New York Times (2009), ‘Chinese State TV Starts Arabic Channel’, *The New York Times*, 26 July 2009 [online]. Available:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/27/business/media/27iht-tv.html?_r=1
[Accessed 3 October 2010].

¹⁷⁴ Chitty (2010).

establish a content exchange agreement, where “a program like *Asia Pacific* could be broadcast on an English-language radio channel in an Asian country in exchange for their programs being broadcast on *ABC News Radio*”.¹⁷⁵

Perhaps the most unorthodox proposal came from Prakash Mirchandani, who asserted that in recent years, “the skies have become so crowded with signals” that it may actually make more financial sense in the long term for the ABC to consider merging its broadcast presence in the Asia-Pacific with other partners or conglomerates rather than continuing to struggle alone.¹⁷⁶ While this suggestion would appear to run counter to Mark Scott’s emphatic pronouncement that the ABC can become the “dominant regional provider” of news, information and education,¹⁷⁷ Bruce Dover admits that such ideas may in fact be worth considering:

Is the future really about doing a 24-hour channel like us, or is it about providing blocks of programming – relevant and quality programming – to Chinese broadcasters? Would that be a far more effective way, because it’s on their channels, it’s in Chinese?¹⁷⁸

As the next chapter will discuss, Australia Network has already established extensive rebroadcast relationships across the Asia-Pacific. The ABC is also undertaking regional production collaborations. In July 2010, the ABC announced that it had signed a co-operation agreement with the Shanghai Media Group for a long-term partnership between Australia Network and International Channel Shanghai, involving the exchange of television programs, mutual news gathering support and

¹⁷⁵ Seneviratne, Kalinga (2010), personal interview with the author, 20 July 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Mirchandani, Prakash (2010b), personal interview with the author, 31 July 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Scott (2009).

¹⁷⁸ Dover (2010).

content supply, and opportunities for future co-production.¹⁷⁹ This agreement is particularly significant in the face of the ABC's current struggle for landing rights, as it allows Australia Network access to 4.4 million homes in the Shanghai area alone.¹⁸⁰ It also builds on existing arrangements between the ABC and both Chongqing Television and Radio Group and CCTV. While the full potential of such partnerships has not yet been explored, the ABC's willingness thus far to think imaginatively and creatively about how it can reach audiences in difficult markets like China suggests that it may eventually be able to mitigate or even overcome some of its current resourcing constraints.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that in its efforts to develop and maintain a successful broadcast and public diplomacy presence in the Asia-Pacific, the ABC faces a complex contradiction between its mandated independence from the Australian federal government and its ongoing reliance on this government for funding.

Despite Radio Australia and Australia Network's efforts to act as impartial voices in the region, the independence of each service is subject to three significant challenges: the influence of the Australian federal government of the day on the ABC's international strategy and priorities; the impact of Australia's relationships with its neighbours on the ABC's reputation and reception in the region; and the role that

¹⁷⁹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Media Room (2010a), *The Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Shanghai Media Group Sign Co-operation Agreement on International Channels* [online]. Available:

<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2959803.htm> [Accessed 24 July 2010].

¹⁸⁰ International Channel Shanghai (2010), *About Us* [online]. Available:

<http://www.icshanghai.com/html/2010/04/29/435.html> [Accessed 25 July 2010].

foreign media regulation plays in shaping the ABC's opportunities in its target markets. Under such circumstances, the political independence of the ABC's international services is proven to be largely illusory, with clear consequences for their public diplomacy potential.

It is also evident that Radio Australia and Australia Network face significant financial obstacles in the Asia-Pacific. While other major international broadcasters are at present increasing their investment in this region, both the ABC's international services and Australia's broader public diplomacy program remain subject to strictly capped budgets and fluctuating political interest. Proposals for co-productions, partnerships and content exchanges may provide Radio Australia and Australia Network with opportunities to overcome these constraints; the evidence to date suggests that such collaborative relations may offer the ABC its best chance at presenting an effective public diplomacy presence in highly-controlled markets like China.

Yet developing and maintaining successful relationships with governments and industry is only part of the public diplomacy puzzle. The next chapter will explore how effectively Radio Australia and Australia Network can attract and influence Asian publics. It will discuss in more detail the second set of frames with which we can assess the contemporary public diplomacy impact of the ABC's international services: colonialism and engagement.

CHAPTER THREE

Colonialism versus engagement

The previous chapter identified two key frames, political independence and resource dependence, that can be used to interpret the success of the ABC's international services as diplomatic tools. This chapter will turn its attention to the policy objectives and day-to-day cultural production activities of Radio Australia and Australia Network in Indonesia and China to assess just how effectively these public diplomacy channels have communicated the nation's strategic goals and values in recent years. As outlined in the literature review, at the heart of this discussion is a debate about the fundamental purpose of the ABC's involvement in twenty-first century Asia; a battle between the old international broadcasting model of colonialism and the new public diplomacy paradigm of engagement.

Within the interpretive scope of these opposing frames, my interview respondents expressed strong beliefs and attitudes concerning the recent public diplomacy efforts of Radio Australia and Australia Network. First, support for the ABC as a vehicle of regional development was matched by concerns about the paternalism of such activities. Second, questions were raised about the ABC's relevance to local audiences and its ability to attract their interest amid an explosion of new domestic media operators. Third, hopes that online, mobile and social media technologies will provide new platforms for engagement with audiences in Indonesia and China were met with anxieties that the ABC simply lacks the funding or strategic direction to take advantage of these new opportunities.

Regional development or neo-colonialism?

Regional development goals have long been at the centre of the ABC's mission in the Asia-Pacific. While such a role has never been mandated and is not currently specified in the Charter of the Corporation, Radio Australia began broadcasting its *English for You* lessons to Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam in 1959,¹⁸¹ and has since expanded its language-learning program to Cambodia and China. Australia Network followed suit upon its relaunch in 2006 with a series of educational programs for audiences across the entire region. ABC International Projects has also been working with broadcasters and communities to strengthen the public service broadcasting field across Asia and the Pacific since the 1990s, offering new educational and vocational opportunities to local journalists and producers through training, production, and infrastructure support.¹⁸² According to Murray Green, the overarching goal of ABC International's work in the region is to communicate, promote and act on core Australian values: democracy, opportunity, fairness, accountability, transparency and openness.¹⁸³

Recent figures show that Radio Australia and Australia Network's educational podcasts, which teach Australian English skills for travel, living, study, business and hospitality, account for at least 20 per cent of the broader ABC's 41 million annual podcast downloads.¹⁸⁴ Local media operators in both Indonesia and China have recognised and capitalised on this popularity by rebroadcasting Radio Australia's English lessons on major provincial stations in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai,

¹⁸¹ Radio Australia (2009).

¹⁸² Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2010d), *ABC International* [online]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/international/> [Accessed 7 March 2010].

¹⁸³ Green (2010).

¹⁸⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2008b), *ABC Annual Report 2008*. http://www.abc.net.au/corp/annual_reports/ar08/ [Accessed 14 May 2010], p. 30.

allowing the ABC access to “tens of millions of listeners” who may not otherwise have associated such content with Australia.¹⁸⁵ Attempts by Radio Australia thus far to expand its English language-learning program beyond the airwaves and into schools and universities in the region have been met with varying degrees of success, but Hanh Tran believes that with increased resources, this area could hold great potential for the ABC, particularly in terms of e-learning opportunities: “it’s a no-brainer – we’ve got content that no one else can provide. So that’s our niche content; we have to claim it and take ownership of it”.¹⁸⁶

In recent years, Australia Network has also found success in taking its English lessons to local audiences throughout Asia. In partnership with the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia Network presents an annual Study English Roadshow, which takes program presenters and English teachers to cities across the region to run workshops for students preparing for their IELTS English proficiency test.¹⁸⁷ According to Bruce Dover, the interaction these workshops have encouraged between well-known Australia Network personalities like Margo Politis and local students in Vietnam and India has surpassed the ABC’s expectations: “We’ll have 700 people turn up every day, and they have to shut the doors... She gets mobbed!”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2007), p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ Tran (2010).

¹⁸⁷ The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is an international standardised test of English language proficiency required by those who want to enrol in universities and other institutions of higher education and for professionals such as doctors and nurses who want to study or practice in an English-speaking country.

¹⁸⁸ Dover (2010).

In 2010, the Study English Roadshow visited China for the first time, with workshops scheduled for the cities of Beijing, Chengdu, Jinan, Ningbo, Shenzhen and Urumqi.¹⁸⁹ Given that Australia Network is currently unable to reach these cities via its television broadcasts due to landing rights restrictions, such workshops offer a unique opportunity for the ABC to simultaneously increase its brand exposure and offer local audiences a high quality, in-demand service. This is a particularly powerful form of public diplomacy: not only does it personalise the ABC's soft power mission and encourage Chinese students to visit Australia upon completing the IELTS, but the content of the lessons themselves – including recent sessions on the challenges of global warming and Australia's Indigenous history – helps to explain and reinforce key national values in a straightforward and engaging way.¹⁹⁰

Mark Scott, Murray Green, Mike McCluskey and Bruce Dover all stated that alongside its English language-learning programs, the ABC's work in Asia is driven by a strong commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, a set of eight international development goals agreed on by all United Nations member states in the year 2000 with the ultimate objective of ending poverty by 2015.¹⁹¹ Consideration of these goals, which include universal education, gender equality and environmental sustainability, can particularly be seen in the recent initiatives of ABC International Projects in both Indonesia, providing crisis reporting training and editorial policy development to local media organisations, and China, where ABC

¹⁸⁹ University of Technology, Sydney: Insearch (2010), *IELTS Preparation Seminars: China and Vietnam 2010* [online]. Available: <http://www.insearch.edu.au/default.aspx?ArticleID=332> [Accessed 25 August 2010].

¹⁹⁰ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2010e), *Australia Network IELTS Preparation Series 1* [online]. Available: http://australianetwork.com/studyenglish/se_series1.htm [Accessed 3 October 2010].

¹⁹¹ United Nations (2010), *Millennium Development Goals* [online]. Available: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> [Accessed 17 August 2010].

staff have run training programs for CCTV news and current affairs producers. This strategic commitment also impacts on the philosophical approach that Radio Australia takes to broadcasting in the developing world.

According to Mike McCluskey, it is important to understand modern public diplomacy as a multi-layered pursuit that is concerned not only with communicating viewpoints and opinions to audiences overseas, but also with encouraging regional development on a much broader scale:

There's great advantage in advocating development for countries that are less developed than our own, because by building development, education, health, welfare and the economic status of the countries around us, we can build stability into the region.¹⁹²

This objective is behind Radio Australia's long-term vision for the region, with the launch of a new Burmese service in late 2009 and plans for North Korea on the drawing board.¹⁹³ It is also reflected in Radio Australia's more recent priorities, including the provision of a reliable radio service in times of emergency, following major disease outbreaks or natural disasters, and a renewed focus on audiences living in rural and regional areas. While McCluskey notes that to date, Radio Australia has targeted "the AB type demographic: people who are educated, reasonably affluent and interested in international issues", he says that in the future, the service will be much more strongly focused on providing content that is meaningful to audiences regardless of their education level, occupation or socio-economic status.¹⁹⁴ A major aspect of this will be identifying the areas throughout the Asia-Pacific region where audiences do not have access to mobile technology, satellite television or even FM radio, and

¹⁹² McCluskey (2010).

¹⁹³ Tran (2010).

¹⁹⁴ McCluskey (2010).

developing the infrastructure to ensure that Radio Australia can continue to reach these communities via shortwave – in their own languages, featuring content that is relevant to their lives as well as to those living in more developed towns and cities.

It is clear, however, that there is a significant difference between the ability of Radio Australia and Australia Network to connect with these niche audiences. The contract between the ABC and DFAT specifies that Australia Network must target “the aspirational decision makers of Asia”.¹⁹⁵ Bruce Dover describes this group as “university educated, normally two-income and certainly upper-level, because they’re the people who travel regularly, have an interest in international affairs, and would be interested in getting an alternate view on news and information”.¹⁹⁶ This focus is in line with Australia’s broader public diplomacy target of travellers, businesses and students.¹⁹⁷ However, it also raises questions about the extent to which the ABC’s approach to soft power relies on a neo-colonial view of power relations within the region, whereby development is concerned not with advancing the interests of foreign audiences, but with furthering Western dominance.¹⁹⁸

Is it possible, for example, that by targeting a solely aspirational, English-speaking audience, Australia Network is practicing elitism in its target markets? While Radio Australia broadcasts in seven foreign languages in addition to its English service, Australia Network is simply unable to do the same, given that its signal stretches

¹⁹⁵ Dover (2010).

¹⁹⁶ Dover (2010).

¹⁹⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2007), *Submission by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia's public diplomacy* [online]. Available:

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/fadt_ctte/completed_inquiries/2004-07/public_diplomacy/submissions/sub18.pdf [Accessed 12 May 2010], p. 8.

¹⁹⁸ Dossa, Shiraz (2007), ‘Slicing up development: colonialism, political theory, ethics’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 887 – 899.

across 45 countries, from the Pitcairn Islands to the Maldives, and takes much of its content – apart from news, current affairs and English language-learning – from commercial providers. Yet according to Hanh Tran, in a field where the concepts of public diplomacy and soft power are inevitably coloured by a lingering Cold War mentality and the last vestiges of colonialism, it is of paramount importance to reach out to a country’s entire population: “If you don’t broadcast in the local language to the masses, then the people who have access to information – the ruling class – are free to choose what their people can hear about”. If a service broadcasts only in English, no matter its intention, it ultimately “makes a mockery of public diplomacy, because you’re still channelling information to the ruling elites, and unwittingly allowing that information to be filtered by them to suit their needs”.¹⁹⁹

History also suggests that the ABC’s dedication to the values of democracy, independence and impartiality can be interpreted in some parts of the region as paternalistic. As discussed in the literature review, Radio Australia’s news and current affairs coverage of Indonesian politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s – particularly following Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975 – contributed to the escalating rift between the Australian and Indonesian governments. The ABC’s prominent role in this diplomatic breakdown led to the expulsion of Radio Australia’s Indonesian correspondent for eleven years, and also negatively impacted on Australian government attitudes towards the service throughout the funding cut debates of the late 1990s, with one minister declaring that “the ABC delights in producing conflicts in the region”.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Tran (2010).

²⁰⁰ Gerry Hand quoted in Inglis (2006), p. 287.

As a diplomatic instrument, the ABC would also be hard pressed to escape some criticism of its political investment in what Philip McMichael calls the “development project” – the international push for industrialisation and democracy based on assumptions about the desirability of Western standards of living and political systems.²⁰¹ There was little consensus among interviewees on how the ABC can overcome such perceptions of neo-colonialism, particularly given its limited resources and the tremendous investment that would be required for Australia Network to diversify its language services to meet the needs of audiences across the region. Kalinga Seneviratne, however, suggested a useful starting point, arguing that if the ABC aims to market itself as having moved beyond the old colonial model of international broadcasting, then it must be able to “think as Asian” to a certain extent. What this requires, he says, is “an infusion of Asian talent to creative and production positions – mere presenters will not do. And they need to come from Asia, not be Australian-Asians who think like Anglo-Saxons”.²⁰²

No data was available to this researcher on the proportion of Radio Australia and Australia Network staff born and raised in Asia, but the managers of each service readily acknowledged that in order to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the political, social and cultural complexities of each of their individual broadcast markets, it will be necessary to engage more local staff in the near future. In Indonesia and China in particular, where market competition is increasing at an unprecedented rate, developing a clearer picture of the needs and preferences of listeners and viewers is currently one of the ABC’s greatest public diplomacy challenges.

²⁰¹ McMichael, Philip (2003), *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*, 3rd ed., Newbury Park: Pine Forge Press.

²⁰² Seneviratne (2010).

Demonstrating relevance

Across Asia, local media providers are increasingly offering more choice in quality services that inform, educate and entertain; in the local languages, guided by local staff and local knowledge. In China, this means turning to the state-run national broadcaster CCTV, or any of the 55 other satellite services available in different provinces across the country.²⁰³ In Indonesia, it might involve tuning into one of a reported 803 radio stations,²⁰⁴ or alternatively visiting Detik, an Indonesian news portal that receives around 25 million page views per day,²⁰⁵ or Kaskus, an online forum with over two million regularly contributing members.²⁰⁶ As a result, the international broadcasters that once dominated the region are now finding it extremely difficult to compete. More and more, says Bruce Dover, traditional favourites like the BBC, CNN and the ABC are losing the premium they could once command, becoming “a second or third watch” to local services:

Because entertainment and news is inherently local, people want local stories, they want their own stories... I want to know what's happening in my backyard, my street, my suburb, my state first.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Zhong, Yong (2010), ‘Hunan Satellite Television over China’, *The Journal of International Communication*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 44.

²⁰⁴ Press Reference (2010), *Indonesia* [online]. Available:

<http://www.pressreference.com/Gu-Ku/Indonesia.html>

[Accessed 20 September 2010].

²⁰⁵ MatchMove Games (2010), *MatchMove Games Continues Indonesian Expansion* [online]. Available:

http://corporate.matchmovegames.com/docs2/MatchMove_Continues_Indonesian_Expansion.pdf [Accessed 1 July 2010].

²⁰⁶ Kaskus (2010), *Kaskus: The Largest Indonesian Community* [online]. Available: <http://www.kaskus.us/> [Accessed 20 September 2010].

²⁰⁷ Dover (2010).

As suggested in the previous chapter, competition among foreign services is also tougher than ever before. Not only are more European nations investing significantly in international broadcasting in Asia, but audience expectations of what these services should offer have changed dramatically. Hanh Tran says feedback to Radio Australia from listeners in the region suggests that audiences have developed a newfound confidence to pick and choose their news and thus demand a higher standard of broadcasting from international services to match the local providers who are increasingly adept at modernising their styles and meeting audience expectations.

According to Tran, listeners in the region who once tuned in to broadcasts from Britain, the United States or Australia are now more likely to question the ABC: “why should I listen to you? I know you come from a Western society, I know you guys are quite rich, but that’s not a good enough reason”.²⁰⁸ Such a shift has required a significant recalibration on the part of traditional international broadcasters; Tran cites the proliferation of online forums where groups of young people in countries like Vietnam and Indonesia actively debate the merits of different international services as a significant factor in the efforts of Radio Australia to move online in these countries and continually improve the quality of their content. The biggest mistake that Radio Australia or Australia Network could make in this changed environment, Tran believes, would be to underestimate the intelligence of their audiences.²⁰⁹

In order to ensure its continued relevance, the ABC works closely with local services to rebroadcast its content throughout the Asia-Pacific. Australia Network is connected to over 640 different rebroadcasters, “ranging from big corporations down to ‘ma and

²⁰⁸ Tran (2010).

²⁰⁹ Tran (2010).

pa' backroom operations".²¹⁰ According to Murray Green, the sheer number and diversity of these rebroadcasters is a strong measure of the ABC's relevance to local audiences, with such services clearly willing to stake their own reputations on Australia Network's content.²¹¹ Radio Australia participates in similar exchanges in Indonesia, where well-known veteran presenters such as Nuim Khaiyath or Hidayat Djajamihardja appear daily on popular local radio stations in major cities like Surabaya, Bandung, Medan and Padang to take part in live talkback programs that reach "tens of millions of listeners" every week.²¹² In 2007, Radio Australia also conducted the first ever live English broadcast from within China.²¹³

Despite the success of these important linkages, the limited data available concerning the ABC's audience share and reach in the region over recent years paints a troubled picture. Figures for Radio Australia vary considerably across sources; while the ABC's submission to the 2007 Senate Inquiry reported that the service's reach across the Asia-Pacific had grown to over 100 million, with regular weekly audiences of at least 20 million,²¹⁴ the Lowy Institute's recent research indicates that the service currently has only 2.7 million listeners per month (although this figure may be higher on an 'available homes' basis).²¹⁵

Mike McCluskey cited a rapidly increasing diversity of media choice, the difficulty in measuring audiences across diverse platforms and local rebroadcast outlets, and the lasting effects of the 1997 budget and staff cuts as the major reasons for any audience

²¹⁰ Green (2010).

²¹¹ Green (2010).

²¹² Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2007), p. 5.

²¹³ Radio Australia (2009).

²¹⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2007), p. 4.

²¹⁵ O'Keefe and Oliver (2010), p. 62.

decline.²¹⁶ Dramatic decreases, however, have not been uniform across the international radio broadcasting sector; in 2006 the BBC World Service recorded its highest ever audience figures in the Asia-Pacific, with a total of 61.1 million weekly listeners, up 7.9 million from 2005.²¹⁷

Australia Network's figures are also low. While the service can be accessed in 31 million homes and 200,000 hotel rooms across the Asia-Pacific,²¹⁸ the most recent audience figures suggest that Australia Network's actual viewership is closer to seven million per month,²¹⁹ ranking the service twenty-sixth out of the top fifty international channels in the region – well behind major competitors CNN and the BBC, and commercial channels like Discovery and National Geographic.²²⁰ Additionally, while the ABC reported an Australia Network viewership increase of six per cent in 2008,²²¹ more recent figures from DFAT make clear the impact of the global financial crisis on the service, with audiences in a number of key markets including Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta, declining over the 2008/09 financial year.²²²

The news is not all bad, however; the limited audience research Australia Network has commissioned to date suggests that a high percentage of its audience across the region falls into its 'aspirational' target market. According to a recent ABC annual

²¹⁶ McCluskey (2010).

²¹⁷ British Broadcasting Corporation Press Office (2006), *BBC World Service audiences hit all-time record levels* [online]. Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/05_may/15/world_service.shtml [Accessed 25 August 2010].

²¹⁸ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2009), p. 3

²¹⁹ O'Keeffe and Oliver (2010), p. 62.

²²⁰ Dover (2010).

²²¹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2009), p. 100.

²²² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2009), *DFAT Annual Report 2008 – 09* [online]. Available: http://www.dfat.gov.au/dept/annual_reports/08_09/index.html [Accessed 28 April 2010], p. 203.

report, around 60 per cent of Australia Network viewers belong to “the local, urban, English-speaking populations of the Asia-Pacific regions, primarily the political, academic and economic leadership communities”.²²³ Independent media tracking company Synovate PAX further found in 2006 that 95 per cent of Australia Network’s audience could be considered ‘affluent’, defined as people earning over the equivalent of \$80,000 per year.²²⁴

One reason for Australia Network’s recent audience decline could be its programming mix. While the majority of Radio Australia’s content is produced and/or versioned with regional audiences in mind – including shows like *Connect Asia* and *Asia Pacific Business* – the contract between DFAT and the ABC requires Australia Network to screen a variety of commercially-produced lifestyle, drama, documentary and sport programs originally made for the Australian domestic market, alongside its flagship news and current affairs coverage and targeted children’s and educational content. There are benefits to this genre mix, says Bruce Dover: among news-only networks, Australia Network is differentiated as a “multi-genre channel” that offers something for everyone.²²⁵ But there are also valid questions to be asked about the public diplomacy value of aspects of this schedule, such as the soap opera *Home and Away*, the *V8 Supercars Championship* series, and the travel program *Getaway*, which Dover describes as “white men travelling, badly”.²²⁶

Again, what is most challenging for Australia Network here is cost. While the ABC is keenly aware that there is no such thing as pan-regional broadcasting, it is beyond Australia Network’s current capacity to provide targeted programming in each market

²²³ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2008b), p. 96.

²²⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2007), p. 16.

²²⁵ Dover (2010).

²²⁶ Dover (2010).

it hopes to penetrate. According to Dover, this is where there needs to be “some careful thought around the future of international television broadcasting, because if nobody’s watching, then nobody’s watching.”²²⁷

Online media and user engagement

So far, this thesis has focused its analysis on the ABC’s international radio and television broadcast services. Nevertheless, it is clear from both the literature surveyed in Chapter One (see Cull 2009a; Mirchandani 2010a; Powers and El Gody 2010) and my original research that increasingly, both international media and public diplomacy efforts are moving away from linear radio and television channels. The goal is to develop internetworked, interactive, customisable platforms and services that allow audiences to access and engage with the content of their choice; at the time, in the place and via the device that suits them best.

While China already has the world’s largest online population, with more than 400 million web users – 233 million of whom regularly access online media via their mobile²²⁸ – a recent study has identified Indonesia as the fastest-growing online market in Southeast Asia, with mobile devices becoming the dominant Internet access point there as well.²²⁹ It is therefore imperative for Radio Australia and Australia

²²⁷ Dover (2010).

²²⁸ The Sydney Morning Herald (2010), ‘More than 400 million online in China, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May 2010 [online]. Available: <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/technology-news/more-than-400-million-online-in-china-20100503-u217.html> [Accessed 25 May 2010].

²²⁹ Asia Media Journal (2010), ‘Yahoo study probes Internet use in Southeast Asia’, *Asia Media Journal*, 3 June 2010 [online]. Available: <http://www.asiamediajournal.com/pressrelease.php?id=1839> [Accessed 28 August 2010].

Network's public diplomacy efforts that the potential of new media technologies in these markets is not left unexplored.

All ABC managers interviewed demonstrated a keen awareness of the potential of online, mobile and social media services as vehicles of effective dialogue and interaction between Radio Australia, Australia Network and audiences in Asia. The ABC's domestic web presence has been relatively successful in recent years, with an average of 2.6 million monthly visitors to its websites,²³⁰ 41 million annual podcast downloads²³¹ and over one million iPhone app downloads to date.²³² The international services have not fared as well, although as a result of its English language-learning content, Radio Australia's website receives approximately 1.4 million visitors per month.²³³ Damien Dempsey, Executive Producer of ABC International Online, admits that Radio Australia and Australia Network have considerable work to do if either is to distinguish itself from both the local and international competition, identify the most effective ways to make personal connections with audiences, and implement these strategies in key Asia-Pacific markets.²³⁴

To date, targeted efforts to engage Indonesian and Chinese users in online dialogue have met with varying degrees of success. In 2009, Radio Australia launched *Rantang*, a blog designed to connect with socially mobile Indonesian audiences interested in visiting Australia for study, travel or work.²³⁵ Despite high hopes for this

²³⁰ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2009), pp. 2; 96.

²³¹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2008b), p. 30.

²³² Australian Broadcasting Corporation Media Room (2010b), *ABC achieves record figures across mobile devices* [online]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/corp/pubs/media/s2999511.htm> [Accessed 3 October 2010].

²³³ Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (2009), p. 14.

²³⁴ Dempsey (2010).

²³⁵ Radio Australia (2009).

website, *Rantang* has so far struggled, attracting only 20,000 users per month; a particularly poor figure in comparison to the 250,000 hits recorded each month by Radio Australia's Vietnamese website, *Bay Vut*.²³⁶ Dempsey suggests there are three key reasons for *Rantang*'s failure: a tendency to focus on news, rather than the entertainment and lifestyle content more suited to its target audience; an inability to compete with a host of more established, popular Indonesian digital media providers like *Detik* and *Kaskus*; and a confusing name – a *rantang* is a multi-compartment food container, an object which bears little relevance to what the website hopes to achieve.²³⁷ Such fundamental oversights indicate that at present, the ABC is unsure of how it wants to engage Indonesian users online.

Similar troubles plague the ABC in China, with Dempsey describing Radio Australia's online Chinese offering as a “sorry, stale old website which is very web 1.0... it's not a modern service in terms of being engaged with its audience”.²³⁸ By web 1.0, Dempsey is referring to what has become known as the first Internet age, where web pages were generally static structures, with few opportunities for user participation.²³⁹ Indeed, a brief exploration of Radio Australia's Chinese language site demonstrates that it offers few multimedia or interactive features beyond English language-learning materials.

Notwithstanding the condition of this website, however, the ABC faces two other significant obstacles in reaching Chinese audiences online. First, as a result of the Chinese government's strict regime of regulation and censorship discussed in Chapter

²³⁶ Dempsey (2010).

²³⁷ Dempsey (2010).

²³⁸ Dempsey (2010).

²³⁹ Flew, Terry (2008), *New Media: an introduction*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, p. 19.

Two, Internet usage in China is almost entirely dominated by domestic providers. As Dempsey argues, this makes it very difficult for the ABC to achieve even limited public diplomacy exposure online:

What are people doing on the Internet in China? They're on *QQ*,²⁴⁰ they're operating in social media spaces that are Chinese... They've got their own Internet; they've got *Baidu*,²⁴¹ their own search engines and news portals and so on. So what the hell do we do about that?²⁴²

Recent site rankings confirm the existence of a parallel Chinese webscape; as of October 2010, only two foreign sites – Google and Yahoo – featured among the top twenty most popular websites in China.²⁴³ Such a constraint leaves international broadcasters like the ABC “hanging in there on the edge”,²⁴⁴ unable to reach, let alone effectively engage, China’s fast-growing online population.

Second, the ABC does not have an effective social media strategy to build user engagement. In terms of social media, Dempsey says that Radio Australia and Australia Network “do all the things you’re supposed to do” – including maintaining Twitter feeds, Facebook sites and YouTube channels – and reports a “reasonably

²⁴⁰ QQ is China’s second most popular website, an instant messaging service with more than 100 million members.

Source: China Internet Watch (2010), *100 million simultaneous users on QQ* [online]. Available:

<http://www.chinainternetwatch.com/585/100-million-simultaneous-users-on-qq/> [Accessed 12 September 2010].

²⁴¹ Baidu is China’s most popular website, a search engine that indexes over 740 million web pages.

Source: Orbicom (2008), *Digital Review of Asia Pacific 2007/2008*, London: Sage Publications, p. 134.

²⁴² Dempsey (2010).

²⁴³ Alexa (2010), *Top Sites in China* [online]. Available:

<http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/CN> [Accessed 3 October 2010].

²⁴⁴ Dempsey (2010).

good take-up” of these services.²⁴⁵ Yet the ABC’s attempts to interact with Asian audiences via global social networking services have been less successful than those of their international broadcast competitors: as of October 2010, Australia Network’s Learning English Twitter feed attracted only 288 followers compared to Radio Australia’s 1,781, the BBC World Service’s 6,776 and Voice of America’s 8,345;²⁴⁶ on Facebook, Radio Australia had only 354 fans, compared to Australia Network’s 1,083, the BBC’s 1,240 and VOA’s 1,477.²⁴⁷ In China, both Twitter and Facebook are banned,²⁴⁸ and while Dempsey notes that a handful of Radio Australia groups have been set up in QQ, he reports that they have no official relation to the ABC and are only occasionally monitored by staff from the Chinese service.

These missed public diplomacy opportunities point towards a recurring theme: neither Radio Australia nor Australia Network have the resources to fully explore, develop or maintain any sophisticated dialogic interaction with Asian users. According to Dempsey, budgetary constraints mean that his team is unable to adequately invest in social media, investigate the possibilities of mobile applications, or build on the existing success of English language-learning podcasts and vodcasts by more fully developing opportunities for e-learning.²⁴⁹ Mark Scott confirms that in recent years, the ABC has received “no funding for these technologies at all”,²⁵⁰ meaning that any new interactive initiatives must be supported within the division’s existing budget.

²⁴⁵ Dempsey (2010).

²⁴⁶ Twitter (2010) [online]. Available: <http://twitter.com> [Accessed 3 October 2010].

²⁴⁷ Facebook (2010) [online]. Available: <http://www.facebook.com> [Accessed 3 October 2010].

²⁴⁸ Wauters, Robin (2009), ‘China blocks access to Facebook, Twitter after riots’, *The Washington Post*, 7 July 2009 [online]. Available: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2009/07/07/AR2009070701162.html> [Accessed 23 September 2010].

²⁴⁹ Dempsey (2010).

²⁵⁰ Scott (2010).

For Dempsey, such pressures also suggest a significant lack of institutional and industrial understanding of the unprecedented potential that mobile and social media hold for the exercise of public diplomacy activity:

This is an interesting one for a TV or radio executive to get their head around, because they're just trying to figure out how they can put a transcript or a vodcast up on a website – and when you come to them and tell them that those things are dead, and that it's about social media, they ask “what's that?” I think we really underestimate the clout that Facebook and Twitter and these things have, as a traditional media organisation.²⁵¹

Further indicative of this disconnect is DFAT's classification of Australia Network's website as an “ancillary service” in the ABC's contract; this is an approach that Dempsey describes as “the classic way of seeing the web – circa 2000, probably – if you're a television executive”.²⁵²

Dempsey says he is hopeful that with Mark Scott at the helm, the next few years may hold significant potential for new opportunities for the ABC's international services online. Hanh Tran reports that Radio Australia's Chinese service has recently recruited a new executive producer, is currently transitioning from shortwave-only to exploring online and mobile capabilities, and will hopefully come to act as a model for the future development of all of Radio Australia's language services.²⁵³

Tran, however, also warned that due to the diversity of geography, technology and development across the region, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to new media publishing. In Indonesia, it is impossible for any one signal to reach all 17,500 islands, meaning that rather than being able to consolidate their presence onto a single

²⁵¹ Dempsey (2010).

²⁵² Dempsey (2010).

²⁵³ Tran (2010).

platform, Radio Australia and Australia Network must continue transmitting a costly combination of shortwave, satellite, and FM signals.²⁵⁴ In some instances this arrangement is effective – Australia Network, for example, is available as part of the basic package offered by Indonesia’s major satellite provider, Indovision, which means that while audiences have to pay more to access channels like the BBC or CNN, Australia Network is automatically available to its entire subscriber base.²⁵⁵

On the other hand, Mike McCluskey notes that it is increasingly difficult for Radio Australia to reach Indonesia via FM radio, given the sudden and significant increase in domestic providers competing for a limited number of licences as a result of the deregulation of Indonesia’s media market following the fall of the Suharto regime.²⁵⁶ He also says that while shortwave was once the most effective way to reach audiences in Indonesia, it is increasingly being overtaken by a variety of other platforms in many parts of Indonesia, particularly in more developed and urban areas,²⁵⁷ leaving Radio Australia guessing as to what their most effective approach in any given market will be in the future.

Damien Dempsey describes this issue of uneven technological development across Asia and the Pacific as one of the biggest hurdles currently facing the ABC in terms of both its international broadcasting and public diplomacy endeavours. While China has in recent years developed into a strong mobile media market – often far ahead of Australia in terms of both uptake and diversity – it remains that “you’re not going to be streaming live radio on an iPhone in the outback of Sumatra for a long time – or

²⁵⁴ Tran (2010).

²⁵⁵ Dover (2010)

²⁵⁶ McCluskey (2010).

²⁵⁷ McCluskey (2010).

even in Jakarta, given the costs”.²⁵⁸ On a limited budget, however, it is unclear how Radio Australia and Australia Network will be able to meet the needs of audiences at both ends of the spectrum.

Mark Scott says that his approach is to focus first on the creation of strong content, and then on how the ABC can calibrate this content so that “different audiences can get it in the way and at the time they want”, whether this means strengthening FM radio in the Pacific or implementing an aggressive 3G and 4G mobile strategy in Asia’s most developed cities. To Scott, reaching listeners and viewers throughout such a diverse region means moving beyond the traditional broadcasting mantra of “this is television, television is x and it’s got to be experienced in a certain way”, to ensuring that the ABC’s content is available for audiences whenever, wherever and however they choose to engage with it.²⁵⁹ Yet he is also aware that in order to develop a strong presence in Asia, to tailor content across a range of platforms, and to effectively distribute and market this content in key countries like Indonesia and China, more investment will be required – particularly if Australia hopes to keep pace with the recent investments of its G20 competitors.²⁶⁰ This, it seems, is the problem that plagues Radio Australia and Australia Network at every turn, and will continue to considerably limit the effectiveness of Australia’s public diplomacy efforts in Asia in the years to come unless significant changes are made in the way that both the ABC and the Australian government approach the exercise of soft power.

²⁵⁸ Dempsey (2010).

²⁵⁹ Scott (2010).

²⁶⁰ Scott (2010).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the ABC's international services are currently at a crossroads between the old international broadcasting model of colonialism and the new public diplomacy paradigm of engagement.

It is clear that one of the greatest challenges facing Radio Australia and Australia Network is that of putting to rest their colonial heritage and acknowledging the diversities and complexities of Asian audiences. The struggle for relevance is considerable: while international broadcasters once held a monopoly on markets like Indonesia, new domestic providers are now forcing them to the perimeter. At present, Radio Australia and Australia Network's greatest success in Asian markets is as providers of English language-learning, although Australia Network is developing an increasing number of relationships with local rebroadcasters.

It has further been established that despite Australia Network's current one-size-fits-all approach to television programming, there is no such thing as effective pan-regional broadcasting. This means that if the ABC hopes to consolidate its presence beyond the Asia-Pacific, it will need to develop both market-specific content and new ways of distributing this content to audiences. There is a strong awareness among ABC managers that online, mobile and social media may hold the key to the Corporation's future interaction with audiences across Asia, but evidence shows that recent exploration and investment in this area has been minimal, with Australia likely to soon fall even further behind its G20 counterparts. As with all other areas of its international services, this lack of political will and financial security is at the heart of the ABC's recent struggles to succeed as a vehicle of Australian soft power.

The final chapter will draw together the arguments made throughout this thesis about the challenges the ABC's international services have recently faced in terms of political independence, resource dependence, colonialism and engagement. It will reflect on the findings of my original research into the effectiveness of Radio Australia and Australia Network in Indonesia and China and suggest this project's contribution to the field.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by questioning the grounds for Australian Broadcasting Corporation Managing Director Mark Scott's proposal for 'a global ABC'. Scott's ambitious plan, which this study indicates was prompted by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's desire for Australia to cement its position as a regional leader and global middle power, suggested that an expanded international broadcasting strategy could dramatically change the shape of the nation's contribution to international communication and governance.

I have sought to determine the plausibility of Scott's vision by critically evaluating the contemporary effectiveness of the ABC's international broadcast services as tools of Australian public diplomacy. A series of qualitative interviews with six senior ABC managers, including Mark Scott, and four academic specialists in Asian political and media research – combined with detailed analysis of a variety of political and policy documents – informed my case study of Radio Australia and Australia Network television's soft power activities in Indonesia and China under the Rudd/Gillard Labor government from 2007 – 2010. Frame analysis was used to identify how the strategic actors involved in the daily operation and evaluation of these services perceive their recent achievements, problems and challenges.

Drawing on a wide range of existing academic work, Chapter One presented the theoretical framework upon which my original research was based. First, I determined that while the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy are increasingly influential in the global foreign policy environment, they remain largely unexplored in an Australian context, particularly in terms of the role that international

broadcasting plays in such pursuits. Second, I found that the ABC's history of engagement with Asian audiences has been littered with a range of financial, political and cultural obstacles that have significantly impeded its ability to develop and maintain a consistent and effective public diplomacy presence in the region. Third, I identified four interpretive frames – political independence, resource dependence, colonialism and engagement – based on existing scholarly approaches to understanding soft power within the international broadcasting environment, which have allowed me to analyse and structure my argument about the ABC's contemporary capacities for public diplomacy.

Chapter Two explored the ways in which my interviewees employed the first two frames, political independence and resource dependence, to discuss the recent public diplomacy impact of Radio Australia and Australia Network. This chapter investigated three major challenges to the ABC's independence: the influence of the federal government on the Corporation's international strategy and priorities; the impact of Australia's regional relationships on how the ABC is perceived in the Asia-Pacific; and the role of regulation and censorship in key broadcast markets. I also determined in this chapter that the ABC's international services currently face significant financial challenges, placing them at a considerable disadvantage to their competitors in countries like Indonesia and China.

Chapter Three discussed in detail my second set of frames, colonialism and engagement. This chapter explored three difficulties currently facing Radio Australia and Australia Network in their efforts to understand and demonstrate cultural relevance to diverse audiences across the Asian region: overcoming the ABC's colonial past to recognise the contemporary complexities of Indonesian and Chinese audiences; finding new ways to reach and connect with these listeners and viewers

among an explosion of new domestic providers; and harnessing a range of cutting-edge online, mobile and social media technologies to engage local communities in meaningful and effective dialogue.

Together, these chapters suggest three key obstacles to the ABC's ability to develop and maintain an effective public diplomacy presence in Indonesia and China.

First, Radio Australia and Australia Network simply do not receive adequate funding to compete with other major international broadcasters in the region. It is evident from discussions with both ABC management and academic commentators that as long as governments continue to fund the ABC inconsistently, in accordance with fluctuating political will and without any bipartisan commitment to its long-term financial security, its international services are likely to fall even further behind their competition, risking the loss of even the small audiences they currently command. A similarly indifferent approach from governments of both persuasions towards the development of and investment in Australia's broader public diplomacy program demonstrates a critical misunderstanding of the potential of soft power in the contemporary international environment.

Second, the ABC's dependence upon the federal government of the day for funding and strategic support calls the independence of its international services into question. While it is clear that any successful public diplomacy broadcasting effort must be able to demonstrate its independence from both domestic and foreign political forces, it remains that Radio Australia and Australia Network are in large part captive to both the foreign policy priorities and performance of the Australian federal government, as well as the political, cultural and regulatory sensitivities of foreign governments, such as in China. While these factors are largely beyond the ABC's control, they have a

significant impact on the extent to which Radio Australia and Australia Network to are perceived as credible and impartial voices in the Asia-Pacific region.

Finally, it is clear that the ABC's pan-regional approach to broadcasting in the Asia-Pacific, in part a result of its budgetary constraints, impedes its ability to engage its audiences in a credible, localised and relevant way. While the cost of developing unique program schedules and producing targeted content in countries like Indonesia and China is currently prohibitive, the inability of Australia Network in particular to speak to viewers in their own languages about issues that concern them is only encouraging audiences to turn to a new breed of domestic media providers armed with native staff and local knowledge. If the ABC hopes to eventually expand beyond Australia's neighbouring region into the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, it must seriously weigh the value of continuing a pan-regional, multi-genre service against the development of more targeted, niche offerings.

Despite these problems, however, *A Global ABC* should not be dismissed as an impossible dream. This thesis has discovered a number of opportunities that show great potential for the development of Radio Australia and Australia Network as tools of Australian public diplomacy, including the partnerships they have formed with popular local radio networks like Ramako and Maraghita in Indonesia and powerful television services like CCTV and the Shanghai Media Group in China; the success to date of English language-learning programming, available via podcast, vodcast and in person at the Study English Roadshow; and the growing number of local, provincial and national rebroadcasters who are willing to stake their reputation on the quality and relevance of ABC content by featuring Radio Australia or Australia Network programming on a daily or weekly basis.

It may be that even a modest increase in funding to its international services would allow the ABC to explore a wealth of new soft power possibilities, including: conducting detailed audience research across the region, to better understand how Radio Australia and Australia Network can meet the needs and preferences of Asian audiences in an increasingly crowded field; developing targeted programming schedules and content in key markets like Indonesia and China, taking into account the cultural, geographic and linguistic diversities and peculiarities of these target nations; and dedicating more resources to the cultivation of sophisticated, culturally relevant online, mobile and social media strategies, to take advantage of the opportunities for personalised engagement and interaction that these new technologies offer.

This research has been completed at a critical time for both the Australian federal government and the ABC. The field of international relations is changing, with the rise of soft power and public diplomacy as essential strategies for asserting national influence on the world stage. The international broadcasting environment is similarly being transformed by the entrance of new players alongside the renewed commitment of old powers, all willing to invest significantly to ensure that their voices are heard. This research aims to aid Australian institutions to make decisions about the extent to which they want to be involved in both public diplomacy and international broadcasting in the twenty-first century.

Through its study of the recent activities of Radio Australia and Australia Network in Indonesia and China and its proposal of a methodological framework with which the impact of such activities can be evaluated, this thesis offers a significant contribution to current debates regarding the future of the ABC's international services specifically, and that of Australia's public diplomacy program more broadly. It

complements the Lowy Institute's recent analysis, particularly through its unique focus on the ABC's social and cultural influence in two key broadcast markets. This study is also notable for its application of frame analysis to strategic communications research; to date, no framing studies evaluated by this author have employed this method in order to develop an understanding of how the perceptions of strategic actors can help us measure effectiveness or impact in the international broadcasting sphere.

This study offers a number of opportunities for future research. First, it is clear that any future examination of the contribution of Radio Australia and Australia Network to Australia's public diplomacy program would benefit from the support and involvement of the federal government departments responsible for their financial security and strategic deployment, something which this project lacked. While I have referred to a wide range of government documents to fill these gaps, I have been limited in the extent to which my research could provide insights into the government's perception of the national public diplomacy program, the ABC's role within it and the value and function of soft power to Australia's foreign policy outlook. In light of the forthcoming delivery of the Gillard government's official response to the Senate Inquiry into Australian public diplomacy and DFAT's decision about the Australia Network contract, investigation into the perspectives of each of these government departments will be of particular interest in the near future.

Second, while this case study focuses on the public diplomacy impact of the ABC's international services in two specific Asian markets, the framework developed throughout could be similarly applied to assess the effectiveness of Radio Australia and Australia Network in other countries, or to evaluate the contribution of other state-funded international broadcasters worldwide.

Finally, beyond the questions this thesis has explored, regarding the recent effectiveness of the ABC's international services, is a range of equally complex debates about what the rest of the twenty-first century will hold for Australia's national public broadcaster and its role in domestic affairs. In an era of political uncertainty, fiscal austerity and increasing audience expectations, the challenges faced by the ABC are not only international, but also domestic. I hope that this study will reignite scholarly interest in discussing, analysing and imagining the future possibilities of not only a global, but also a local Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

APPENDIX A

Sample interview schedule

ABC management

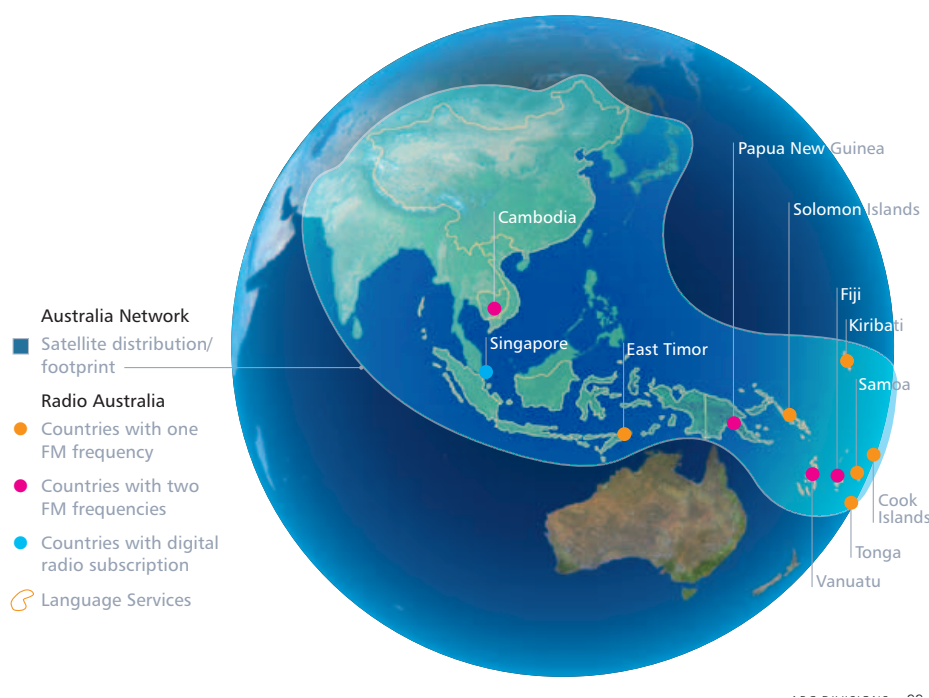
- How does Radio Australia/Australia Network understand soft power/public diplomacy? How important are these concepts in the current environment?
- To what extent is Radio Australia/Australia Network a vehicle of Australian public diplomacy? How effective is it? How is this measured?
- How important is Indonesia/China to Radio Australia/Australia Network? What evidence can you present of recent effectiveness in these markets?
- What are the major challenges of the Asian broadcasting market and why?
- What are your current funding and staffing levels, and how does this limit your ability to reach audiences, compete and explore new opportunities?
- What role do regulation and censorship play in Indonesia and China?
- What impact do online, mobile and social media have on your service?
- Who are Radio Australia/Australia Network's major competitors in Indonesia/China? How do you rank in terms of exposure, reach and feedback?
- How do you differentiate your service from your major competitors?
- How do you maintain your independence from government? What impacts do changing governments have on Radio Australia/Australia Network's service?
- What are the most/least popular programs/service offered by Radio Australia/Australia Network in Indonesia/China? Why?
- How feasible is Mark Scott's vision for a global ABC?
- What is your vision for the future of Radio Australia/Australia Network in terms of strategic priorities, audience engagement and public diplomacy?

Academic commentators

- How are the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy understood in the Australian context? How important are they in this country? How seriously are they taken by the government at present?
- How can we measure soft power in the international environment? Any examples of this being done effectively?
- How effective is Australia's current public diplomacy program in reaching populations across Asia? In Indonesia/China specifically?
- What impact has Kevin Rudd's Labor government had on Australia's public diplomacy presence? On the ABC's role in this program?
- How effective is the ABC as a tool of public diplomacy in Indonesia/China? What are its most effective international services? What are its biggest constraints/challenges in Indonesia/China?
- What impact do Australian foreign policy decisions have on Australia's reputation in the region? What impact do these have on the ABC's reputation?
- Who are the ABC's major competitors in the region and how do they compare in terms of exposure, reach and feedback?
- What are the implications of the emergence of online, mobile and social media for public diplomacy?
- How feasible is Mark Scott's vision for a global ABC? What factors might compromise its success?
- What opportunities does Radio Australia/Australia Network have to improve their services in Indonesia/China? To improve their public diplomacy effectiveness?

APPENDIX B

The ABC's footprint in Asia and the Pacific



How to access the ABC in Indonesia and China

Indonesia

Radio Australia: online via live English and Indonesian streams and podcasts; twelve shortwave frequencies; two satellites (Intelsat 8 and 10); partner station rebroadcasters.

Australia Network: online via video on demand, vodcasts and YouTube; one satellite (Intelsat 8); satellite rebroadcasters including Indovision, First Media and Telkomvision.

China

Radio Australia: online via live English and Mandarin streams and podcasts; ten shortwave frequencies; two satellites (Intelsat 8 and 10); partner station rebroadcasters.

Australia Network: online via video on demand, vodcasts and YouTube; one satellite (Intelsat 8); agreement of co-operation with CCTV, Chongqing Television and Radio Group and International Channel Shanghai.

APPENDIX C

Images of the ABC's international services online

All images reproduced with permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation

The screenshot shows the ABC International website. At the top, the ABC International logo is displayed. Below it, a banner states: "ABC International promotes the ABC's values of honesty, fairness, independence and respect by facilitating cross-cultural communication, encouraging awareness of Australia and building regional partnerships." The main content area is divided into several sections: "International Projects" with a "Go to our website" link; "International Relations" with a "Email us" link; "Pacific Pulse" with a "Read their blog My" link; "Our international broadcasters:" which includes "Radio Australia" and "Australia Network", each with a "Go to our website" link and their respective logos.

ABC International online

<http://www.abc.net.au/international/>

The screenshot shows the Radio Australia website. At the top, the Radio Australia logo and "70 Years" anniversary banner are visible. A "LISTEN NOW" button with "LIVE" and "PODCASTS" options is prominent. The navigation menu includes "Home", "News", "Program Guide", "Ways to Listen", "Learn English", "Languages", "About Us", "Services", and "Contact Us". The main content area features a "News" section with a search bar and several news items, including "North Korea reportedly prepares for historic military parade", "India promises to have housing ready for Delhi Games", and "Indonesian prosecutor pushes for death penalty for Rush". A "Three Australian soldiers" image is also present. On the right side, there is a "Search all Radio Australia" bar and a list of programs such as "Asia Pacific", "Asia Pacific Business", "Connect Asia", "Correspondent's Notebook", "Innovations", "In the Loop", "Pacific Beat", "Radio Australia Today", "The Australian Bite", and "Tech Stream".

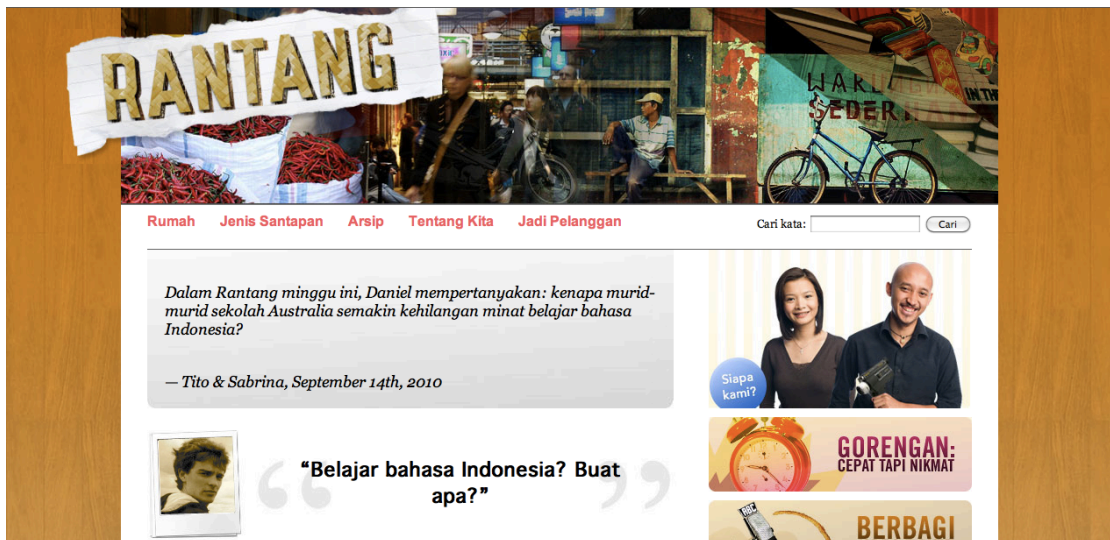
Radio Australia online

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/>



Radio Australia online – Chinese service

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/chinese/>



Radio Australia online – Indonesian service *Rantang*

<http://www.rantang.com.au/>



Australia Network online

<http://australianetwork.com/>



Australia Network online – English-language learning website

<http://australianetwork.com/learningenglish/>

Coverage Area

Australia Network is broadcast in a number of ways throughout the Asia Pacific region and our list of providers is expanding. The map shows where we currently broadcast and the ways you can watch us are detailed further below.

Select your location on the map to reveal the ways to watch Australia Network where you are. To Zoom in to your location use the + button.

Australia Network online – coverage map

<http://australianetwork.com/tuning/>

ABC International Projects
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Home About Us Projects Links Jobs Staff Room

ABC International Projects works with media organisations to help them find their own path to sustainability and growth. We are part of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Read more about who we are

A journalist from PNG's National Broadcasting Corporation reporting in Kundiawa, Simbu Province

What's New
Introducing Cornelius Rathamana
Meet the General Manager of Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation

ABC International Projects online

<http://abcinternationalprojects.net.au/>

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