

# *An Analysis of the Changing Role of the Western Media and the Role It Plays in International Relations*

**Xu Liang**

*Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China*

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**Abstract:** With the development of science and technology, the world has entered the era of all-media. In the all-media era, Western media still occupies a dominant position and still profoundly influences the changes in international relations. National soft power has gradually become one of the indicators to measure the comprehensive power of a country, and the concept of soft power is gradually accepted by people all over the world. Against this background, the role played by the Western media in international relations has gradually changed, and the role it plays in international relations has also gradually changed. This article analyses the changing role of the Western media in international relations and the role it plays in international relations, with a view to providing useful references.

## **1. Introduction**

In the past, traditional media was the main channel for international information transmission, which mainly included newspapers, radio, television, magazines and so on. Western countries used traditional media to dominate international relations, and even dominated the international media landscape. With the development of information technology and the rapid rise of the Internet, the deep integration of new media with traditional media, represented by the Internet, has brought the world into the era of all-media. Western countries have seized the opportunity of the all-media era to continue to maintain their dominant position in the international media landscape, and they play an important role in international relations, which is difficult for other countries to reach[1]. However, with the advent of the all-media era, the role played by the Western media in international relations has quietly changed, but what has remained constant is that the Western media has been intervening in international events and influencing the course of international relations through the media as a means.

## **2. The Interaction between Western Media and International Relations in Different Communication Eras**

### **2.1 Newspaper Era**

The first form of media to emerge in international relations was the newspaper, and the newspaper industry matured through hand-copied news, news books, weekly magazines and daily

newspapers. 1702 saw the publication of the American Daily News in London, England, which became the progenitor of the modern daily newspaper. After more than two hundred years of development, the newspaper industry reached its zenith in the 1930s.

The most typical example of newspapers influencing international relations in the handling of international relations is the Vietnam War. The New York Times continuously published the core content of the attitude and policy of the US high command towards the Vietnam War, which attracted widespread domestic and international attention. The defeat of the Vietnam War was caused by the wrong decisions of the US government, which wanted to cover up its mistakes, and eventually the US government was forced by public opinion to withdraw the troops stationed in Vietnam to their own country.

## 2.2 Broadcast Phase

After newspapers, radio entered the media industry and grew considerably. Broadcasting in the West began in the 1920s and reached its heyday in the 1940s.

The most typical example of the influence of broadcasting in the conduct of international relations is the Cold War. Historically, the Cold War was a “cold confrontation” between the socialist camp, represented by the Soviet Union, and the capitalist camp, represented by Britain and the United States. The US military used the Voice of America to interfere with the psychological defences of the Soviet Union and other countries, and in response the socialist camp, led by the Soviet Union, began to use radio to interfere with them. In the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe were, to some extent, influenced by the Voice of America.

## 2.3 Tv Stage

With its ability to output not only sound and text, but also video, television has gradually replaced broadcasting as the dominant form of international media with its powerful features.

The most typical example of television influencing international relations in the handling of international relations is the Gulf War. During the Gulf War, the US military set rules that no journalist could conduct interviews without being accompanied by the military, but CNN television managed to avoid censorship and used television to expose the inhumane bombing by the US military, which drew widespread international attention for a while [2].

## 2.4 Internet Phase

The Internet is a form of media that has had a much deeper impact on international relations. The Internet business in the West began in the 1980s and, through the 1990s, is now entering a phase of rapid development.

The influence of the Internet in the conduct of international relations has far surpassed that of newspapers, radio and television, and has become the dominant and most effective form of media in the conduct of international relations. A prime example of this is the Arab Spring revolutions, where the self-immolation of Mohammed al-Buwaji was met with sympathy by a large number of Internet users, who used the power of the Internet to mobilise the nation and eventually overthrow the regime.

## 2.5 New Media Phase

The information age has gone through the stages of 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G, which have also given

rise to new forms of media such as Weibo and WeChat. The new media phase is an extension of the Internet phase, and can also be combined with the Internet phase.

In the new media phase, Western countries have taken advantage of the instantaneous, virtual and time-spanning nature of new media such as Twitter and its advantages in terms of public opinion guidance, social mobilisation and image building to fully intervene in international events and consolidate and perpetuate their dominance in the international communication landscape. “Twitter has had a significant impact on social events such as demonstrations in a number of countries, and has contributed to new changes in the international landscape through the impact of new media on international communication.

### **3. The Changing Role of the Western Media in International Relations**

#### **3.1 The Role of Communicator Remains the Same**

The media has a great social responsibility, which is related to the stability and order of society and the direction of public opinion. When engaging in journalism, the most important thing is the word responsibility, which is a sense of duty to the country and to the people. Therefore, the media needs to have a strong sense of social responsibility and mission. Only by strengthening the social responsibility of the media can they maintain the objectivity of news dissemination and gradually mature, and their influence and credibility can be established in the minds of consumers and stand up in the fierce communication environment.

The most basic function of the media is to communicate, and in no era does the media's communication function change, which is why the Western media has always played the role of communicator in international relations. Among the various types of information, such as political, economic, cultural and war information, the dissemination of war information has received the most attention. The role of the Western media as a communicator has never changed, and this consistent role is unlikely to change in the future. Although the role has not changed, the ability to communicate has increased with the development of technology and information [3].

#### **3.2 From Critics to Image Destroyers or Image Repairers**

Another role of the Western media in international relations is that of critics, who always look at the world and report the news from their own standpoint, losing the objectivity of the news. Objectivity and truthfulness are the two main characteristics of news, but different people interpret news differently and the various interpretations of news are often intertwined with the facts of the news. The Western media uses its own moral standards to criticise news events in other countries, taking the moral high ground to criticise and boast of the greatness of its own values. But this critical function of the Western media can be used both by Western countries to destroy the image of other countries and by non-Western countries to repair their own good image.

In recent years, as China's comprehensive national power continues to grow, China has become more and more vocal in international affairs, and China has become the target of criticism by the Western media because of this. Through various news stories, the Western media have used various reasons to strongly criticise China and even to damage its international image. For example, statements such as The Great Firewall Of China; China scaling the firewall of digital censorship; China will not guarantee Web freedom over Olympics) and so on. At the same time, the news content reported by the Western media can also be used to our advantage. The Sunday Telegraph, for example, protested against some Western media outlets for passing on negative coverage of the Beijing Olympic torch in London, to great effect.

### **3.3 From Glorifier to Image Maker**

Although the Western media boasts of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, at critical times they often do things that are contrary to freedom of the press, either for their own interests or due to government pressure, and become glorifiers of government policies. It is true that in the past the Western media have not been mere glorifiers of policy, but they have also opposed their own governments, particularly in the case of the Vietnam War and the fall of Nixon. For the most part, however, the Western media has moved in the same direction as government policy. The Western media has gradually moved closer to government policy. Previously the Western media was used as a glorifier of policy, but now it has moved in a deeper direction and has become an image maker of government.

For example, in the aftermath of 9/11, under pressure from the government, the US media cooperated with the government in its campaign against terrorism, refraining from publishing news that was detrimental to US national security and becoming a glorifier of government policy. The *Invisible War*, directed by British war correspondent, author and producer John Pilger, exposes the ugly phenomenon of political elections in the United States, where many politicians, with the support of their backers, use the media to portray candidates in a positive light in order to gain public support, a phenomenon that is common in the West.

## **4. The Role Played by the Western Media in International Relations**

The Western media has always played an important role in the conduct of international relations and has played a significant role. With the advent of information technology and globalisation, the role of the Western media in international relations is constantly being improved, gradually developing to a deeper level and profoundly influencing the direction of international relations.

### **4.1 From Guiding the Direction of Public Opinion to Constructing the Ecology of Public Opinion**

Guiding public opinion is an important function of the media, and the Western media take this function to the extreme. International affairs rarely take place in the public's immediate vicinity because of the distance from the source of the events, and the public must use the power of the media to learn about international affairs from sources such as newspapers, radio, television or the internet. The public is informed about international affairs and makes its own judgements based on media reports as the only source of information. When media coverage is biased, public judgement is also skewed. Thus, media reports have a similar function as a 'baton', using their bias to guide public judgements towards a convergence and shape public opinion.

### **4.2 From Ideological Infiltration to Changing Public Attitudes**

The Western media's ideological infiltration of other countries by incorporating a specific ideology through its news coverage reached its peak during the Cold War. During the Cold War, Radio Martí, which was used by Western countries against the Cuban regime, Radio Asia, which was used against Asia, and Radio Free Europe, which was used against Eastern Europe in the former Soviet Union, were all important media tools to propagate their values and carry out ideological struggles. The Western media has never given up its ideological infiltration, and in recent years has been promoting human rights, democracy and other so-called "universal values". Despite the claim of freedom of the press, the Western media still inevitably report the news with a certain ideological bias. In addition to ideology, there has been a boom in public diplomacy in the

developed West in recent years. In this boom, the Western media is an essential vehicle for public diplomacy. The governments and consortia of Western countries are well aware of the communication role of the media, and they can use the media to report on their political agenda and public opinion in the direction they want it to go in order to achieve their goals.

### 4.3 From Influencing Foreign Policy-Making to Influencing International Issues

Western media coverage of news events not only directs attention but also influences governments' foreign policy decisions. Some scholars have studied the relationship between media attention to conflict and whether governments make intervening foreign policy decisions, concluding that media attention is directly linked to intervening decisions, with media attention increasing the likelihood of intervention in internal conflicts. Intervention also increases media attention.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the Western media has consistently failed to maintain objectivity and truthfulness in its coverage of international news, seeking to portray a good national image for its own news and to criticise and undermine news coverage of other countries. Its role in international relations has further deepened, influencing foreign policy decisions to influencing international issues. In response, we should take a range of measures to counteract this.

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