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International Broadcasting: An Important Tool To Promote Mutual Understanding

By

Xia Jixuan
and
Du Baichuan
COUNTRY PAPER FOR

BROADCASTING MANAGEMENT 2000:

PROGRAM TRENDS AND

PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

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CHINESE MINISTRY OF RADIO, FILM & TV
(PART I)

INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING
AN IMPORTANT TOOL
TO PROMOTE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

International broadcasting has become a powerful and advanced mass medium as the world approaches the 21st century. Scientific and technological progresses have greatly improved short-wave transmission, but, international broadcasting still faces a serious challenge — how to improve programming to ensure survival in the marketplace. I believe international broadcasting is a fast and effective method for cross-border information exchange, and therefore, it should serve the sacred goal of promoting mutual understanding among the peoples of the world.

China Radio International, C.R.I., is a state-run radio station whose goal is to help foreign listeners get a better understanding of China. In order to carry out this task, we have tried to improve our programming in the following areas:

A. SETTING UP CRI NEWS-GATHERING NETWORK

Before the 1980's, CRI's newscasts used to be based on wire stories from the Xinhua News Agency and other major Chinese newspapers. That was why CRI got the nickname: "Secondhand Newscaster". Another problem with this arrangement was that the news items were not written for an overseas audience.

In 1980, CRI began setting up a nationwide news-gathering network. It also has established overseas correspondent bureaus in 19 foreign capitals or major cities, such as Tokyo, Washington, Paris, Sidney, Moscow and Mexico City.
This has not only greatly improved the timeliness of our newscasts, but also enabled us to write news items that are of special interest to our listeners abroad.

B. CHANGING PROGRAM FORMAT TO CATER TO LISTENERS’ INTEREST

CRI’s programs are mostly in the one-hour format, offering comprehensive programming, including news, commentary, features and music. In the past, CRI had a few regular features, such as "CULTURE IN CHINA", "CHINA IN CONSTRUCTION" and "TRAVEL TALK".

Over the past decade, in an effort to help people abroad better understand China’s reform and opening-up policies and gain their support for our modernization drive, CRI added new features, such as "ECONOMIC CONSTRUCTION AND REFORM", "SOCIAL LIFE" and "CHINA’S MINORITIES". Some language departments have set up special programs for their particular audience. For example, the English Service has "CURRENT AFFAIRS" and "CHINESE COOKING"; the Japanese Service has "CHINA REPORTS" and "ANCIENT CHINESE JOKES"; and the Arab Service has "CHINESE MUSLIMS", to name just a few. At the same time, many language services have adopted the host-format so that their programs are more lively and attractive.

Additionally, CRI has tried hard to develop new broadcast formats. For example, we have ventured into live-coverage of major events in China. During major Chinese festivals or festive seasons in target countries, relevant language departments also run special programs to bring holiday greetings to our audience. This kind of programs are among our listeners’ favorites.

From time to time, CRI runs specials with overseas radio stations that require audience participation. These specials have been highly successful.
C. OPENING UP NEW CHANNELS FOR OVERSEAS BROADCASTING

1) Improving Overseas Reception Through Renting Transmitters And Mutual Program-relay Arrangement With Foreign Radio Stations

Reception of CRI's signals used to be poor or impossible in Africa, Europe and North America because most of CRI's programs were transmitted by low-power transmitters with no overseas relay stations. The situation has improved greatly since 1987 when CRI agreed to mutual program-relay with radio stations in Canada, France, Spain, Switzerland and other countries. It has also since entered agreements to rent air time from radio stations in Brazil, Mali, Russia and the United States.

2) Exchanging Programs With Foreign Radio Stations

Exchanging programs with foreign radio stations is another way to extend our coverage. We have paid special attention to sending programs to foreign radio stations to be used on their AM or FM broadcasts. This method, also known as the "second front of international broadcasting", provides much better reception in the target areas than short-wave broadcasts. In 1992, CRI sent a total of 14-hundred hours of programs to radio stations in 54 countries and regions.

3) Launching Domestic Foreign-language-broadcasts To Cater To Foreign Residents, Tourists And Business People Inside China

Over the past decade, China has seen a big increase in the number of people from other countries, who come as tourists, experts or advisers to aid China's development, and business people. In order to make life easier for them and keep them better informed about what's going on around them, CRI launched an English Service in the capital area in 1984. Later on, other languages were added and the programming is now relayed to 15
other Chinese cities.

D. CRI BOASTS LISTENERS ALL OVER THE WORLD

As a result of all these changes, more and more foreign listeners are tuning in to our programs. Many listeners wrote in, saying that our programs "are no longer full of ideological terms" and "have become interesting". Since 1983, CRI has won recognition in several international DX ratings as the "Best Short-wave Radio Station In Asia", one of the world's "Most Popular Radio Stations" and the radio station with outstanding achievement in improving its programs. Several of CRI's documentaries have won rewards for the "Best Programs For International Broadcasting" in contests sponsored by ABU.

Ten years ago, CRI received an average of 78-thousand letters from overseas listeners a year. Last year, the number topped 328 thousand, a record in CRI history. These letters came from 170 countries and regions. If we follow commonly used letter/listener ratios, where one letter represents 300 to 500 listeners, CRI now boasts 160 million listeners around the world.

CRI is ready to work with our colleagues around the world to promote a better understanding and strengthen the friendship among all the peoples in the coming years.

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Author of Part I is Mr. Xia Jixuan, Deputy-director of CRI's English Service
A. INTRODUCTION

China is experiencing a rapid growth and change due to its reform and open policies. One of the fast growing areas is the country's broadcasting industry. China now has 700 radio stations, 592 TV stations with program production capacity, 700 cable TV stations and satellite earth stations. These have facilitated the great changes of the society.

The social change also changes people's mind, especially that of the young people. They have different ideas, interests and needs — they ask for more information and they have more time to develop hobbies or to seek entertainment. On the other hand, we are living in a technical transform age. New concepts, new equipment and new systems are being introduced into broadcasting every day. This makes it possible to produce new program formats, but that demands new knowledge and special skills, which simply means: MORE TRAINING.

A new training center has been set up by the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (TCMRFT), together with the Beijing Broadcasting Institute. The center provides adult training programs (including correspondence courses) to MRFT staff members.

B. ORGANIZATION OF TCMRFT

The training center has its own building inside the Beijing Broadcasting Institute. It's consisted of three parts: namely, the office, training and dormitory areas. The center can cater for 100 trainees at a time. The training area has five classrooms, one lecture hall and several seminar rooms as well
as a TV studio, an audio studio and several announcer training rooms. The equipment here is relatively old: for example, a 3/4 inch editing system with DME-450 digital video effects unit from Sony and 8-channel audio mixer. However, we can use BBI’s facilities, lecturers and professors thanks to BBI’s friendly cooperation.

In terms of TCMRFT organization, there is the Director, two Deputy Directors and a Head of Office. They are in charge of the Training Department, the Correspondence Department and Logistics Department. Under the superintendence of corresponding MRFT departments, such as the Education Department, the Foreign Affairs Department and the Science & Technology Department, TCMRFT offers such programs as Before-Job Training (Qualification Training), Mid-career Training, Correspondence, Education, new and high technical training and training courses for new trainers.

C: FACING A CHANGING SOCIETY

Due to the reform and open policies, China is developing very fast. It has not only changed the country's economy, but also the society and people's concept:

* Although there is no commercial radio station, station management pays more attention to cost-effectiveness — which means higher program quality and more listeners.

* The Information Age is coming. There is an increasing need for business information: price changes on the market, foreign exchange rates, value of negotiable securities and stocks, etc..

* Improved living standard results in a greater demand for more entertainment and service programs.
There is a trend to run interactive programs through telephone nets.

No doubt, these changes and demands require radio staff members to adopt new attitudes, knowledge and skills so as to produce more audience-oriented programs. Now, new radio stations have come into being for targeted audience, such as music radio station, business information radio station, traffic information radio station and even special radio stations that provide the latest information about negotiable securities. Regular radio stations have also set up various programs and services to cater to special needs from the listeners, eg., play requested music or song during the Mother Festival and send flower to designated person.

D. FACING TECHNICAL CHANGES

Broadcasting industry is experiencing rapid changes in the technical area. Digital technique has been widely used in production and transmission. The current broadcasting system will soon be replaced by a new system: Single Site Band System, Digital Audio Broadcasting System and HDTV System, to name but a few. This means we must introduce new knowledge, new method and new concept in training. The new technical progress includes:

* Multi-media technique in audio production
* Single site band system
* Digital audio broadcasting
* Desk-top video studio system
* Digital video recorders
* Bit rate compression for cable TV transmission
* Off-line and on-line video editing system
E. NEW TRAINING CONCEPTS

Due to the above-mentioned changes and developments, I think the following points must be stressed in our training:

* Training must be cost-effective. We must regard training as an investment into staff.

* Training should offer courses in basic theory and practical skills to deal with basic technical changes.

* New training courses must be developed, combining different professional fields: arts and technical (Graphic and Animation Production, Special Effects Production), Computer and Video & Audio (Video Workstation, Audio Workstation).

* New technical attitudes must be adopted. Multiple generation ability of digital production does not need so many VTRs. Digital system has a different system structure; One-Man-Team ENG has different situation as well as SNG; Off-line editing has many advantages over normal editing.

* To develop human resources.

D. CONCLUSION

The world is changing and broadcasting training should catch up with it.

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Author of Part II is Mr. Du Baichuan, TCMRFT Director