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# Dissecting the Glocalization of Chinese Reality TV Shows

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## ABSTRACT

The Chinese media has expanded significantly in recent years along with the country's interest in investing in emerging nations as its relations with these nations deepen and with the spread of Chinese culture through the media. Since the Chinese government began implementing substantial projects in countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, the Chinese media has been distinguished by localizing its television programming to compete with the host countries and extending their feeling of soft power to these nations. The Chinese reality television programs have remained to be a staple of the television programming in their host nations despite encountering substantial hurdles related to cultural differences and technical advancement. Despite significant pushback from the initial global dominant media in these markets, Chinese reality television series have persisted to be part of the regular host countries' television program diet. As a result, this study examines these patterns with a focus on Chinese reality television shows that have entered the host countries' markets, as well as the motive for their evolution. The paper examines the extent to which states might use these tactics to balance their domestic production while maintaining friendly relations with China. It is critical to smidgeon the evolution of this critical phenomenon in the philosophical context of product internationalization and marketization. The article addresses these difficulties by drawing attention to them from many actors in this prominent field. This study is crucial because it debunks widespread myths about reality television, such as the notion that viewers should not expect spontaneous, unscripted programming. The morality of the claimed programming of reality television programs may even be considered.

## Keywords

Reality TV; shows; China; global; diplomacy

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of glocalization of reality TV series has recently gained traction. In China, for example, several scholars have immersed themselves in this topic, documenting various studies on the glocalization and transformation of Chinese reality TV shows by establishing the relationship between Chinese and international reality TV programs. According to Zhang and Guo (2012), reality TV shows in China are imported items that, after years of introduction and investigation, have finally

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taken root and, gradually, the country has begun to establish its brand. Recognizing the existing inadequacies of reality shows in China and the worldwide market is crucial for television programs' ever-competitive internationalization.

Because of the peculiarities of the unique form, China's reality TV program has displayed a spectacular style of development in recent years (Richeri, 2016). Field survival, entertainment, marriage and love, education, and the job are among the key fields of interest. The performing space for these reality TV shows has likewise evolved from a field to an indoor, studio, and concert-style large stage. The vivid style of these TV series has instantly addicted the viewers (Takahashi et al., 2015; Zhang & Guo, 2012), making them accessible in China's technology age.

In the United States, reality television programming's potential first emerged in 1948. Since their beginnings, these unscripted dramas have saturated the global television broadcast market. Since the premiere of the program "Great Challenge for Survival (Shengcun da Tiaozhan)" in the year 2000, this kind of television programming has been flourishing in China (Zhang & Guo, 2012). There are currently more than 100 reality TV series available on the more than 3,000 TV stations spread across China's thirty-three provinces, municipalities, and special territories. The media environment, audience demographics, and viewing habits, along with the extensive internet penetration in China, are primarily blamed for this exponential boom in reality television (Richeri, 2016).

When reality television programs from China are exported for viewing, they encounter many difficulties. Determining the importance of exposing foreign participation is therefore crucial for the glocalization of these items. These may take the form of options like a strategic alliance with global market partners. This relationship's growth establishes a network for the production of reality television. The Chinese ethnic group has a foundation for creating economic networks of social reality through common principles. During the development of reality shows, people to people exchange programs could be used to teach these ideals. The trend of the electronic market's quick expansion is a current demand for the Glocalization (Richeri, 2016; Zhengrong et al., 2013). The choice of the international markets is influenced by similarity rather than physical closeness. With the aforementioned context in mind, this study examines how Chinese reality TV shows have become localized in the twenty-first century.

Numerous studies related to reality television are documented in the literature review. It is significant to highlight that few researches have focused on reality television in China. The current research highlights several aspects of audience involvement, technology adoption, gender difficulties, and ways to evaluate a successful reality television program in the big data era.

A study conducted by Hill (2017) on *Got to Dance* reality tv show identified that, the audience diversity reflects the present mobility of being an audience for traditional and digital television content. *Got to Dance* exemplifies the current media landscape in which live event television, the very foundation of what is television in its traditional sense, dominates the format while a slew of other features, ranging from interactive voting and integrated social media comments in the live show to a live Facebook studio, a YouTube celebrity, and Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram marketing, are woven into the fabric of the series overall. The fact that digital elements are present to support the ephemeral spectacular says something about live television's enduring power (Hill, 2017).

Further, the scholar content that through interviews with frequent viewers, for example, highlighted the meaning of interaction with the series when viewing it at home, with family and friends, voting for favorites, and judging candidates from afar. The everyday rituals created around the series were critical in these interviews, not just in increasing engagement series by series, but also in appealing to a family audience that made time for the series in their daily lives. Interviews with series fans highlighted the arduous labor of fandom, in which interaction with the series entailed viewing, reacting, voting, and attending live events, combining "at-home fandom" with an up-close and personal relationship with performers, judges, and the production itself (Hill, 2017).

Furthermore, a study carried out by Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2017) revealed that reality television was a genre in which non-actors were placed in dramatic circumstances with unforeseen outcomes. The invasion of reality TV-dominated network and cable programming was very reflective in its format evolution, as evidenced by the variety of narrative motifs buried in reality-

based series. Their findings from an exploratory study revealed significant disparities in how college students engaged with reality TV affectively, intellectually, and behaviorally. Identification, participation, enjoyment, perceived realism, and perceived rivalry differed considerably among 9 reality TV subgenres: dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, game show, docusoap, sitcom, law enforcement, and court. Their empirical findings gave substantial support for the notion that programs often referred to as reality-based provide viewers with fundamentally diverse affective, cognitive, and behavioral experiences and gratifications (Tsay-Vogel & Krakowiak, 2017).

On a different note, Glascock and Preston-Schreck (2018) found that African Americans were overrepresented and disproportionately depicted as more verbally aggressive and more likely to be victims of verbal aggression than other races/ethnicities in a composite week of popular reality TV programming on cable and broadcast television. When it came to verbal violence, African American women were more likely than men to be both the attacker and the victim. They contend that watching reality TV may have adverse effects due to exposure to verbal abuse and its attendant environmental conditions (Glascock & Preston-Schreck, 2018).

de Boer et al.'s (2022) study on the Emancipatory Significance of Representations of Women on Infertility Reality TV indicated that Infertility and infertility treatment are common themes in reality TV, which is a very popular media genre. The emancipation of women, according to feminist theory, is fundamentally dependent on normative and created realities concerning infertility and infertility treatment, such as those found in reality television. These realities have the power to influence how viewers interpret the world. They viewed the women in these exhibitions as representations of monstrous even though they all had "odd" qualities. The idea of monstrosity in literature was to provide an alternative identity in order to subvert none-emancipatory standards. They discovered four categories of in/fertile monsters through a content study of seven reality TV programs: the cyborg, the freak, the destitute, and the childless. As a result of the processes used to change, exclude, or condemn infertility in connection to what is deemed normal and acceptable womanhood, the results indicated that these monsters were primarily non-emancipatory. Consequently, the scholars pleading for more varied and emancipatory depictions of infertile women in popular culture (de Boer et al., 2022).

For the Korean reality TV program "Perfect on Paper," Kang et al.'s (2019) study developed an outlier detection technique based on the visual-physiology multimodal data system. This system's objective was to deliver real-time facial expression data and bio signal analysis findings of program participants to the production team and master of ceremonies. The program production team and master of ceremonies can quickly recognize the attendees exhibiting strange behavior using this information. In addition to offering a dynamic time warp-based clustering algorithm for the outlier and micro-expression identification technique, the researchers suggested insole-type hardware that analyzes the wearer's skin conductivity, temperature, and motion. The created technology evaluated the biometric data and facial expressions of 88 participants in 11 episodes and gave the production crew at the filming location quick feedback in real time. The authors claim that application of a visual-physiology multimodal system can be useful for TV broadcasting production.

A study by Suna (2018) that focuses on the staging of emotions in reality TV shows as it relates to issues of belonging. discovered that reality TV show producers talk about belonging as a perceived cultural connection to trans-local meta-narratives of a desire for change, romantic love, competition, and success. These trans-local meta-narratives are linked to supposedly universal emotions by the creators. Instead, the creators focus on belonging as a sense of cultural proximity to regional discourses on ideals of beauty and pair them with a particular regional display of emotions. The findings demonstrate that during the trans-local format adaptation process, an emotional repertoire is created and negotiated. It makes reference to a universalistic conception of emotional expression and negotiates certain "feeling norms" in accordance (Suna, 2018).

Television's moving pictures help people, draw attention, and ultimately have an impact on their attitudes and actions. The younger generation now prefers watching live reality shows to dramatic, written dramas. Pahad et al.'s (2015) study on "Opinions of the Youth regarding the influence of Reality Shows on society" examined the general viewpoints of the chosen youth on the impact of reality television on society from the Science/Technology, Commerce, and Social Science

programs at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in Vadodara in the 2013–14 academic year. Their findings demonstrated that reality television programs are among the most influential television communication formats and have a significant impact on society (Pahad et al., 2015).

In her study on feminist media, Ho (2021) examined post-millennial Chinese reality programs that focus on motherhood against the context of the one-child policy's repeal and an aging population. These well-liked programs, such as *Supermom*, attempt to raise respect and public awareness for all moms and would-be mothers by highlighting the selfless sacrifices and labor of love made by famous mothers in carrying out their maternal responsibilities. The study concentrated on *Supermom*'s choice of famous mothers, the construction of a female voice through confessional-style interviews, motion graphics, voice-overs, and monologues, as well as the male presence established through interviews with the subjects' husbands and disembodied male voice-overs. All of these topics were examined through the lens of critical discourse analysis. According to this study, *Supermom* encourages and portrays childbearing and raising children as a way of personal fulfillment for women, which feeds the societal concept of forced motherhood in China. These parenting-themed reality shows provide a window through which one can see the numerous ways that television contributes to defining women's socially acceptable lifestyle choices and forming post-socialist conceptions of motherhood and the family (Ho, 2021).

The links between cultural variety, power, dispute, and mitigating measures were studied by Zhang et al. (2021). According to a multi-modal analysis of actual data from the two TV programs *Dragon's Den* in China and *Shark Tank* in the US, investors' linguistic performance demonstrates greater frequency and variance in both disagreement and its mitigation, impacted by power and politeness. Regarding the significance of cultural variation, their research disproved certain preconceived notions about culture by showing that Chinese participants used negation more frequently than US ones. Participants from China and America pick several formats for reducing disagreements: In the American *Shark Tank*, investors tended to enforce explicitness to start conflicts, and entrepreneurs tended to defuse them by providing justifications, whereas in the Chinese *Dragon's Den*, investors tended to make negations before defusing them with qualifiers or alternative claims. Additionally, the American show includes instances where the pre-determined power-asymmetrical relationship shifts throughout the presentation and entrepreneurs with growing power begin to test investors by posing various questions to them. Nevertheless, it seems that in the Chinese context, this change in power dynamics will be more challenging (Zhang et al., 2021).

### *Screening Reality TV in China*

The structure of the Chinese media system creates a window into all of its capabilities. The national, provincial, municipal, and county divisions that make up the four-tiered broadcasting system each have their own extensive channel lineup (Jiang, 2013). Because of the lack of governmental backing, media companies are in a constant struggle in this oversaturated market. Each is therefore attempting to continue to be a viable alternative for viewers in order to maintain or improve ratings and financial objectives. It was discovered that audiences responded well to the television entertainment genre. Since shows like "People's Actual Show" and "Zhenren Xiu" shifted the focus of the viewers, these programs have taken over the traditional fictitious drama series' primetime slots (Zhu, 2008). Many TV networks have either partnered with independent production businesses to save internal production costs or purchased franchise rights to top-rated international reality TV show models to ensure success in order to maintain market share. Broadcasting networks are the dominant players in China's reality television market. The networks are either provincial or state-owned, such as CCTV, Wasu Media Holding Co. Ltd., Hunan TV & Broadcast Intermediary Co. Ltd., Beijing Gehua CATV Network Co. Ltd., Shaanxi Broadcasting & TV Network Intermed, Shanghai Media Group (SMG), Zhejiang TV, and Anhui TV (Zhang & Guo, 2012). For example, Shanghai's Dragon TV acquired the franchise rights to China's *Got Talent* from foreign owners Fremantle Media at the provincial satellite television tier for one million yuan. Additionally, it self-produced *Roommate Wanted*, another program that aired in the late-evening time period. A number of programmes, including the *Perfect Vacation*, *Super Girl*, *Super Boy*, *Chinese Restaurants*, and *I Am a Singer*, have been produced by Hunan Broadcasting System over the years. *Chase Me* was a television program created by Zhejiang TV.

China's Next Top Model is a product of Sichuan Satellite TV (SSTV), which also purchased the production rights from America's Next Top Model (Zhang & Guo, 2012). I Supermodel was rebranded because SSTV failed to renew the contract rights, and it was broadcast for three seasons on Chongqing TV, another provincial level network.

Several regional networks, such as Jiangsu Broadcasting Corporation, have a history of producing and airing their own content, such as the dating competition. If you are the one. Private production companies have entered the fray and have started creating programmes that are broadcast on Chinese television networks. I Sing is created by Star China Media and is aired on Zhejiang Television; the Voice of the Silk Road is produced by Talpa and is shown on Xinjiang Television, a local television station. For instance, R by R Limited, a Hong Kong-based corporation, airs a series of weekly travel shows with a Japan-set (Takahashi et al., 2015). Chinese digital titans Tencent, Baidu, and Weibo have all jumped on the reality TV bandwagon and launched these shows for their live-streaming video market. They are occasionally evolving into independent producers. For instance, The Rap of China, a competition show, is produced by Baidu's video streaming service iQiyi. Another well-liked online reality program on the Youku video platform is Street Dance of China (Armstrong, 2019; Cheng, 2019).

## **METHOD**

The study employed a qualitative content analysis methodology. A variety of significant scholarly books, journal articles, and publications served as the source for the secondary data. The justification for this methodology is that it offers a wider variety of materials for review and analysis. A linguistic and content analysis was done to make sure the data was within the guidelines of the study. An extensive interview was conducted with a Chinese expert in reality TV shows in order to translate the numerous programs written in Chinese into English. This strategy was used to guarantee that the information from the translation was consistent with the information from the literature. For instance, all the transcriptions were put via an internet platform to see if the translated content matched the data that was translated in order to enable for data verification. Table 1 is provided below.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Chinese investment in Africa and other countries where they have business interests has made it possible for the market to more easily advertise products from the TV sector, such as reality television series. As a result of the effect of regional Chinese dramas that are shown on the national television network, nations like Tanzania have been able to learn about Chinese culture. As a result, China now has the opportunity to generate more reality TV material for these viewers. On the other hand, the usage of the Swahili language and the incorporation of African characters have made it possible for such goods to enter the market quickly.

The issue of marketization has resulted in a number of issues, but Chinese authorities have also taken appropriate action in this area by announcing the "restricted entertainment order." According to Zhang and Guo (2012), the rise of restriction orders successfully lessens the vulgarity of reality TV program content and controls the social phenomena of excessive enjoyment, both of which are highly important. To establish a genuinely peaceful television market, however, a variety of initiatives are required. It is evident that reality television has developed a reputation for vulgarity and blind following while being localized (Jiang, 2013).

Therefore, it is impossible to dispute that reality TV has had a large positive impact on the global entertainment business, particularly in nations where China has made significant investments.

The environment in which the various reality TV programs were produced had a big impact on how well they were received both locally and internationally. It is crucial to closely monitor their reality TV production business, strive to encourage it with government funding, and, occasionally, defend it. According to some, the Chinese reality TV model is a continuous manifestation of the nation's culture and traditions.

Going global and local in this regard enables them to escape the political and economic ambitions of nations who are focused on cultural sensitivity (Zhengrong et al., 2013). The assurance of making reality TV shows a key component in the integration of culture into the wider sphere of

the nationals has been made possible by a number of supporting organizations in various countries. The Chinese film industry has been growing in order to become more competitive and market-driven (Richeri, 2016). The rise in reality TV shows is a reflection of insufficient inventiveness and a lack of enthusiasm, which pose a threat to the program's appeal (Cheng, 2019). These programs were either domesticated by producers or are based on well-known foreign programs.

Even if the producers may be skilled at creating works of excellent quality, their rich cultural substance suffers as a result. The most watched television genre at the moment in China is reportedly reality shows. This trend is being fueled by the rapid advancement of technology, which has resulted in a massive uptake of inexpensive Chinese cellphones and widespread access to the internet.

Numerous reality TV programs in China are adaptations of programs from other countries, but Chinese producers localize these programs to appeal to the market for Chinese culture and national identity (Richeri, 2016). "Daddy Go Where," a large-scale reality TV parent-child program that Hunan Satellite TV debuted in 2013, swiftly rose to national fame. The entire introductions of South Korea's MBC television program served as inspiration for this program's copyright and design "Daddy! What is our destination?" Once more, in October 2014, "Running the Brothers," a popular TV program on Zhejiang TV, served as the "Running Man" for the SBS TV station in Korea. These two reality TV series have been very successful, according to Y.Z. Xu and F. Xu in their article on "Typology of TV Programs," and this indicates that South Korea still has lessons to learn and inspiration to draw from when it comes to TV shows (Richeri, 2016). The goal of reality TV is to showcase the participants' charm, and the foundation of the Korean reality TV star system is to define the star's distinct personality position.

In this sense, the star system and reality shows in South Korea are a great match, giving rise to the Korean star reality program. Based on this design, China's debut of "Daddy Go Where" and "Run Bar" adopted this star system, obtaining the viewing frenzy for the program at the same time as being popular to participate in the production of real people, so that their image is richer and more adored (Richeri, 2016; Takahashi et al., 2015; Yiming, 2020).

The growing consumption of Chinese reality TV series on African platforms has been spurred by the high production quality. Regarding the creation of messaging and content with the needs of the consumer in mind.

The shifting trends of China's reality TV shows have developed a different narrative in cultivating the components of humanity and humor while tackling social problems generally, in contrast to the western reality TV shows that are mostly centered on the idols (Richeri, 2016; Takahashi et al., 2015; Zhang & Guo, 2012). Even though learning the several languages spoken in African nations can be difficult, China has made structural investments in these nations by giving them technology-enabled devices that allow for the viewing of reality TV. These programs' content was dubbed, which allowed for their seamless integration into these markets.

Since these reality TV programs are heavily controlled, political speech is not hindered, guaranteeing the non-partisan character of their influence on many political ideologies around the world (Jiang, 2013; Zhang & Guo, 2012).

Following China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) vision, local reality TV show producers have been inspired to be more innovative as a result of the audience's exposure to reality TV programs from other nations (Cheng, 2019). A SARFT Directive covering reality TV production that adapts foreign series was released in June 2016. (Cheng, 2019). To safeguard local production and encourage local producers to be more inventive, the directive prohibits similar or collaborative production with overseas companies (Zhang & Guo, 2012).

On the negative side, this has restricted the ability to adapt and localize the programming by learning from various reality TV series. However, the innovation impacts local producers and grows popularity for reality TV in line with the national aim to promote national heritage demonstrates how rich in Chinese culture it is (Armstrong, 2019). The Story of Minglan is one of the prominent TV shows that has been a success since its debut. In its first three days on Hunan TV, this drama garnered 400 million views (Yiming, 2020).

The WTO-TRIPS signatories are another set of regulations that facilitate the internationalization of Chinese reality television (Jiang, 2013). When the local reality TV programs are released to a worldwide audience, these agreements enable them retain their copyright.

The Format Recognition and Protection Association (FRAPA) has additionally inspected and authorized each piece of content. "Copyright law covers categories of creative works, including as literary, artistic, musical, and dramatic works," according to FRAPA's supra note 34, at 10 (Jianguo & Xin, 2012). "A concept or an idea, such as an outline or a high-level plot, will not be protected by copyright."

The production of local shows has been increasing in inventiveness and popularity since the affirmation of this law and China's status as a signatory to various copyright agreements (Cheng, 2019). With reality TV programs rich in nationalism, Chinese culture, and modern culture, the global market might learn more about China and enjoy entertainment with a Chinese flair.

By streaming these TV episodes online, technology aids in their promotion. Chinese TV shows make up the majority of the content on digital platforms. There is little question that reality TV programs will broadcast on foreign platforms in order to supply the global market with high-quality Chinese material (Armstrong, 2019; Garrahan & Sender, 2016; Zhang & Guo, 2012).

The study's results showed that most foreign reality TV programs had local Chinese counterparts on Chinese television. The Chinese are making sure they can effectively compete in the international markets using this method. The majority of the Chinese audience is young and is interested in learning more about foreign programming. Therefore, local TV stations in China have seized these chances to broadcast the same shows in their own tongue. In addition, the majority of reality TV series come from European markets, with a small number coming from Korea. It's interesting to note that none of these reality television programs have yet been developed for the African market.

**Table 1** Overview of the reality T.V. progression.

<b>Original Programme</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Chinese Version</b>	<b>Broadcaster</b>	<b>License</b>
<i>Take Me Out/ Taken Out</i>	UK/Australia	<i>If you are the One</i> <i>F éi chéng wù rǎo</i>	Jiangsu Satellite	No
<i>The Biggest Loser</i>	NBC/US	<i>The biggest loser</i> <i>C hào jí jiǎnfēi wǎng</i>	Cctv2	Yes
<i>I Am A Singer</i>	Korea/MBC	<i>I am a singer</i> <i>Wó shìgè shòu</i>	Hunan Satellite	Yes
<i>Pop IDOL</i>	UK/Fremantle media	<i>Supergirls</i> <i>Chào jí nùshēng</i>	Hunan Satellite	No
<i>Where Are We Going, Dad?</i>	Korea/MBC	<i>Where are we going, dad?</i> <i>Bàba yào qù nǎlǐ?</i>	Hunan Satellite Tv	Yes
<i>Pop Idol</i>	UK/Fremantle media	<i>Chinese idol</i> <i>Zhōngguó mèng zhī shēng</i>	Dragon Tv	No
<i>Granddads</i>	Korea/CJ E&M	<i>Granddads</i> <i>Hu a yáng yéyé</i>	Dragon Tv	Yes
<i>Britain's Got Talent</i>	UK/SYCO tv	<i>China's got Talent</i> <i>Zhōngguó mèng zhī shēng</i>	Dragon Tv	Yes
<i>Shall We Dance</i>	Philippines/Australia. -ABC	<i>Let's shake it</i> <i>Wǔlín dàhuì</i>	Dragon Tv	No
<i>The Voice</i>	Netherlands/Talpa	<i>The song of China-zhonnguo hao shenyin</i>	Hunan Satellite Tv	Yes
<i>So You Think You Can Dance</i>	US/FOX	<i>Super diva</i> <i>Wú líng zhēngbà</i>	Dragon Tv	Yes
<i>The Voice</i>	Netherlands/Talpa	<i>The song of China</i> <i>Zhōngguó dá rén xiù</i>	Zhejiang Satellite Tv	Yes
<i>The Apprentice</i>	The U.S.	<i>Win in China</i> <i>Yíng zài zhōngguó</i>	Cctv 2	No
<i>The X Factor</i>	UK/SYCO TV	<i>The x-factor China</i> <i>Zhōngguó zuì qiáng yīn</i>	Hunan Satellite	Yes

<i>Ugly Betty</i>	Columbia	<i>Ugly Betty</i> <i>Chǒu nǚ bèidi</i>	Hunan Satellite	Yes
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## CONCLUSION

The scope of Chinese reality television programs is examined in this article, from their inception through what might be called a shift to the outside world with features of marketization. It is important to note that the growth of reality programs in China has been significantly influenced by the adoption of the western and European infotainment paradigm. Western-style drama and television shows are shown on a variety of international and local channels, as evidence. It's interesting to track the incorporation of Chinese language into the creation of reality shows tailored to China's foreign friends given China's rising interest in developing countries, particularly Africa. Although it is believed that this is a strategy for blending in naturally with these markets, the argument may actually be founded on their ability to use their soft power to their advantage. Therefore, this article suggests an investigation on how foreign TV viewers perceive Chinese reality television. This will be important to find out how Chinese media are able to propagate their culture through the reality tv. It is from the viewers and audience perception studies that a concrete evidenced could be each at in regards to Chinese reality tv shows going global.

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