

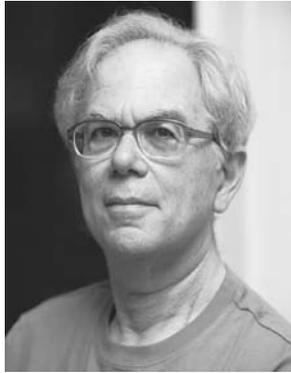
學術對談

## 新聞學比較研究的價值和挑戰

對談人：Akiba Cohen、李立峯、陳韜文

統稿：李立峯、陳韜文\*

翻譯：何穎琪



高翰 (Akiba Cohen)

「我向來相信在比較的脈絡下進行研究的重要性。除了個人興趣或好奇心驅使我想認識一些事情在別處的面貌，我想從事比較研究的主要原因是它可以幫助研究者更了解他/她所處的環境。就以電視新聞為例，若我只是研究新聞在以色列如何製作、報導，和被以色列觀眾理解，我將會缺乏對電視新聞的整體了解。雖然電視記者的基本價值觀很相似(至少就民主社會而言)，但當中仍有相異之處，若說到非民主社會，分歧就更明顯了。因此，透過研究不同國家或社會，就能讓人對自己身處的國家或社會更具洞見。」

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## 高翰教授簡介

Akiba Cohen 於 1973 年於密芝根州州立大學取得傳播學博士，現任以色列特拉維夫大學傳播學系教授，多年來主要從事有關電視新聞的研究，近年亦關注流動電話對社會及人們日常生活的影響。他共編著過學術書籍十本，包括 *Almost Midnight: Reforming the Late Night News* (Sage, 1980)、*The Television News Interview* (Sage, 1987)、*The Wonder Phone in the Land of Miracles* (Hampton, 2008) 等，以及在不同學術期刊及書籍中發表過文章超過 60 篇。

Akiba Cohen 多年來積極統籌及參與國際性的比較研究，包括與 Pamela Shoemaker 教授一起統籌的，共十個國家參與的 *News Around the World* 研究計劃，以及現時仍在進行中的，共 17 個國家參與的 *Foreign News Around the World* 研究計劃。Akiba Cohen 教授是現今非常少數具豐富跨國比較研究經驗的傳播學者之一。

Akiba Cohen 在 1993 至 94 年擔任過國際傳播學會 (International Communication Association) 主席，在 1997 年則被國際傳播學會選為終身榮譽會員 (ICA Fellow)。他現時亦是多本頂級國際傳播學刊物，包括 *Communication Research*、*Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*、*Journal of Communication* 等的編輯委員會成員之一。

LC: 李立峯、陳韜文

AC: 高翰教授 (Prof. Akiba Cohen)

LC: 過去十年，傳播學學者對比較研究愈來愈感興趣，然而由於比較研究所需的資源龐大，操作上亦面對連串實際困難，令現今為止，這類研究的數量仍相當有限。你在過去20年曾參與不少關於電視新聞的跨國比較研究項目，而且這些項目均相當成功，你可以簡單介紹一下這些項目背後的意念嗎？當中如何結集不同國家的學者成為團隊參與這些項目？在協調上的最大挑戰是甚麼？

AC: 以我記憶所及，我對電視新聞從來就很感興趣，我也不大知道它有甚麼吸引我的，但它已成為我研究多年的範疇。過去30多年，我曾參與三個專門研究電視新聞，大部分是國際新聞的大型研究。其中一項研究針對社會衝突這個新聞要素在美國、英國、(統一前的)西德、種族隔離政策下的南非，以及以色列這五個國家的電視新聞中如何被呈現。該研究考查電視新聞的內容與及觀眾的觀感，並集中於社會衝突的三個層面：複雜性、激烈程度和解決的可能性。第二項研究審視為其會員國提供主要國際新聞片段的歐洲廣播聯盟 (EBU) 新聞通訊服務的運作。該研究考查 EBU 在 11 個國家的運作、其為會員提供的衛星片段、在某些國家某些故事如何被「馴化」，也提出一些關於觀眾如何理解這些故事的洞見。尚在進行中的第三項研究審視四大洲上 17 個國家的國際新聞內容、人們對國際新聞的態度和觀感，以及國際新聞編輯對這些內容和觀眾態度的掌握程度。

在解釋如何籌組這些項目前，我得說在過程中我曾多次以為自己要放棄這些項目，集合國際的研究團隊是一個複雜且陷阱滿佈的過程。我想首先要處理的就是從哪些國家邀請哪些學者參與。就理論角度而言，所選擇的國家應能代表在某些變量上相異的社會，以便研究這些變量對新聞的影響。但實際上，特別是在研究資金匱乏的情況下，選擇就往往落在一些你所認識、你對他們的研究能力有信心，且信任他們是好的團隊成員、能完成工作的學者和他們所處的國家之上。

顯然，招募愈多學者參與，就會為研究帶來愈多的變化，這當然是一件好事，但同時亦增加了任務的複雜性和難度。參與的人愈多，意見也就愈多，同樣地，這也是好的，但有時情況也會變得令人沮喪。無論如何，要集合一群學者，其中最重要的大概就是取得他們承諾委身，但就算如此，我們也往往難以避免在過程中有人無法按約定提交研究成果，這也是必須考慮的。就以我們現正進行的研究為例，我們開始時有22個國家，但有三個國家很快就退出了計劃，在往後的階段又有另外兩個國家無法繼續參與。

還未說到資助。希伯來古諺說：「沒有麵粉，就沒有律法經卷。」換句話說，有錢能使鬼推磨……因此，沒有資助就不能有研究。我會說，要取得單獨一項能支持整個大型國際性研究的資助的機會很微，至少在社會科學方面是這樣，因此我們通常需要由每一個國家各自籌集其所需的資助，因資助來源、申請期限各異，這個過程往往變得既困難又費時，加上不同的資助機構對計劃書的內容和規模、申請用的表格等均設有特定的要求，以致雖然項目有劃一的核心，卻必須因應各地的要求作出修訂和調整。

簡言之，要推行一項國際性的研究項目一點也不容易，需時長，過程中常有令人沮喪和失望的事情，但潛在回報卻極大。

**LC:** 關於比較研究的優點和挑戰，向來有不少討論。你可以透過你過往的研究項目跟我們分享一下你對比較研究的價值有何看法嗎？

**AC:** 我向來相信在比較的脈絡下進行研究的重要性。除了個人興趣或好奇心驅使我想認識一些事情在別處的面貌，我想從事比較研究的主要原因是它可以幫助研究者更了解他/她所處的環境。就以電視新聞為例，若我只是研究新聞在以色列如何製作、報導，和被以色列觀眾理解，我將會缺乏對電視新聞的整體了解。雖然電視記者的基本價值觀很相似(至少就民主社會而言)，但當中仍有相異之處，若說到非民主社會，分歧就更明顯了。因此，透過研究不同國家或社會，就能讓人對自己身處的國家或社會更具洞見。

在研究電視新聞中的社會衝突時，我們的團隊想了解，較諸

本地新聞，國際新聞中的社會衝突是否被描述為更複雜、更激烈、及更難解決。只在一個國家研究這現象的意義不大，因為要得出有普遍性的結果，必須至少在數個國家進行觀察，這樣，我們才能斷定某一國家是否偏離「常規」。在有關EBU的研究中，知道X國用上百分之N由聯盟所提供的新聞材料的意義也不大，必須要知道每一國家所用的百分比，才能為X國定位。最後，在另一項我與Pamela Shoemaker進行的比較研究中，我們探尋全球新聞製作方式的共通點，我們想找出偏差行為和社會意義在甚麼程度上構成新聞價值的基本指標，而且不但是在我倆祖籍的美國或以色列，而是全球而言。這個名為「News Around the World」的研究項目，透過在十個國家抽取主要和邊緣城市各一，並以一星期的新聞為樣本，分析了她們的報章、電視和電台新聞。只有比較研究才能把這些問題一一反映。

LC: 這些的確是新聞學研究中的一些重要的題目，那麼這些研究有何主要發現？整體而言，在全世界的新聞中是否找到共通的元素？

AC: 我很高興你提出這個問題。那些早期的項目的結果可在 *Social Conflicts and Television News* (Sage, 1990)、*Global Newsroom, Local Audience* (John Libbey, 1996) 和 *News Around the World* (Routledge, 2006) 等書中找到。整體而言，我會說——而這應該並不新鮮——大概有兩組主要的因素解釋新聞報導方式的變化：一方面是新聞工作者的常規、價值觀與實踐，另一方面則是政治經濟力量，這也許在媒體在收視上的競爭（這大概在今日比過往更普遍）和政府的規管上反映出來。

在關於電視新聞中的社會衝突的研究中，我們把五個國家置於兩個概念性向度上：（在現存頻道下的）潛在競爭強度，以及政府的影響。我們預期會觀察到這些國家之間因它們在這兩個向度上的位置不一而出現差異，可是，我們卻發現更多的共通點。首先，各國新聞均側重社會衝突。其次，大部分的衝突都只涉及少數的議題，包括國際政治、內部政治，以及勞資關係（五個國家中70–86%的衝突新聞均屬這幾類）。最後，讓我引用 *Social Conflict and Television News* 一書中寫到的（頁117）：「……較諸

非衝突新聞，衝突新聞有以下三種傾向：一、報導衝突事件與其他衝突事件的關聯；二、報導衝突與其他事件的關聯；三、提供歷史背景與脈絡。」另一項整體發現是，相比本地的衝突，外國衝突被報導為較嚴重，換言之，較複雜、較激烈、較難解決。但我估計，20年後的今日，隨着競爭加劇，本地新聞亦愈趨戲劇性和煽情，情況可能有變。所以，不錯，就像我剛說的，很多事情都在改變。

News Around the World 項目中的數據也顯示出一些我們稱之為新聞報導的普遍傾向。例如，十個國家的新聞媒體——電視、電台和報章——傾向選取激烈程度平均屬於低至中的新聞，而極端異常和社會意義極高的新聞則明顯較少出現。我們也發現，相比電視和電台，報章傾向報導異常和社會意義較溫和的新聞。必須一提的是，我們研究的是整份報章，而非單是頭版，否則結果可能大相逕庭。第三個普遍傾向是(電視和報章)影像比文字報導溫和及社會意義較低。即使報導中有不少駭人的內容，但卻少有令人毛骨悚然的影像。

所以，總括而言，在兩項研究中我們都發現各國的新聞報導方式有好些相似之處。那意味着甚麼？這有可能反映，相對於各國的社會政治差異，新聞工作文化在取決甚麼新聞被報導和如何報導上是較強和較重要的因素。

LC: 回到比較研究上，Sonia Livingstone (註：英國傳播學者，前任國際傳播學協會主席)在2003年刊於 *European Journal of Communication* 中一篇關於跨國傳媒研究的文章中指出，「在社會科學中，跨國比較一方面被指是不可能的，另一方面卻被視為是必要的。」撇開找尋合作伙伴和資助等實際問題，在概念和理論層面，你認為甚麼是比較研究項目所面對的最重要的挑戰？有沒有在某些層面上比較研究確實是「不可能」的？

AC: 讓我先指出，我可以肯定在一些情況下比較研究的確是不可能的，不論在「實際」上，就是籌組、技術、資助、人力(或者文化)的理由，還是理論和概念的範疇。

愛因斯坦最為人所知的大概是他的相對論。當然，他在物理

方面的研究，要是說跟社會科學和傳播學有甚麼關係的話，關係也是很小，可是在人類世界中，若非全部，至少大部分東西都是相對的。你知道，在Livingstone的文章中，他建基於Jay Blumler和其他學者的著述，指出比較研究可分作以下四個模式：國家作為研究對象、國家作為研究脈絡、國家作為分析單位，以及國家作為國際或跨國系統的一個組成部分。容許我在這裡不多解釋這些模式，總之，所有比較研究都應該牢牢扣着這些模式的其中之一。可是，要牢牢扣這些模式，又要選擇適合的國家，並非易事。很多時候，比較研究都缺乏對這四個模式的任何考慮，以致最後無論得出甚麼結論，難免流於偶發。

在進行比較研究時，亦有一些較具體的問題，讓我簡述幾項。其中一個最大的挑戰是達致「功能對等」，意思是要在不同國家或社會採納一些表面看來不同但卻在各地肩負同樣基本功能的東西作為研究對象。例如：何謂公共廣播？很多國家都有一個她們稱為「公共」的系統，但其運作和規管模式、製作的節目等都很不同。因此當我們要比較不同國家的公共廣播，就得界定各國中在功能上與公共廣播最為對等的頻道。另一個例子：在不同國家中何謂「主要」電視新聞？到底是在黃金時間播放的新聞報導、最長的新聞報導，還是收視率最高的新聞報導？其實，在不同國家中，「黃金時間」又是甚麼？她們又怎樣界定收視率？在比較研究中，我們要找出的不是那絕對相同的事物（因為那不一定存在），而是找出功能對等的最佳配搭。

我們也得理解，文本的意義往往取決於社會脈絡，因此，用於問卷調查中的一個概念（例如：「滿足度」）或是內容分析研究編碼簿中的一個概念（例如：血腥圖片），在不同的國家或文化中可能有不同的意義。進行比較研究的學者往往面對如何為不同國家的使用者將研究工具逐字翻譯或讓他們明白其中意義的難題。比較研究通常以一種語言為共同工具或標準——而當然這通常是英語——但即使英語這種相當穩定的語言，也未必經常能提供跨文化或跨國性貼切的意義。

內容編碼的可信度是另一項困難的挑戰。雖然有不少方法和

統計技術可以衡量信度值，這在單一文化中亦通常很有用，但在不同國家合作研究時則不然。理想中，不同國家的資料應該在「同一屋簷下」編碼，就是說，在同一處由可以對來自不同國家的資料進行編碼的編碼員負責。但顯然，這在比較研究的真實世界並不可行，就算不同國家的編碼學員能共聚一地，且懂得不同文本的語言，他們對報導的事件也欠缺足夠的認識，讓他們能對較複雜的變量編碼。因此，編碼通常都是分別在各國由參與研究的「本土」編碼員負責。各地的運作是否完全一模一樣？當然不是。那麼，有沒有一些好方法去測試跨文化信度？很遺憾，沒有！

但同時，我不認同把比較研究說成不可能；否則，在我過往的職業生涯中大部分的工作都會變得沒有意義，而我希望事情並不是那樣。

- LC: 你剛提到功能對等和公共廣播的例子。我們絕對認同找出功能對等的重要性，但提及功能對等意味着假定某實體的具體功能。以電視公共廣播為例，若我們成功定義其功能並找出不同國家與之功能對等的實體，我們會找到一系列有相同功能的電視台。但到時候，「公共電視廣播」可能已不再是最合適的標籤，事實上我們可能得找一個新的概念來代表它。對既有和大家習以為常的概念進行反思，看來是比較研究重要的一環，而新概念的產生可能是比較研究最重要的貢獻之一。
- AC: 有趣的論點！事實上有時候——但當然不是總是這樣——我們至少含蓄地暗示了那些我們所研究的概念和我們所找尋的功能對等的確存在某些功能。關於公共電視的概念，你絕對是正確的。我早前提及過時代的轉變，它在另一個方面的展現就是再概念化的需要。我對公共電視的關注是，不論我們如何定義它，廣義的公共廣播或是具體的公共電視可能不久就會在不少國家的傳媒生態中消失，而有關這方面的討論也可能因而變得無關重要，成為過去式。我希望不是這樣，但有可能在不久的將來，剩下的就只有公共廣播的歷史研究。
- LC: 另一個在比較研究的興起中的弔詭之處是，一方面，對比較傳媒研究的興趣是(再次引用 Livingstone)「由全球化現象和隨之而來

的全球化理論所引發的。」但另一方面，全球化過程帶來的其中一個結果就是對國家作為自足的分析單位的質疑。有些人可能提出城市是較為貼切的分析單位，也有人追隨着 Wallerstein 而認為「世界系統」應該作為一個單位來分析。你對這個分析單位的問題有何看法？我們應否仍強調跨國比較研究？

AC: 我相信在你提及的眾多選項中——國家、區域、城市——在今日和這個時代中，最合適的是國家。雖然如此，我認為我們必須記得，不論國家大小，一國之內可以存在很多差異。可是，每一國家在社會、政治和文化領域上有一些共同之處，是即使在今日的全球化趨勢之下仍然適用的。換言之，這些研究就不能用「世界系統」作分析單位。

我想全球化概念往往誘導我們將世界視為一個龐大的社群，但我們的確不是地球村！宗教、政治和種族的分野仍然在人們的身份中扮演重要角色，因此，淡化或忽視這些分別，彷彿它們已不再適用，是錯誤的。事實上，我會說就傳播學而言，全球化往往是在技術上適用——例如實時在全球傳送聲音和影像的能力——但觀眾加諸這些「同一」文本的意義，在不同國家往往有着不同的感知。事實上這與其他產品或服務的全球化現象可能相當不同。信用卡在哪裡使用都是信用卡；豐田汽車在哪裡出售都是豐田汽車（雖然可能各國機關對安全設定的要求稍有不同）；耐克運動鞋在全球都是耐克運動鞋。但媒體產品，即使它們基本相同，卻往往需要被翻譯，被詮釋，而當中很可能在某些方面改變了所傳達的訊息。

LC: 除了比較研究，在過去30年你曾涉足廣泛的題目。你其中一項影響至鉅的研究是1990年代初的「全球新聞室」研究，也就是你剛才提及有關EBU新聞通訊服務的研究。在這項研究中，你的團隊說明了國際新聞的馴化概念。你認為過去20年在國際新聞方面有何重要變化？在這些變化下，你認為有沒有需要改動或調整全球新聞室研究的主要結論？

AC: 我們在1980年代末至1990年代初進行EBU新聞通訊服務的研究時，雖然EBU是大部分歐洲國家甚至歐洲以外地區的國際新聞片

段主要供應者，但學術界對該機構和它的運作模式所知甚少。該機構亦為世界其他地區新聞通訊服務提供了一個模式。但，沒錯，就如Bob Dylan的名曲*The Times They Are A-Changin'*，時代正在改變，事實上，自該研究以來，雖然EBU仍是一個活躍和重要的新聞供應者，但已出現了不少變化。20年前，當時每日只有數個衛星片段，每段只包含數條新聞，現在的資訊流動則全日不斷。同時，雖然不少新聞部都縮減了海外派員的數目，一些新聞機關如美聯社和路透社則擴充了其電視服務。透過美國有線新聞網國際頻道(CNN International，當時已存在)、英國廣播公司世界新聞頻道(BBC World)、半島電視台(AI Jazeera，阿拉伯語及英語廣播)、法國24(France 24)等，全球新聞廣播商亦愈見突出。此外，不少全國頻道——如天空新聞(Sky)和霍士新聞(Fox News)——成了跨國供應者。所以，新聞市場擴充了，而且世界很多地方的觀眾都能透過不同的來源獲取國際新聞。

你問及我認為原初結論有否需要改動，嗯，我認為它們在那個時代是正確的，而且為這個我認為很有趣的過程提供了有用的資料和洞見。事實上，幾年前我設想過把這研究複製一次——沒錯，複製往往是很有用的研究，卻很少人做，大概因為學者覺得新的東西總是較好較合時，因此不願意「浪費」他們的精神和資源去做一些「已經做過」的東西。我會說，複製有時是相當有用的，能夠反映隨時間而發生的變化。回想起來，我認為EBU研究是我其中一項最出色的成就，它是一項我稱為「從頭到尾」的研究，意思是它同時處理了新聞的製作、內容，以至觀眾。大部分新聞研究處理這三項元素之一，有時是其中兩項，很少三者並存。

要是你容許我懷舊片刻，我有幸籌組的其中一個最有趣的節目，就是在EBU研究期間，於1988年耶路撒冷的一個會議中，安排十數位以色列學者與數目相若的外國學者進行一天的會面。當時會議的主題是電視新聞研究的未來方向：內容、認知與規管，而EBU超過40個國家的新聞主管湊巧亦在耶路撒冷舉行他們的中期會議——不，事實上我們的會議是跟他們合辦的。總之，當日學者們和專業工作者們就討論了國際新聞的各個方面，

那是一次難得的會面，盼望我們有機會「複製」這種會議。

LC: 若把這項EBU新聞通訊服務研究重複再做一次，的確會相當有趣。要是進行這樣的複製，你估計會有甚麼發現？仍會維持原初的結論嗎？你認為有甚麼可能出現的新發現？

AC: 同樣地，時代改變了，EBU新聞通訊是這類機構的始創者（今日已有不少這類機構），它創立時的1950年代是一個完全不同的傳媒年代。那時，電視片段以菲林從事件現場透過車、火車或飛機傳送到電視台，最快的文字傳播是用打字機，那時沒有傳真機、電腦、衛星和互聯網。我們剛開始在該機構研究時，人們仍在用打字機，傳真機剛出現，圍繞地球的只有數個傳訊衛星，每日會議透過收音機電話進行。EBU的創辦人如果今天還在的話，將會完全認不出現行的系統。

可是，它的功能基本上維持不變：為會員國（由60年前的23個增至歐洲以內及附近56個國家內的75個活躍會員及全球43個附屬會員）提供電視新聞片段。今日，新聞通訊透過數個衛星提供每周七天每天24小時的新聞，早年則只有每天兩至三個片段。雖然已有其他新聞來源，現時大部分會員國在報導國外事件時採用的EBU資料仍多於其他來源。

所以，若對研究進行複製，我相信會員國之間的合作精神仍然存在，但會有不同的服務機關傳送和廣播更多既重要亦有趣的外地新聞。事實上，基於近年新聞界中大幅縮減駐外記者的現象相當常見，我預計某程度上新聞通訊社對不少電視台會更形重要。

LC: 談到縮減人手，隨着各國之間的聯繫更緊密，但不少國家卻減少在國際新聞上的支出，這不是一個不幸的矛盾嗎？

AC: 新聞製作基本上是一項昂貴的業務，今日大部分新聞製作都是由牟利的商業機構負責，從新聞機構的角度，派駐外記者很昂貴，要是可以減免這些支出，從而增加利潤，何樂而不為？既然新聞通訊社以及全球廣播商可以輕易提供國外事件的材料，就更是如此。可幸的是，駐外記者仍未成為過去式；華盛頓、倫敦、巴黎、莫斯科、北京、東京，和耶路撒冷等地仍是不少電視台派駐

駐外記者的重地。但同時亦有一些電視台只有一位甚至沒有任何駐外記者，這實在可惜，但這就是現實！

LC: 讓我們集中討論馴化的概念，作為實際存在的現象，自你的研究後，很多研究都展示了國際新聞的馴化，但在規範性層面上，馴化是否必然是可取的現象？過度強調馴化會否帶來扭曲世界事務的真實意義的危機？換言之，馴化有沒有可能只是民族中心主義的另一種體現？我們能否談及多種不同且有高下之分的馴化國際新聞的方法？

AC: 這是一個挺難的問題。正如新聞製作，總體而言，我可以想出兩方面的馴化。首先是選取要報導的國際新聞的問題，接着是從有利於本地觀眾的角度構寫故事或給予故事一個框架的問題。在任何一天、任何國家境外發生的眾多事件中，新聞編輯必須選取某些國際新聞事件在新聞節目中報導。我們可以合理地假設大部分新聞報導都處理本地新聞，那麼，問題就是，應該報導哪些國際新聞？記者通常會說這些新聞該是重要或有趣的事件，但甚麼構成重要或有趣的海外事件；對誰而言重要或有趣；對世界？對牽涉事件的國家？對廣播的國家？對所有人還是只對部分觀眾？固然一些事件可視為對幾乎全球所有人都是重要或有趣的，但這些事件很少，不常發生。另外一類事件，雖然在本地發生，但可能與廣播的國家有關，例如廣播國家的領袖與另一國領袖在海外會面，這可看為一種混合的事件，附有一些馴化的元素。簡言之，新聞編輯需要決定選取哪些（純海外或是混合的）事件放在新聞報導中，而很有可能同一時間已考慮到如何報導的問題。

然後來到第二部分，當編輯選定了新聞以後，如何構寫故事。每宗事件都必定經過某種框架化處理，馴化是其中一種將事件進行框架化使之成為新聞故事的過程。例如以色列電視新聞頻道給予近期泰國政治暴力事件相當多的篇幅，原因何在？至少部分原因是由於泰國是以色列人其中一個最常到的旅遊點，且有數千人正在當地遊覽。在報導當地的對抗時，若不提及對以色列遊客的影響，是不切合現實的，但這不代表是過度強調馴化。這些報導本質上是關於泰國和它的內政，但摒除「以色列角度」卻的確

會令以色列觀眾側目。馴化外地新聞涉及程度的問題，而不是二分的決定有或無。在我看來，馴化遠說不上是民族中心主義的一種。

在猶太文化中有一個關於「大象與猶太問題」的比喻，意思是所有東西都可以放在猶太問題的框架或與之扯上關係，那些與猶太人完全無關的事也不例外，可是，猶太文化中，卻沒甚麼關於大象的描述：雖然聖經描述多種動物，卻沒有提及大象；而在全球大部分猶太人曾聚居的地方，包括以色列，是沒有大象的（動物園除外）。所以說，雖然新聞編輯有可能去馴化任何一個新聞故事，他們卻沒有這樣做。新聞中的馴化並非無處不在，當它出現的時候，是為了讓故事對本地觀眾而言更適合和更有意義。

在我與以色列兩條主要電視頻道的國際新聞主管最近進行的連串訪問中，他們告訴我，他們會在認為有用的時候對新聞進行馴化，但絕不是每次如是。我相信這個傾向在其他國家也類似。

LC: 照你所言，把剛才的問題反過來，大概馴化帶來全世界媒體中「觀點」的多樣性，而這可能是件好事？

AC: 絕對是！馴化新聞故事的方法有很多，在同一國家的不同電視台之間，或是在不同國家之間也是。讓我舉個例，在EBU 研究中我們詳細審查的其中一個新聞事件是1987年的愛爾蘭選舉。美國的哥倫比亞新聞 (CBS) 集中報導愛爾蘭的經濟問題，特別是愛爾蘭青少年的高失業率，而當中就有部分愛爾蘭青少年嘗試到美國找工作。法國 TF1 電視台則集中在愛爾蘭天主教會，描述愛爾蘭人如何「無奈」地要付上沉重的代價來保存他們的信仰。最後，在比利時，RTBF 電台邊播出多孩家庭和年輕母親推着嬰兒手推車的片段，邊討論當地教會對避孕和墮胎議題的阻力。

而我認為最重要的是，若馴化國際新聞能引起市民對外地發生的事情的興趣，即使故事的報導採取個別角度，也會是好事。在這個雖然有全球化，但對海外事件愈趨冷漠的時代，能讓本地觀眾感興趣總是好的。說到底，就算在同一國家，本地新聞也被不同的電視台用不同的方式不同的框架處理，那我們又怎能期望不同國家的國際新聞的劃一報導呢？

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Academic Dialogue with Prof. Akiba Cohen

## **Comparative International News Research: Strengths and Challenges**

LC: Francis L.F. Lee and Joseph M. Chan

AC: Prof. Akiba Cohen

**LC: In the past decade, communication scholars have become more and more interested in comparative research, though the actual volume of such studies arguably remains limited due to the huge amount of resources required for and a range of practical difficulties involved in such studies. You have been at the core in a number of successful cross-national comparative research projects, all related to television news, in the past two decades. Can you briefly introduce to our readers the ideas behind the projects? How can one put together a team of international scholars to work on such projects? What are the biggest challenges involved in coordinating these efforts?**

AC: As far back as I can remember, I have been interested in television news. I'm not quite sure what fascinated me about it, but it's an area that I have been studying for many years. Over the past 30 years or so, I've been involved in 3 large-scale studies dedicated exclusively to TV news, much of it to foreign news. Specifically, one study dealt with the way social conflicts—a central component in news in general—was portrayed in television news of 5 countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany (before unification), South Africa during apartheid, and Israel. The study examined the contents of TV news as well as viewers' perceptions. The focus was on three dimensions of social conflict: complexity, intensity and solvability. The second study looked at the operations of the News Exchange Service of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) that provides much of the foreign news footage to its member countries. The study examined the EBU operation in 11 countries, the satellite feeds provided to members, the way several stories were "domesticated" in select countries as well as some insight on how

viewers made sense of the stories. The third study is still underway and has been looking at the contents of foreign news in 17 countries in 4 continents, the attitudes and perception of people regarding foreign news, and the extent to which foreign news editors are aware of both the contents and attitudes.

Before telling you how the projects got organized, I want to say that at several points along the way I thought I would have to give up. Creating an international research team is a complex process with many potential pitfalls. I suppose that the first issue is which colleagues in which countries to invite to participate. From a theoretical perspective, the choice of countries ought to represent societies that differ on certain variables so as to be able to study the impact of these variables. But in reality, and especially when research funds are not abundant and easy to come by, the choice often rests in selecting countries, and scholars therein, whom you know, whom you believe are competent, and whom you trust can do the work and be good team members.

Obviously, the more scholars you recruit, the more variance you will have in the project—which is a good thing, of course—but it will also increase the complexity and difficulty of managing the tasks. The more people involved, the more opinions, too; and again, this is good, but sometimes can become rather frustrating. In any event, probably the most important thing in trying to assemble a group of scholars is to get their commitment. And even if so, it is almost inevitable that somebody at some point along the way will fail to deliver what was promised. This must be taken into account. For example, in the current study, we began with 22 countries; within a short time 3 countries dropped out and at later stages 2 additional countries could not continue.

And I haven't yet mentioned funding. There is an ancient Hebrew saying: "Without flour there is no Torah." Putting it differently, money makes the world go around ... so without funding there can be no research. I would say that it is very unlikely to obtain funds from one source to support a large international project, at least not in the social sciences. So it's often necessary to have each country raise its own funding and this can be difficult and time consuming, especially since sources vary, as do deadlines for applications. Also, different funding agencies often have their

idiosyncratic requirements, in terms of contents and scope of proposals, as well as the forms they use so that although there can be a common core for the proposal, it must be modified and adjusted in each location.

In short, getting an international project underway is not easy, it is time consuming, there are frustrations and disappointments along the way, but the potential reward is great.

**LC: There have been many general discussions about the virtues and challenges of comparative research. Can you share with us your views regarding the values of comparative research in relation to your past research projects?**

AC: I have always believed that it is important to do research within a comparative context. In addition to the inherent interest (or curiosity) as to how things appear or how they are done elsewhere, I think that the main reason for doing comparative research is that it enables the researcher to better understand his/her own situation. Speaking of TV news, for example, if all I did was to study the way Israeli news is produced, presented, and perceived by Israeli viewers, I would be missing much of the bigger picture about TV news. While the basic news values of television journalists, at least in democratic societies, are similar, differences do exist. This is even more pronounced when dealing with non-democratic societies. So by studying a variety of countries or societies one can gain better insight as to one's own country or society.

In looking at social conflicts in TV news, my colleagues and I wanted to know if complexity, intensity and solvability of social conflicts are presented more severely in foreign news than in domestic news. It would be of little value to study this in only one country, for to reach any generalized finding it was necessary to look at the situation in at least several countries. This way, we could determine if any country deviates from the "norm." In the EBU study it was of little value to know that country X used N percent of the material that was made available by the organization; only when looking at which percentage that each country used was it possible to place country X in perspective. Finally, in another comparative study that I conducted, together with Pamela Shoemaker, we looked for universalities in the way news is produced. We wanted to find out

the extent to which deviance and social significance constitute basic parameters of newsworthiness, not only in the United States or Israel—where we come from—but universally. This News Around the World project looked at newspapers, television and radio in 10 countries by analyzing a sample of one week’s news in one central and one peripheral city in each country. Only comparative research can show all of this.

**LC: These are indeed important issues in our understanding of news. So what were some of the major findings in the studies? On the whole, are there universal elements in news around the world?**

AC: I’m very glad you ask this question. Detailed findings of those earlier projects can be found in *Social Conflicts and Television News* (Sage, 1990), *Global Newsroom, Local Audience* (John Libbey, 1996) and *News Around the World* (Routledge, 2006). Overall speaking, I would say—and this is nothing new—that two main sets of factors probably explain much of the variance in terms of the way news is presented: journalist norms, values and practices, on one hand, and socio-political pressures, on the other hand. These might be reflected in media competition for ratings (which is probably more pervasive today than ever) versus government regulation.

In our study of social conflict in TV news, we placed the 5 countries along two conceptual continua: the extent of potential competition (based on the availability of channels) as well as government influence, respectively. And yet, despite differences that we expected to find among the countries based on these continua, we actually found more commonality among them. First, there was a preponderance of social conflict in the news. Second, most of the conflict items dealt with very few topics: international politics, internal politics, internal order, and labor relations (70–86% of the conflict items in the 5 countries were of these types). Finally, and here I quote from the book *Social Conflict and Television News* (p. 177): “... there was a greater tendency for three things to occur among conflict items as compared to nonconflict items; first, presenting conflict items in relationship to other conflict items; second, presenting conflict connected to other events; and third, providing historical background and context.” Another overall finding was that conflicts dealing with events in foreign countries

were presented as more severe, that is, more complex, more intense, and more difficult to solve than domestic conflicts. I suspect, however, that things may be different now, two decades later, with much more competition all around resulting in more dramatization and sensationalism in domestic news as well. So yes, as I said earlier, things have been changing.

In the News Around the World project, the data also indicate what we interpreted as universal tendencies in the presentation of news. Thus, for example, there was a propensity for the news media in the 10 countries—TV, radio and newspapers—to include news items that on average were of low to moderate intensity, with extremely deviant and very highly socially significant news appearing significantly less often. We also found that newspapers, compared with TV and radio, tended to present less intense deviance and social significance. Do keep in mind that we looked at the entire newspapers, not only the front pages that might have presented an opposite trend. Our third universal trend was that visuals (in TV and newspapers) are less deviant and less socially significant than the verbal text that accompanied them. Despite many awful things that are reported, rarely are gruesome images shown.

So in sum, in both studies, we tended to find quite a bit of relative similarity across countries in terms of how the news was presented. What does this mean? It may suggest that the journalistic culture is relatively stronger and hence more important in determining what gets in the news and how, more so than socio-political differences that often characterize variations among nations.

**LC: Going back to comparative research, Sonia Livingstone, in an article about cross-national media research published in the *European Journal of Communication* in 2003, stated that “in the social sciences, cross-national comparisons are both attacked as impossible and defended as necessary.” Put aside practical issues such as finding collaborators and funding, at the conceptual and theoretical level, what do you see as the most important challenges facing comparative research projects? Are there senses in which comparative research is really “impossible”?**

AC: Let me begin by saying that I’m sure that there are circumstances where comparative research is indeed impossible—both for “practical,”

that is, logistic, technical, funding and human (or often cultural) reasons as well as in the theoretical-conceptual domain.

Albert Einstein is probably best known for his theory of relativity. Of course his work in physics has little, if anything, to do with social science and communication, but nonetheless even in our human world most, if not everything, is relative. As you know, in that article by Livingstone, which is based on earlier work, notably that of Jay Blumler and others, comparative research can be considered as one of four models: nation as object of study; nation as context of study; nation as unit of analysis; and nation as component of a larger international or transnational system. Without elaborating on these models here, suffice it say that each comparative study should be anchored in one of them. And yet, this process of anchoring, coupled with the need to select nations (or countries) doesn't always work well. Too often, comparative research is attempted without consideration for any of these four models; hence whatever conclusions that can be drawn from such research are haphazard at best.

There are also some more specific problems in doing comparative research. Let me briefly mention a few. One of the biggest challenges is obtaining functional equivalence. By this I mean the ability to use objects and subjects in different countries or societies that on the face of it are different but serve the same basic function in each of the locations. For example: what do we mean by public service broadcasting? Many countries have a system which they refer to as "public" but the way it operates, the way it is regulated, the kinds of programs it produces, etc., are different. So when we want to compare public broadcasting in different countries, we must try to identify what would be the most relevant channels that would be functionally equivalent to public broadcasting. Another example: what is the "main" television newscast in different countries? Is it the one aired in prime time, is it the longest one, or it is the one that has the largest viewership? In fact, what is "prime time" in different countries? And how is viewership determined? In doing comparative research we need to find not the absolutely identical "thing" (because it may not exist) but rather the "best" fit or those that are functionally equivalent.

We also need to understand that the meaning of text lies often,

if not always, in its context. Thus a concept used in a survey questionnaire (e.g., “satisfaction”) or in a codebook of a content analytic study (e.g., gory pictures) may have different meanings in different countries or cultures. Scholars doing comparative research often face the dilemma of translating research instruments verbatim or trying to make them meaningful to users in the different countries. Usually, one language must serve as the common tool or denominator for comparative research—and of course this is most often English—but even the English language, which is very robust, cannot always provide the precise meanings that are pertinent cross-culturally or cross nationally.

Reliability of content coding is another difficult challenge. While several methods and statistical measures are available for assessing of inter-coder reliability, this can usually work well within a culture but often less well, if at all, across countries. Ideally, all coding of materials from different countries should be done “under the same roof,” that is, in one location by coders who can code the materials originating from different countries. But obviously this cannot work in the real world of comparative research, even if student-coders from various countries are available in one place. Even if the coders know the various languages of the texts, they would not be familiar enough with the events being reported to be able to code the more complex variables. Therefore, coding is usually done separately in each of the countries involved in the study by “native” coders. Do they operate the same way everywhere? Surely, not. And is there a good method to test for inter-cultural reliability? Unfortunately, not!

But then, to say that comparative research is impossible is not something I’d agree with; otherwise, most of what I’ve done in my entire career would be irrelevant and I want to believe that this is not the case.

**LC: You just mentioned functional equivalence and the example of public service broadcasting. We definitely agree that looking for functional equivalence is very important. But any talk about “functional equivalence” would presume a specification of what functions an entity has. Talking about public service television, if we succeed in specifying its functions and find “functionally**

**equivalent” entities in different countries, we will be arriving at a set of television stations which share the functions. Yet at this point, the label “public television” may no longer be the most appropriate one. Essentially we may have to come up with a new concept for it. It seems that re-conceptualization of taken-for-granted concepts can be a key aspect of comparative research and the generation of new concepts can be one of the most important contributions made by comparative studies.**

AC: Interesting point! Indeed we sometime—but surely not always—imply, at least implicitly, the existence of certain functions for concepts that we study and for which we seek functional equivalents. And you are absolutely correct regarding the concept of public television. Another aspect of the changing times, that I referred to earlier, is the need for reconceptualizing concepts. My concern about public television is that perhaps this entire discussion may become irrelevant given the fact that regardless of how it is defined, public broadcasting in general and public television in particular may soon disappear from the media ecology in many countries, hence it will become a non-issue, a thing of the past. Hopefully not, but perhaps in the not-too-distant future only historical studies of public broadcasting will be done.

LC: **Another seeming paradox involved in the rise of comparative research is that, on one hand, the increasing interests in comparative media studies is probably (quoting Livingstone again) “stimulated ... by the phenomena of globalization and the concomitant rise of globalization theory.” But on the other hand, one thing which the process of globalization does is to put into question the idea of a nation-state as a self-contained unit of analysis. Some may argue that cities constitute a more pertinent unit of analysis, and others may, following Wallerstein, argue that the “world system” should be analyzed as one single unit. What’s your view on this question of unit of analysis? Should we still emphasize *cross-national* comparative research?**

AC: I believe that of all the options that you mentioned—nation, region, city—the most relevant in this day and age is the nation (or country). Having said this, however, I think that we must keep in mind that within countries, large and small, there can be much variability. And

yet, there is something common in each country or nation, regarding its social, political and cultural domains, that seems to be relevant even today despite the trend towards globalization. In other words, the “world system” cannot serve as the unit of analysis in such studies.

I think that the concept of globalization often tempts us to consider the world as one large community. But we are really not a global village! Divisions based on politics, religion and race still play a central role in peoples’ identities and thus it would be wrong to dissolve or ignore, so to speak, such differences as if they are no longer relevant. In fact, I would say that in terms of communication, globalization is often technically relevant—such as the ability to transmit voices and pictures across the globe in real time—but that the meaning attributed to these “identical” texts by audiences are most often perceived differently in different countries. This may actually be quite different from the globalization phenomenon regarding other products and services. Thus a credit card is a credit card wherever it is used; a Toyota is a Toyota wherever it is sold (even if there may be slightly different safety features demanded by the authorities in different countries); and a Nike shoe is a Nike shoe all over. But media products, even if they are basically the same, they often require translation which is likely to modify at least in some way the message being presented.

**LC: Beyond issues of comparative research, you have been working on a wide range of topics in the past 30 years. One of your most influential works has been the “global newsroom” study conducted in the early 1990s, that is, the study about the EBU News Exchange Service which you already mentioned above. In that seminal study, you and your collaborators explicated the notion of domestication of international news. Twenty years have passed since the original global newsroom study. What do you see as the most important changes in the past twenty years when international news is concerned? Given the changes, do you see any need to alter or adjust the main conclusions of the global newsroom study?**

AC: When we conducted our study of the EBU News Exchange Service from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, the organization and the way

it operated was barely known in academic circles even though the EBU was the major provider of foreign news footage for most European countries and beyond. It also served as a model for other news exchange services in other parts of the world. But yes, as Bob Dylan says in his famous song, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*. Indeed, much has changed since that study although the EBU is still a vibrant and important provider of news. While at the time, two decades ago, there were only a few satellite feeds per day, each consisting of only a few items, now there is a continuous flow of materials all day long. Also, while many news department have cut the number of their foreign correspondents, some of the news agencies, notably the Associated Press and Reuters have expanded their television services. Also, global news broadcasters have become more prominent with such networks as CNN International (that did exist at the time), BBC World, Al Jazeera (in Arabic and English), France 24, a Chinese channel and more. In addition, several national channels—such as Sky and Fox News—have become transnational providers. So the marketplace for news has expanded and in many places around the world viewers can get foreign news from a variety of sources.

You ask about changes in our original conclusion. Well, I think they were correct for their time and they provided useful information and insight on what I considered to be a fascinating process. In fact, some years ago I toyed with the idea of doing a replication of the study—yes, replications are often very useful but unfortunately rarely done, probably because scholars feel that new things are better and more timely, hence they don't want to “waste” their energies and resources on something that “has already been done.” I would argue that sometimes replications would be very useful precisely in order to tap changes that occur over time. In retrospect, I think that the EBU study was one of my own best achievements. It was what I would call “start-to-finish” research. By this I mean that it dealt with the production of news, the content, as well as the audiences. Most studies of news deal with one of these three components, sometimes with two of them, but rarely with all three.

And if you allow me to be nostalgic for a moment, one of the most interesting events that I had the pleasure of organizing was a day-long meeting between a dozen or so Israeli scholars who hosted

an equal number of foreign colleagues for a conference in Jerusalem in 1988 during the course of our EBU research. The title of our conference was *Future Directions in Television News Research: Content, Cognition and Control*. The EBU news coordinators from over 40 countries just happened to be having their semi-annual meeting, also in Jerusalem—no, not really, our conference was coordinated with theirs, of course. Anyway, the scholars and the practitioners spent the day discussing various aspects of foreign news. It was a fascinating get-together, a forum that I cannot imagine takes place very often. I wish we could “replicate” this kind of meeting some time.

**LC: It would indeed be very interesting if your study of the EBU News Exchange Service is replicated. What would be your “bet” regarding what findings will be generated if such a replication were done? Would the original conclusions still hold? Any new findings you think are likely to emerge?**

AC: Once again, times are changing. The EBU News Exchange was the first of its kind (several such organizations exist today). It was founded in 1950 in a totally different media era. Television footage was provided with film, sent by car, train or plane from the location of the event to the studio. The quickest form of written communication was the telex machine. There was no fax machine, no computer, no satellite and no Internet. When we began studying the organization telex was still used, fax was coming in, and there were only a few communication satellites circling the globe. The daily conference was conducted via radio-telephone. Founders of the EBU, if they were around today, would not recognize the current system.

And yet, its functions remain basically the same—to provide member countries (that have expanded from 23 countries 60 years ago to 75 active members, from 56 countries in and around Europe, plus 43 associate members around the world) with television news footage. Today the Exchange provide 24/7 news using several satellites compared with 2 or 3 “feeds” in earlier years. Most member countries still use EBU materials more than other sources for their reports of events taking place outside their countries although other sources are also available.

So if I did the replication I suppose that the spirit of cooperation among the members would still be there, and that more foreign news—both important and interesting—would be available, delivered and aired by the various services. In fact, I would expect that in one sense the news exchange would be even more important for many stations because of the serious cutbacks that have typified the news scene in recent years in terms of having foreign correspondents in key locations.

**LC: Talking about cutbacks, isn't it paradoxical that as countries are more closely interconnected with one another, news stations in many countries seem to be spending less on foreign news?**

AC: Producing news is generally a costly operation. Most news production today is done by commercial organizations where the profit motive is dominant. As news organizations see it, placing correspondents abroad is expensive and if such spending can be saved, thereby making more profit, why not? This is especially the case when the news exchanges as well as the global broadcasters can easily provide materials on events taking place outside one's national borders. And yet, fortunately the foreign correspondent is not yet a thing of the past; certain locations are still hubs for correspondents of many stations: Washington, London, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, Tokyo, and Jerusalem. But it's also the case that some stations have but a single or even no foreign correspondent. This is a pity but *c'est la vie!*

**LC: Focusing on the concept of domestication itself, as an empirical phenomenon, domestication of international news has been demonstrated in many studies since your seminal research. But normatively, is domestication necessarily a desirable phenomenon? Would an over-emphasis on domestication risk distorting the true significance of world affairs? In other words, can domestication just be another manifestation of ethnocentrism? Can we talk about different ways to domesticate international news, with some better than the others?**

AC: This is quite a difficult question. As in news production in general, I can think of two aspects of domestication. First, there is the question of *selecting* foreign news events to be reported. Then is the question

of the *composition* or the framing of the story for the benefit of the domestic audience. Of the multitude of events taking place outside the borders of any country on any given day, news editors must, if they so wish, select certain foreign news events to be reported in their newscast. It can be assumed, reasonably, that much of the newscast would deal with domestic issues. The question then is which foreign events ought to be reported. Typically, journalists will say that they should be important and/or interesting events. But what makes a foreign event important and/or interesting; to whom; to the world, to the country or countries involved in the event, to the country of broadcast; to everyone or only to select viewers? Surely there are some events that would be considered as important and/or interesting to the almost everyone all over, but these events are few and far between. Another set of events could be relevant to the country of broadcast even though they take place elsewhere, such as a meeting abroad of the country of broadcast's leader with the leader of another country. This is a kind of hybrid event having some element of domestication attached to it. In short, editors must decide which events, purely foreign or hybrid, to include in the newscast and presumably already at this point consideration is given to the potential question of how to present it.

And now comes the second part, that of composing the story once the editor decides to include it in the newscast. Every event is framed in one way or another. Domestication is one way of framing events for presentation as news stories. For example, the Israeli television news channels have been providing significant coverage of the recent political violence in Thailand. Why? At least in part because Thailand is one of Israelis' most popular tourist resorts with thousands visiting there. It would almost seem unrealistic if no references were made to the hostilities there without mentioned the impact on Israeli tourists. This does not mean, however, that such reporting would be over-emphasizing domestication. These reports are essentially about Thailand and its internal politics but disregarding the Israeli "angle" would actually raise eyebrows among Israeli viewers. Domesticating foreign news involves a question of degree, not a dichotomous yes or no decision. Domestication, in my view, is far from being a form of ethnocentrism.

There is a metaphor in Jewish culture which refers to the "elephant

and the Jewish problem” which means that everything can be framed or connected to Jewish issues, even things that are totally unrelated to Jews. However, there is nothing in Jewish culture referring to elephants: although many animals are referred to in the Bible, no elephants are mentioned; and in most places around the world where Jews have lived, including Israel, there are no elephants (except in zoos). So while news editors could potentially try to domesticate almost any news story, they do not do so. Domestication in the news is not omnipresent but when it is done it serves to make the story more relevant and meaningful for the domestic audience.

In a series of recent interviews that I conducted with the heads of the foreign news desks at two of Israel’s leading TV channels, I was told that they do domesticate the news sometimes when they believe it is useful, but surely not always. I would imagine that this trend exists in other countries as well.

**LC: Following your thoughts, to turn the previous question around, maybe domestication leads to plurality of “viewpoints” in the world’s media, and maybe it’s a good thing?**

AC: Absolutely! There are various ways to domesticate a news story, both by different stations within a country as well as in different countries. Let me give you an example. One of the news events that we examined in detail in the EBU study dealt with the 1987 elections in Ireland. The American CBS report focused on Ireland’s economic problems, specifically the high rate of unemployment among Irish youth, some of whom attempted to secure jobs in the United States. The French TF1 station focused on the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland by creating ambivalence towards the “innocent” Irish who wish to preserve their religion while paying a heavy price for it. Finally, in Belgium, the RTBF station showed images of multi-children families and young mothers pushing baby strollers as the backdrop for a discussion on the resistance of the Church to contraception and abortion.

And what’s most important, I believe, is that if domesticating foreign news can lead to more interest among citizens in what is happening abroad—even if the story is presented in an idiosyncratic fashion—so much for the better. In an era of declining interest in what is happening abroad, despite globalization, whatever can be made

meaningful to domestic audiences is all for the good thing. After all, if domestic news is framed in different ways by different stations even in the same country, how can one expect foreign news to be presented uniformly?

## Selected Works by Akiba Cohen

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for Akiba Cohen's selected works.