

# Surveying television drama on China Central Television's foreign language channels

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## Abstract

■ This paper surveys over one hundred and seventy drama series (*dianshiju*) broadcast on four of China Central Television's (CCTV) foreign language channels between 2004 and 2015.

■ It analyzes the genre, theme, time of action and location of these series as it seeks to understand how, through the narrative of fiction, China's public broadcaster contributes to constructing a global narrative on contemporary Chinese society.

■ The paper also highlights the uncoordinated logic behind China's efforts to internationalize its television drama industry.

## Background

■ Maximizing soft power has become a twenty-first century obsession for China. Through an array of tools, such as international broadcasting, China seeks to redress negative views abroad.

■ Since the early 2000s, China has been internationalizing its TV industry and currently has six foreign language channels, which are an integral part of current efforts to increase China's cultural appeal and maximize its discursive power.

■ Television serial dramas are the most popular narrative form in contemporary China. Because of this, and because of the success of other countries in exporting their TV series abroad (like South Korea or Japan...), in recent years China has invested time and resources in making its cultural industries more global.

■ TV series are a powerful social institution in the reproduction of social order and in the creation of images of foreign countries.

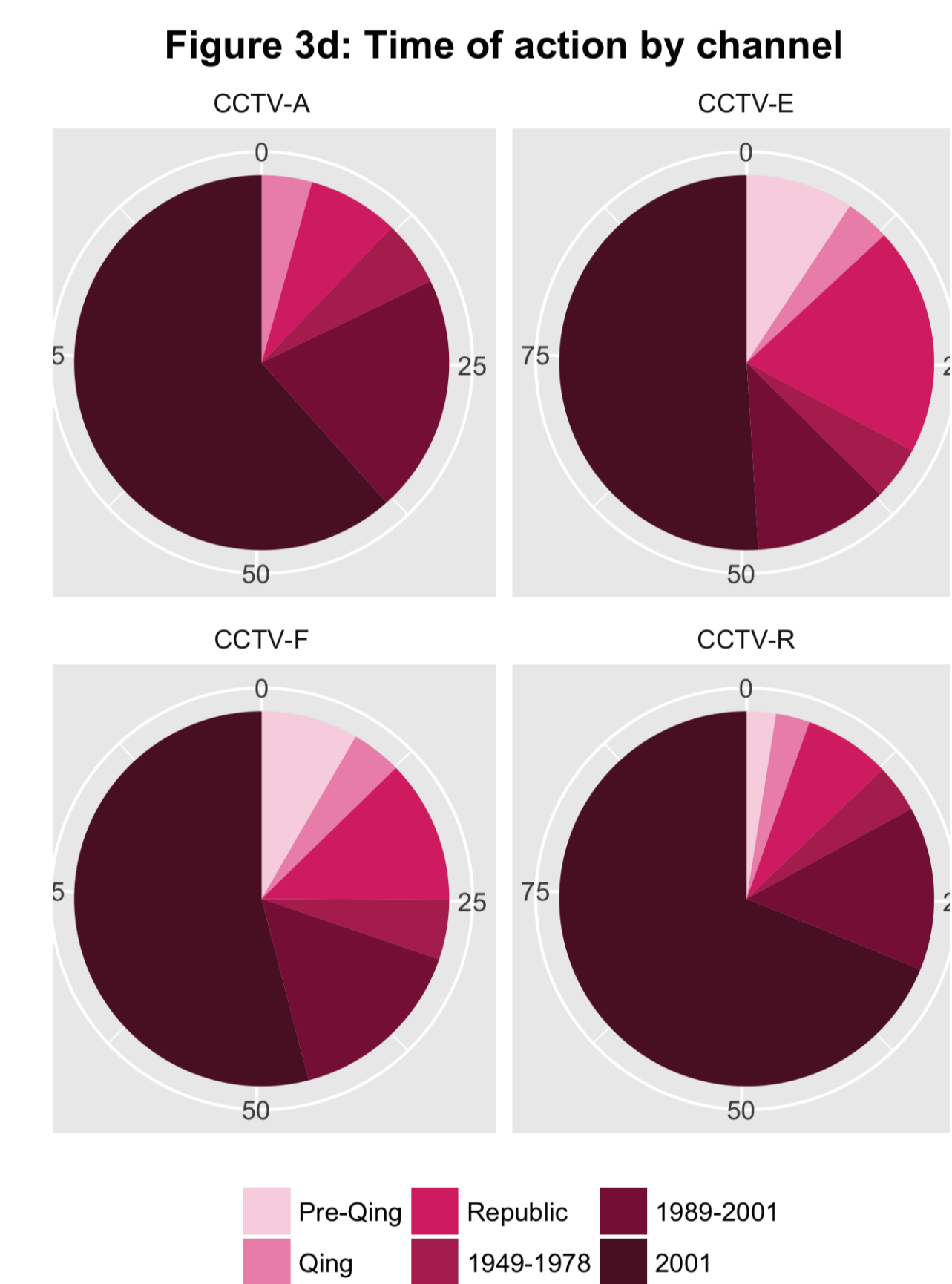
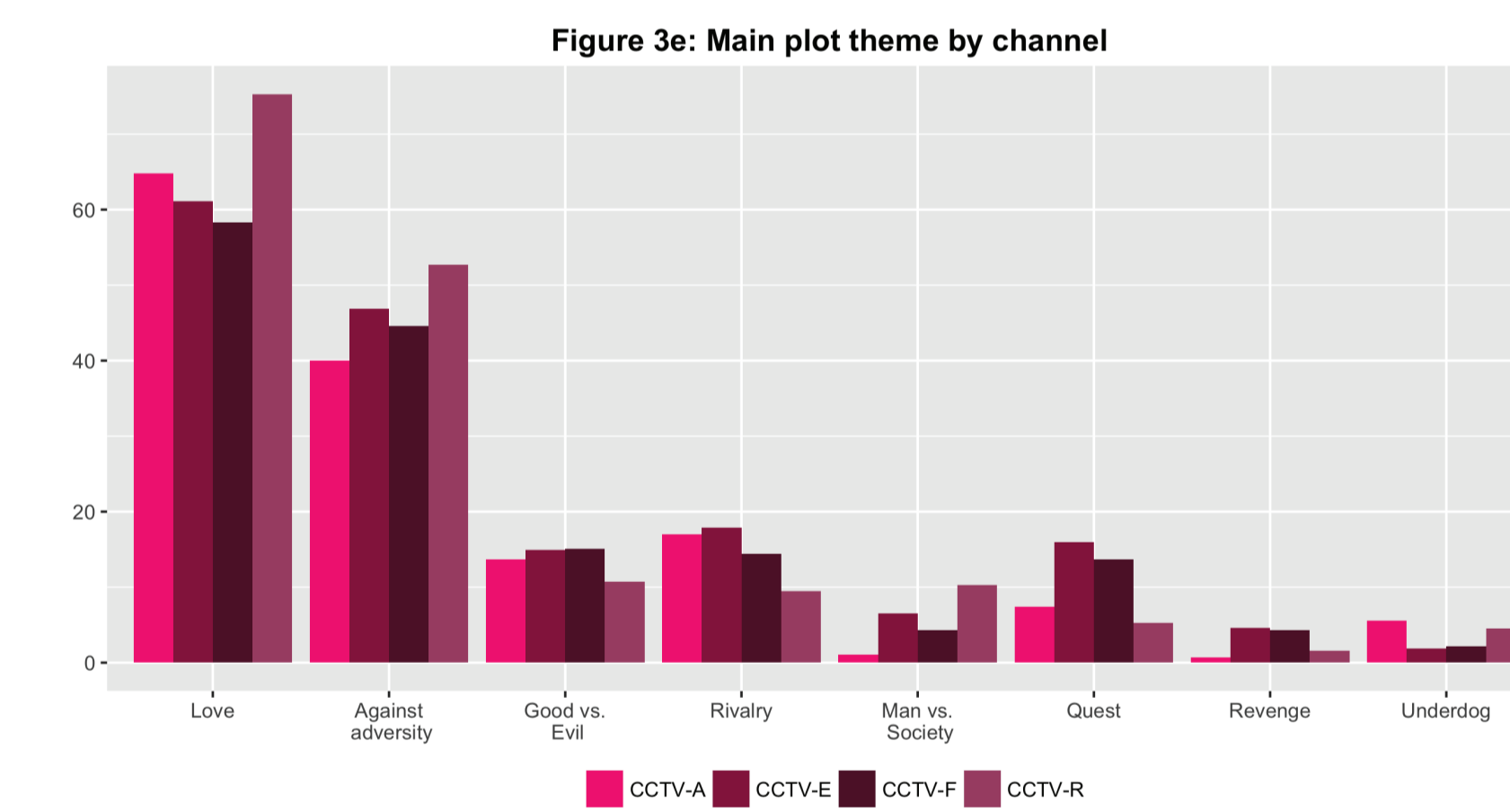
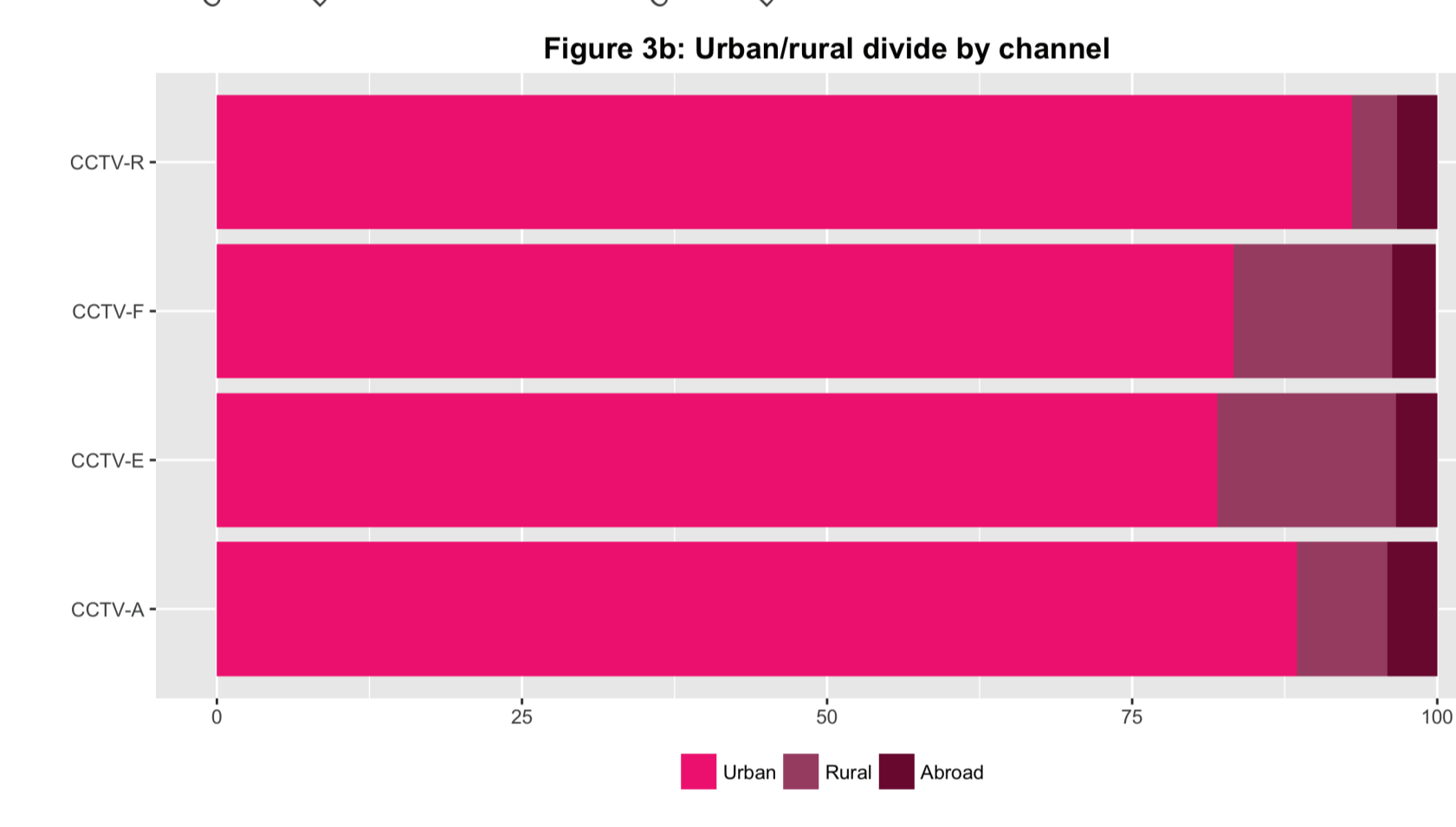
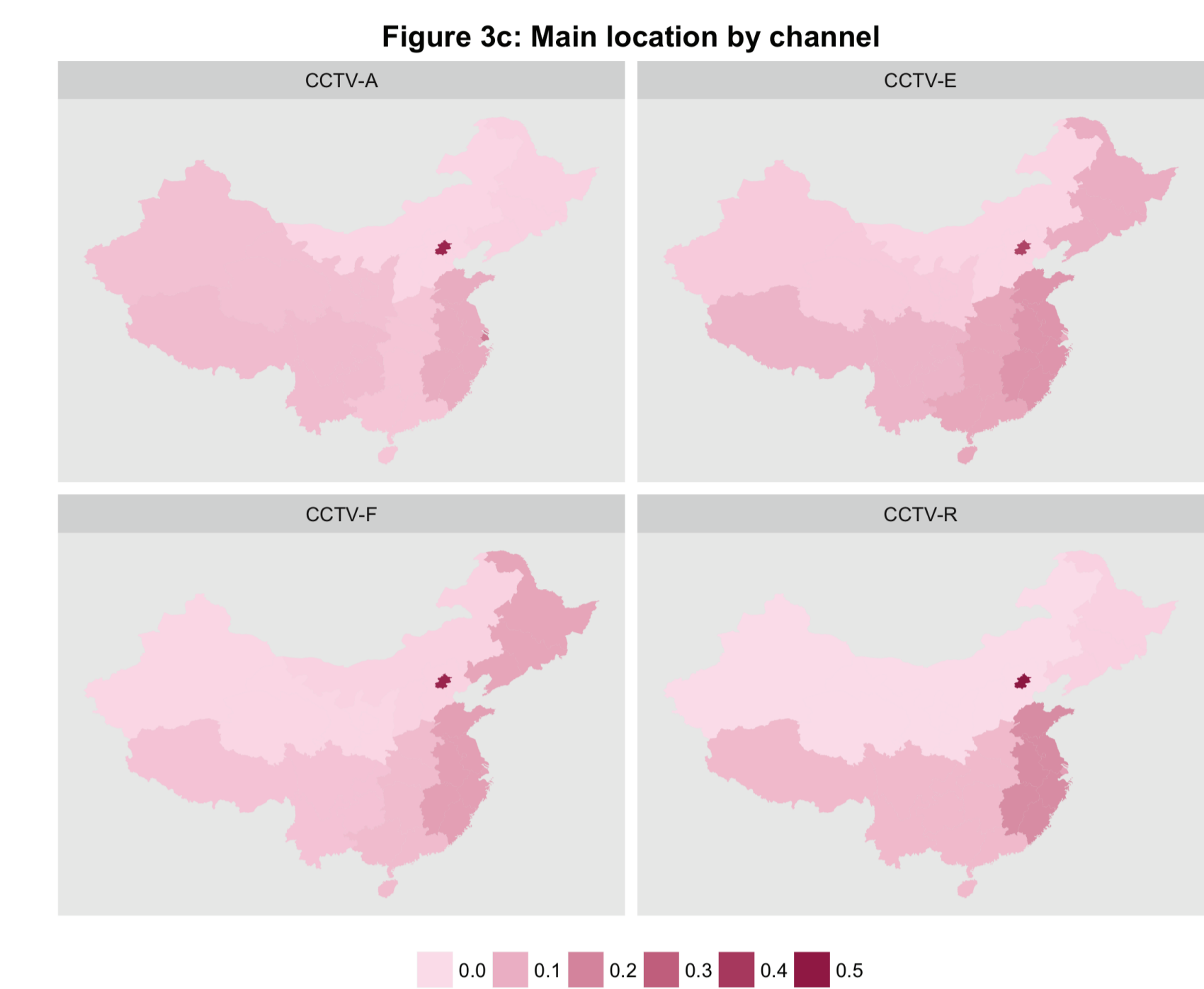
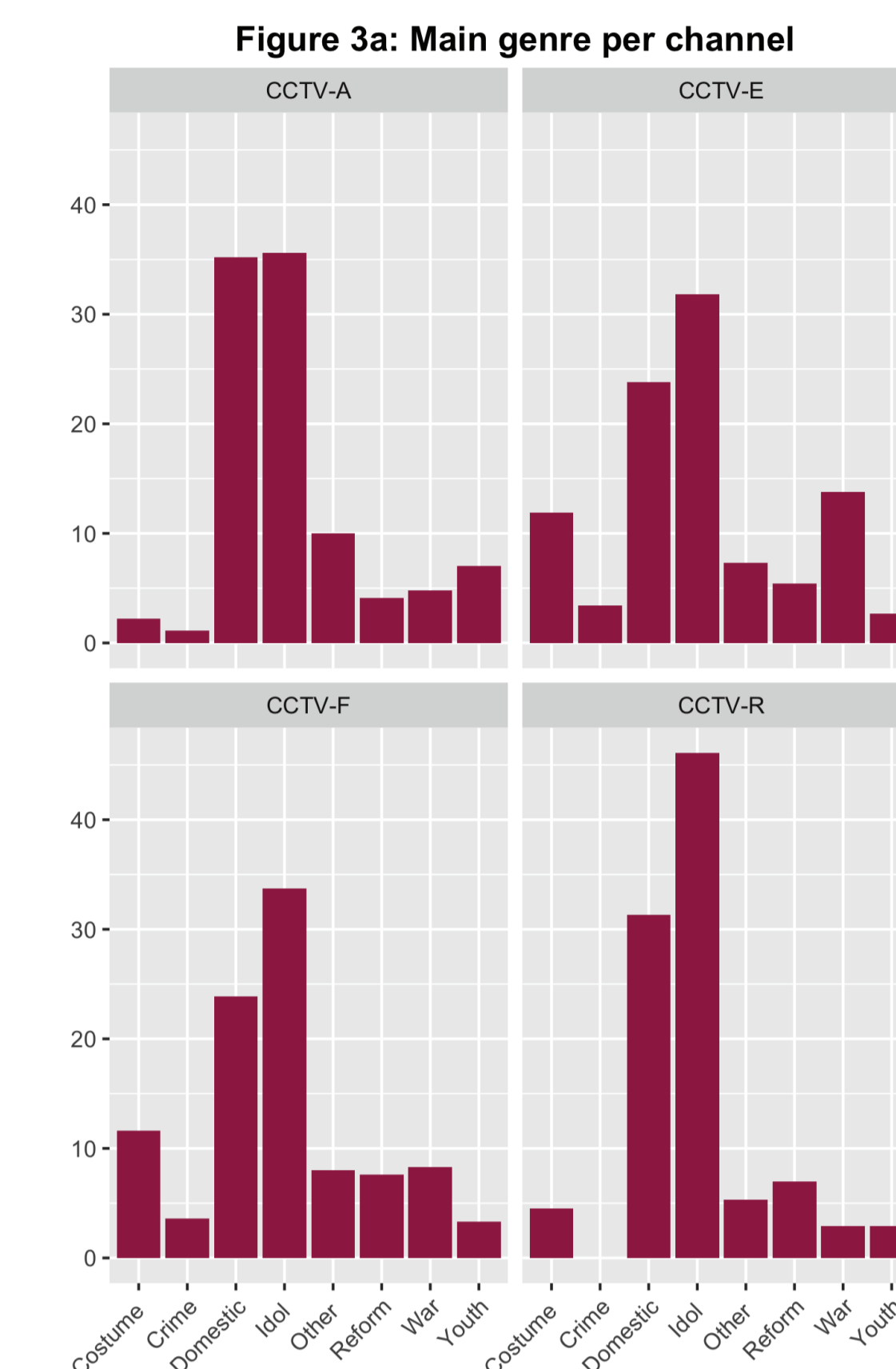
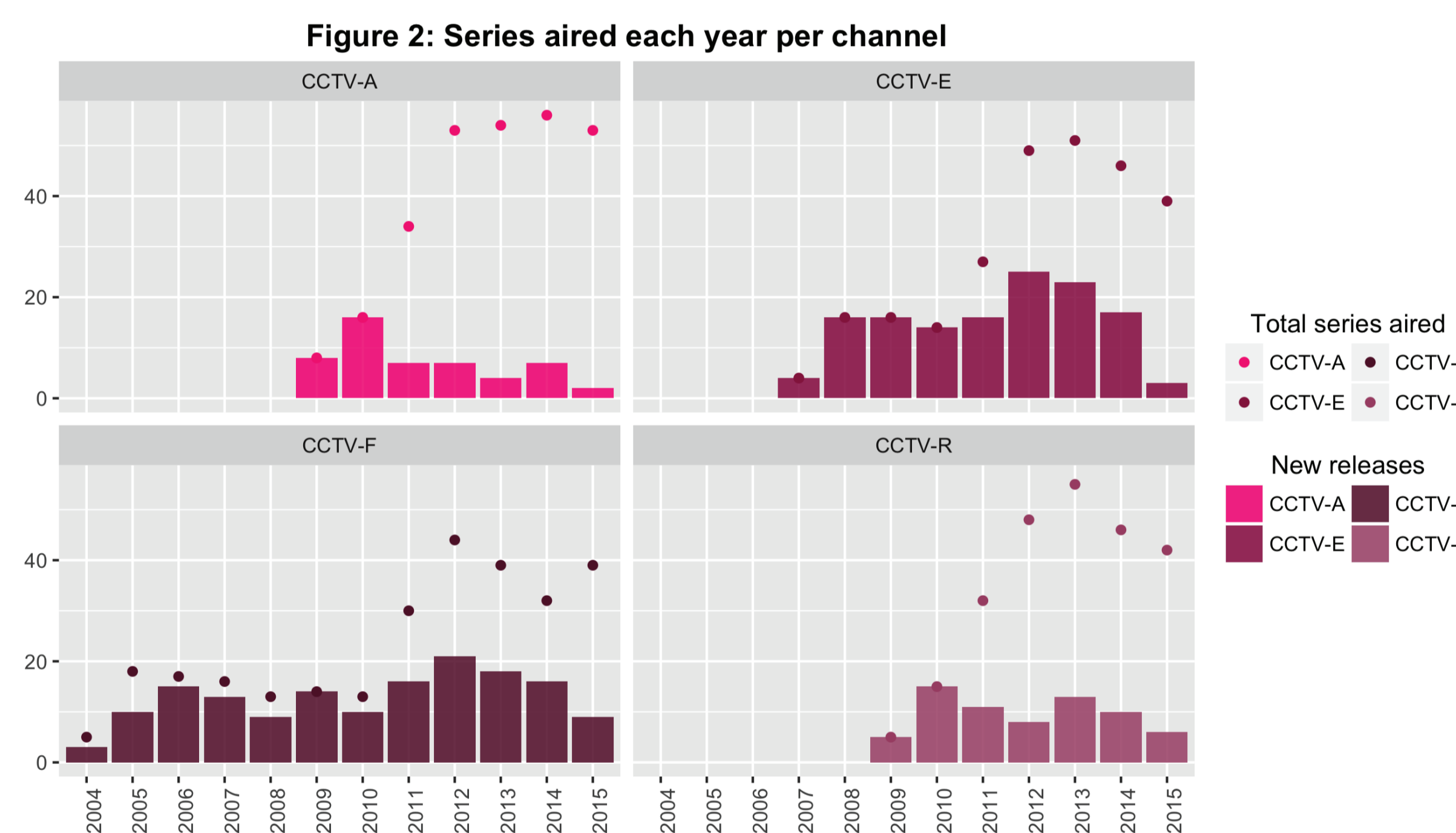
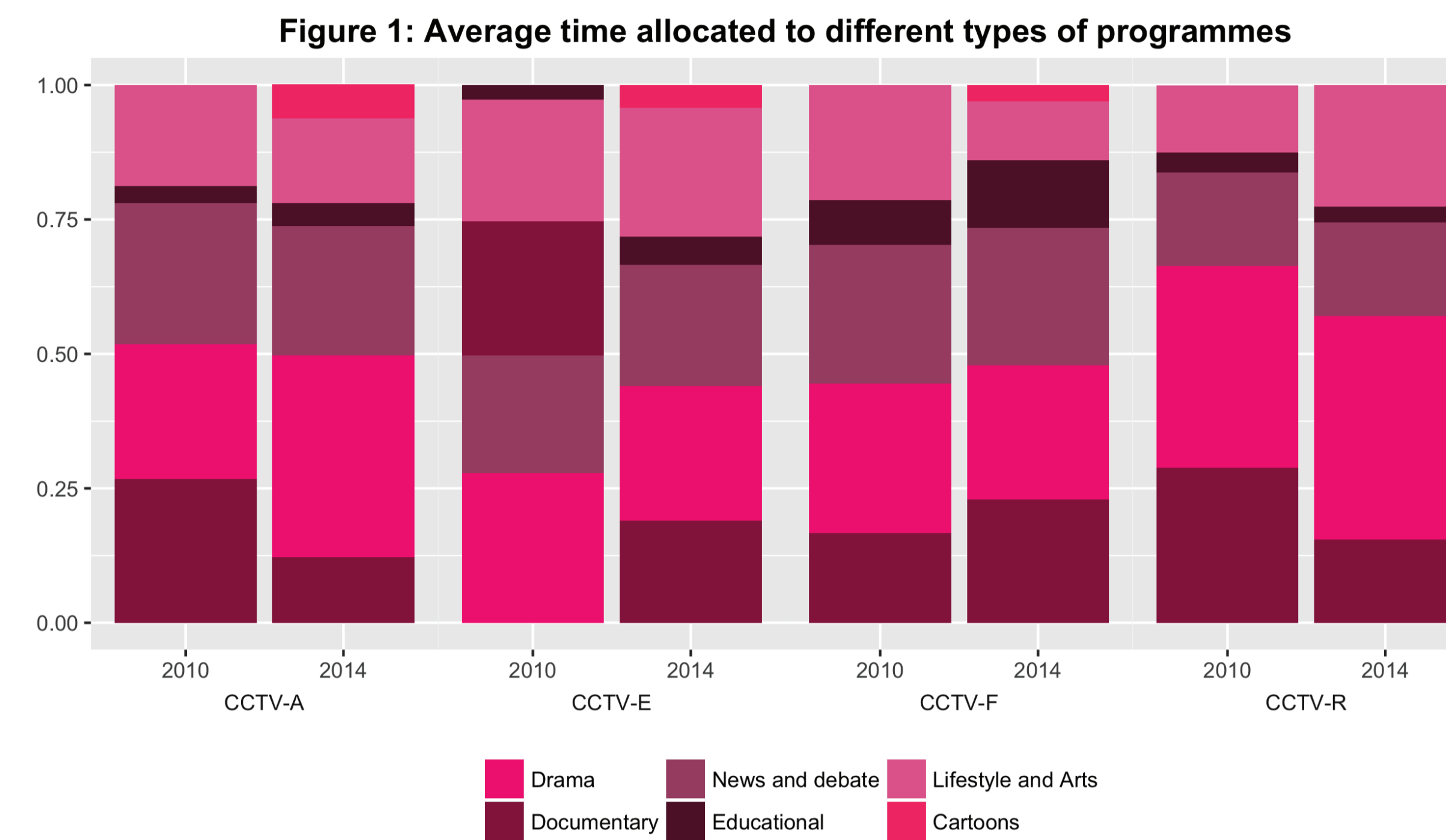
## Key findings

#1 In contrast to the diversity of visual representations of China available domestically, the content offered to foreign audiences through CCTV is largely restricted to the "main melody."

#2 The two series that have been broadcast most times (22 reruns) are *Zhang Xiao Wu's Spring* and *Naked Wedding*.

#3 Previous audience success in China does predict which series will be aired on CCTV's international channels. However, some degree of planning goes into choosing the shows. Significant differences exist between CCTV-E & CCTV-F and CCTV-A & CCTV-R.

## Results



## Methods

■ All 173 TV series aired on China's foreign language channels between 2004 and 2015 were hand coded by coders. The final average intercoder reliability scores were .81 (Krippendorff's  $\alpha$ ) and 91% percent agreement.

■ Series were manually coded for genre, time of action, place of action and plot theme.

■ For each drama other descriptive information (year of production, year of release, number of viewers online and users' rating) was collected from Baidu Baike, Youku and Douban.

## Conclusion

■ China's intensified efforts to boost its soft power capabilities have had mixed reactions overseas. The country lacks a coordinated strategy. China is, in cultural terms, a partial power.

■ In exporting drama overseas, neither audience success nor narrative quality appear to be the criteria in selection shows. There is a mismatch between the most popular shows domestically and those shown on CCTV's foreign language channels.

■ In China's international broadcasting, quantity prevails over quality. Politically safe content is always chosen over quality.

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