
Editorial

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China's rise as an economic power has attracted enormous attention: from policy makers to business circles, and from journalists to academics worldwide. The economic reform and 'open door' policies carried out in the late 1970s have brought the world's most populous country on to a fast track of economic growth and increasing openness. The transition from a centralized command economy to a market economy has been accompanied by unprecedented social change, but it has taken place without any substantial change in the political structure. The clear contrast between 'continuities and discontinuities' seems to suggest a different model of transition in comparison with that experienced by the former USSR and other Eastern European countries. For all these reasons, Chinese media undoubtedly make an interesting case for study.

Numerous studies have attempted to investigate Chinese media transformations over the last two and a half decades (Chan 1993; 2003; Chu 1994; Hong 1998; Lee 1990; 1994; 2000; 2003; Liu 1998; Lynch 1999; Pan 2000; Polunbaum, 1990a; 1990b, 1994; Zhao 1998; 2000; 2003). Some pioneering English-language literature aims to bring a broad range of issues into the debate upon the relationship between marketization and democratisation. The central theme lies in the question whether the media marketization process, characterized most notably by 'cuts in state subsidies and the rise of advertising and other alternative forms of financing' (Polunbaum 1994, 115), will ultimately contribute to create the conditions for establishing 'a competitive political system' in China modelled on the Anglo-American type of liberal democracy.

There are three powerful views on this question. They may be referred to as the optimistic view, the negative view and the 'middle ground' position. The optimistic view suggests that media competition, along with the increasing awareness of Western journalistic codes and norms will motivate Chinese journalists to act from below against the current ideological and political control.

Alternatively, freer expression might be ensured from above during ideological and political struggles between 'continuist' and 'reformist' currents in the bureaucracy that will ultimately lead to a desirable change to the whole system (Goldman 1994; Hsiao and Yang 1990; Wu, 2000). This argument finds support in the observation of considerable but unintended freedom created through reporting non-political or societal news by newly established market-driven media outlets (Lee 2000; 2001).

The optimistic view has encountered immediate opposition from those who argue that what has taken place in China is rather 'commercialization without independence' (Chan 1993) or 'liberalization without political democratization' (Zhao 1998), which is explained in terms of 'China's unique approach of development in the post-Mao era' by 'interlocking of Party control and market forces' (Zhao 1998, 3). Despite attempts at separating Party and government functions, implementing a legal system, increasing local self-government and modifying personnel management, the Chinese media transformation, as it is claimed, does not imply any substantial change to the current political structure (Ibid). Moreover, 'the Party still monopolizes power, informal and personal politics still prevail, the independence of the judicial system is still on shaky ground...' (Zhao 1998, 3). Therefore, under increasing market pressure, Chinese media practitioners are more likely to read between the Party line and the bottom line rather than endeavoring to challenge the former (Zhao 1998, 181-94). Some pessimists even conclude that nothing, or very little, has changed, due to the still tight political control over the media (Su 1994; Lu 1994).

The third view takes a middle ground position. It opposes the pessimistic view 'nothing or very little changed' while showing a touch of cautious optimism towards the possible impact that the ongoing media change might have on the whole Chinese political system. Some scholars taking this position intend to explore the change in media structure(s) in order to capture the gradual, instrumental and uneven nature of Chinese media transformation, which is 'marked by continued political repression and powerful resistance to the democratizing pressure of marketization' (Wu 2000, 46). This line of argument has abandoned the early hypothesis of some optimists, which assumed a 'sweeping change', as that achieved in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, would take place in China before producing 'substantive changes in media structures' (Wu 2000, 45-67). Instead, the middle ground claim suggests that the ongoing change is 'significant enough to offer an increasingly larger space for journalists' reports in the social realm, albeit not yet in the political realm' (Wu 2000, 46). It assumes that the gradual liberalization in China is 'economic in nature, but its effect may eventually spill over into the political arena' (Wu 2000, 63). Clearly, the middle ground position shares its ultimate goal with the optimists, although they suggest different ways to reach the end.

In the course of this debate, major attention has been given to the examination of the 'ambiguous contradictions' of journalistic practices in the interplay with political and market forces (Lee 1990; 1994; 2000; Zhao 1998). These studies either analyze news content and representation of significant media events, notably the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 (see Cao 2000; Friedman 1994; He 2000a; Pan et al 2000), or evaluate the role of Chinese journalists during the socioeconomic transformation (He 2000b; Polunbaum 1990a; 1990b; 1994; Xu 2000; Zhao 1998). Some scholars have also examined the rise of investigative journalism in China in the 1990s, and its implications in relation to the watchdog role of journalists, or the notion of media professionalism endorsed mainly by liberal-pluralists (de Burgh 2000; Lee 2000; Rosen 2000; Zhao, 2000). These studies have revealed a mixed, not to say rather chaotic, picture of Chinese journalistic practices, notably in the 1980s and the 1990s: 'paid journalism'¹ (Zhao 1998) coexisted with the adoption of western professional ethics, such as 'objective reporting', fighting for more editorial autonomy, and exposing political and business wrongdoings for public concerns (de Burgh 2003; Li 1994; Polunbaum 1990a; 1990b; Rosen 2000). These contradictions have also puzzled western scholars when they have tried to explain and conceptualise Chinese journalism by adopting an approach generated mainly from the cases of the US and Britain (Schudson 2000). There are some studies concerning the structural change of the whole media system, but they largely refer to it in terms of decentralization, de-politicisation and commercialisation, because of the rise of local market-driven newspapers (Wu 2000, 45-63). However, it remains unclear how journalists would respond to these dimensions of structural change, and how journalistic practices would in return impact on the media structure.

With China's continuing economic growth alongside its accelerated integration into the global economic system marked by its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, Chinese media as a whole and the television sector in particular have attracted increasing academic interest from the globalization theoretical perspectives. Some scholars have attempted to move away from the purely national perspective for analysing the 'state vs. market' binary relationship, to a broader international or global context, employing a multidimensional approach for examining articulations between political, economic and social forces at different levels (Chan 2003; Lee 2003; Zhao 2003). Other scholars endeavour to document institutional changes to Chinese television, which is considered as the most promising medium to be internationalised or globalized (Chin 2003; Guo 2003; Hong 1998; Hu 2003). Conglomeration, capitalization and international trade – all phenomena of advanced capitalism – find their Chinese version, although with some variations. These phenomena are closely linked to regulatory changes, which partially meet or partially disappoint the expectations of western media conglomerates (Guo 2003; Hu 2003; Zhao 2003).

In the globalization debate, the Chinese media and communications system becomes not merely a case for testing 'the values of Western liberal democracy' as 'a world standard for social governance' (Lee 2000, 3), but also a good example for developing critiques of existing theories of globalization and political economy (Curran and Park 2000; Downing 1996; Sparks 1998). Some scholars regard China as a non-Western, or de-Westernized case for boosting their confidence in nation-states, which are claimed to be eroded by the ongoing process of globalization (Curran and Park 2000). Other scholars perceive China as an emerging market, which along with the rest of the world apart from the US and Europe, 'remains very much a secondary arena' for all media transnational corporations (TNCs) (Sparks 2003, 106). They claim that this challenges the argument of globalization theorists for the truly international or global operation of the TNCs (Ibid). For them, on the one hand, the Chinese media market remains partially closed to foreign or non-public funds (Hu 2003). On the other hand, the majority of media and communication transnational conglomerates seem not ready yet to take the emerging but uncertain Chinese market seriously enough, at least not in a way comparable with how they treat the rich and stable market in the US and Europe (Sparks 2003, 93-108).

At the same time, some scholars began to note China's self-projection, mainly as applied to the international trade and other business initiatives in the telecommunication and information sector (Schiller 2005). In order to understand self-projection, Schiller (2005, 86) suggests that 'the significance of these events lies elsewhere, beyond any putative zero-sum game between current global hegemony and would-be rival'. For him, attention needs to be drawn to 'the structural reconfiguration of transnational capitalism with which China's rise is so profoundly intertwined' (Schiller 2005, 86). Moreover, the question of the Chinese case should not be cast simply as 'how comprehensive or immediate a challenge one nation may pose to the other, but what current changes betoken for the structure and function of a more encompassing world political economy' (Ibid). However, studies of the self-projection of China, have not so far included many studies of media examples.

For Chinese media scholars, particularly those who have contributed both to the 'old' and the 'new' debates, the methodological problems they faced remain the same. As scholars mainly trained in the US and the UK, they 'have inevitably turned and returned to Anglo-American literature' to shape their questions or sharpen their analyses (Lee 2000, 9). Since most established theories in sociology, media and communications are based on the cases derived mainly from the US and the UK, these theories cannot be taken-for-granted or automatically applied to other cases, including China (Downing 1996; Lee 2000; Sparks 1998; Schudson 2000). While the 'old problems' remain unsolved, more and more new issues have

arisen in recent years. The current generation of researchers into Chinese media are forced both to update their concrete research and at the same time to try to tackle the methodological issues involved in 'de-Westernizing' media studies.

This issue of WPCC intends to provide an open platform to the broad international community for debating the major issues surrounding the Chinese media transformations in the global context, in terms of the structural changes of Chinese media, and journalistic practices. The first three authors deal with some of the most recent changes in Chinese media structure as a whole, and the television and film sector in particular. Michael Keane starts by analysing the change in the financing of the Chinese film and television industries in recent years. The author builds his analysis on the examination of China's development agenda under the 'Washington Consensus', and of the impact of economic globalization on the relationship between developed and developing countries, in which the latter still functions 'as a second tier of resources and production capability' (see this issue, p. 15) in the industrial organization of developed economies. Keane's suggestion for developing countries, like China, is to shift away from providing infrastructure, or abundant but low value goods, to exporting creative and value-added cultural goods and services. Thus, the author is concerned mainly with 'the synergy between financial and creative inputs into production, distribution, and marketing of film and television' (see this issue, p. 12). At the same time, Keane also notes the obstacles for China to enter the global cultural market, notably the lack of incentives for international competition, and the fragmentation of the national market into several-tiered administrative segments, or different levels of the 'local'.

The next two articles tackle the issue of Chinese local television, which is further divided into provincial, city and town levels, following the institutional arrangement of the central government of China. Zhang Xin's paper reveals how executives and journalists of a local television station – Chongqing Television in the Southwest of China – understand the notion of 'local' in relation to their counterparts 'national' and 'international'. This inland television station sees itself as having an advantageous position in competition with the national broadcaster CCTV at local level (within the city of Chongqing), but it also collaborates with the latter in order to make links between the local and the central government. It targets the local market, provides localized TV programmes (e.g. using local dialect and focusing on local issues), and highlights these local characteristics as part of its product differentiation strategy designed to make it more competitive in the domestic market. However, because of regulatory constraints, limited resources and the lack of incentives, 'internationalisation' in terms of exporting cultural products remains far more beyond its capacity and interest.

Even among the local television stations, there is unevenness in terms of the political and economic resources allocated to them under the current pyramidal

broadcasting structure, which is becoming less stable because of conflicting local interests. Sun Wusan's study demonstrates how the institutional arrangements of the central government have been reshaped by local interests groups, and how the power struggles between local television stations at different levels of the administrative hierarchy, conducted mainly for their own economic interests, have ultimately resulted in institutional and structural changes to the current television broadcasting system. Clearly, there is a contrast between 'central rationality' and 'local irrationality'. Sun's case study suggests that the intensifying market competition has made the contrast even more apparent than before, at least at the lower local level.

Anne-Marie Brady's paper brings us back to the national arena of Chinese media. She looks at the top of the pyramidal media structure – the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), investigating its role as an instructor, monitor and censor for all kinds of Chinese media outlets throughout the entire process of cultural and information production at all levels of the administrative bureaucracy. Brady's examination of a number of cases proves that the guiding role of the CPD is still effectively performed, particularly in circumstances of crisis, such as the pandemic outbreak of Sudden Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003. In such occasions, the CPD gives strict guidance on whether or not, and how, to cover the events, and then passes its instructions through its nationwide propaganda network both to old and new media outlets, regardless of whether they are state-funded or market-driven, for implementation. In order to adapt to the new socio-economic condition, the CPD has adopted western methods of social control and persuasion since the late 1980s. As a result, according to the author, the power of the CPD has been enhanced in terms of its ability to control the media content and activities in recent years. Thus, Brady concludes that the whole Chinese propaganda system has experienced 'the re-birth', not 'the death' in the period since 1989 (see this issue, p. 73).

The last two authors echo Brady's argument from different perspectives. Peter Pugsley's analysis suggests that the return of Chinese media to the construction of 'hero narratives' in times of crisis, including natural and social disasters, is both a consequence of the effective guidance of the Chinese propaganda authority and an indication of the high degree of continuity in Chinese journalistic practices. The use of heroic images and rhetoric language for mass mobilization and nation-building purpose, typical of the Maoist era, is still a defining feature of Chinese journalistic practices today. Cara Wallis draws attention to a usually ignored perspective – the representation of Chinese women in the Party press organs. She points out that the unprecedented economic and social changes have resulted in the reconstruction of China's ideological environment, in which it is becoming more crucial for the Party to legitimise itself. In this context, as the author has

argued, the rhetorical and discursive representation of Chinese woman (in their roles as workers, housewives and consumers) in the official press can be seen as a reflection of the government's strategy aiming to accommodate the vast social reconstruction to its massive economic development plan while maintaining the current political system. According to Wallis, the result of this is paradoxical: the modernization process has opened up new windows for Chinese women, whereas others have been shut down again in the name of modernity or serving the nation.

Notes

¹ This term covers several discrete activities: journalists expecting economic returns (cash or gifts) for writing or publishing favourable reports about news sources; news sources covering the expenses for journalists' travel, hotels and meals in return for so-called 'three-warranty reporting'; the erosion boundaries between editorial and advertising content (Zhao 1998, 72-81).

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