

RETROSPECTION, PROSPECTION AND THE PURSUIT OF AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR CHINA'S COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM STUDIES

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Abstract

Transcending a one-dimensional paradigm of globalisation, this article provides a kind of archeological analysis of communication and journalism studies in China. It examines the historical trajectory of the introduction of Western communication theories since the early 1980s, the articulation of Western theories and the initiatives of Chinese intellectuals of the time, and the complex social contexts of a transitional China in which a dominant US-based administrative paradigm has prevailed for decades. As a result of this articulation, communication and journalism studies in current China are widely considered an organic part of the leading paradigm of neoliberalism, and less attention has been paid to seeking alternative paradigms, or at least to rediscovering the distinctiveness of Chinese experience in the global sphere. To point out the limitations of this articulation, the article illustrates the increasing difficulties or misappropriations in using those Western theories to interpret the complex reality of both social and media transformations. A positive relationship between theories and practice prompts social justice and democracy rather than a tendency towards "uneven development" with growing social inequality. Therefore the article contends that China's communication and journalism studies are standing at another historical crossroads today, compared with the time when Wilbur Schramm made his groundbreaking visit to Beijing in 1982. In pursuit of a reorientation in communication and journalism studies in the future, an integrated approach is suggested.

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Introduction

2011 marked a decade of systematic and rapid globalisation for China. As Zhenglai Deng, a Shanghai-based Chinese scholar known for his “world structure theories” noted, the fundamental difference between the years before and after China’s accession to the WTO in 2001 is the changing nature of China’s identity in a globalised world or, in his terminology, “the world structure” (Deng 2009). There are two stages to this according to his historical criticism. The first occurred at the collapse of the feudal empires at the turn of 20th century, when Chinese intellectuals internalised a West-centered world history and based their ideas of revitalising Chinese civilisation and of rebuilding China as a powerful nation-state in a Western sense on a one-dimensional definition of modernisation, in which progress in science and technology played a key role. In this first stage, in other words, the only way for China to be modernised at the beginning of 20th century was to be a follower of the already powerful West, taking on its lessons and advanced experience in science and technology, and also its social institutions. In the second stage, as China has “reentered” the global system in the 21st century, particularly by being an indispensable and increasingly significant engine for the global market economy, China has become integrated within a new world structure subject to a set of international agreements, such as the WTO. The rules are accordingly well designed and strictly observed, and there is less space for flexibility, negotiation, or even imagination. China therefore changes from an innocent child of Western civilisation to a full member of the world structure. However, the world is neither flat, nor just and democratic, although the defining feature of globalisation is to be “open” to alternatives.

As such, both challenges and opportunities are facing China and its people. A few essential questions, for instance what is the “China model” and how will China influence the world and shift the orientation and structure of globalisation in the future, have been proposed in pursuit of new paradigms when discussing economics, politics, cultural values and society. The same goes for communication and journalism studies. In this sense, we have positioned China’s communication and journalism studies in the contexts of globalisation and current social transition. By focusing on their mutual enhancement, the academic pursuit of a new paradigm of communication and journalism studies in China is shown as possible. However, instead of proposing a “scientific paradigm” (Kuhn 1996) for Chinese researchers, which is beyond our capacity and still in need of comprehensive and deep examinations on the historical trajectory of Chinese academia in rapid transition, we aim to provide a tentative approach, which might be called “an integrated approach,” in pursuit of a new epistemology to rebuild theories. This article is thus structured in two sections: (1) a retrospective reflection on three decades of introducing Western communication theories and (2) the difficulties of using Western theories to analyse Chinese practices and the internal contradictions between them. Finally we suggest the development of an integrated approach of communication and journalism studies in an increasingly globalised China.

Opening to the West: Three Decades of Introducing Western Communication Theories

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Since the late 1970s, there has been a wave of rebuilding of the social sciences and humanities in post-Cultural Revolution China. Among diverse disciplines or institutionalised knowledge that were claimed to be destroyed during the 10 years of revolution, journalism was representative in terms of its “over-politicisation” in a narrow sense. For the “vanguards” of Chinese intellectuals and journalist practitioners who wanted to change its trajectory and extinguish the “bad memories” of the revolution, the traditional class-based, politicised and instrumentalist Party journalism paradigm was no longer acceptable, nor did it make common sense (Pan and Chan 2003). A new set of ideas, concepts, theories and most importantly the ways of defining news media and their functions in a society were expected to break through. Yet before moving on to the review part, one critical point should be inserted here: history is a continuum, whereas thoughts can be fractured. In this sense, we will pay attention to the common evolution and articulation of Western communication and journalism theories and Chinese local knowledge and practices, instead of considering Western theories as substitutions for traditional Chinese propaganda-based journalism theories.

In May 1982, one of the founding figures of the US-based communication discipline, Wilbur Schramm, who at times is referred to as the father of communication studies, visited China and delivered an introductory lecture on modern communication studies in the main building of the People's Daily, a major organ of China's propaganda system. In the orthodox history of Chinese journalism, even though a number of other Chinese scholars and university departments had already contributed to the introduction of Western communication theories earlier than Schramm's groundbreaking visit, this event was indeed a milestone signaling the end of one age and the opening of a new one. As one of the attendees at that lecture recalled, “This was the first time for Chinese journalism researchers to have direct conversations with Western scholars” (Chen 2006). In a symposium that followed in November 1982, some Chinese journalism scholars compiled a series of handouts elaborating the Western communication theories introduced by Schramm, which formed the basis for the publication of the first communication book in Chinese, a *Brief Introduction of Communication Theories*, in 1983. Since then, the US-based, developmentalist communication theories which Wilbur Schramm represented have been recognised as the “mainstream” among Chinese journalism researchers and practitioners. At that point it seemed that the traditionally propaganda and class-oriented journalism studies in China entered a new phase, implying a seemingly brand-new age in which the whole system of journalism knowledge and the positions of Chinese scholars in society should be redefined, or some of them even “liberated.”

Since the beginning of the revolutionary era in the early 20th century, the traditional Party journalism studies in China were called “Marxist journalism studies” and consisted of three fundamental arguments. First, the source of news reporting is fact, whereby news reporting is not the recovery but the representation of the fact. Second, news organisations and journalist practices are an organic part of a nation's propaganda system. And third, news institutions should represent and

serve the people, not the enemy. In a sense, these points can be summarised in the well-known statement: the news media are an instrument of class struggle to achieve class interests. According to this historical materialist perspective, the modern news media, ranging from printed periodicals and newspapers to the more recent electronic mass media such as radio and television, were cast as instruments of the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Since the new Republic of China claimed to be a socialist society, news media and journalism must serve the interests of the proletariat, specifically representing the two major classes of workers and peasants, who were the essential components of the term “people” in Chinese society.

In contrast to the principles of Party journalism that occupied the dominant position in China, Wilbur Schramm, with the “mainstream” US-based communication studies, seemingly opened a new window for the Chinese. Journalism could be categorised by its theories and practices of “information” and “communication” as less politicised, while at the same time media “naturally” deserve (or depend on) advertising revenue in the marketplace, so that marketisation is a necessary force in driving local development towards modernisation, especially for developing countries. As China stepped up its role in a globalised world by the end of 20th century, this “emancipation of thoughts” in the form of knowledge coming from the West has penetrated almost every corner of the country. This means that a new recognition that media should function as information carrier as well as economic contributor has arisen and now competes with the notion of Party Journalism at both theoretical and operational levels. A general framework of this new paradigm can be outlined as follows:

First came the developmentalist approach, which was pointed out as early as the 1960s by Schramm in his book *Mass Communication and National Development*. In his view, news media should and are able to play a significant role in local development. Among all the indicators of developmental achievement, the economy is the most important. News media are considered influential for disseminating innovation and information to help individuals and groups construct a well-run, market-based, national economic system, as well as to support a “democratic” social order by maintaining a platform for exchanging diverse ideas under the theme of pluralism. Yet it is obvious that the ideal of relations between media and society described above is undoubtedly an abstraction from a Western context, regardless of the characteristics of some local political and cultural heritages. Although, as former leader of China Deng Xiaoping proclaimed at the beginning of the rapid and comprehensive marketisation within most of social sectors in the early 1990s, “Development is the absolute principle,” questions such as where the development is heading and how development can benefit everyone have been distorted by the “No debates theories” and the entire process of development.

Second, there is a structural, functionalism-based social science tradition. This considers that news media, like other social sectors, play an organic and positive role in maintaining and improving the existing social and cultural order. The four major functions through which media impact on society are: disseminating information, representing public opinion, educating the public, and sustaining culture. Without much consideration of the revolutionary role of media, especially the influence of particular social groups who favor alternative media to propose

alternative social structures and moral requirements, this tradition is inadequate for discussing the possibilities of new media and society relationships outside the framework of liberal democracy. Instead of guiding a particular society towards perfection, news media sometimes have a revolutionary impact on certain social structures, restructuring it when necessary.

Third is an implication of the “natural” relationship between journalism and communication studies and the increasingly growing media industries. There has been a consensus among Western and Eastern media scholars that the very reason for modern media studies emerging in the 20th century was the prosperity of the mass media. This can also be seen as a factor underpinning today’s relevant research. The new media industries not only gave birth to a huge economic sector but also incisively shaped the patterns of social communication. No matter whether one agrees with it or criticises it, the commercialised media environment and its institutions where multiple players compete for benefits have been the crucial context for the continuation of journalism and communication studies. Topics like professionalism, autonomy of news media organisations and journalistic innovation cannot be discussed without careful thinking about the commercial forces behind them.

Fourth, as a result of the pervasiveness of the Western approach during the introduction of communication theories in China, there was a tendency to explicitly ignore the country’s contemporary socialist history, in which the traditional Chinese Party journalism research direction made sense. It was a “Cold War Mentality” that aimed to rupture history and integrate China’s reforms within a West-centered world history. One of the results of articulating Chinese journalism history into a Westernised liberal narrative is that, no matter how much reform there has been within the media and journalism, and no matter how much that reform has deeply shaped the domestic social communication structure, China has first to deal with the dichotomy of freedom and censorship of expression in the narrow sense of political regulation. Furthermore, as the “mainstream” Chinese journalism scholars internalised, and to some extent became disciples of, Western theories, careful examination of contemporary Chinese history in which diverse and different interactions between Chinese society and journalism occur has been marginalised or assumed to be meaningless.

To sum up, the Schramm-symbolised Western communication theories have had a two-fold impact on the transition of communication and journalism studies in Mainland China. After years of isolation, when China opened to the West in the late 1970s on its own initiative, the newly introduced communication theories brought a whole and systematic set of terminologies (information, communication, mass communication, media and media industries, etc.); theories (mainly US-based administrative mass media theories, such as media effects research tradition, audience-centered analysis and some psychological experiments); methodologies (large-scale employment of scientific methods, the division of quantitative and qualitative approaches) and hypotheses (objectivity of information-processing and communication, freedom of market transaction, citizen rights in expression and publishing, election democracy, etc.) into the Chinese academies. This has been coupled with China’s accelerated integration into a global market economy, which is increasingly driven by information and media growth. However, while Chinese journalism scholars have transformed themselves into mass communication

researchers within this paradigm, the dynamics of social practices and the particular historic juncture of Party Journalism and Western communication theories in a China that is following the path of economic reform are still posing challenges to the one-dimensional way of thinking. As Hailong Liu, a Beijing-based scholar, pointed out, the balanced introduction and translation of Western communication theories (including both US-based administrative schools and critical schools) and the imbalance of an overwhelmingly emphasising US-based administrative approach, and the simultaneous marginalisation of the critical school imply a biased epistemology (Liu 2006). If we proceed further to explore the social and intellectual backgrounds of this trend, we come upon a historical reality that is hard to leave aside. We categorise this as the “articulation” of particular theories and particular practices in particular contexts.

So far, the complex phenomena of the intertwining of party journalism and market journalism (tabloidisation), the growing public mistrust of the professionalisation in journalism, and institutional corruption within news institutions have shown that the reality of social transition is far more complicated than a shift in the theoretical paradigm.

The Difficulties and Misappropriations of Using Western Knowledge to Interpret China’s Case

Despite a “Westward-Looking” developmental strategy involving a paradigm shift in journalism studies and some media practices that have been brought about by the pace of China’s globalisation, there have been many difficulties in using so-called “universalised” Western knowledge to guide Chinese journalism and news reporting at both individual and institutional levels. This complication can be attributed to the internal contradiction within the processes of introducing a Western communication paradigm to legitimise China’s media and journalistic reforms and imposing a manipulative hegemony on how to define and position the media in a particular nation which took a totally different path in structuring the triangular relationships of state, market and society. Therefore, there are historical facts that each reformer should confront directly when discussing the possibilities ahead. The fact is that China’s media and journalistic reforms are distinct from the Western ideals imagined by some, but are a mixture of processes of Westernisation and localisation. Globalisation for China in this sense refers to a “two-way” movement, rather than a “one-way” process of modernisation. A couple of analyses of the contradictory features of China’s social and media reforms are provided to illustrate the complexity of the situation.

First of all, China’s reform is unsynchronised in terms of the degree of changes within different social sectors. Over the past three decades, China has taken a different path from that of Western capitalist society and Western “modern” social transition. China has been integrated into the process of globalisation ever since the beginning of the “Open-door policy.” China’s developmental road, however, is different and uneven: a giant population of agriculture and migrant workers coming from disenfranchised agricultural areas into modernisation, rapid urbanisation and a new social stratification. While China’s manufacturing industries and financial markets have been overtly integrated with a WTO-ruled global market under an “export-led” policy, the ways of political regulation and social mobilisation are

still dissimilar to those of its Western counterparts. Further, elements of Chinese cultural heritage, Confucian traditions, for example, still have a wide influence on local development and people's recognition and definition of globalisation.

Although, as David Harvey (2005, 2) contended, China has unexpectedly become a member of global neoliberalism since the early 1990s, which "proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" - and the marketisation of almost every social sector has been an obvious trend - the market in China is still largely controlled by the government. This is exemplified by the strict regulation of the ownership of news media, which continues to be one of the defining features of Party journalism. Ian Weber (2005) described this situation as "controlled commodification": certain limitations and borderlines are imposed on the expansion of commodification and the use of market logic.

On the one hand, the neoliberal shift since the early 1980s is one of the defining features of China's media development. Although neoliberalism in China is different, due to its "Chinese characteristics" (Harvey 2005, 120), the core value of market freedom has been undoubtedly embedded within the media sector. Against this background, we could map the transition of news reporting from "hard" to "soft" and finally arrive at a new form of news narratives - "infotainment"; we could contextualise the urban-based Chinese "civic journalism" (Minsheng Xinwen) and its tremendous influence on social restructuring; and we could also see the integration of mass communication and web-based social networking communication into news reporting, which is changing rapidly.

On the other hand, as domestic witnesses, we have seen an expanding tendency of commodification and marketisation in the media industries, and some media conglomerates have emerged since the mid-1990s to meet the threat claimed from transnational players before the accession to WTO, whereas the Party-state-owned media enterprises are still the dominant forces in the domestic communication system, implying an intensified interaction between the market and the state. This raises a number of questions. How do market and political systems intertwine with each other in media development? Where is legitimacy to be found in such a situation? How do the socialist legacies shape people's attitudes toward globalisation and media development? And to what extent has the Western paradigm of journalism and communication theories gained a solid base among both academic circles and practitioners? It is difficult to say whether we have come to the end of transition, or whether we are standing at the starting point of further reforms.

In the terrain of media reform, it has been widely acknowledged that media content and media organisations are only in part able to challenge the hegemony of the existing political regime, and only the political regime can opt for changes. Any changes in ownership and journalistic operation must be contained within the existing institution of Party journalism. Although market-based journalism since the 1980s - evening tabloids, for example - has achieved great prosperity at the economic level and great impact at the cultural level, and although market-oriented media reform has been considered broadly as the liberation of journalism in China, each step "forward" toward a market democracy is under systematic monitoring by the Party-state leadership. In this sense, the transitional reality in China indeed

has proved what Karl Polanyi (2010, 272) emphasised, that markets and economies are embedded in society and culture. The market only works within particular social and cultural relations, which shape the scope and scale of marketisation. Based on this view, the unsynchronised social reform that has occurred in China is understandable.

Secondly, the attempt to use Western communication theories to interpret China's communication phenomena has to deal with the various co-existing stages of development, or in David Harvey's terminology, with "uneven geographical development" (2005, 87), which is one of the outcomes of neoliberalisation at both regional and global levels. So far, despite its rapid nationwide urbanisation, China still has a giant population in agriculture that lives in rural areas, for which media access is far more important than how to consume media contents for entertainment. The same problem faces millions of migrant workers who used to be peasants and who have chosen temporarily to move into urban areas where they can get jobs, mostly as manual labor, (for instance, construction workers), and can earn a better income than they can from farming. The commercialised media are less important to them than getting a formal contract and getting paid on time by the companies they work for, not the tabloid stories about their living difficulties that are offered by urban-based commercialised journalism to entertain the cities' middle classes. In a nutshell, the increased stratification of the Chinese population should be considered a key issue surrounding media reform by media and journalism scholars.

Another tendency of the uneven development in China is the growing gap between urban centers and rural peripheries. As cities are the best space for capital accumulation in terms of their capacity to concentrate labor and other means of production, China has since the early 1990s prioritised urban areas in both short-term and long-term development policy. Huge public and foreign investment has been directed towards important coastal and inland cities in order to build urban infrastructure such as a public transport, housing, education and medical care systems, facilitating business and other commercial-related social groups. The cities are thus privileged, no matter how the whole national economy may suffer, and how high the social cost of this sort of biased developmental model may be; cities will always be the first to be aided by the government and by public subsidy. In contrast, the rural areas, where most but largely disenfranchised Chinese people dwell, bear the burden of supporting an urban-centered economic system, coupled with relatively biased pricing, household registration and other long-standing political and economic instruments upheld by the central, provincial and municipal governments. The uneven development, in this case, amounts to the uneven redistribution of national wealth and other critical resources between urban and rural districts.

Among the social resources, media access is a typical one. Because the unprecendented process of commercialisation has pushed media reform in an irreversible direction, both state-owned media organisations and partly-privatised media-related companies have been flooding into big cities, in which abundant business opportunities can be found. Not only basic services but also unlimited value-added products have been the targets for media entrepreneurs. In addition, the government prioritises cities in public investment so as to support commercial activities and to attract international cooperation, also in the information and communica-

tion industries. As a result, in the cities most citizens enjoy better information and communication infrastructure and services, such as high-speed internet, digital and multichannel TV as well as a mobile telecommunication network of high quality, based on the alliance of government and companies, while the rural areas are increasingly in short supply of public support to improve local media and IT services. In this case, studying the great divide between urban centers and rural peripheries in getting basic and advanced information and communication access is far more crucial than scholarly work that focuses only on city issues.

Geographically, the coastal Eastern area is much more developed than the inland and Western districts in Mainland China. This is the result of a strategy historically chosen by the Chinese leadership during the process of social reform. Because the coastal East enjoys numerous geographical and cultural advantages in exchanging goods and ideas with the Western worlds, a number of cities, provinces and specifically designed administrative zones in Eastern China have risen to become the most developed regions in the country. Some of them are even listed among the most developed areas in the world, for instance, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen, the Yangzi River Delta and the Pearl River Delta. From a global capitalist perspective, these cities and regions are better seen as manufacturing and financial bases for the whole world market economy, rather than the singular components of a particular country. However, on the other hand, what is the situation in the rest of China, in those western provinces and inland cities and villages? Are they also the beneficiaries of the reform process or are they, on the contrary, dispossessed by the developed East through the same structural bias that has occurred between urban and rural areas? The history of thirty years of reform has so far shown what David Harvey termed “accumulation by dispossession” (2003, 137), in which the process of modernisation has resulted with the same distinction between East and West within China.

We have discussed the diverse social outcomes of the developmentalist modernisation of China and its accelerated globalisation that have had a profound impact on Chinese society. Rather than becoming an ideal of society as postulated by a Western paradigm of development, the complexities that have emerged during the historical processes are far beyond the capacities of Western theories to deal with. In this sense, instead of following the mainstream Western paradigm – for example, doing more concrete research into the media effects and urban-based audience behavior that is aimed at improving marketing and advertising strategies for media-related companies in order to direct China towards an imagined ideal of Western society - responsible scholarly work should shift attention to the uneven character of China’s development, in which journalism, and in particular media communications, can play a key role to revitalise some fundamental principles of justice and to democratise the relations between regions and class strata.

As Chris Patten (2006, 9) noted, “for any liberal pluralist the comparative performances of India and China in the future will be a test of the correctness of our political philosophy.” In the discussion of the intertwining of Party line and bottom line in Chinese media reform, Yuezhi Zhao (1998) contended that “as China struggles for democratisation in media communication, an important question needs to be asked about the adequacy of a Western liberal model as a normative ideal, regardless of its feasibility in China.” These words were written more than

ten years ago, but the inquiries Zhao mentions are still at the center of debate in both academic circles and public opinion in China.

Furthermore, we must include the distinct historical and cultural background of China in any discussion. Since 2009, the Chinese central government has launched a huge project to expand the influence of Chinese news media on the global stage and to make China's voice better heard in international journalism. This entire expansion project is wholly funded by government subsidies. Without much consideration of getting economic benefits from the global media market, the project, as the leader of Xinhua News Agency Congjun Li argued in 2011, is designed to reconstruct a New World Media Order. Specifically, "we need a mechanism to coordinate the global communications industry, something like a 'media UN.'" Of particular interest here is what Li said about the purpose of this project, which carried echoes of the NWICO (New World Information and Communication Order) proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s within the framework of UNESCO. If China does not intend to be a commercial empire in global communication industries as its Western counterparts have done very successfully, the orientation of China's media expansion remains to be discovered. If Xinhua is not designed to be another AP and Reuters in international journalism, what it will be in the future has definitely gone beyond a one-dimensional definition of developmentalist modernisation and globalisation. Since China has announced an ideal of building a "harmonious world," has China's intent to create a "harmonious society and harmonious world" also imposed theoretical difficulties for using Western paradigms to interpret China's rise? How are these ideas different from the strategies used by Western counterparts who got to the place of being a superpower in history? The answers cannot be given at present, but the questions themselves indeed open up space for paradigm and theoretical innovations. Besides, parallel to the media's "Going-out" policy, China's culture export has also been experimenting for years. Hundreds of Confucius Schools and Chinese programs supported by the Chinese government have been established in Western universities. To evaluate the influence of those cultural institutions in today's world also goes beyond the paradigms that China borrowed from the Western contexts.

As Hui Wang – a prominent Chinese public intellectual, known for his outstanding studies on contemporary Chinese literature and intellectual history – once insightfully noted, over hundreds of years in contemporary Chinese history, a handful of epistemological dichotomies have played a key role in framing Chinese intellectuals' worldviews, for example among others, Empire and Nation-State, East and West, Tradition and Modernity, underdeveloped and developed (Wang 1997). This binary epistemology assumes that merely borrowing a narrative structure from a West-centered worldview can lead to a meaningful and suitable identification for China in the world. But the reality is far more complicated. When Chinese intellectuals internalise Western knowledge and modes of thinking, they also have to face some aspects of history that are contradictory to a West-centered worldview, which undervalues the identity of China. After all, China was a country exploited and colonised by the West-centered global capitalist world. How does this kind of legacy shape the view through which Chinese think of modernity and development?

Therefore, a new paradigm or, at least a new approach, is needed to open eyes and shift attention on China's historical transition within a globalised world. The

first step forward is to critically examine the dominant Westernised epistemology which, after all, uses methodologies that are based on the existing West-centered political, economic and communication order and are shaped by Western history and values. It is time to use a macroscopic lens for Chinese media and journalism studies to look for alternative paradigms for future studies concerning the real identity of China in an open process of globalisation.

De-westernising Media and Journalism Studies

So far it is still hard to say that there is an emerging Chinese paradigm of communication and media studies as well as journalism studies. But the fact is that we have seen that tremendous changes have taken place not only in the realm of information and communication technologies but also in the social structure. Taking the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo, as an example, the single year of 2011 saw a rapid growth of Weibo users while the forms of traditional mass and internet-based journalism are changing accordingly. During some influential social events in the Mainland, the high-speed train crash in Zhejiang province, for example, Weibo has been the major channel for revealing the facts, sharing emergent information and social mobilisation. Some Chinese journalism and communication scholars even contend that such a wide usage of Weibo technology and the derived social interaction pattern is an actual communication revolution – the “Wei Revolution” (Yu 2011). The challenges this brings to Chinese daily lives lie at different levels and already go beyond people’s capacity of imagination. We are not going back to a technological determinism, but the ever-changing relations between technology, market, politics and society have questioned the validity of the existing system of communication and journalism studies. Based on this concern and the historical trajectory of containing both Western and Chinese theories in a reformed China, we want to propose (an academic attempt in pursuit of) a new approach suitable for communication and journalism studies in the future.

This new approach is certainly not a complete creation, but a synthesised macroscopic view of historical analysis, epistemological rethinking and recombination of theories and practices in the modern Chinese context. In her article “Rethinking Chinese Media Studies: History, Political Economy and Culture,” Yuezhi Zhao argues from a transcultural, global, political-economic point of view of communication that there are five “Rs” that are significant to revitalise domestic Chinese social processes in media studies: re-root the area in history, re-embed the area in the social terrain, re-define agency, re-engage with meaning and community and finally re-claim utopian imaginations (Y. Zhao 2009). Following Zhao’s proposal, Hong Kong-based media scholar Linchuan Qiu calls for a “re-introduction of class back into Chinese communication studies” (Qiu 2010). By class, he refers to a theoretical category that works through the history of capitalist social transition. Based on these concerns of shifting communication and media studies from a Western hegemony to a more domestic-based historical approach there is a need for a new integrated approach that combines both Western and Eastern local knowledge within a context of the deepening globalisation. Most importantly, a de-westernising innovation of media and journalism studies depends upon a consideration of the theoretical aspects of domestic issues, a comprehensive historical analysis of the processes of globalisation, and a solid understanding of a particular society in its own identity (Zhengrong et al 2013).

A paradigm shift in journalism and communication studies is not only needed theoretically but is occurring in practices. What Chinese scholars and those international scholars who have an interest in China issues urgently need to do is to make active and responsible responses, rather than holding to frameworks and theories that have already been shown to be not appropriate.

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