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Emerging Chinese Theory and Practice of Media

Media in Cina: nuove teorie e nuove pratiche

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Editorial

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Since the foundation of the People's Republic of China, the country has developed its own model of media management and journalism. This model, which traditionally encompasses a very strong relation between politics and media practices, has evolved over the last 40 years of reforms.

At the national level, it has transformed into a much more complex and nuanced system based on the mediation between political, commercial and professional interests. At the international level, the ambition of China to contribute to the media agenda and flow of information has grown significantly. These transformations are reflected in the discursive representations of the Chinese media coming from the political, academic and media realms, and in the practice of media production in the country.

This issue is aimed at providing original and up-to-date explorations and reflections on the role and functions of the media in today's China as well as on journalism values and products.

The issue contains contributions by scholars from different Chinese and international research institutions, each of whom approach the subject from diverse methodological perspectives, is divided in two sections: Discourses on the Chinese media and Chinese Media Practice and Products.

Discourses on the Chinese media focuses on the current political and theoretical discourses, aiming to offer insights as to how the political authorities and the media themselves understand, frame and present the Chinese media to the national and international publics.

In the first section, Xu Jing and Wang Dengfeng analyse the practice of political communication in China by focusing on the Party media's

activities. The two authors discuss the current evolution of the Party media's dual identity as both organizational communicator and mass communicator, showing their multi-faceted functions in Chinese political communication, from conventional publicizing of policy, to supervision of the media and guidance of public opinion.

Olivier Arifon compares and contrasts soft power discourses produced by the European Union and by China for their alignment with or discrepancy from reality. The study shows the importance of the credibility factor in both China's and Europe's implementation of soft power, and discusses the normative power of soft power in both cases. While assessing that individuals are able to decipher and understand messages, the author postulates that individuals attribute credibility or unreliability to policy messages framed by a state, an organization, or the media.

In the final contribution to this section, Emma Lupano presents the two main genres in which written journalistic production can be understood, i.e., "news" and "views", as well as their sub-genres, showing how they are interpreted in Chinese media studies. The contribution shows that, although journalistic genres in China have acquired distinctive characteristics and have shaped original sub-genres unique to the local journalistic tradition, European and Anglo-American principles of journalism still appear to be the most relevant in the theoretical definition of genres of Chinese journalism.

These contributions, from different angles, focus mainly on the Chinese political and academic discursive construction of the specific media context.

Chinese Media Practice and Products explores the application of theories and discourses on the media in cases of journalistic practice and in specific media products.

Qin Lei's study, opening the section, investigates the recent boom in the use of animated cartoons for political communication in China which began in late 2013. A series of political cartoons are examined against the background of a comprehensive media revolution following the Chinese Communist Party's new understanding of the role of media and public opinion. The author argues that the creative use of political cartoons, which is a sign of the adjustment of the Party's views on the role of media in the digital age, has given rise to a new communication model of mixing top-down and bottom-up flows of messages. The new model implies the CCP's changing understanding of the public from "target audience of propaganda" to guided audience, and then to central players in popularizing the Party.

Ma Yiben explores the case of Jin Jing, a disabled torchbearer and Paralympic fencer who protected the torch during the Paris leg of the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay. By using a critical discourse analysis of online posts relating to the incident, this case study discusses the processes involved in the making of a national hero in a popular media discourse, and how the online discursive practices of creating, worshipping and defending a hero can contribute to the building of the nation.

Fake news, which the authors call a “severe problem” of the rapid development of the media industry in China, is at the centre of Li Xiguang, Su Jing, and Wang Lianfeng’s contribution. The scholars identify four types of fake news, arguing that the acceleration of the trend of media marketization, the loss of professional ethics by media practitioners, the influence of stakeholders, and the marketization of news value in university education have all been among the causes of the phenomenon in China. The contribution also investigates the influence of fake news on society and explores potential countermeasures.

The final contribution, by Bettina Mottura, analyses how the political discourse on the People’s Republic of China Constitution permeated the media from 2012 to 2018. Her aim is both to trace the influence that political language exerts on the press in China through a concrete case study, and to verify to what extent the growing importance accorded to the constitutional text by the leadership was conveyed by the press to the public before the adoption of the Fifth Constitutional Amendment in 2018.

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