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### • The taming of the shrew: global media in a Chinese perspective

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No global media outlet can be considered truly 'global', if it fails to reach a quarter of the world's population. Put another way, the world system of global communication would remain a far-fetched myth without China's involvement and commitment. Not surprisingly, 'engaging China' has risen to the top of the agenda of transnational media

corporations (TMCs). Global media tycoons such as Rupert Murdoch and Sumner Redstone have recently tried every means to court the topmost leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for a permit into the local media sphere.

Even after the country's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Chinese cultural exceptionalism still prevails over the all-powerful media imperialism. Suffice it here to mention two examples: the direct, legalized access to global media like CNN or MTV is restricted either to some peripheral 'experimental zones' (Guangdong province) or to privileged locations (such as five-star hotels); thousands of government-employed 'internet watchdogs' commit to blocking or filtering 'inappropriate' information – ranging from the banned cult (such as Falungong) to pornography – from the surfing of some 87 million 'netizens' in China. Put simply, global media currently need to be tamed under heavy-handed partisan press/media regulations before they can claim a niche in the Chinese media marketplace.

It is an indisputable fact that the inherent dichotomy and ideological lacunae between the logic of market liberalization and the legacies of the CCP's revolutionary hegemony have paved the way for TMCs' latent penetration into Chinese media spheres in various forms. First, under the patronage of politically innocuous 'infotainment' programming, global media have successfully developed a 'brand loyalty' amidst the 'E-generation', those who were born in the 1970s and 1980s. To them, online newswire from *cnn.com* or *yahoo.com* appears more reliable and efficient than official mouthpieces like the *People's Daily*, China Central Television (CCTV) or *xinhuanet.com* (the official Xinhua News Agency's website). Virtual heroes and heroines from Hollywood blockbusters, Japanese manga, or online videogaming have gained more potency and relevance than the real-life 'model Party members or citizens', who are rendered in a propagandist manner via mainstream media outlets. Thus, what global media aim to achieve in China is not an overnight coercion, as they did in the former Soviet Union, but rather a long-term 'consensus making' via cultivation of potential consumers and, ultimately, a gradual encroachment of the local media marketplace.

Second, post-socialist China's integration into the system of global capitalism has made problematic the traditional role and regulative system of Chinese press and mass media. As the Party-state's mouthpiece or, more literally, its 'throat and tongue', media outlets in China have long remained part and parcel of the ideological state apparatus (ISA), solely subject to authoritarian control and financial subsidies from

partisan and governmental institutions of various levels. With the advent of economic liberalization and market systems, calls for the structural and behavioral transformation of Chinese press/media reform have been soaring in the past few years.

At this critical juncture, global media seem to offer an efficacious role model with their dual capacities of grabbing tons of dollars while still propagating Western (read American) ideology. Consequently, it is not uncommon to hear that the newly-established CCTV-NEWS channel claims to be 'China's CNN', and that the *New Beijing Daily* avows to 'be responsible for covering everything', ostensibly parroting the *New York Times*' renowned motto 'all the news that's fit to print'. In every respect, global media have been serving as a significant driving force for the ongoing reform, which aims to make the Chinese press and media more diverse, more market-driven, and more capital-oriented within the limits of maintaining the legitimacy of officially sanctioned (not necessarily Communist) ideology.

Third, despite the aforementioned restriction and regulation, global media have become more palpable to a Chinese readership and audience through direct or indirect investment, joint venture, chain distribution, or, worse still, through smuggling and piracy. For example, the US-based International Data Group (IDG), which has launched 12 journals in China, including the widely-circulated *Computer World*, plans to accrue an investment of \$3 billion in the next two decades. The IDG model of investment has been followed by many global media giants, which might map out a whole new topography for Chinese media/cultural industrialization. Another salient yet less attended fact is that global media virtually serve as major content providers for the ever-expanding media marketplace in present-day China. It is worth mentioning that approximately 60 percent of international news coverage on Chinese media is either translated or adapted from source materials produced in the US. Obviously, such an over-reliance in terms of content provision will nurture an American-centered perspective of international affairs among Chinese audiences, as has happened elsewhere in the world.

In every respect, the process of 'taming of the shrew' is never unidirectional: on the one hand, Chinese authorities have tried every means to regulate global media's increasing penetration into local marketplaces in the name of nationalism or cultural/ideological exceptionalism; on the other, global media, under the patronage of China's accession to capitalist globalization, have also made every effort to integrate the 'renegade' Chinese counterparts into a US-led world system. Both Chinese authorities and global media can be the shrew in

each other's vision. However, their ultimate goals of taming each other are more economic than political. One would not be too optimistic to assume that the coming of global media will promote press freedom and media democratization in China, for their intervention with local Chinese conditions will not make the best business sense. Conversely, one would not be too pessimistic to conclude that global media are doomed to failure in the Chinese marketplace in the face of authoritarian restriction from the propaganda 'czars' and deep-rooted nationalism at grass-roots level, for the ongoing process of social stratification and cultural diversification has already left little room for any endeavor of conformity, let alone coercion.

More significantly, the tale of 'the taming of the shrew' in the Chinese media sphere is not merely another embodiment of the inherent dichotomy between China and the West; it also manifests the efforts of reinventing the term 'global' in the context of third-world nations. Compared to their Euro-American counterparts, Chinese media appear more 'global' by way of alluding to such news sources as the Qatar-based TV network al-Jazeera, importing soap operas from Brazil and Venezuela, and selling pop music stars from Japan and South Korea. Meanwhile, local institutions also endeavor to make Chinese media products more 'globalized', as evinced by CCTV-9 (English Channel)'s integration into Viacom's distribution system in Euro-America, and by the global success of Zhang Yimou's recent Kungfu-cum-epic, *Hero*. In a Chinese perspective, what the coming of global media evokes in contemporary China is not simply another rehearsal of Hollywoodization or Disneyfication, but rather a plethora of ideological, institutional and discursive conflicts, contests and negotiations at various levels.

### • **Up the Amazon without a paddle: developing nations and globalization**

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Globalization in the last decade and a half has acquired an all-pervasive meaning. We use the term to imply many different processes and ideas. From the creation of a 'global village' where all share similar insights and access to a process of technological colonization where cultural imperialism acquires a global dimension, globalization as a concept has