

Chinese Media, Global Contexts

Review >
China

Few books discuss such a fast-changing phenomenon as China's media landscape in such an observant and up-to-date a way as *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* does. Continuing the line of Chin-Chuan Lee's trilogy, it covers a wide range of topics on the development of Chinese media in the light of globalization.¹

By Lokman TSUI

Looking back now, it is almost inconceivable how many transformations the Chinese media have undergone in the past ten years. The rise of cable and satellite television, the advent of the internet, and continuing marketization of the media are just a few of the monumental changes in the media landscape. *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* provides us with an excellent insight into the current situation, namely how the media affect China on different levels. The book covers a broad spectrum of articles, ranging from Greater China's pop culture to the media's reaction to landmark events such as entry to the WTO and the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Two questions dominate the book. Firstly, how do current developments, of which globalization is the

most crucial one, shape the media in China? Secondly, how do the media, as interpreters of truth, deal with these changes and relay them to the public?

China's increasing participation in the globalization process leads to a higher level of nationalism. Playing out this nationalism has a double-edged character for the Party-State. After the demise of communism as the state ideology, state-sponsored nationalism has become the most convenient way of gluing modern-day China's 'conflicting regimes of truth' together (p.2). At the same time, the outbursts of nationalist outrage displayed during international crises, such as the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade or the EP-3 spy plane incident of 2001, had to be restrained in order not to cause an international political embarrassment. The huge impact these events had is shown

by Rosen (pp.109-110), who argues that 'the attack on the Belgrade Embassy is likely to remain the key image of American foreign policy intentions for young Chinese'. The explosive character of nationalism, as Lee shows us (p.2), is founded on xenophobia (anti-Americanism) on the one hand and narcissism on the other. This narcissism is born of a feeling of indignity about China's current position in the wings of the global stage, where it is waiting to be accepted and to claim its rightful place. The media play a crucial role in this process. They continue to selectively construct an image and portray landmark events, such as the entry to the WTO and the 2008 Olympics, as glorious national achievements, while at the same time downplaying or even ignoring possible negative social side effects. In this sense, the media function as a mirror which >

can be tweaked as much as is deemed necessary, so as to construct an image of China exactly as they see fit. Chang (pp.132-136) shows us that this is not an exclusive trait of Chinese media, as it equally pertains to US media during the coverage of presidential summits of 1997 and 1998.

The nature of the topic calls for a multidisciplinary approach as indeed is presented in the book. The articles are founded on insightful research and set within solid theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The exceptional collection of articles is written by a team of well-respected authors. It is slightly unfortunate, however, that in this collection of authors, whom are either US or Hong Kong based, no European scholar has been included, which would have further strengthened the balance of this book. The second suggestion is that, while the main scope of the book is the impact of globalization on media in China, it would have been interesting to analyse the other, even less researched, side of the two-way inter-

action of globalization: the impact China is making on the world and its media. For example, further to examining how the internet impacts on China, might it not be interesting to look into the ways in which the development of the internet in China impacts the internet worldwide? A first sign of things to come can be seen in the problems arising due to China's developing its own standards, which clash with international ones.²

Despite these minor suggestions, *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* further cements the outstanding reputation of the collection of books edited by Lee. *Chinese Media, Global Contexts* is a cru-

cial work for anyone interested in the development of contemporary media in China. ◀

– Lee, Chin-Chuan (ed.), *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*, London: RoutledgeCurzon (2003), pp. 275, ISBN 0-415-30334-6

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- 1 The book under review forms a series with *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism*, New York: Guilford Press (1990); *China's Media, Media's China*, Boulder (CO): Westview Press (1994); and *Power, Money, and Media: Communication Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China*, Evanston (IL): Northwestern University Press (2000), all edited by Chin-Chuan Lee.
- 2 Lohr, Steve, 'China Poses Trade Worry as it gains in Technology', *New York Times*, 13 January 2004. www.nytimes.com/2004/01/13/technology/13china.html