



Articulation and Re-articulation: Agendas for Understanding Media and Communication in China^o

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Rapid changes in China are filled with “contradictions and ambiguities” (Lee, 1994). They have engendered a deep-seated legitimacy crisis not only of a state that is still monopolized by the ruling Communist Party, but also of all social institutions (Shue, 2004). As China is being integrated into the global economic system, problems with change there are inevitably intertwined with “problems of globalization,” thus complicating “the China problem” for other global actors. The “China problem” concerns how the nation may use its increasing economic power and political clout on the global stage. It has been framed most commonly from the vantage point of the West and Western interests, even though it is often expressed in terms that presume the universality of the capitalist market economy coupled with liberal democracy. Problems of globalization relate to the tensions unleashed by the global flow of capital, resources, cultural representations, and people in accordance with a fundamentally unequal and unjust global order. The problems in this category are centered on issues of justice at all levels and in all realms of social life. When viewed from the empirical locale of China, the concern is with “problems in China’s changes,” i.e., how China copes with the tensions of entering this global pact through the process of articulation and re-articulation.

Here, I am appropriating the concept of articulation as a process of problematic, tension-filled, and highly unstable joining of different social forces (Hall, 1986; Slack, 1996) to characterize the changes in China. I am arguing that these changes involve articulation and re-articulation of various forces that are simultaneously present and functioning in contemporary China, including the past and the present, indigenous and foreign, ideational and material, institutional and improvisational, and so on. I am also asserting that some of these forces are contradictory ideologically and that articulation of them often produces changes that defy easy categorization with our familiar theoretical arsenal. Therefore, understanding China’s social changes requires situated and grounded examinations of how such multifaceted (re)articulation takes place and is embedded in the ways in which individuals carry out their work and conduct their life.

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Media changes perform double duty in articulation. On one hand, they are part of the articulation of various forces in the social and cultural formation. On the other, they provide resources, both ideational and material, for the articulation to take place. Recognizing such double duty means that although we need to foreground media changes to understand the formation of a media system, we also need to de-center the media by locating media changes in the process of the social and cultural changes that they both constitute and enable. In essence, I am arguing for understanding articulation as a key process of China's changes via sociocultural examination of first, its role in and for media institutions; second, institutionally produced representations that enable such articulation; and third, articulation practices in people's everyday lives by means of the media and, at times, in the arena of the media.

Taken together, I submit, these research agendas serve three overarching goals. The first is theory development. The claim is based on the recognition that changes in China represent a unique case that cannot be addressed comfortably with the theoretical apparatus that is largely rooted in very different historical experiences of others. China's case is uniquely powerful in reminding us that most of the theoretical propositions framed in universalistic terms are abstractions from case studies of non-Chinese. The second is social and cultural criticism. To understand how changes are taking place in China is to critique the measures and steps for change that depart from such normative principles as equality, justice, and human agency. It is also to be constantly alert to the danger of accepting what happens as inevitable and to expose the oppression, distortion, and hypocrisy embedded in the rhetoric for changes. Further, given the global context of China's changes and the global interest in them, understanding such changes also aims to criticize the discursive characterizations of them — in both academic and media arenas — that are ideological in nature, with roots in economic, political, and national interests. The third goal is practical instigation. That is, our research must address action issues and provide discursive means that could enable alternative actions and alternative voices, especially those voices that are institutionally silenced. By demonstrating the problematic and oppressive articulation in various facets of social changes, we should also help, as Pierre Bourdieu (2003) argued, "to create the social conditions for the collective production of *realistic utopia*" (p. 21, italics original).

Viewed with this orientation, changes in China present enormous opportunities for research. The subject matter is challenging without doubt, both theoretically and empirically. Studying it also holds the promise of broadening "the social stock of knowledge of the social world" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 21) that has been built largely upon selected cases of nations, cultures, and contexts. Further, with increasing openness to scholarly exchanges and dialogues made possible by years of willingness and recent heavy investment in higher education and social research in China, we are now facing much improved intellectual infrastructure in both material and human resource terms, allowing us to engage in systematic collaborative inquiries. Below, I will discuss the three research agendas with illustrations from some of my own studies.

Articulation in Changing Media Institutions

In the mid 1990s, when I first plunged into studying journalistic practices and media changes in China, I was overwhelmingly impressed by the creativity of media practitioners, including journalists. What I saw were vivid examples of what James Scott (1990) had depicted as "the arts of resistance." I

also saw the emancipatory consequences of the market and the influx of discursive resources that had come with market expansion. Fifteen years later, it is time to ask where the trajectory of the changes, instigated wittingly or not by the regime's reform policies and enthusiastically and energetically pursued and advanced by the entrepreneurial actors in China's media sector, is going. My reading of the trajectory has led to a rather pessimistic assessment (Pan, 2010a).

Most of the changes constituting the reforms may be characterized as steps by the authoritarian state to co-opt market forces into its orbit for the purpose of or with the effect of preserving the core of the Party-press system. The media reform is a state-controlled project in which the Party-state authority and media practitioners embark on a joint adventure into some uncharted terrain. The only clear stipulation of "the future" is to strengthen the Party-media system with market mechanisms. The innovative practices by journalists and media practitioners are inevitably molded through a process in which state authority and media practitioners negotiate how to manage the tension between market forces and the Party-press system, or how to articulate the two. In essence, although the process clearly involves and reproduces the agency of the social actors for change within and beyond the Party-state realm, the trajectory is imbued with a strong systemic tendency toward preserving the political legitimacy of the Party-state.

This bias is structured in the state corporatist logic. That is, in the reforms, although market-based interests impede the state actors' policymaking on behalf of public interests, the political interests of the state actors harvesting legitimacy claims from rapid economic growth also distort their normatively presumed role as trustees of public interests (Cawson, 1986; Molina & Rhodes, 2002). In other words, China's media reforms do not carry a compass pointing toward a democratic future. To be sure, the ongoing media change is expanding the presence of and voices from the societal sector in the media. The significance of this change must be fully recognized and appreciated. However, it is equally important to recognize that such expansion has been limited to enabling the social roles of consumers at the expense of those citizens, and to extending the reach of the media as the Party's corporations at the expense of the media as an open and inclusive public sphere. Further, the state corporatist mode of changes has served to legitimize social stratification, harden boundaries of social strata (or classes), neglect disadvantaged social groups, glorify wealth and "upward" mobility, and de-articulate the social formation from the principles of equality and justice. Therefore, the improvised innovations in media change are not devised with the aim or effect of growing a democratic media system. The two parties — media controllers and practitioners — in the system are working cooperatively to choose and mold measures that would serve each other's interests and their joint interests while ignoring the democratic impetus in the society that is being liberalized by the expanding market. Worse, such interest-based corporatism has led to systemic prescriptions (i.e., legitimized measures) for willing ignorance of public interests and their inconvenient expressions.

Situated in the state corporatist arrangement, journalistic professionalism is also being distorted to serve the interest negotiations between media and state actors (Pan & Lu, 2003). Discarded is its pillar of public interest. This is not to say that some journalists do not, at times, act on their judgments of the

public interest. We can point to the moments such as the Sun Zhigang case¹ and the coverage of the epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome, as well as to such outlets as the *Southern Weekend*, the *Nanfang Metro News*, and *Caijing* magazine as exemplars of how journalistic professionalism inspired laudable practices and coverage. None of these exemplars, however, is sufficient for us to address the three-fold systemic issue. First, to what extent have changes in China's media industries in general been formulated and undertaken to produce a system of a more just and equal distribution of media resources as well as a more just and equal representation of interests and voices? Second, to what extent has journalistic professionalism, sanctioned by official licensing of journalists and willful exercise of censorship, become "a strategic ritual" for media practitioners to harness media practitioners' vested interests in the state corporatist system? Third, what, if any, institutional venues for articulation of interests and representation of all groups in the society are being fostered to enable journalists and policy makers to gauge such interests independently and to facilitate democratic contestation among them? In brief, the core issue is this: How do the social actors in media institutions undertake their practices to enable or confine the formation of the public?

The difference between optimistic and pessimistic readings is not whether the glass is half full or half empty. Rather, it reflects the changes in what is foregrounded as the key "concern for action." When breaking the confinement of the Party-press system based on the propaganda model (Lynch, 1999) was the key action concern, we had every reason to see the emancipatory power of the market and the entrepreneurial social actors devising innovative practices as the vanguard of media changes. After more than three decades of market-oriented reforms, the action concern for future development must focus on how the representation of interests of different social groups and the formation of the public are articulated with the institutional and economic changes. In essence, the question now is to what extent the trajectory of the changes is pointing toward a more equal, just, and inclusive systemic arrangement. For example, whether this is emerging as a goal in media changes under current political slogans such as "building a harmonious society" and "people orientation" (*yiren weibei*) must be addressed.

We need more studies addressing questions along this line. One type could employ observational and in-depth interviews of policymaking, in connection with systematic documentation analysis of published policies or policy statements to reveal the interest representation in the process and its policy outcome. The second type could go more deeply into case studies of the organizational dynamics of mission formulation, structure formation, resource allocation, and the work routine development to uncover the ways in which interest representation is molded in media operations. The third type would require systematic investigation of media outlets in representing various social groups, as well as their interests and demands. In particular, there is a need for a systematic examination of interactions among media outlets and media platforms to reveal the patterns of interest contestation.

¹ Sun Zhigang, an employee at the Guangzhou Daqi Garment Company from Wuhan, capital city of Central China's Hubei Province, was beaten to death on March 20, 2003 by employees of and patients at a penitentiary hospital just hours after being arrested as a vagrant for not carrying ID. The intense media coverage of the case led many legal scholars to criticize the administrative policy of forced repatriation of vagrants — individuals who live in a city without the city's residential registration or permit — as being unconstitutional, resulting ultimately the abolishment of the policy three months later.

Articulation in Media Representations

That the expansion of the media market in China has mostly benefited the urban middle class and neglected the economically deprived segments of the Chinese society has been widely recognized (e.g., Zhao, 2008). In the critique of the state-corporatist logic in media changes, I also noted that the media have served to activate the subjectivity of consumers rather than that of citizens. Observations substantiating such a claim come from both ethnographic studies of the rise of consumer culture (e.g., Davis, 2000) and survey studies of media effects on the formation of the consumerist values (e.g., Paek & Pan, 2004). The previous section addressed the systemic and normative issues behind this recognition in terms of articulation of the arrangement of the media and public formation. What needs to be explored further concerns the media representations of China and the Chinese people.

Much has been written about the awakening of Chinese national identity and Chinese nationalism. But most writings on this issue have focused on the political dimension, concerning "the China problem" (e.g., Gries, 2004) or the legitimation of the Communist authoritarian regime (e.g., Shue, 2004). Some have also written about how China is responding culturally and politically to the economic liberalization in the global geo-economic-political context (e.g., Liew & Wang, 2004). We remain less informed about how media representations function as a nexus articulating the national identity and nationalist ideology on one hand and people's everyday lives on the other. To be sure, issues concerning national identity and nationalism are intimately tied to the collective inspirations in China for political representations within and beyond the country. They are about the contemporary construction of collective memories.

Situated in the state corporatist system, such a construction has also been a state-led project, as demonstrated by the Chinese media's representation of Hong Kong's handover in 1997 and state's orchestration of such a representation (Pan, Lee, Chan, & So, 2001). In that case, the Chinese media representation of the "national triumph" not only provided political legitimization to the state but also brought commercial advantages to selected state-owned media outlets. The recent triumphs of the state-media collaboration in fostering heightened national identity and pride include the aftermath of the Sichuan earthquake in 2008, the staged media spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and the televised 2009 60th anniversary National Day military review on Tiananmen Square.

To the extent that the most Chinese media are under state control or at least its strict sanction, the nationalistic discourse on the media inevitably carries the official stamp of approval. But by clinging to representing the Chinese nation as its chief source of political legitimacy (e.g., Shue, 2004), the Beijing regime is also fostering a discursive climate in which media projects that contribute to the nationalistic chorus are conceived and carried out. The environment today is quite different from what it was in the latter half of the 1980s, when the environment for wholesale embrace of the Western model of modernization incubated the influential 1988 Central China TV (CCTV) documentary series *River Elegy*, which advocated abandoning the backward "yellow-earth Chinese culture" and embracing the civilized "blue ocean" Western culture. The present environment has fostered greater eagerness to look inward at China's collective self and backward at Chinese history. The purpose, however, is not to engage in critical self-reflections, but to uncover the historically and culturally rooted greatness of China, and to search for

the symbolic resources for China to acquire a new kind of greatness in the contemporary globalizing era. Several recent media projects reflect these characteristics. We see the longing for China's greatness through reforms and integration with the world in the TV series *Towards the Republic* (zouxiang gonghe), a 2003 historical drama on the transition from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China; we see renewed national confidence and eagerness to be a global player in the 2007 TV documentary series *The Rise of Great Powers* (daguo jueqi), a grand narrative of how the global powers of the past and present rose to supremacy with fortuitous timing, strategic cunning, and exploitation of others; we also see the mystification of the national bound in the annual Spring Festival Gala aired on CCTV, in which "all the descendents of the Yan and Huang Emperors," the mythical ancestors of the Han Chinese, are called on to join the national family reunion (Pan, 2010b).

Despite voluminous cultural products that are in circulation to articulate the Chinese national identity and nationalist ideology, and despite the ink that has been spilled on Chinese nationalism, outside observers continue to be "astonished" and "bewildered" every time Chinese nationalist fervor erupts. Clearly, we do not yet have a systematic analysis of the media representation of the Chinese national identity and the genres, styles, and forms of nationalistic sentiment. Nor do we have a historically situated understanding of how such nationalist representation may be articulated with the Chinese people's experiences of the country's transition, the experiences that are both informed and skewed by the continuously mystified and contentious history of China (Dirlik, 1996), a cultural and political entity with a glorious past and humiliating defeats in the modernization or globalization project of the West. We also have very little understanding of how, under the state corporatist system, media platforms, in particular the official media that enable what has been depicted as "orderly communication" and the new interactive media such as the Internet and cellphones with which "disorderly communication" take place (Latham, 2009), might feed into one another. There is also very little understanding of how, through mutual amplification, the nationalistic discourses in different arenas hegemonize nationalism — a deeply rooted sentiment or even passion based on the collective identity of a social group and "a theory for political legitimacy" (Gellner, 1983, p. 1; Smith, 2001) — as a prism through which the social world of the collective self and its relationships with others is viewed, framed, and acted upon.

The disarming charm of nationalism is its invisibility and transparency to most who share a collective identity and life experiences in which such identity rarely rises to the level of conscious reflection. People even scorn blatant statist expressions of the nationalistic sentiment that seem to be out of context in daily routines. I arrived at this recognition from a small project conducted in early 2008. In this project, I trained 64 Chinese undergraduate and graduate students from different parts of the country to conduct ethnographic observations of their own families on the eve of the 2008 Spring Festival and to record and describe how the family members watched the CCTV's live variety show called the Spring Festival Gala during their traditional family reunion activities. Almost all the field observers noted prevalent indifference toward the show. Although the TV set was tuned to the Gala during most of the evening, to many, watching the show was only a peripheral activity. Viewers "entered" or "exited" the viewing setting at will in the midst of other festival activities. The show played the role of an accompanist in the family reunion performance. Viewers turned their attention to it mostly during comedy routines, acrobatic extravaganzas, and appearances of certain celebrities. When they commented on the show, their focus was on gossip related to celebrities, extravagant costumes, and "fake" or "unrealistic" expressions of

patriotic feelings. But it was also unmistakable that the show contributed to the collective experiences of the young and old, rural and urban residents, men and women. This recognition came up in lively discussions of elements of the show each year before and after the Spring Festival Eve. It came up in our fieldworkers' in-depth interviews in connection with the ethnographic observations: Many of those interviewed said they found it compelling to have the TV set tuned to the show and to schedule Spring Festival Eve activities around the show because they would have otherwise missed valuable experiences. It also came up in the conversations during the viewing — or the monitoring — the show in which some recalled the memorable moments of programs from the earlier years, in particular, the moments in the 1980s when watching the show was the most "novel" entertainment activity in New Year celebrations, while others commented on how much they wished some performers would have appeared or some specific performances would have been included.

The point here is that media representations in such shows as the Spring Festival Gala on CCTV are ingrained in the fabric of everyday activities, often being "unobtrusively" and "naturally" present as an accompanist or as background. This — the articulation between representations of the official media and people's everyday lives — may be poorly researched. We need to take a holistic view of the common symbolic environment of the media representation and examine the everyday activities that take place in this environment and that use the symbolic resources from this environment.

Articulations in Everyday Life

This essay has moved from a discussion of media representations to their articulation with people's lives. It depicts a process in which the media are de-centered because of the sheer anchoring weight of everyday life. It is the everyday life that pulls the media in, not the other way around (Silverstone, 1994). The media, in both their physical forms as devices placed in people's homes or carried in people's hands and their representations, may be used by individuals as resources from their "cultural tool kit" (Swidler, 1986) to carry out their everyday activities. Articulation, therefore, is a process of social agents carrying out their situated practices to sustain, repair, or fortify on one hand, and to amend, resist, or erode on the other, a known systemic configuration or a structural propensity toward a particular systemic configuration. To this extent, a narrow focus on media institutions or industries will not be satisfactory, theoretically or empirically.

The argument goes beyond advocating the ethnographic method. My intention is to advocate examining and interpreting China's media changes (or any other inevitably situated social phenomenon) based on ethnographically grounded "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983) and in the web of significance (Geertz, 1974) of the people whom we study. In other words, I am arguing to strive toward understanding the people we study and placing the media and their representations in the symbolic environment in which they live and the "tool kit" they use.² I am also arguing that there is a constant danger for those of us

² This view, while opposing a rigid notion of structurally deterministic causality (see Sewell, 1992), by no means entails downplaying the institutional logic and the power embedded in such logic that shape this environment and constitute this tool kit.

acquainted with the theoretical knowledge based on Western experiences to be drawn into the universality claim of such knowledge. To make my point, I will briefly describe a small part of a project that I am currently working on. This part touches on issues of the Internet and its enabling power in opinion expressions.

Much has been said about the democratizing potentials of the Internet. To many China observers, the vivid cases of citizen journalists and activists using the Internet to advance an issue agenda or a point of view, or to coordinate some form of oppositional discourse or collective actions, are too sweet to resist. To be sure, these cases are quite telling when placed against the pre-Internet era and pre-reform totalitarian era (e.g., Yang, 2009). When looked at in terms of the state-society framework, such cases have all the key elements of a vitalized society resisting the authoritarian state, testifying to the changing patterns of the state and society interactions (Zheng & Wu, 2005). These are insightful observations, but they would be over-interpretations if certain necessary local knowledge were neglected. The first is the knowledge not only of the distributions of media resources, in this case access to the Internet and all those material resources needed for effective access, but also of the distributions of communicative potentials for individuals to use such media resources to live their lives and articulate their interests. Without this placement, an analyst would run the risk of equating what he or she wishes to see with what he or she has observed. The second is the knowledge of the distribution of opportunities for opinion expression (or interests representation) among all citizens. At issue here are not only the opportunities to express, but also the opportunities to be heard; not only opportunities to have a voice, but also opportunities to make that voice matter. Viewed in this light, the nagging problem of structured inequality in political and civic participation in democracy and its possible policy outcomes that perpetuate the structured inequality and injustice (e.g., Verba, Kelman, Orren, Miyake, Watanuki, Kabashima, & Ferree, Jr., 1987; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) should remind us to pay particular attention to inequality and injustice when studying a transitional society, in which resources are redistributed and a changing resource distribution system is being formed.

In a survey conducted in Shanghai between June and August 2009, we asked questions that would shed some light on the kinds of distribution we needed to examine. Before discussing the data, however, we need to bear in mind that Shanghai is arguably the most economically advanced city in China with a much larger concentration of urban middle class than smaller cities and rural areas (e.g., Lu, 2002; 2004). For this reason, the evidence from the survey understates structural disparities in the country.

By employing a multistate probability sampling of all adult residents in the 18 districts in Shanghai,³ we completed 2,910 interviews and included in our sample many residents in the rural areas or in the urban-rural intersections. But even on representing the 11.8 million adult residents in these Shanghai districts, our sample was limited in an important way: Our sampling procedure yielded only 8.1% of migrant residents, compared with the official total of 28% as of the end of 2008. This happened because there is no government or semi-government agency such as the Resident Committee (*juweihui*)

³ Chongming County is a rural county belonging to Shanghai. Because of resource constraint, we were unable to include it in our sampling frame.

that has a record of the migrant residents in the area. The under-representation of migrant residents in our sample, therefore, is by itself an indication of structured inequalities in China. We can easily imagine that similar under-representation of migrant residents might be reflected in the municipal government's lack of responsiveness to this segment of the population in policies and social services.

In two papers, we analyzed the data on Internet use and opinion expression engagement respectively. With regard to Internet use (Pan, Yan, Jing, & Zheng, 2009), we examined the questions on the frequency of Internet use and, among the users, the extent of usages associated with each of the four functions: using such tools as e-mail and search engines on the Internet, playing games and getting entertainment, browsing the news, and social networking. Following the structural view of communication effect gap (Nowak, 1977; Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1978; 1983) and the community infrastructure perspective (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001), we used the notion of structures of communicative potentials, conceived as the totality of communicative resources that individuals possess to achieve their goals, to develop the argument that social structures become embedded in the patterns of individuals' choices and media use. Specifically, we argue that, although individuals choose to use the Internet, the factors affecting such choices would transfuse the existing distributional structures into the distributional properties of individuals' use behavior. These factors affect 1) access (i.e., individuals' access to a computer and a stable, convenient, and fast connection), 2) utility expectancy (i.e., individuals' needs and perceptions of what online activities and online content would do for them), and 3) literacy (e.g., individuals' Internet skills).

From our sample, we observed that 42% of the respondents used the Internet at least once a week. Not surprisingly, younger and more educated people were more likely to use the Internet and used it more frequently. But an unexpected factor was that those with cadre status (*ganbu*) were also more likely to use the Internet and to do so more frequently. Everything else being equal, females were less likely to use the Internet and used it less frequently than males. Our results also showed that age was a much stronger predictor of instrumental, entertainment and social networking use of the Internet than news consumption and that education did not predict use of the Internet for entertainment. Females used the tools on the Internet and consumed online news less frequently than males. Overall, the evidence cautioned us that the Internet could serve the democratizing functions in China only to the extent that it is equally accessible to and effectively used by all social strata. Our evidence depicts a configuration that is far from that ideal.

In another paper (Pan, Jing, Yan, & Zheng, 2009), we examined people's engagement in opinion-expressing activities. We differentiated such activities by issue domains (livelihood and political) and settings (face-to-face informal social, formal institutional, and new media). Two batteries of questions were used to assess how frequently (1=never, 5=many times) in the past 12 months the respondents had expressed opinions on a livelihood or political issue in each of the settings. We found that although more than 84% reported having discussed political issues with others in their immediate social networks and nearly 87% reported having discussed livelihood issues, expression of opinions in the other settings was decidedly less common: the corresponding figures were 13% to 22%, with the lower number in formal institutional settings. In other words, the respondents did not use the new media and formal institutional venues to express their views on the issues, which they clearly talked about a lot in their immediate social

settings. It is worth noting that the issues we asked about were all rated as being seriously problematic; the livelihood issues were rated significantly higher than the political issues.

Overall, we hypothesized that those who believed they had a vested interest in the system were more likely to express opinions. Our results show that this was the case with regard to expressive engagement via the new media and in formal institutional settings. Those who were employed and were members of the Communist Party were more likely to express opinions. Those who perceived more serious problems concerning each set of issues, who had higher levels of internal political efficacy, and who perceived themselves as having relatively high socioeconomic status expressed their opinions more frequently. Their frequency of browsing online news was positively related to levels of engagement in expressing opinions. The effect, however, was small, especially when placed with the observations that the most frequent Internet activity involved using e-mail and search engines. Use of the Internet to express opinions on livelihood and political issues was limited to a very small segment of the sample.

These quantitative results are limited in important ways; specifically they do not reflect how people used the Internet to achieve their goals in their life situations, what opinions they expressed, and how they expressed those opinions. What we measured were simply behavior frequencies. But they are telling in that individuals' life situations, including their positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy, had a significant effect on whether and how they used the Internet as well as on whether and how often they expressed their opinions beyond their immediate social networks. Use of the media resources, therefore, is indicative of the articulation between media institutions and the distribution system of communicative resources that undergirds people's everyday lives. Along this line, there is a whole host of issues to be examined via empirical studies.

A Few Final Remarks

In responding to the conference organizer's call, I have ventured in this essay to offer a few thoughts on research agendas on Chinese media and communication, informed largely by my own research. I want to emphasize three points as a way to close this essay.

First, to call for grounding our studies of Chinese media and communication in the ethnographic knowledge of Chinese contexts is to address the two issues. One is to take articulation and re-articulation in China's changing media and communication as a central research focus. That is, China's social and cultural formation ought to be the context in which and of which we raise and frame our research questions. The other issue is to articulate our scholarly discourse on Chinese media and communication within the context, not only of the country's historical and cultural deposit and trajectory, but also of the everyday lives of the people "on the ground." This grounded approach is not meant to trump "the Chinese uniqueness" over the relevance of the theoretical resources accumulated in the Western contexts. Compared with an outright rejection of the West-based theoretical apparatus on the ground that it is indeed West-based, it will be far more beneficial to explicate theoretical constructs, regardless their origin, in ways that would not only shed light on empirical observations in China and but also have these very

theoretical constructs enriched by the China experiences. This is particularly the case when a theoretical construct or a set of such constructs may help analysts to perform their role as social critics.

Second, the research agendas I outlined here and the way in which I moved to introduce them were meant to call for more attention to problems *in* China, as well as to their dimensions that reflect problems of globalization, rather than simply “the China problem.” The distinction is about the vantage point. I am calling for one that is aimed at bringing the changes in China as experiences of a vast population of the world to enrich and even contest the Anglo-centric social knowledge that has been framed in universalistic terms. This research enterprise ought to develop the “stock of knowledge of the social world” (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 21) of China in the global and globalizing context that would enable social criticism and social actions for re-articulation in China’s cultural and social formation. Its mission is different from that of searching for strategic and tactical ways of treating “the China problem.”

Third, advancing our research in China and on China must be done with constant critical reflections of the articulation of our own scholarly discourse with China’s local context. We must be wary of the potential for our scholarly discourse to be hijacked by China’s state and corporate actors to advance their interests through control, domination, and oppression of deprived social groups and their suppression of democratizing impetus in the Chinese society. It is my view that an unqualified claim of either the universality of the known forms of modernity or Chinese uniqueness could lead one to fall into that conundrum. And the effective way to escape entrapment in research on media and communication in China is being in China in the “Being There” sense (Geertz, 1983) and trying, on that basis, to understand the articulation and re-articulation in China’s cultural and social formation that implicates the media.



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