



Popular journalism in China: A study of *China Youth Daily*

Journalism

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Abstract

It is commonly stated that the press in China can be divided into two main categories, the party-oriented official press and the market-oriented commercial press. This article examines an official paper, *China Youth Daily*, which is a central organ of the Communist Youth League of China. The findings of a content analysis demonstrate that this title differs significantly from other central official titles, like *People's Daily*, but also from commercial papers, like *Southern Metropolis Daily*. While *China Youth Daily's* journalism is close to the official pole in the amount of propaganda-related material it covers, it also has a greater emphasis on watchdog journalism than does *People's Daily*. It places a much greater emphasis on infotainment than do either of the official and commercial poles. It is more likely to use journalistic techniques like sensationalism and the revelation of personal details than are the other titles analysed. These findings lead to the conclusion that the bi-polar characterization of the Chinese press requires modification. At least one prominent national title is best described as 'popular official' media. One of the main features of this kind of journalism is that it presents the party and business elite in a human light and thus constitutes a renewal of the repertoire of hegemonic devices at the party's disposal. What is certainly the case is that the frequent claim that there is a contradiction between popular journalism responding to audience tastes and official journalism constrained by the propaganda needs of the party is mistaken.

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Keywords

China, infotainment, journalism, propaganda, watchdog

Introduction

This article reports on the content analysis of five Chinese daily newspapers in 2012 and 2013. It discusses aspects of the findings for the newspaper *China Youth Daily* (CYD), the official organ of the Communist Youth League of China, published in Beijing and circulating throughout China. The analysis presented here raises some important questions about how the structure of the press market in China is conceptualized.

It is conventional to divide the press in China into two broad categories: the 'official' press and the 'market oriented' press (Lee, 2000: 13; Zhao, 1998: 159; Zhao, 2011: 217–218). The former is closely controlled by the party and has the role of expounding the political priorities of the sponsoring party body, while the latter has more freedom to pursue a news agenda designed to win readers and hence advertisers. On this account, CYD, as the official voice of a central party organization, should fall firmly within the 'official' category. The analysis presented here demonstrates that this is not the case and that CYD's journalism is significantly different from that present both in papers that are unquestionably 'official' and others that are, equally unquestionably, 'market oriented'.

The article first offers a brief account of current thinking on the nature of the Chinese newspaper press in order to provide the context within which the findings can be interpreted. It then discusses the background of the project from which these findings are drawn before presenting the findings themselves and their implications for conceptions of the Chinese press.

The Chinese press

Newspapers, like the whole of the Chinese media, have been increasingly dependent upon advertising revenue for more than 30 years now. The first advertisements in the press appeared in the late 1970s and the advertising industry grew rapidly with increasing marketization (Zhao, 1998: 52–71). By the 1990s, it provided a major source of income, particularly for the more commercially oriented titles (Chen and Guo, 1998). Dependence upon advertising revenue was officially confirmed when the State Press and Publication Administration's long-term plan for the newspaper press, published in 2000, required that 'newspapers must raise the percentage of advertisement revenue in their total revenue from an average of 60% in 1996 to 70% by 2000, and 80% by 2010' (Zhao, 2004: 186).

One consequence of this new revenue stream has been a rise in the number of titles and total circulation. While the editorial policy of all newspapers remains controlled by the Communist Party, there has been a diversification of roles. In broad outline, and accepting that there is a degree of diversity within the categories, it is usually argued that there are two main types of newspaper. Some newspapers retain a commitment to a propaganda role, with the main task of reporting the world from the perspective of the Communist Party and explaining its decisions to the readership: these are usually termed 'official' newspapers or the 'party press'. Other newspapers, while often belonging to the

same press group as the official newspapers, enjoy more freedom to determine their news agendas and have adapted to the tastes of their readers: these titles are usually termed ‘market oriented’ or ‘commercial’ newspapers (Qian and Bandurski, 2011). The news agendas of the latter have sometimes been termed ‘tabloid’ because they tend to stress entertainment, human interest, social and natural dramas and so on (Huang, 2001; Shirk, 2007; Zhao, 2002). The term should be used with caution, since there is little agreement on its content internationally, but it nevertheless does indicate the extent to which these papers are observed to operate with a different and more popular kind of journalism to that prevailing in the official press. In addition to this relatively sensational material, some have tended to prioritize criticism of social problems and the exposure of scandals among political and economic leaders, since these often prove very useful in attracting larger audiences (Stockmann, 2013: 5).

One recurrent theme in accounts of the Chinese press is that there is a tension between the demands of the market and the demands of the party, and that this tension will lead to conflicts (Esarey, 2006). There have certainly been conflicts between the party and some publications, but whether such incidents represent an on-going crisis of the Chinese press is a more difficult question. In the early days of marketization, the view that there was a profound and irreconcilable conflict between party and market was very widespread (Lee, 1994). In line with the overall analysis which points to the incompatibility between a market economy and the continued rule of the Communist Party, some writers continue to seek evidence of such a ‘revolutionary’ conflict (Qian and Bandurski, 2011; Shirk, 2011: 32). Most detailed studies, however, have failed to confirm this hypothesis: relatively isolated incidents of open conflict continue but overall there is little evidence of a general and irreconcilable contradiction between the party and even the most market-oriented press (McCormick, 2003 [2002]). On the contrary, one influential current of analysis argues that the party has succeeded in establishing a stable compromise in which the division of labour between official and market-oriented papers has been normalized and in which the majority of journalists have no incentive and little desire to undertake journalism that conflicts with the perspectives of the party (Lee et al., 2006, 2007).

It is in this context that CYD is an interesting title to study (Chan and Qian, 2008). It was one of the first newspapers to respond to the relatively relaxed official atmosphere of the 1980s, winning a huge circulation on the basis of its reformist stance. 1989, of course, represented a severe setback to such positions, but a decade later the paper was once again a leading critical voice (Shirk, 2011). It developed, in its *Freezing Point* supplement, a strand of highly critical journalism (Li, 2005; Liu, 2015). This led to a conflict with the party in 2006, as a result of which the chief editor was fired and the paper ‘tamed’ (Distehorst, 2006; Pan, 2006). It continues, however, to be a successful and popular newspaper. The nature of the journalism practised today by CYD is thus indicative of the extent to which it is possible to combine the status of an official newspaper with a news orientation that stresses more market-friendly kinds of journalism (Stockmann, 2013: 71–72).

Background to the analysis

This study is part of a wider international comparative project, ‘Journalistic Role Performance around the Globe’, led by Professor Claudia Mellado of the Pontifical

University of Valparaiso, in Chile (Mellado, 2014). The aim of the project is to compare journalists' conceptions of their professional roles (what they think they are doing) with the performance of their professional roles (what they actually do). This study relates to the latter dimension of the project: role performance is here measured through a content analysis of the published material of journalists in selected titles in each country. The material analysed consists of a representative sample of the stories on national news topics published in the titles during two composite weeks in 2012 and 2013 (Song and Chang, 2012). The data gathered throw fresh light upon many aspects of Chinese journalism which have seldom before been subject to systematic empirical analysis, including the relative balance of content and journalistic styles between different kinds of titles.

The aim of the study is to use content analysis to classify national news into one of the six different models of journalism. This framework was developed primarily by Claudia Mellado and operationalized as a coding frame which measures the presence or absence of different indicators in the national news stories of the target newspapers. The models are as follows: 'Interventionist-disseminator', 'Loyal facilitator', 'Watchdog', 'Infotainment', 'Service' and 'Civic'. The first of these is rather different from the other five since it is 'formal' in character, measuring the presence of indicators determining the nature of narrative in news stories. It will thus be present in all stories from all titles in all countries in one form or another. What these indicators measure is the degree to which the journalistic voice and other indicators of opinion are present in the story. It contains measures of whether the text takes sides in disputed issues or the journalist expresses an opinion. When many of these indicators are present, a story lies at the 'interventionist' end of the spectrum and when there are few or none it lies at the 'disseminator' end. The other models are much more 'substantive', measuring the presence of concrete indicators of particular types of journalistic practice.

Alongside the indicators of the presence of the models of journalistic practice, the data generated contain other materials, such as the use of sources, the prevalence of long-form journalism, the prominence of different topics and the extent to which written stories are accompanied by illustrations, that allow further and more detailed insights into the practices of journalism.

From the point of view of the Chinese press, three of the models developed for this study are particularly interesting. The 'Loyal facilitator' model approximates to the propaganda functions ascribed to the press in Chinese Communist Party theory. It measures indicators such as the presence of praise or support for official policies, a positive picture of the economic and political elite, praise for one's own country's achievements and so on. Conversely, the 'Watchdog' model measures indicators such as the presence of critical opinions in an article, the use of investigative reporting and so on. This critical dimension would be expected to be present, at least in a minor form, in the Chinese press, since one of its official functions is to 'supervise' the exercise of political and economic power, albeit under close constraints (Zhao, 2000). The 'Infotainment' dimension corresponds more closely to forms of journalism associated with the 'tabloid' press and is thus an indication of the extent of marketization. The model measures indicators such as the degree of personalization, scandal, sensationalism and so on.

An attempt was made to select a balance of the main types of titles in mainland China. The resources were not available to analyse a representative sample, but a 'most different

cases' design was chosen, in order to allow the identification of the range of journalism available in the country. *People's Daily* (hereafter PD) was selected as the most official of official newspapers in the country: it describes itself, accurately, as the voice of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. CYD was selected as another central organ circulating nationally. An evening newspaper, *Xinmin Evening News* (afterwards XME), and daily provincial level papers *Chengdu Economic Daily* (afterwards CDE), and *Southern Metropolis Daily* (afterwards SMD) were selected. All of the latter have strong market orientations. Within the limits of the resources available, an attempt was made to have titles from the main regions of the country and, in the case of SMD, a newspaper with the reputation of being the most critical title in China.

It was anticipated that the 'interventionist-disseminator' model would be heavily skewed towards the interventionist pole, with the highest presence of these indicators in the official titles. It was also anticipated that the 'loyal-facilitator' model, which is closest to the official propaganda function attributed to the Chinese media, would be the most prominent substantial presence. This model would be most frequent in the official titles and least frequent in those most oriented on the market. Conversely, the 'Watchdog' model would be less frequent overall, most frequent in the market-oriented titles and least frequent in the official titles. The 'Infotainment' model would be similarly distributed, with an even greater presence in the market-oriented titles.

The content analysis was conducted by Chinese native-speaking doctoral students who had experienced prior training in the use of the code book. A total of 3264 items of national news in the main sections of these papers published on the pre-determined dates selected by the project were coded. In all, 1685 of these were from 2012 and 1579 were from 2013. Inter-coder reliability was measured by Krippendorff's alpha at 0.7 or above, with a range from 0.71 to 0.88. All results discussed in this analysis are statistically significant at least at the 0.05 level unless otherwise noted.

Findings

Categorising Chinese newspapers

The content analysis yielded a very large body of data concerning the overall classification of the Chinese press. The diversity of the journalistic models identified in different kinds of newspapers has been reported on elsewhere, and the range of differences that are currently present within the overall field have been analysed (Wang et al., 2016). Here, one further insight provided by this overall analysis is developed.

Because there are different numbers of indicators for each of the models, it is misleading to present the unmodified average of their presence. We accordingly constructed an index by adding all of the occurrences of indicators of each model and dividing the sum by the number of indicators in each model in each paper and the number of coded cases in that paper. This index was used as the basis for comparing the presence of the different models in the two papers although to compare the articulations of particular models required the use of the original data. Table 1 shows the presence of an index of the different models in the five titles. The 'Civic' model was not present in any of the titles. The 'Service' model was weakly present in four of the titles but not present in the CYD.

Table 1. Index of the presence of journalistic models.

Model index	All titles	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Southern Metropolitan Daily</i>	<i>Xinmin Evening</i>	<i>Chengdu Economic Daily</i>	<i>China Youth Daily</i>
Interventionist	0.2425	0.2449	0.2000	0.2358	0.2246	0.2990
Watchdog	0.0115	0.0055	0.0211	0.0166	0.0092	0.0102
Loyal facilitator	0.0295	0.0453	0.0166	0.0101	0.0093	0.0357
Service	0.0031	0.0042	0.0010	0.0071	0.0055	0.0000
Infotainment	0.0314	0.0246	0.0206	0.0304	0.0291	0.0601

Because there are different numbers of indicators for each of the models, it is misleading to present the unmodified average of their presence. This index was constructed by adding all of the occurrences of indicators of each model and dividing the sum by the number of indicators in each model in each paper and the number of coded cases in that paper. These procedures establish comparable measures for each of the models.

An exploratory cluster analysis provisionally identified different kinds of titles and this was confirmed by detailed investigation. It was demonstrated that there were significant differences in the character of reporting between, not the predicted two, but three or possibly four, categories (Wang et al., 2016). There is indeed a kind of journalism which corresponds to the 'official' definition, represented here by PD. There is also 'market-oriented' journalism, represented here by XME, CDE and SMD, although SMD embodies some characteristics that distinguish it from the other two titles sufficiently strongly as to constitute a separate category. The fourth, unexpected, category present, represented by CYD, displays elements of both the other groupings and, in addition, has a distinctive characteristic of its own. As can be seen, CYD has a higher index of the 'watchdog' model than does the other official paper while at the same time having a higher index of the 'loyal facilitator' model than the market-oriented papers. At the same time, it has a very much higher index of the 'infotainment' model than do any of the other papers. In the case of CYD, as Table 2 shows, there is a positive correlation between the presence of the 'loyal facilitator' and 'infotainment' models, as well as a negative correlation of the 'watchdog' model with the 'loyal-facilitator' model. In turn, the 'loyal-facilitator' model is positively correlated with the 'infotainment' model. This article concentrates on exploring the characteristics of this fourth type of journalism, which we provisionally label the 'official-popular'.

Long-form journalism and a plurality of source

Dividing the sample on the basis of the three categories, the official papers category displays 1301 articles, the market papers category displays 1347 articles and CYD displays 616 articles. It contains much more reporting on education, with 15.6 per cent of its stories dealing with this subject as opposed to 6.5 per cent overall. It contains significantly more political news than do the market papers but has much more reporting of the police and courts than does PD although nowhere near as much as the market papers. With 4.5 per cent of stories on these subjects as opposed to 3.4 per cent for official papers

Table 2. Correlations between models.

	Watchdog	Loyal facilitator	Service	Infotainment
Interventionist	0.66 ^a	0.332 ^a	0.028	0.260 ^a
PD	0.097 ^a	0.415 ^a	0.006	0.229 ^a
SMD/XME/CDE	0.068 ^b	0.254 ^a	0.075 ^a	0.226 ^a
CYD	0.076	0.205 ^a	n.a.	0.308 ^a
Watchdog		-0.083 ^a	0.017	0.000
PD		-0.067 ^b	0.051	-0.016
SMD/XME/CDE		-0.058 ^b	-0.004	0.024
CYD		-0.087 ^b	n.a.	-0.018
Loyal facilitator			-0.039	-0.058 ^a
PD			-0.055 ^b	0.034
SMD/XME/CDE			-0.027	0.022
CYD			n.a.	0.129 ^a
Service				-0.030
PD				-0.021
SMD/XME/CDE				-0.030
CYD				n.a.

PD: *People's Daily*; SMD: *Southern Metropolitan Daily*; XME: *Xinmin Evening News*; CDE: *Chengdu Economic Daily*; CYD: *China Youth Daily*.

^aCorrelation significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

^bCorrelation significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

and 12.0 per cent for market papers, it is below the overall average of 7.2 per cent. It is much more likely to carry stories about accidents and natural disasters than either of the other two types of papers: 8.2 per cent of its stories cover these subjects, as opposed to 2.5 per cent for the official title and 2.4 per cent for the market papers.

Stories in CYD tend to be longer than those in either of the other two categories: it has 11.7 per cent of stories characterized as 'features' compared with 6.7 per cent for the whole sample, and 11.2 per cent of stories are 'reportage' as opposed to 6.2 per cent overall. CYD is more likely to use this 'long form' journalism for its coverage of political news and reporting police and court news than either of the other categories although only the former of these is statistically significant. These long-form stories are also given more prominence in CYD: 11.6 per cent of its long-form stories are on the front page, compared with an overall average of 7.0 per cent, and 62.3 per cent are on the front page of a section, compared with an average of 40.3 per cent. These stories are mostly about education news, which accounts for 37.5 per cent of the total of front page long-form stories, followed by politics and police and court reporting, both of which account for 25 per cent. These two latter categories also lead the front of section long-form stories. While these totals are greater than for other papers, none are statistically significant. This long-form journalism is much more likely to be textually dense than in other papers: 76.8 per cent of such stories are purely textual, as opposed to an average of 54.2 per cent, and only 15.9 have photographic illustrations as opposed to an average of 30.8 per cent.

The sourcing strategy of CYD is also distinctive. While all titles tend to use official sources to a much greater extent than any others, CYD uses them less frequently than do the other two categories: 44.5 per cent of its stories have state and party as their main source, as against an overall average of 58.9 per cent. Conversely, it tends to use more expert and anonymous sources, as well as ordinary people, than do the other two categories, particularly in its long-form journalism. CYD uses more sources than do the other two groups of papers (an average of 4.27 per story as opposed to 2.83 in the official paper and 3.10 in the market papers for its stories as a whole, and 10.91 per story as opposed to 8.55 and 9.04, respectively, in the long-form journalism). The tendency to use many sources is accompanied by a greater readiness to use sources with different points of view. Single-sourced articles are in all cases by far the most prevalent, but in long-form journalism in particular, CYD is significantly more willing to use differing viewpoints: 91.3 per cent of such stories cited different sources and points of view, as opposed to 69.9 per cent in the official press and 89.8 per cent in the market press. Consistent with its relatively heavy use of anonymous sources, CYD tended to have a greater percentage of stories in which there was a preponderance of non-verifiable information, particularly in its long-form journalism, where 65.2 per cent of stories displayed this characteristic as opposed to an overall average of 58.7 per cent.

As a national-level newspaper, CYD is relatively well-resourced, and 80.8 per cent of its stories were attributed to its staff, which stands in marked contrast with the provincial level market titles analysed, which have far fewer resources and in which only 45.7 per cent of stories were attributed to staff. The highest proportions of internally generated stories were in the categories of education (88.5%), transportation (88.9%) and the economy and business (87%). On the other hand, in some very important emerging areas of news coverage in China, notably the environment (57.1% of stories internally authored) and health (again 57.1% of stories), the article is much more heavily reliant on outside sources than the other national title although the difference is not statistically significant.

Watchdog journalism

As with all of the titles in this study, indicators of the 'watchdog' model of journalism are present but relatively few in number. CYD is significantly more likely to display such indicators than is PD, but less likely than the market papers. There are, however, strong similarities in the ways in which this very sensitive type of journalism is handled. All three types of paper are more likely to have watchdog journalism indicators present in long-form journalism, notably in reportage, and for all papers the most common indicator of the model is that stories report criticisms of the government and political elite by others. By far the most likely topic for CYD's watchdog journalism is environmental reporting, although this is not a statistically significant finding. The use of anonymous sources, however, is significantly more likely in CYD than in the other papers, suggesting a very cautious approach to this model of journalism.

Investigative reporting by the newspaper itself is not a common indicator in any of the titles; it is three times more likely to occur in CYD than in the other types of newspaper, but this difference is not statistically significant and, in any event only occurs in 0.3 per cent of articles. Reporting the investigative work of others is, conversely, less likely to be

Table 3. Presence of indicators of the 'infotainment' model of journalism.

Title	Infotainment model indicators (0–8)	Infotainment model index (0–1)
<i>People's Daily</i> (n = 1301)	0.1968	0.0246
<i>Southern Metropolitan Daily, Xinmin Evening and Chengdu Economic Daily</i> (n = 1347)	0.1990	0.0249
<i>China Youth Daily</i> (n = 616)	0.4805	0.0601
All (n = 3264)	0.2512	0.0314
F (ANOVA)	51.335***	51.335***

*** $p < 0.001$.

represented in CYD than in the other papers. Occurring in 0.6 per cent of stories, it is three times less likely to be present than in the market press (1.8%) and slightly less likely than in PD (0.8%) although again these differences are not statistically significant.

Infotainment journalism in CYD

By far the most distinctive type of reporting in CYD lies in its stress upon the infotainment model of journalism. As Table 3 shows, CYD is statistically likely to display simple indicators of this model almost twice as frequently, and to score almost twice as highly in terms of the model index, than the overall average, while the other two types of papers are very close indeed on both measures.

The foci of CYD's infotainment journalism are upon private life, personalization, sensationalization and, particularly, emotional expression, all of which it uses to a significantly greater extent than do either of the other kinds of papers. Together with PD, and unlike the market press, it does not report on scandal nor have any morbid characteristics in its writing (none of the papers use gruesome pictures). Feature articles in CYD are most likely to contain personalization, content about private lives and sensationalism, while emotional expression occurs most frequently in articles. Indicators of the infotainment model are most often present in the relatively infrequent coverage of environmental news and news of accidents and disasters, but none is significantly different from the other categories.

Education news, which, as we have seen, is a major subject in CYD, is the area in which personalization and details of private life are most likely to occur, while emotion is most common in presenting dramatic news: that is, police/court news and accidents/disasters. These stories are also more likely to use ordinary people as their main source than other categories: they are the main source in 40 per cent of stories, compared with the 40 per cent of main sources being state and government sources and 10 per cent for both business and expert sources. Although these results cannot be tested for significance, they suggest a pattern that is quite distinct from that present in other fields of reporting, notably politics. Personalization, details of private life and the use of emotion are also common in reporting on the economy although the latter two indicators are much less frequent.

Table 4. Indicators of infotainment journalism and main source of news in *China Youth Daily*.

	Personalization (n = 111; 100%)	Private life (n = 30; 100%)	Sensationalism (n = 21; 100%)	Emotion (text) (n = 128; 100%)	Emotion (picture) (n = 6; 100%)	Model Score (0–8)
State/political party	28 (25.2%)	8 (26.7%)	2 (9.5%)	62 (48.4%)	2 (33.3%)	0.371
Business/company	21 (18.9%)	2 (6.7%)	6 (28.6%)	5 (3.9%)	0	0.597
Civil society	2 (1.8%)	0	0	2 (1.6%)	0	0.400
Ordinary people	53 (47.7%)	19 (63.3%)	11 (52.4%)	44 (34.4%)	0	1.323
Expert	0	1 (3.3%)	0	4 (3.1%)	0	0.180
Media	4 (3.6%)	0	0	0	0	0
Anonymous	0	0	0	3 (2.3%)	1 (16.7%)	0.078
No source	3 (2.7%)	0	2 (9.5%)	8 (6.3%)	3 (50%)	0.216

The infotainment model is positively correlated with the interventionist model and the loyal-facilitator model. The overlaps between indicators of the infotainment model and the interpretative model are substantial, particularly with respect to the use of interpretation and the presence of adjectives. The overlaps between the indicators of the infotainment model and the loyal facilitator model are less striking, although there is significant overlap between the use of emotional indicators and support for official activities and the presentation of a positive image of the political elite.

‘Ordinary people’ are the sources cited most often in stories where indicators of the infotainment model are present in all of the titles, but this is particularly true of CYD. The latter, however, is more likely to display these features when covering political and economic elites than are either of the other categories. As Table 4 shows, stories with ordinary people as the main source are most likely to display the indicators of personalization, sensationalization and details of private life, while emotion is most commonly present in stories in which the main source is the political elite although it is not possible to make any claims of significance for these figures.

Discussion

A more detailed analysis of the data supports the overall suggestion above that the Chinese daily press is best considered as consisting of (at least) three, and arguably four, different categories, rather than the classical division into official press and market-oriented press. CYD, unquestionably an official paper in terms of its status, also displays quite strongly some of the key characteristics of PD, notably its heavy stress upon the deployment of indicators of the ‘interventionist’ pole of the ‘interventionist-disseminator’ model. Perhaps surprisingly, it displays fewer of the indicators of the loyal-facilitator model than expected, and indeed fewer than the market oriented press. On the other hand, it displays indicators of the watchdog model more strongly than PD, and more or less as strongly as the market press. It is, however, in the use of indicators of

	Indicators of Intervention model		Indicators of Loyal-facilitator model		Indicators of Watchdog model		Indicators of infotainment model	
	Predicted	Observed	Predicted	Observed	Predicted	Observed	Predicted	Observed
<i>People's Daily</i>	++	++	++	++	—	—	—	+
<i>Southern Metropolitan Daily, Xinmin Evening, Chengdu Economic Daily</i>	—	+	—	++	+	+	+	+
<i>China Youth Daily</i>	++	++	++	+	—	+	—	++

Figure 1. Predicted distribution of indicators.

the infotainment model that it is most distinctive. This model is more widespread than anticipated in the Chinese press, being present even in PD, but CYD is unique in the strength of the model. Taken together, as illustrated by Figure 1, these findings suggest a different categorization of those elements of the Chinese press analysed here. CYD suggests the presence of the category of ‘popular official’ media in China.

Stockmann (2013) also deployed a tripartite model to analyse the Chinese press. She used a distinction based on ownership patterns suggested to her by media professionals in China to examine the handling of sensitive political questions and to discuss audience attitudes towards different kinds of news. She shares with previous writers a stress upon the political dimensions of the press. Such an approach is important and valuable. It is part of the heritage of its ‘totalitarian’ past that politics in China is much more pervasive in everyday life than is common in, say, the United States. It is not, however, designed to illuminate the more general issue of the possible appeal of the media beyond a narrowly conceived definition of the ‘political’. The analysis presented here confirms the common-sense understanding that no contemporary media system in a fast-developing society like China can be thought of purely in such terms: to a greater or lesser extent, all media display elements of a broader conception of human life (Sparks, 2012).

These observations raise the relationship of popular journalism and politics itself. Studies of entertainment-driven television programmes such as CCTV’s *New Year Gala* and Hunan Satellite TV’s *Super Voice Girl* have demonstrated that popular media have an inescapable relationship with formal politics (Cui and Lee, 2010; McCormick, 2009; Meng, 2009; Rydholm, 2005; Wang, 2010; Yu, 2014). In the case of Chinese journalism however, there has long been a view that the demands of popularity are disruptive of the Party’s control of the media. The evidence presented here demonstrates that this view is incorrect. CYD is unquestionably a central party organ and has not been involved in any serious political confrontations with the leadership for a decade now (Hassid, 2008). One indicator of this rapprochement is that compilations of the paper’s investigative reporting are now published regularly without any problem (Wu and Liu, 2009, 2010; Ye, 2015). On the other hand, it utilizes some of the repertoire of popular journalism, to a much greater degree even than the recognized market-oriented newspapers. It combines this

with many of the central features of the most official of official publications, notably the stress upon an opinionated and interpretative presentation of news and a strong presence of indicators of the loyal facilitator model of journalism. At least some of the major elements of popular journalism appear to be entirely compatible with the role of party organ.

It is important not to carry this argument too far, since the categories used in this analysis are, as was stated above, largely 'formal' in character. Thus, while the data tell us that there is a significant relationship between the presence of emotional expression in reporting and the use of the political elite as a source, we have no way of knowing whether these emotions are positive or negative. It is reasonable to presume, however, that since the use of emotional indicators is also associated with the presentation of a positive image of the political elite that the general character of the use of emotion in CYD is supportive of that elite. It follows that it is also likely that the prevalence of personalization and use of elements of private life are used in supportive ways when they are present in stories whose main sources are from the state and political parties. Taken together, however, these data suggest that one future line of research would be to investigate whether CYD, and perhaps other papers, have developed techniques of popular journalism using the tools of infotainment in order to humanize the Communist Party and present it in a positive light.

Some other elements in the use of infotainment are better explained by the official role of CYD. It is understandable that the official organ of the Communist Youth League of China should have younger people as its main target audience and, given that many of these are in formal education, that it should therefore devote much more space to stories about education than other newspapers. It is further understandable that such stories should use elements such as personalization and elements of private life in expositions both of members of the political elite and the business elite. It is not possible to know from this data whether such material presents positive images of political and business success for young people to admire and emulate, but it would be a reasonable assumption to make, given that 'role model reporting' ('*dianxing baodao*') has been a strategy in the Communist Party's propaganda arsenal since the days of Mao Zedong himself (Du, 2001; Mao, 1983; Wang, 2009; Wu and Gu, 2001). Once again, the use of infotainment techniques does not necessarily imply any critical relationship with political and economic power and may indeed be evidence of a successful expansion of the ways in which these can be legitimized and popularized.

The prevalence of such techniques in CYD also invites the consideration of whether the term 'tabloid' can reasonably be applied to CYD. As noted above, this term has often been used, rather loosely, with regard to the Chinese press but it does not seem entirely appropriate. The sheer weight of political news in this title, as in all Chinese newspapers, immediately rules out comparison with US-style 'supermarket tabloids', which normally eschew such material. It also distances CYD from European tabloids such as *The Sun* in the UK, *Bild Zeitung* in Germany, *Neue Kronen Zeitung* in Austria or, much closer to home, *Apple Daily* in Hong Kong. They do address political questions directly but not so prominently, at least outside of election campaigns and moments of political mobilization. CYD has far fewer illustrations and it has a higher proportion of relatively substantial articles. To the extent that it contains infotainment material, however, it uses many of the same techniques as these European and East Asian titles. We might also note that

these techniques in themselves do not imply either a critical or supportive role towards political power: *Apple Daily* is notoriously hostile to the Chinese Communist Party and their local stooges in Hong Kong while London-based tabloid *The Sun* is generally supportive of established political powers in the United Kingdom. Overall, while it is reasonable to say that CYD uses some of the same techniques as do its international cousins, it is difficult to describe it as tabloid in the same sense.

Huang (2016) has suggested that the ugly neologism ‘broadloid’ could usefully be applied to Chinese newspapers. He notes that this term originated in the Western context and argues that presenting serious news in a popular manner might be a strategy for the market-oriented Chinese press to reverse its current decline. The data show no evidence that this strategy has been adopted by the market-oriented titles, but it would be reasonable to argue that this is one way of describing the kind of journalism practised by CYD. As is recognized by Huang himself, the western proponents of this strategy, notably *The Guardian*, started from the position of being serious, elite newspapers and developed forms of journalism that rendered their coverage more inclusive in reach and more popular in presentation. Newspapers like *The Guardian* share a large part of their news agenda and journalistic practices with papers like *The Financial Times*, which remain recognizably within the ‘broadsheet’ category. They have, however, a wider agenda of sport, culture, leisure, personal affairs and so on, and a more engaging journalistic style. Although the place of an official party mouthpiece in China is different from that of any western newspaper, CYD seems to be following a similar trajectory in combining much of the classic agenda of the elite press with many of the techniques similar to those employed by the popular press in the west.

Every research project has limitations, and this is no exception. In order to ensure that the same research instruments could be used in different environments, the categories are framed at a high level of abstraction. In this study, part of the price is the formal nature of most of the categories employed. While this produced results sufficiently reliable as to permit international comparisons, research instruments designed specifically for the Chinese context would allow better insights into many of the issues discussed here.

The design of the research instrument means that the analysis presented here is necessarily exploratory in nature. The data gathered do, however, demonstrate that there are more nuanced variations within the Chinese press than are suggested by the overall opposition between party and commercial titles. A research instrument designed for the specific purposes of allowing a more accurate categorization of the Chinese press would necessarily involve a broader range of material than that analysed here, and would have greater scope for testing whether the findings presented here are sustainable.

It was impossible to analyse a representative sample of Chinese newspapers and there is no way of being sure whether these findings can be generalized across the Chinese press. While other researchers have given strong reasons for believing that the polarity of official and market is indeed a useful one, there is little recent scholarly material about CYD. There is no way of knowing from this research whether CYD is a product of accidental historical and political circumstances or representative of a broader category. That question could only be decided by research that was able to encompass a wider range of titles than were possible in this study. If CYD is *sui generis*, then it is an interesting and important case. Its broader significance is that the leadership of the Communist Party of

China (CPC) has chosen to deploy a distinctive journalistic strategy in the newspaper to which it entrusts the central task of attempting to win young people to its view of the world. If it is representative of a class of titles, it is evidence that the strategies that have been used to popularize and legitimize the contemporary form of the Communist Party's rule in, for example, television drama, have a parallel in the newspaper press. In that context, the case of *Phoenix TV's* news programmes, which have a similar agenda to *Xinwen Lianbo*, while presenting these topics using techniques familiar from CNN or the BBC, suggests itself as a parallel (Wu and Ng, 2011).

The third problem is an accident of history. Since the sample was drawn in 2012 and 2013, there has been a change in the Chinese leadership. The Xi Jinping regime has taken a much more restrictive position towards public expression on political questions. A fresh analysis, using a sample drawn from 2014 and 2015, might reveal significant differences resulting from the more restrictive environment. While it would be expected that this would be most obviously present in the watchdog role of journalism, the fact that the evidence presented here suggests that infotainment also has a strong political dimension might mean that this field would have changed as well.

One mitigating factor is the formal nature of the categories employed. The models of journalism used here leave many questions open for further enquiry, but they do not depend upon a judgement of its political substance. This grants them some immunity from the changed environment. Since, for example, we do not know what the character of the emotions identified as an indicator of infotainment actually are, even a hypothetical transformation from wholly negative emotions about the Communist Party to wholly positive ones would not alter the substance of these findings. Similarly, the identification of the elements of the watchdog role contains no indications of whether they are directed at a target identified by the Party leadership as worthy of criticism or if the target is sufficiently well-connected as to render any criticism dangerous. Given that, the current purge of corrupt officials might lead to an increase in the watchdog role as a direct consequence of the tightening of control, more accused officials officially stigmatized by the Party could lead to the presence of more watchdog journalism.

Conclusion

This article has shown that a central-level official party organ, CYD, has significant differences both from the official PD and from titles generally regarded as being highly market oriented. The most striking of these differences is that the paper displays a much higher incidence of indicators of the infotainment model. It is much more ready even than the market-oriented titles to use techniques such as personalization, sensationalism, details of personal life and the display of emotion in its journalism. These findings entail a refinement of the traditional distinction between official and market newspapers: while it remains, organizationally, a central party organ, in terms of its journalism CYD may be termed a 'popular official' newspaper.

The findings also contribute to the long-running debate about the impact of marketization on the Chinese media. The evidence presented here suggests that there is no contradiction between discharging the official role of party propagandist and using the

techniques of popular journalism. On the contrary, it strongly suggests that these techniques can contribute in a new way to the effort to establish the credibility of the Communist Party which is one of the main functions officially attributed to the press. The Xi regime is notorious for its tighter control over journalism, but at the same time it should be noted that it is actively exploring ‘popular’ methods to win support for party policies: the ‘Xi Dada’ phenomenon is one well-known example. CYD’s journalistic practices long pre-date this shift in emphasis, but they can be seen as having the similar primary objective of presenting the ideas, values, personalities and achievements of the Communist Party in a manner that will make them accessible to the widest audience and to younger generations.

It is important to keep these findings in perspective. The data presented here are based upon only one title and it is not possible to use them to make generalizations about the Chinese press: it may be that it is an isolated instance of no great importance. It is also clear that while the data demonstrate significant differences between CYD and both PD and the more commercial titles, the overall variation, as discussed elsewhere, is not enormous (Wang et al., 2016). CYD represents an inflection upon the established procedures of Chinese journalism, not a radical innovation and certainly no evidence of any evolution towards more ‘western’ practices. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the journalism practised by CYD is measurably different from the representatives of both ‘party’ and ‘market’ poles, and this difference has implications for our understanding of the current state of Chinese journalism. At the very least, it suggests that the propaganda functions of the official press can be discharged in different ways and that, at least in some circumstances, these can involve forms of journalism that are normally associated with a more popular and engaging style.

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