

Gary D. Rawnsley & Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley (Eds.), **Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media**, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2015, 486 pp., \$ 240.00 (hardcover), \$67.95 (Kindle).

Reviewed by

Yavor A. Kostadinov

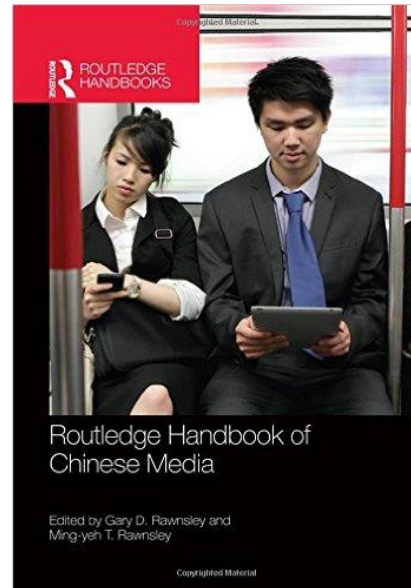
Ming Chuan University, Taiwan

What is the role of the media in Greater China today? Content-rich, analytically diverse, and thought-provoking, the **Routledge Handbook of Chinese Media** offers a rewarding journey in understanding the changes taking place in the media scene in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The book provides insight into the role of the media as facilitator of political, economic, and social metamorphoses. In the same vein, Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-yeh T. Rawnsley, editors and contributors, perceive the media in China's landscape as performing a dual role as both "an agent and an object of transformations" (p. 5).

#### Book Content

With a vast collection of 28 chapters, this volume targets a broad audience interested in media dynamics in Greater China. The chapters, diverse in authorship from across the world, go beyond the traditional in theoretical orientation and demonstrate plurality in methodology. For instance, big names in the field (Zhao, Creemers, and Hong) lead the way for new contributors (Chen and Ma). While some of them map history (Zhang, M. T Rawnsley, Feng, Cao, Hong and Liu), others explore unique case studies (Hung, Gong, Wang, and Liang). Furthermore, many use secondary data, and at least a dozen authors strengthen their arguments with empirical data from field research, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and surveys.

The book is comprised of five parts. Part I provides the reader with an assessment of mainstream theoretical perspectives in the field. Aiming to answer the question of how to approach Chinese media studies, Zhao's unorthodox contribution traces her own research experience in the field. Recognizing intellectual and ideological influences from within and without China, Zhao criticizes capitalist and socialist shortcomings alike. She goes beyond media-centric and institutionalist perspectives by adopting a knowledge-power approach, with enduring influence on her recent works, stressing the importance of a multi-ethnic, multi-national view for future Chinese media research. In addition, Sparks's chapter appraises cultural imperialism and the concept of soft power, seeking to fill in the theoretical gaps, and Creemers's contribution uses a philosophical approach to explore the roots of Chinese media governance, arguing that philosophical concepts facilitate changes in structures, processes, and expectations.



Part II discusses press freedom, social mobilization, and journalistic practices. The ensuing broad-spectrum analyses explore roots (Zhang), set boundaries through "strategic rituals" (Chen), adapt investigative journalism to political "mood swings" (de Burgh), and compare party with popular dynamics (H. Lee) of the press in mainland China. One study looks at the evolution of press freedom through an interplay of media, state, and society and the role of the media in social mobilization in Hong Kong (F. L. F. Lee and Chan.). Finally, the last chapter underlines the importance of citizen journalism as an alternative to "widespread distrust of the sensational and commercial media" in Taiwan (Hung, p. 174).

Part III contains three separate themes. The discourses examine the link between digital media and politics, media representation of society and social class, and public service television. First, while Willnat, Wei, and Martin conclude that more Internet use corresponds to greater political engagement, as evident in the case of online nationalism (Ma), Karatzogianni and Robinson point out that the CCP government has utilized "pervasive nationalism" to counter transnational dissent (p. 231). Second, Sun argues that the working class has changed from being the ruler of the nation to being a subject of oppression and marginalization, resulting in a number of media practices and forms being created to counter mainstream commercial and official media. Similarly, Gong criticizes even the most liberal mainstream outlet in China, Southern Weekend, for not being able to represent the voice of the underclass. In Taiwan, a girl's desire for freedom of expression and empowerment over privacy control, Wang argues, is made possible due to new communication technologies and illustrated by the utility of the "selfie" in escaping normative social controls. Finally, Lin, M. T. Rawnsley, and Feng investigate public service broadcasting in Taiwan and mainland China. In both cases, dissociating public service broadcasting from interested groups remains a challenge, in Taiwan due to "conceptual and structural confusion" (p. 294) resulting from elites' dialogue pushing out civil society actors and in mainland China due to CCP political interventions.

Part IV addresses issues of commercialization, production, and copyright. The majority of authors focus on production of various media content, such as historical television dramas (Guo), television documentaries (Cao), live media events (Liang), and online games (Fung), and show that CCP behavior has gone from censorship to managed negotiations. Keane looks at the geography of audio visual media production, observing a shift toward digitalization of clusters during which content is drained from East Asian markets. Cheung provides evidence of the negative effects of the oligopolistic media system on pluralism in Hong Kong and defends practical negotiated discursive struggles. Finally, Montgomery and Ren argue that Chinese publishers have long been conscious of the advantages of copy controls, yet the establishment of copyright failed until 1990 due to broader political, economic and legal conditions. Thereafter, first international, then domestic pressures have led to the establishment of a legal framework. However, the future development of a culture of copyright protection will depend on copyright benefits for domestic investors and governments' desire to support and export creative content.

In the final part, attention turns to the internationalization of mainland China's media and media production. The recent push for international expansion has resulted in an environment of market-state tensions in which CCP attempts to shape mainland China's international image, but faces resistance from foreign journalists at home (Song) and global audiences abroad (G. D. Rawnsley).

### **Discussion**

The majority of authors in the volume agree that shifts in the media industry in mainland China correspond to the economic liberalization policies of Deng Xiaoping. Combined with technological changes in communication, some observe that media dynamics have shifted from the top-down diffusion of content during Mao's time to a relationship of negotiated governance, especially in content making and distribution, as illustrated in the case of TV documentaries and online gaming. Such developments are observed elsewhere by Wenhong Chen (2015), who argues that the evolution of the "Chinese Internet paradox" will depend on negotiations between the state and the emerging civil society.

Some of the authors (Gong and Cao) point toward the emergence of social spheres of discourse somewhat different from Habermas's "public sphere" in the sense that they are not open for all members of society to participate. Heather Inwood claims that these spheres or scenes give power to individual expression that often helps the development of the media and provides new dynamics with no prime objective to challenging the state but instead to "further their chosen area of culture" (2014, p. 5). However, if we allow that citizens and nongovernmental organizations would have had the prime objective of doing so, the anticorruption case exemplifies how neither netizens nor nongovernmental organizations in mainland China are encouraged to participate independently in engaging the government in policy making (e.g., Ang, 2014). The CCP is in firm control of the media and live broadcasting, especially on political issues. In the near future, there is little hope to observe CCP sharing some of its control over the media.

In contrast, media in Hong Kong and Taiwan play a more constructive role as agents of transformation. For instance, in Taiwan, nonpolitical interference embedded in democratic values and citizen journalism supports autonomy of the media and media production; and in Hong Kong, the nature of the media and the market counter CCP attempts at censorship. However, issues of media autonomy persist in both regions. For example, the Anti-Media-Monopoly Act, a civil society act which stalled in Taiwan's legislature in 2013, could be subject to political interference (Rawnsley & Feng, 2014). Likewise, civil society needs to aid press freedom in Hong Kong to prevent market monopoly (Cheung) and political interference from mainland China (L. F. L. Lee).

### **Conclusion**

In sum, the handbook offers a large pool of perspectives, evidence, and analyses on Chinese media. It is a shining gem in the field, one that decodes the duality and complexities surrounding the media and their role in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The second volume envisioned by the editors could expand on the digital media-social actor relationship and the development and internationalization of the Chinese media entertainment and film industries.

### References

Ang, Y. Y. (2014). Authoritarian restraints on online activism revisited: Why "I-paid-a-bribe" worked in India but failed in China. *Comparative Politics*, 47(1), 21–40.

Chen, W. (2015). Taking stock, moving forward: The Internet, social networks, and civic engagement in Chinese societies. In W. Chen, (Ed.), *The Internet, social networks and civic engagement in Chinese societies*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Inwood, H. (2014). *Verse going viral: China's new media scenes*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.