

Compare Modeling of Investigative Journalism in Anglo-American and Chinese Approaches —Quantitative Case Studies of The Economist and Caijing

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to provide comparing models to understand investigative journalism. Based on the mobilization model justified from Anglo-American approach, the paper shows a modified model of consensus through cross comparing the different contexts between Anglo-American and Chinese in investigative journalism. Therefore, based on a combination of the themes of globalisation and China's economic integration, the paper analyses comparing contents. The data explore how investigative journalism constructs the narratives of China's economic globalisation.

Keywords: *muckraking; exposés; moral discourse; agenda setting.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of investigative journalism can be traced back to the United States in the early 18th century. In the 1960s, British newspapers facing the competitive pressure of TV news gave birth to a questioning and disrespectful reporting style to attract readers and advertisers [1]. As a “reformer”, investigative journalism usually outlines victims and villains in the narrative. “Victim-villain” strengthens the role of investigative journalists as a watchdog, who responds to the theory of social practice, promises to enlighten the public and plays a guiding role in the moral construction of citizens.

The Chinese media began to try to practice journalistic professionalism from the role of the spokesman of the ruling party and through the economic independence brought by marketization [2]. The change of ownership in the media industry has had a profound impact on the production of news content, changed the essence of Chinese investigative journalism and influenced the narrative construction on China's economic globalisation.

2. CONTEXTS AND CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

President Roosevelt, who was achieved by the drastic reform in the progressive era, called them “

muckraker” . This definition confirms the constraints of investigative journalists on rights and money. Therefore, the concept of “journalism of outrage” points out that investigative reporting not only refers to the method and process of news collection, but also can arouse people's outrage [3]. The malfeasance of politics and business circles spread through the media helps to define and redefine the moral character of the American society; it provides an unspeakable vocabulary for people's understanding of justice [4].

2.1. Investigative Journalism in the American Context

From the perspective of historical development, Robert Miraldi (2000) equates the role of muckrakers with reformers with the nature of social activists. The muckraking behavior of the reformers is closely related to the ideal of upholding justice. As the inheritance and development of this tradition, during the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, the American media set off a war without guns or smoke at home. The “Pentagon Papers” published by New York Times directly led to the anti-war climax of the American people, and finally forced the change of foreign policy[5]. The Watergate scandal, which had a far-reaching impact on American history in the 1970s, raised the national influence of investigative reporting to a new level. For the American right wing, the news of “muckraking” means a threat

to the orthodoxy of the interests of the consortium [6][7]; for the left wing, investigative journalism creates a false assumption for the American society that revealing the diseases is equivalent to curing the difficult and complicated diseases of democracy [8].

Aucoin believes that investigative journalism must be serious and expose original, undiscovered, or even intentionally hidden information on issues of public concern [9]. Due to the subjectivity of journalists' judgment of morality, there is a contradiction between highlighting moral standards and maintaining journalistic objectivity. Can journalists really distinguish between fact and value? Etema and Glasser proposed a model of the justification of the content production process. It aims to prove the rationality of news sources by explaining how investigative journalists use independent analysis and evaluation, so as to construct a moral discourse in the form that is more professional and different from other news carriers.

2.2. Investigative Journalism in the British Context

British media have reported about "exposés" since the Victorian era. Although the investigation and research methods at that time were similar to those at present, serious newspapers regarded them as an inglorious reporting technique [10]. In the 20th century, British investigative journalism ushered in vigorous development. Different from the United States, a series of TV news reports mainly occupied the public's attention [11]. The two topics most concerned by British investigative reports are social security and political sleaze.

For British media, the principle of impartiality and objectivity was abandoned and the journalism of attachment was promoted. Journalists believe that the detachment of emotion by objective reporting is immoral and difficult to win the trust of the people. Some TV peers argued that too dramatic a presentation will weaken the analytical function of the report and turn the content unilaterally into a "victim"; public opinion is driven by irrational emotions and manipulated by the commercial interests behind the media [12].

2.3. Investigative Journalism in Chinese Context

In Chinese context, literatures generally believe that the economic reform and media marketization in the 1980s jointly promoted the rapid rise of investigative news reporting in China's modern sense [13]. The Chinese media began to try to practice journalistic professionalism from the role of the spokesman of the

ruling party and through the economic independence brought by marketization[14][15][16][17]. Facing the dual pressure of government media supervision and market survival, Chinese journalists are not opposed to the government (on the contrary, the government encourages and supports many of them to some extent), and develop social functions that are not completely dependent on political parties and serve the public interest [18][19] [20].

At the beginning of the investigative journalism, "Topics in Focus", "News Probe" produced by CCTV, Financials jointly established for the capital market, "New Century" founded by Hu Shuli, South Weekly and Nanfang Metropolis Daily of the Southern media, as well as Bindian Weekly of China Youth Daily, etc., all of these are examples of Chinese investigative journalism often mentioned in English academic works. They outline the rudiments of China's investigative reporting, and show that they are not inferior to their Anglo-American counterparts by exposing the abuse of power by the government, the corruption of state-owned enterprises, and the reform in the fields of housing, education and health care.

3. FROM MOBILISATION MODEL TO CONSENSUS MODEL

In the theoretical framework of media agenda setting, journalists are seen as "reformers that turn public opinion, change policy formulation, and reset moral boundaries [9][11]. The establishment of this heroic image stems from the reporter's judgment on the newsworthiness of the reported events [11], as well as the understanding of how individuals promote moral progress through institutions in the theory of social practice [9]. For the agenda setting of general genres, journalists select information sources through the agreed newsworthiness standards, and use them as the basis for subsequent content production [21][22]. However, the media agenda of investigative journalism runs in the opposite direction -- journalists must have their moral insistence before identifying and selecting information [11]. From the perspective of journalists' cognition, he practice of ethics in investigative reporting, and the role of journalists in the construction of moral discourse. In the cognition of distinguishing facts and values, the facts and values in the process of news production are interrelated, and what the audience wants to know and should know are interdependent.

As a "reformer", in the mobilization model it shows that the media enables the public to obtain the right to know through the disclosure of a specific problem in the "failure of the system", so as to be accountable for relevant government actions. When such a voice is strong enough, policy change can be promoted. In the linear flow of the flow model, the narrative model of "victim-villain" strengthens the role of investigative

journalists as a watchdog, who respond to the theory of social practice, promise to enlighten the public and play a guiding role in the moral construction of citizens. The mobilization model emphasizes why from the investigative journalists themselves to various film and television documentary works, they are portrayed as “reformers” with heroic color (Figure 1).

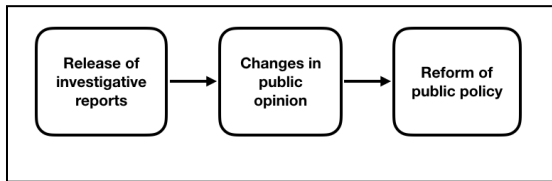


Figure 1 Mobilization Model

However, many political scientists do not agree with the role of public opinion in the improvement of government governance functions. They define the role of the public in political decision-making as passive and illiquid; the negative information revealed by the investigative reporting only affects the attitude and behavior of the political elite to a certain extent, and the public does not take action as a “bystander” [23]. Therefore, the relationship between investigative journalists and political decision-makers has evolved into an ambiguous relationship beyond simple information exchange. While investigating and collecting evidence, they must measure the objectivity and drama of the facts, the extent to which they communicate and cooperate with relevant decision-makers before media release, and the extent to which they confront relevant decision-makers to attract the attention of readers.

So to measure this complex and changeable “policy paradox”, the modified consensus model points out that the investigative reporter does not arouse the awareness of public opinion. On the contrary, they cooperate with public policymakers: on the one hand, government policymakers carefully plan a political issue to be reformed; on the other hand, journalists start to report on the same issue, so as to guide the public’s attention, and the investigative journalism is directly linked to the implementation of public policy [9].

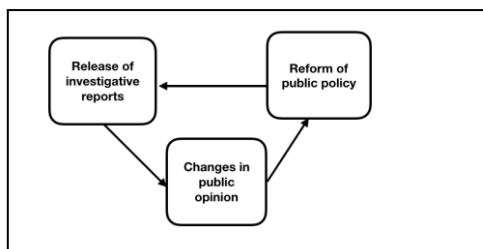


Figure 2 Consensus Model

The interpretation of relevant English literature on the investigative journalism of the relationship between media and rights in the Chinese context is not only similar to the consensus model in the essence of their

interaction, but also an epitome of the whole Chinese media ecology. As a “commodity” produced by media, the living space of investigative journalism is decreasing under the compression of political and economic costs [20]. Therefore, under the pull of the two forces, the media has become the “Party Publicity Inc.” [24] -- in terms of ideological shaping, it publicizes the party’s policies and maintains the legitimacy of the party’s political power [25]. Referring to the interpretation of the relationship between media and rights by clientelism, Wang regarded the relationship between Chinese investigative journalism and political parties as such a customer relationship [26]. Political parties are “masters” and the media are “servants”; the former holds the main political and economic resource in exchange for the latter’s loyalty. Media owners use the content as a bargaining chip to deal with elite groups and get involved in politics [26].

4. EMPIRICAL AND QUANTITATIVE DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE MODEL MODIFICATION

In order to echo the above-mentioned clarification, two outstanding elite financial investigative journalistic journals, Britain’s The Economist and Caijing are chosen as case studies to exemplify differing media discourses, representing, respectively, Anglo-American and Chinese socio-economic and political backgrounds, as well as their own journalistic morals. The comparing of characteristics of narrative construction is the result of the textual analysis of articles published over a ten-year period (mid-1998 to mid-2008). The corpus of samples come from the two media outlets’ coverage of two selected events: China’s outward direct investment (ODI hereafter), and the listing of stocks of Chinese companies in overseas exchanges (IPO hereafter), which are mutually exclusive in sample collection and collectively exhaustive in the inclusion of articles regarding China’s economic globalisation.

4.1. Foreign IPO content analysis results

Before 2002, The Economist didn’t take up too much space for overseas IPOs. $N_{Economist}^{IPO}$ reaches the highest point in 2005 and 2006, when big Chinese state-owned banks undertaking their internal restructuring and getting IPO in Hong Kong or New York stock exchanges. Comparing the year 1999 with 2000, absolute values show $N_{Caijing}^{IPO,1999} > N_{Caijing}^{IPO,2000}$, whereas in relative terms main-themed articles take a larger share in 2000 (47.6%) than 1999 (16.1%). In other words, to look at specific textual items, Caijing in 1999 used most of the space reporting IPO-related stories, among which two prominent issues are extensively discussed. The first issue was the setup of a second

board in Hong Kong in October 1999—Growth Enterprise Market (GEM)—as the ‘Chinese NASDAQ’ (Figure 3).

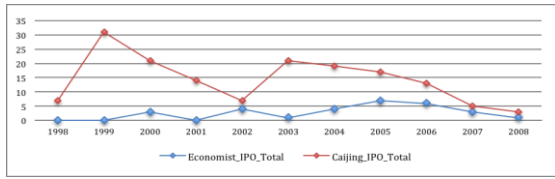


Figure 3 Media attention for total IPO articles

Along the time index, the highest textual volumes exist in 2005 and 2006 for both *The Economist* and *Caijing* (besides the exceptional cases in 1999 and 2000 in *Caijing*), as this time frame covered the years of Chinese IPOs. But another sharp contradiction existed in 2007 and 2008, in that $N_{Caijing}^{IPO}$ was low but slightly even higher for main IPO stories as the $\% N_{Caijing}^{IPO, main-themed}$ in 2008 reaches to the highest of 66.7% (Figure 4).

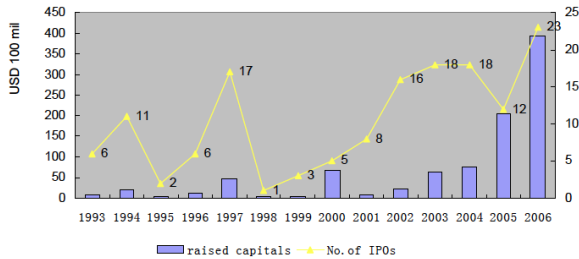


Figure 4 Number of deals and raised capital for H-shares

4.2. ODI content analysis results

The evaluation of news prominence of the two magazines shows sharp distinctions. Except for the year of 2007 and 2008, the relative attention of the main-themed articles shows the numerical differences of $\% N_{Economist}^{ODI} < \% N_{Caijing}^{ODI}$, while the absolute values don't present as much difference as the percentages. Comparing the trends with the real economic statistics, Figure 5 unravels that though the two media have similar patterns of agenda along the time index, clearly neither of them match the economic agenda of Chinese ODI. Speaking of the amount of overseas equity purchase, the real-world figures show nicely the upward tendency since 2005. Whereas the media intends to set apart the ODI activities in 2005 as much more important than the following increasing investments. The main reason is that in 2005 some of the influential deals occurred and obtained worldwide attention, including the failed CNOOC bid for Unocal. Though the deals may not be as economically significant as those soaring in later years, they draw international attention to China's phenomenal economic development and expansion. The image-building feature of the deals

becomes the media agenda under a political context instead of an economic agenda at market or firm levels.

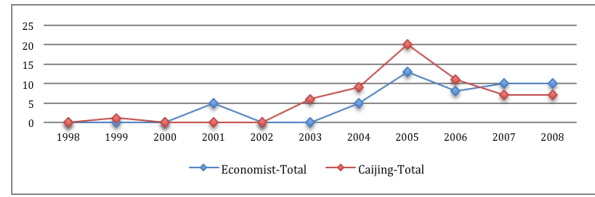


Figure 5 Media attention for total ODI articles

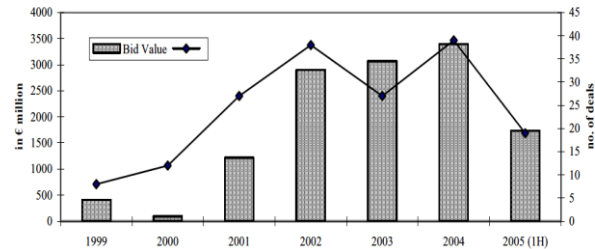


Figure 6 Chinese companies' equity purchase without CNOOC-Unocal deal

5. CONCLUSION

For the Watergate scandal in the United States in 1972 and the “Cash for Questioning Right” incident in Britain from 1994 to 1996, investigative journalism showed its far-reaching influence on the change of political structure. As a special journalistic genre, investigative journalism represents a kind of social composition that is most closely related to power and wealth in journalistic professionalism [27]. The first section of this paper reviews the historical origin and evolution process, and emphasizes an internal contradiction in the essence of investigative journalism, even excluding different national political and economic backgrounds and cultural factors: on the one hand, it is the generally applicable objective justice in professionalism; on the other hand, it is the unique moral judgment of investigative journalism. In any context, the coordination of this internal contradiction follows the trend of gradually changing from moral judgment to objective justice.

The paper's second section responds to this evolution trend. From the role of investigative journalists in mobilizing public indignation and reforming public policy, the focus of investigative reporting lies in the construction of social moral discourse; it is reflected in the description of “victim” and “villain”. The mobilization model is a summary of how investigative journalism realizes its social function as a “reformer”. However, with the change of the economic structure of the media and the political and economic structure of its environment, the social function of investigative journalism is also changing. From the perspective of political economy, the consensus model is obtained on the visual basis of the flow model; it reveals that with the deepening of the

capitalist structure, the essence of investigative journalism has changed from leading public opinion to changing public policy to closer integration with a small range of political and business elites. The manipulation of investigative journalism on public opinion has turned into a tool for political parties and consortia to safeguard their rights and interests; in exchange, some producers of the investigative journalism content have a pass card to join the small circle of political and business elites.

As a special identity, investigative journalism has gone from the most “excellent” group of journalistic professionalism to the most “superior” group of political and business elites. However, the author believes that this evolution is only a group phenomenon, which is not completely mutually exclusive at any time. China’s context reflects a completely different political and economic system, ideology and special transformation period, which extremely compresses the development process of Britain and the United States for centuries and presents it in a few decades. From the review of this paper, it can be seen that the research on Chinese investigative journalism in English literature focuses on the relatively macro dimensions of Sections 1 and 3. However, there is still a lack of relatively influential English works on specific topics in the production process of news content, such as media agenda setting, narrative construction, social roles and so on.

Another related emerging topic is the use of new media and the birth of citizen journalism from the perspective of globalization. Some believe that the Internet is a reforming force that cannot be ignored and can complement the declining traditional media [20]. Others hold that the Internet is also a business branch controlled by multinational consortia. To safeguard their interests, the content on the Internet only transmits information to obedient consumers and does not serve “citizens with freedom of thought” [4]. Pei Yili, President of Harvard Yanjing Institute, said that although new media played a greater role in social movements around the world, the democratization ability of new media was overestimated and the ability of the government was underestimated. The influence of networks is still a relative, temporal and developmental research concept, which needs to be deeply understood in a broader historical framework. Therefore, the author only takes the topic of network media as the extension and prospect of literature review of investigative reporting. Is the new media the rebirth of the social role of investigative reporting, or the extension of the content platform? In China’s transition period, after the role of the network is further amplified, is it a trap of “new media centrism/determinism”, or a topic that needs to be discussed in depth in China’s unique context?

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