

<<Taikichiro Mori Memorial Research Fund>>
Graduate Student Researcher Development Grant Report

Name of the Research Project News Selection Process in Chinese Media

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Master's Program, Year 1

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The observers of China for decades have been facing lack of information while studying Chinese politics and society. In the People's Republic of China information was always under strict government control and the political process has never been made public. Therefore the students of China have had only limited access to important data, such as official documents or decision making process in the country. As a result Chinese media often proved to be the most informative (and sometimes the only one available) source about political process taking place in China. A vast number of China research is based on the analysis of Chinese media and government statements published by it.

However there exists a wide variety of media in contemporary China. The most puzzling question for the student conducting this research was which sources are the most relevant for particular China research. Therefore this research of contemporary Chinese newspapers¹ – as one of the means of media – was conducted. That is the main purpose of this

¹ Here and below the term *newspapers* includes both newspapers and magazines in China. Some of the main printed media, such as *Beijing Review* is published in a magazine format.

research was to identify the newspapers which would serve as reliable sources for content analysis in further research during Master's program.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

This research consisted of 2 parts. Firstly, interviews with media editors and journalists or academics were conducted. Secondly, interviews with newspaper retailers were conducted and readers' habits were being observed.

The first part of the research initially was the core part. Unstructured interviews with media sector employees and media scholars working in a Chinese university was conducted. It has confirmed that Chinese media has relatively wide freedom in certain fields. However, as expected, the information on such issues as national movements, democratization and others are still under strict control. As a result of that many newspapers look for a different niche and drift away from political issues reporting towards less sensitive ones. Moreover, this process is further enforced by the readers' needs. As Chinese readers appear to be rather not interested in politics, newspapers competing under the conditions of free market are forced to provide them with other topics, such as entertainment or so. As a result of such trends Chinese newspaper market has undergone a significant transformation and only a small number of newspapers focus on political issues. For example English language newspaper *Shanghai Daily* after a few failures has decided to focus on foreigners living in China. Therefore most of the information it provides is mostly relevant to foreigners' daily life there. One more outstanding case proved to be a foreign capital financial newspaper in regards to its contents and specific relations with the authorities. This newspaper writes mainly on finance-related topics. But its political stance may provide interesting material for further research.

The above mentioned interviews, as a core of the proposed research, encouraged the

student to extend the scope of the research and conduct some additional interviews in regards to the popularity of some official newspapers. During the initial interviews it became clear that the government published newspapers (still somewhat propagandistic) are no longer popular among the readers. Some of the respondents mentioned that even though they are delivered to the retailers daily the newspapers remain unsold. Such findings called for some extra research. Therefore a number of newspaper vendors was interviewed and they confirmed the aforementioned trends.

At the same time the public newspaper boards were being observed. One of the most interesting findings was that the majority of readers there were men rather than women. This confirmed the statement made by some interviewees that women tend to prefer fashion magazines or household-focused media rather than the political ones. Moreover the main official newspaper in China was almost ignored by the readers. This gives some important arguments which sources should be chosen for the analysis of the attitudes prevalent in Chinese society.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The research conducted provides the student with information necessary to judge which sources should be chosen for further research. These findings will serve as a strong basis for further research and legitimate conclusions.

In addition this research has provided information about the media audiences that is the newspaper readers in China. The findings suggest that Chinese readers are rather apolitic and tend to chose entertainment or daily life oriented newspapers rather than the politics-focused ones. This falsifies the argument that party-ran newspapers such as *Beijing Review* serve as a source of political propaganda in China. Even if it attempts to do so its affect

is very limited. It should be taken into account when making general statements about Chinese politics and society. The government newspapers can be analyzed as an expression of official position or political goals. However the effects of it on society should be view with caution. The research results have made it obvious that Chinese newspapers should be used as the core source of analysis only when examining the governmental policies and position. However if the attitudes of the society are being dealt with some new forms of media should be chosen for the analysis. Some of the interviews have provided especially useful information about media transformation process in China and the nature of the new media there.

In addition to its main purpose this research has also provided the student with a deep insight into the process of media production in China under the circumstances of censorship.