

Chindia' and Global Communication: Two media and journalisms in transition and what it means for the rest of us

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China and India embrace (media) globalization: Unshackling the private sector

The two Asian giants, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of India, are home to some 2.3 billion people or two-fifths of humanity and are currently the world's fastest growing economies. Over the past three decades, China's move from autarkic, centrally planned economy towards a socialist market economy underpinned by global economic integration has generated robust economic growth. With a gross domestic product growth rate average in 9.5% per year between 1980 and 2004 and 9% between 2005 and 2007, and endowed with a GDP of \$1.6 trillion China is now the second largest economy in the world. If China maintains its current level of growth, it could overtake the United States economy as early as 2020. Although the Communist party still rules China with an iron hand, the regimented Orwellian landscape of austere monotony with men and women in their drab Mao jackets cycling silently have long melted into obscurity. The streets of China's cities and towns are now congested with Mercedes and Toyotas and bustling with people dressed in a kaleidoscope of the latest designer clothing. Even the once 'sacred' public spaces reserved for ubiquitous posters displaying defiant Communist iconography have disappeared. As if in a perverse act of desecration, they now avariciously advertise automobiles, and designer couture, among other symbols of modern consumerism.

Although not as spectacular as China's, India's post 1991 economic reforms and global integration have helped the economy grow at more than 6% per year (on average) since 1992. This has laid to rest the ghost of the anemic 'Hindu rate of growth' of 3.5% under which India seemed perennially trapped from the early 1950s to the mid 1980s. India's average annual growth in GDP reached 7.3 in 2003 and has fluctuated between 8.5 to 9% ever since. If, as expected, India maintains this growth momentum over the next several

years, it will propel the country's 80 billion dollar economy (tenth largest in the world, third largest in Asia) into the fifth largest in the world by 2020.

In both countries, such sustained level of economic growth has translated into lower reduction of poverty. The proportion of Indians living in "extreme poverty" has fallen from 40% in 1990 to 25% by 2009, which means about 100 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty. In China, poverty reduction has been simply unprecedented. On the eve of the reforms, the incidence of poverty in China was among the highest in the world. However, between 1981 and 2001, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty fell from 53% to just 8%. This means that across China, there were more than 400 million fewer people living in extreme poverty in 2001 than there were twenty years earlier. Few countries have grown so fast over such a prolonged period of time or reduced poverty so sharply.

Comparing China and India evokes memories of another era when scholars and policy makers had found comparing China and India irresistible, albeit their reasons and agenda were often different than those of today. More than sixty years ago, the merits and pitfalls of socialism, authoritarianism, democracy, and capitalism were passionately debated when these two Asian behemoths, having overthrown centuries of colonial rule and faced with similarly massive problems of economic backwardness, poverty and illiteracy, and human misery boldly embarked on diametrically opposed developmental paths for human emancipation. Although in the shrill partisan atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s many observers hastily declared the erstwhile 'Chinese model' the winner, the passage of time has revealed a more nuanced reality: with the wisdom of hindsight and, of course, as more evidence became available regarding the callousness and grisly excesses of the Maoist era, there has been grudging recognition that India, the venerable and inchoate democracy, had not done that bad after all, and in some ways may have surpassed its more celebrated northern neighbor in strengthening its democratic institutions including creating a free press and a functional judiciary.

Today, the stakes are different, but the questions still have a striking resonance with the past and are just as fiercely debated. Observers once again are attempting to come to terms with the sheer scale of change unfolding in these two countries developmental path as sustainable. Questions being debated include: will India's trajectory prove more enduring, given that its political order respects individual rights and representation in an open market economy based on private property rights? Is the sovereign authority (State) in both countries up to the task of meeting its instrumental and moral obligations, guiding economic development in a productive and equitable manner, providing security to its citizens, negotiating and accommodating their expectations, and preserving the nation's far-flung territorial boundaries? What are each country's towering - indeed, audacious - global ambitions? Will these complement and collide? What does the rise of 'Chindia' mean for the United States, for the global economy, and for international security and stability?

Although we know the forces that propelled both countries to embrace globalization in the first place, what are not as well-understood are their particular approaches or strategies to media globalization or how each country's media been impacted by the massive privatization and deregulation. In this paper, I explore how the complex interplay of social, political and economic forces the power and sway of globalization, sometimes rather unpredictably, to transform journalisms in each country. Each country's miraculous transformation of its media (as its economy) is far more ambiguous, complex, and multifaceted than one would have led to believe. The move from Communist (China) and Socialist (India) systems to a market system has meant a simultaneous shrinkage of the state sector and the growth and expansion of the private sector including the rapid growth of private media. How have such changes impacted the professional practices of journalism?

Two emerging public spheres: Journalisms in the era of transition

China

Gone are the days of the Chinese media industry under siege focused on the struggle between the foreign 'wolf' versus the Chinese industry as the weaker 'lamb' figure. Shunning any broad political and ideological debates, the dominant perspective is currently anchored in the pragmatic question of 'how to' - how to connect the Chinese media and culture industry with the global tracks and how effectively to absorb foreign capital and expertise and how to strengthen the domestic industries global market position. The fear of the survival of Chinese culture in the face of foreign media entry has given way to China's substantial potential in globalization and exporting its cultural products. The political and market imperatives of Chinese global expansion have become increasingly acute in light of success stories like *Al Jazeera* and *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. Global expansion has become a key plank of the Communist party's cultural reform project, for example, notwithstanding the Chinese state's opposition to the American invasion of Iraq, CCTV apparently hoped to exploit the commercial potential of war coverage to become "China's CNN" (Sharma, 2009, p. 89). Since the early 1990s China's leaders have encouraged the commercialization of the country's media resulting in 346 million broadband users and one of the largest in the world.

But the implications of these changes have also caused alarm and consternation among CCP leaders who strongly believed controlling the public agenda was critical to maintaining social stability and the CCP's hold on power. Rupert Murdoch, the transnational media baron who once famously proclaimed that satellite television would bring an end to authoritarian regimes everywhere, first cajoled top Chinese leaders in the early 1990s to liberalize China's media market. Murdoch not only assured them of compatibility between market liberalization and the maintenance of political power, but also claimed that "...China has the potential not only to follow the examples of the US and the UK, but to improve upon these examples to achieve a level of success all of its own" (Zhao). However, Murdoch's venture to take control of Qinghai provincial satellite television to broadcast his Channel V and Star TV to a Chinese national audience had been nixed by 2005. Murdoch subsequently accused the Chinese government of being paranoid, fully realizing that his grand plans to expand in China had hit a brick wall. China's engagement with global capitalism within and around its media system remains

ill-defined. While actively encouraging media to operate on market principles instead of relying on government subsidies, the CCP also continues to resist a redefinition of the role of journalists, whom it still regards first and foremost as promoters of the party's agenda. Despite its growing importance, the private sector too faces constraints. During the Jiang Zemin years, the number of *hong zibenjia* (private entrepreneurs) who were members of the CCP grew rapidly, with more than one third being senior party members. Although the debate regarding what is the appropriate relationship with CCP and 'market socialism with Chinese characteristics' will continue, critics contend that this close relationship between the party and the private sector is not conducive to long-term growth because it is based on personal connections and favoritism rather than individual enterprise and initiative. Moreover, such cronyism fosters corruption; according to Transparency International, China now ranks among the 'most corrupt' countries in the world in which to do business. Without a well-designed system of private property rights and formal economic institutions that serve both the public and private interests, critics argue, maintaining the current growth rate would be difficult.

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Nevertheless, media commercialization, developing norms of journalistic professionalism, and the growth of new media are combining to erode the CCP's monopoly over the public agenda and to open a limited public sphere. The resulting tension between control and commercialization has altered the relationship between the CCP and the media, prompting the CCP to adopt new control tactics to uphold its influence on news. Despite the fact that the CCP continues to punish editors who step over the line and the media formally remain a part of the party-state apparatus, China's leadership are beginning to treat the media and internet as the voice of the public and to respond to it accordingly. Increasingly, we have seen cases where Chinese journalists have risked their jobs, and even lives, in telling the 'truth' and investigative journalism is on the rise in China. Journalists who have successfully produced influential investigative reports are hailed as heroes. News organizations have committed substantial financial resources to support their investigative journalism divisions, provide them with good pay, a special autonomy, and, sometimes, "star" prestige. Investigative journalism has indeed posed challenges to the political authority. Well publicized investigative reports,

such as the Zhang Jinzhu case in 1997, the Niuniu event in 2005, the Pengshui Poem Scandal in 2006, the Shanxi Brickfield Scandal in 2007, the Sanlu contaminated Milk Powder Scandal in 2008 and the Shanxi Unsafe Vaccines Scandal in 2010, triggered changes in sociopublic issues and even public policies. The historical imaginary of Chinese journalism, that the Chinese journalist is always in tune with the authority, is gradually shifting.

Investigative journalism fully emerged in the 1990s when some state officials warmed up to the idea of “Public Opinion Monitoring”, especially in giving local newspapers more freedom of expression. The idea of “media supervision” was systematically promoted. While it could not address political reform – especially the party’s dismay over the 1989 Tiananmen Square revolution – “media supervision” was mainly applied to reveal social injustice, corruption and the wrongdoings of the powerful (especially local cadres) and the rich, and corruption in the processes and implementation of economic reforms. Leading the reform in journalism were two camps (Tong, 2011, p. 13). In the television sector, the China Central Television (CCTV) started two flagship programs focused on “media supervision”: *Focus* (1994) and *News Probe* (1996). Top leaders including Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, and Zhu Rongji publicly supported these initiatives, which were therefore quickly copied by stations at lower administrative levels of the broadcasting system which, because of privatization and commercialization, could now set up their own programs investigating local scandals. In newspapers, it was the regional newspapers and, most remarkably, the Guangzhou-based *Southern Weekend* that took the lead in practicing investigative journalism in the late 1990s. *Southern Weekend* focused on subjects such as corruption of local government officials, environmental problems, criminal cases, and social injustice encountered by vulnerable populations. But, as critics suggest, this journalism was aimed at depicting a picture of “justice countering the evil side” (*zhengyi zhansheng xie’er*) or representing the capacity of the ruling CCP to punish the ‘black sheep’ or the pathologically corrupt who needed to be punished, rather than an endemic and systemic corruption; such stories, though critical, fundamentally enhanced the public’s confidence in the CCP’s rule. Nevertheless, the new genre of investigative journalism has triggered several changes in China’s journalism scene. The first is that

investigative journalism has achieved its legitimacy as a new genre of journalism which now openly questions the dominance of Party journalism. Second, a decade of investigative journalism has changed Chinese journalist's perception of their own occupation. The time when journalists were required to vow to serve the party is over. According to a study of newspaper readers in Beijing in 2004, nearly all respondents who said they read one newspaper (44% total) preferred commercial newspaper and only those who habitually read two or three publications picked up party newspapers (Gang and Bandurski, 2011, p. 39). In a media environment, increasingly driven by consumer choice, the news gap between party and commercial media is opening a corresponding divide in public trust and credibility, which has direct implications for the CCP's ability to guide and shape public opinion. Investigative journalists have started to cover apriori taboo subjects such as AIDS and state's one-child policy. Third, the idea of objectivity has become established with the rise of new technologies such as weblogs and hidden cameras. Calling these "secret investigations", Chinese broadcast journalists now routinely use hidden cameras to videotape unsuspecting criminals, bureaucrats, and businessmen.

If investigative journalism is creating a critical public sphere, the rise of online bloggers and columnists is creating an alterative public sphere. Stories such as the now famous Xiamen project first circulated by freelance journalist Lian Yue about the construction of a toxic chemical plant in his hometown, marks the rise of a new force in China's contemporary journalism scene: public opinion communicated through online forums and Weblogs. Several stories, now categorized as "digital resistance", first began in Weblogs and were later picked up by major newspapers and television news stations. Even with the party censors' constant presence, the ephemeral, anonymous and networked nature of internet communication limits their impact. The explosive growth of internet access and the nebulous nature of the internet technology itself, has lead to *shai* ("put under the sun" or reveal) large amounts of information which circulates freely among users. As an effect, many Chinese journalists themselves have become bloggers leading a "double life, working for the state-controlled media during the day and blogging or participating in forums at night. When covering sensitive stories like natural disasters, major industrial

accidents or official corruption cases, print and television reporters must follow the lead of official sources before conducting interviews and publishing their findings. But journalists now can evade these guidelines by distributing and collecting information on the internet giving traditional media a legitimate reason to cover it.

India

Celebrating its 60th year of independence, the country's political and business leaders can hardly contain themselves, trumpeting India's economic achievements and its rise to global prominence. If an earlier time India was patronizingly dismissed as "the country of the future" forever poised for dramatic takeoff but never quite accomplishing it, today its representatives, such as Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath, confidently proclaimed that "we should no longer discuss the future of India. The future is India..." (Nath, p. 88). No doubt, India has shed its image as a land of grinding poverty, starving children, sacred cows, holy men and snake charmers. New media stories are about its legions of "techies", savvy entrepreneurs, list of billionaires, and brand name multinationals moving or outsourcing their operations to Bangalore, and extravagant Bollywood films. Examples of India's success float around the world in newspapers and magazines: Mittal steel merged with Arcelor, Mittal Arcelor became the largest steel maker in the world; Indian conglomerate Aditya Birla group purchased the American firm Novelis, the world's leading manufacturers in aluminum products, and Tata Motors bought from Ford Motors two of its highly valued brands, Jaguar and Land Rover. These men were celebrated as conquering heroes - symbols of "new India". In media, when Reliance communication quietly acquired 50% distribution rights to DreamWorks SKG, an iconic movie studio started by three famous faces in Hollywood, Steven Spielberg, David Geffen, and Jeffrey Katzenberg, India not only emerged as a regional media giant but as a global media powerhouse.

Like the rest of the economy, Indian media has been transformed given the rapid liberalization and deregulation beginning in the early 1990. Following the breakdown of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the government of then Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, faced a fiscal crisis and was forced to make policy changes which

relaxed restrictions on multinationals, which then expanded and invested in the Indian market. It was the “onslaught from the skies” that radically changed Indian media with the arrival of international satellite-distributed television (Pelton, Oslund, and Marshall, 2004, p. 44). International television came with CNN’s coverage of the 1991 Gulf War. Between 1991 and 1995, several Indian satellite-based television services, prominently among them Zee TV and Sony TV, were launched. Consequently, the Indian media economy changed considerably. Foreign channels like CNNI and BBC World, and domestic channels like Zee TV, NDTV, and Sun TV, suddenly and explosively increased the demand for cable. Before 1991, Indian viewers had received only two channels but, by 2007, they were receiving more than 90 channels. Before reforms, Indian audiences had depended solely on state-owned public broadcasting entity *Doordarshan*, to provide news; after reforms Indian audiences could choose between several 24-hour news channels. India is currently the third largest cable TV viewing nation in the world, after China and the US, with more than 100 million cable and TV households by the end of 2009. Unlike in the West where there has been a drop in newspaper circulation, India has witnessed a growth in the print industry. The competition between newspapers has drastically changed; major newspaper publishers and media companies are trying to expand into geographic regions (to competing cities and smaller markets), initiating price wars and strategically marketing campaigns to specific readerships. With the economic reforms, the vernacular press and regional language TV channels have grown exponentially. Regional and vernacular publications continue to garner the largest circulations (Rao, 2008). Almost every district has at least one or more newspaper. Multiple editions are becoming common given the availability of internet and fax. Newspapers, such as *Eenadu* in the South, have editions coming out from every district of Andhra Pradesh; Rajasthan’s *Patrika* publishes four editions and *Malayala Manorama* issues three editions. *Eenadu* even brings out half a dozen editions for different localities in Hyderabad city. Similarly, *Aaj*, *Nai Duniya*, and *Amar Ujjala* publish several editions. Every cable package in India currently contains several language-based channels. In metropolitan cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, cable packages can include up to 30 regional language channels catering to a linguistically vast and diverse audience.

Even in the context of a rapidly expanding and burgeoning media, the role of a journalist cannot be separated from the key role journalists play in strengthening (or, as some skeptics believe, weakening) the democratic system. Recent scholarship about journalism in India has focused on the connections between the consolidation and success of democracy and democratic institutions and a flourishing, independent, and ethical press. Some scholars have argued that globalization of news has created a façade of media plurality when in fact it was “contributing to a democratic deficit in the world’s largest democracy” (Thussu, 2005, p. 65). What has not been accounted, in such critiques, is that format changes borrowed from a globalized news media has increased journalism’s emphasis on *janmat* or will of the people. While globalization has commercialized news, it has also increased access to and coverage of stories evaded by government controlled news, about serious social and political issues. Despite the obsession with celebrities and urban life dictated by profit considerations, some journalists have ventured into the villages and among ordinary people, who grapple every day with caste and class issues. It has become particularly important for the cable and television news channels and newspapers to provide a platform and a broadcast voice for those who are marginalized. Journalists are conscious of, and news content reflects, and emphasis and sensitivity towards class and caste oppression in India. Globally, the technological, political and economic environments within which journalism is practiced are, as they are now, in flux. The contradictory and paradoxical implications of media globalization not only places Indian journalism at the mercy of market forces, but also enables journalists to give voice to the voiceless and to seek accountability from political actors. The daunting challenge for journalists and media owners is to continue balancing the pressures of capitalism with the need for democracy.

The re-arranging (media) world of an eagle, a dragon and an elephant

There is a truism in the oft-noted observation that although economic reforms in China have proceeded rapidly, meaningful political reforms have moved at a snail’s pace. Whether one sees the glass half-full or half-empty, there is no denying that state-society relations have greatly improved in post-Mao China. In recent years CCP even introduced

semi-competitive elections at the village level and sponsored establishment of numerous civic and professional associations giving them greater space in the formulation of public policy. The Communist society characterized by comradeship is gradually given way to a semi-democratic society characterized by citizenship. While China's political trajectory challenges the conventional assumption of a linear relationship between per capita income and democratic survival and the claim that sustained economic growth is most conducive to democratization, changes in journalism practices suggest a pathway to gradual democratic reforms. Investigative journalism in China is a new genre that has enormous potential to reform the existing social order. Often its reformist potential has been curtailed by the ruling party but the changing paradigm of "good journalism" has led journalists to seek professional autonomy and mobilizing the public.

For all its limitations, India remains the world's largest constitutional democracy with a functioning parliament, a free press, and numerous political parties and free elections for which millions of citizens turn out to vote. Democracy, furthermore, has served India well because it has provided the glue that holds together the polyglot nation with a population of one billion, twenty major languages, and an impenetrable checkboard of identities. The dominant issue in India is no longer whether democracy can survive but whether it can become a meaningful way for diverse sections of society to exercise collective influence over public decisions that affect their lives. There are constant concerns about the "quality" of India's democracy as exemplified by Zakaria's epithet, "democracy is flourishing, liberty is not", a view widely shared by intellectuals and policymakers. What we have found is a form of governance that deliberately combines the rhetoric of liberal democracy with illiberal rules of religion and caste. For example, Zakaria notes, although regular and competitive elections are held, qualifying the country as an "electoral democracy", the everyday practices of the state are marked by arbitrariness and abuses. Similarly, the political freedoms and civil rights may be formally recognized but are hardly observed in practice. The judiciary may officially be deemed independent but is easily compromised, and the free press is harassed in numerous ways to make it compliant. The challenge for Indian journalists today is the rise of private media which comes with its own set of constraints. Some media

organizations totally surrender to market forces by sensationalizing news and falling to the lowest common denominator of reporting (crime, cricket and cinema). Big advertising and circulation revenues have increasingly interfered with good journalism and at times prevented news media from reporting negative news of commercial interests. Yet, new investigative techniques and technologies such as hidden cameras and surreptitious taping have allowed journalists to hold politicians accountable and the general belief that the information so gained empowers their viewers and readers.

Given such a scenario, what are the implications of the rise of 'Chindia' in global media order? There is no denying that the combined media power of China and India will continue to play a key role in shaping the political future of the world. The days of the "American media empire" are over. The 'soft power' of Bollywood, and the industry's popularity in South Asia, Middle East, and Africa, suggests a challenge to the older information hegemonic dominance of the West. China's rise as a "peaceful superpower" could suggest that they will remain a responsible stakeholder and will use their communication and media systems to create an equitable media world. But it is uncertain that when a "changing of the guard" will occur (with China displacing the United States as the great power), it will not use its communication resources to act revisionist and as a hegemon as its power grows. India's rise in the global media world, with high number of technology industries and infrastructure and large audiences, has provided a challenge both to United States and China, a fact that does not get unnoticed in Washington or Beijing. India's full commitment to democracy and a free press further enhances its role as a major political power and one that is likely to promote individual rights. Fact remains, however, if the rising tide of media globalization is to "lift all boats", it will require an unprecedented degree of national and global cooperation and for China and India, despite all their accomplishments, it remains to be seen if they can finally rise above the burdens of history.