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DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE MAINLAND CHINESE PRESS:  
A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract**

This paper reports the results of a content analysis of five newspapers selected from the Chinese daily press. The research was conducted as part of an international project designed to explore the relationship between journalistic self-conceptions and journalistic practice. This paper reports only upon journalistic practice, in particular the extent to which different models of journalism are present. The results of the analysis demonstrate, firstly, that while the concept of a uniform “national media system” is one of some utility in comparative studies, there are, even in the highly structured Chinese case, very significant differences with a single country. Secondly, it demonstrates that the common division of the Chinese press in to a politically oriented party press and a market oriented commercial press is inadequate to explain the identifiable differences between titles in the sample. A four grouping solution fits the data much better and demonstrates that there are newspapers that combine strong evidence of indicators of the party press with strong evidence of indicators of the commercial press. As a consequence, the claim that marketization will necessarily lead to conflicts with the party appears to be mistaken.

**Keywords:** China, newspapers, journalism, party press, infotainment

## **Introduction**

This paper reports on the results of a content analysis of the journalistic models embodied in national news in five selected mainland Chinese newspapers. These journalistic models represent the concrete embodiments of journalistic practices and thus provide evidence as to the presence and extent of different kinds of journalism. This data advances two very closely related debates about media and journalism in China: that on the nature of the current media system in the mainland and the degree of differentiation that there is within its journalistic practices.

Given that the contemporary mainland Chinese media originated in a tightly controlled propaganda system, and are still structurally and editorially subject to control by the propaganda departments of different levels of the Chinese Communist Party, there is a strong body of research that investigates the extent to which it can be considered as a more or less homogenous “system” which has distinct characteristics from those of other national states. An alternative viewpoint argues that, since the economic reforms of the post-Mao era, a large part of the media has developed a very strong market orientation. Many newspapers have been under pressure to adapt to the needs of different audiences, in order to build both circulation and advertising revenue, and the industry has thus tended to diversify.

The extent to which newspapers are in fact divergent is partly a question of structural factors and revenue sources, but it is also an issue of how far the journalism they carry is differentiated. Thus, part at least of the answer to the debate on the degree of homogeneity of the Chinese media can be found by measuring the presence of different kinds of journalism. There have been valuable studies of aspects of Chinese journalism, notably investigative journalism but few studies which have looked at a range of types of journalism. There has tended to be a stress upon political issues rather than different kinds of journalism.

By measuring the different models of journalism present, this study goes some way towards determining both the degree of homogeneity of the mainland Chinese press and the extent to which different journalistic practices are present. What it does not do, and is not designed to do, is to measure political diversity in the Chinese press. On any account, this is likely to be limited – no newspaper is going to run an interview with the Dalai Lama or publish an editorial advocating independence for Xinjiang – and the extent to which even modest divergence are possible will vary with the political climate. At the time of writing, for example, control of political content is tighter than for many years: in February, President Xi Jinping made a high-profile visit to three state media (Xinhua Agency, CCTV and People’s Daily), and advanced the Party press principle by stressing that “The media run by the party and the government are the propaganda fronts and must have the party as their family name.” Following his talk, media organizations in the whole country were obliged to promise loyalty to the Party and government by publicly vowing to always carry the Party’s surname (Associated Press, 2016). Models of journalism, on the other hand, are to a certain extent independent of the political climate: to take an obvious example, “watchdog journalism” can flourish even in a period of political restrictions, provided that the targets are ones approved by the appropriate party body (Tong, 2011, pp. 66-67; Zhao & Sun, 2007).

The paper begins by reviewing the literature on the current structure of the Chinese press and the extent of diversity between journalistic practices. It then discusses the methodology employed in the study, in particular the models of journalism used here, which are those developed by Professor Claudia Mellado for the collaborative investigation “Journalistic role performance around the globe” (Mellado, 2014a). Some of the findings of the analysis are then presented and analysed. In conclusion, the implications of the study, and its limitations, are reviewed.

### **The Chinese media system and Chinese journalism**

The supposition of homogenous national media systems and national journalistic cultures underlies many contemporary studies which seek to make international comparisons (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2012; Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, & Castro, 2014; Hanitzch & Mellado, 2011; Hanitzsch & Berganza, 2012). Taking the nation state as the unit of analysis reveals important comparative features of both journalistic cultures and the dynamics of the media, but this assumption can also conceal differences within given countries.

Given the way in which the press is mapped on to the political structure, there is a strong case for considering the Chinese case as a “media system,” but the two most obvious characteristics of the press since the launch of the economic reform movement in the late 1970s have been, on the one hand, the importance of market forces, expressed through increased competition for readership and advertising revenues, and on the other the continuation of control of editorial policy by the Communist Party (Zhao, 1998; Zhao, 2008). As part of a more general discussion about the chances of the increasing marketization of the economy leading to a crisis of Communist rule, there has been a debate over the impact of these forces on the newspaper press. A number of writers stress that, while there may have been some changes in the financing of the press, it remains closely subordinated to the party propaganda apparatus and retains, albeit in a modified and more sophisticated form, the same basic role of convincing the masses of the correctness of the party’s leadership (Brady, 2012; Brady, 2008; Hassid, 2008; He Z. , 2003; He Q. , 2007; Su, 1994).

On the other hand, a range of external factors have been identified as possibly leading to differentiation, including audience profiles, ownership patterns and the political consequences of geographical location (Stockmann, 2013; Tong, 2013; He Z. , 2000a, p. 146;

Sun, 2012; Wang, 2010). One strand of thinking in this approach sees an insurmountable opposition between the demands of the market and the political imperatives imposed by the party, which drive the press in different directions. In the 1990s, when marketization was a relatively new phenomenon for the Chinese media, these different pressures were seen as preparing a way for a crisis in party control, every bit as much as the overall marketization of society was thought to be producing the potential for a democratic revolution in China (Lee, 1994, p. 15). As the combination of party control and market orientation have become normalized in China, most commentators have modified these predictions to recognise that co-existence, however uneasy, is characteristic of contemporary reality, although there remain some adherents to the notion that the market will, eventually but inescapably, lead to democratic upheavals (Shirk, 2011; Qian & Bandurski, 2011; McCormick, 2002/2003; Polunbaum, 2008; Esarey, 2006).

The journalism practised in Chinese newspapers is obviously one way of illuminating these debates: a strongly controlled press can be presumed to display less variety in journalistic models than one in which control is weaker and contested. Studies of journalistic performance in China have tended to concentrate upon those media and those journalists who engage in innovative kinds of reporting, notably investigative reporting (Bandurski & Hala, 2010; Tong, 2011; Tong, 2015; Wang, 2016; Hassid, 2015). The number of journalists involved in these studies is, however, small relative to the overall size of the journalistic population in China: one survey identified 259 journalists engaged in investigative reporting, whereas the total journalistic population is perhaps 200,000 (Shen & Zhang, 2014).

Studies of journalistic self-perceptions, on the other hand, have revealed a more complex picture than a uniform striving for professional autonomy and the freedom to exercise the role of watchdog unfettered by party constraints (He Z. , 2000b; Pan & Lu, 2003;

Polumbaum & Lei, 2008; de Burgh, 2003). Hassid, notably, has argued that the focus either upon the struggle for professionalism as a desired objective or upon the role of journalists as mouthpieces for the party misrepresents the realities of Chinese journalists' self-conceptions (Hassid, 2011). It is reasonable to argue that, while there will be some important disjunctures, there is at least some relationship between what journalists think they do and the journalism they produce. It follows that, while those kinds of innovative and critical journalism that have been the focus of attention are to be found in contemporary Chinese journalism, there would also be other, more accommodative, forms of journalism present.

### **An outline of the project**

The data presented here were gathered as part of an international comparative research project led by Professor Claudia Mellado of the Catholic University of Valparaiso in Chile. Summary documentation of the project is available on its website, at [www.journalisticperformance.org](http://www.journalisticperformance.org). The aim of the overall comparative project is to gather and analyse data that illuminates the relationship between the ways journalists think about themselves (their role conceptions) and the daily practice of their occupation by those same journalists (their role performance). The latter is measured through a content analysis of the national news in selected newspapers in each country. The project attempts to explore the extent to which journalism in the different cases can be shown to fit six different models, arranged along three different axes.

The first axis contains one model concerning the presence or absence of the journalist as actor in the story as written. Labelled the "interventionist-disseminator" model, it is measured by indicators of the extent to which the text contains marks of this presence, including, for example whether the article contains the journalist's opinion or interpretation of the event reported. The model has a special status because it measures the way in which



all stories are told. It is therefore always much more pervasive than any of the other models (Mellado, 2014b, p. 9).

The second axis concerns the ways in which journalistic practice represents its relationship to powerful forces in society, for example the political and business elites. It contains two models: the “loyal facilitator” and the “watchdog”. The former contains items like the presentation of a favourable opinion of elite groups and a stress upon national successes, while the latter includes categories like investigative reporting and questioning policies and powerful individuals.

The third axis concerns the ways in which journalistic practice represents its relationship to the audience. It contains three models: the “infotainment,” the “civic” and the “service.” The first contains items like sensationalism and personalization; the second the provision of information for and from the audience conceived of as citizens; and the third the provision of tips and advice about everyday life.

Alongside the various indicators of these models, the analysis also collected data concerning other aspects of journalistic practices, such as article type, location in the paper, presence and absence of illustrations, types of sources, and so on. Taken together with the indicators of the models, and the composite models themselves, this data allowed the construction of a fairly detailed analysis of the characteristics of the journalism present and hence how far newspapers differ.

The overall research question that informs this paper is thus: to what extent is the journalism present in the Chinese newspaper press homogenous? The literature reviewed above offers, essentially, two options: either the Chinese press displays uniform characteristics or it can be shown to fall in more than one group of papers. If the latter, then are there two groups, one of official party papers and the other of commercial titles? If the

answer to both of these questions is negative, then what is the most persuasive way to group Chinese newspapers?

Given the nature of this data, it is also possible to answer subsidiary research questions about the ways in which the titles are differentiated. Since it is well-known that, on all the accounts reviewed above, the official role of the media in China is to act as the “throat and tongue of the Party” it is otiose to ask whether elements of propaganda are present in Chinese newspapers, since that is what they are officially designed to disseminate. We can, however, enquire as to how this is conducted in different titles and the extent to which other kinds of journalism are also present. Assuming that the common-sense division into party and commercial titles is correct, it can be anticipated that the interventionist and loyal facilitator models would be prominently present and that they would be more clearly present in the party press than in more market oriented titles. The watchdog model, would be present, since, even according to official CCP theory, the media has a role in “critical reporting” (piping baodao) intended to allow the monitoring of officials’ performance and the operation of public institutions. It would, however, be less prominent, particularly in the party press and, where it was present, it would be in the form of a “watchdog on a party leash” (Zhao, 2004) . It would not be expected that the infotainment model, stressing sensational material, would be prominent and, to the extent to which it was prominent, it would be in the market-oriented press rather than the official titles. The civic and service models, too, do not fit the existing literature on the Chinese press and might be expected to be equally marginal.

We may formulate the above research questions into sets of hypotheses that this data permits us to test:

Set 1: How far is the Chinese newspaper press internally differentiated?

H1a. There are significant differences in the performance of journalism between titles in the Chinese press.

H1b. These differences divide the press in to two main groupings: the official party press and the commercially-oriented press.

Set 2: How far are propaganda functions present in the press and how are they distributed?

H2a. The interventionist model will be present in the press.

H2b. This model will be significantly more present in the party press than in the commercial press.

H2c. The loyal facilitator model will be significantly more present than other substantive modes across the press.

H2d. The loyal facilitator model will be significantly more present in the party press than in the commercial press.

Set 3: How far will journalism fitting the watchdog model be present, how will it be distributed, and will it be kept “on a party leash”?

H3a. The watchdog model will be present.

H3b. The “watchdog” model will be significantly more present in the commercial titles than in the party-oriented papers.

H3c. The journalism of the watchdog model will make significantly greater use of qualifying devices than that of either the interventionist or the loyal facilitator models

Set 4: How far will other models of journalism be present?

H4a. The infotainment model will be less present than either the loyal facilitator or the watchdog models.

H4b. The civic model will be less present than either the loyal facilitator or the watchdog models.

H4c. The service model will be less present than either the loyal facilitator or the watchdog models.

While the data presented here does allow us to test these hypotheses, two important points must be borne in mind. The first is that the models are not mutually exclusive: indicators of different models appear in the same story and it is not problematic that stories contains evidence of different models. Secondly, these categories are not designed to measure the substantive content of news stories but the journalistic models that are present. This analysis is not an account of the political characteristics of the Chinese press and does not provide the grounds for making judgements about the degree to which any particular title has embedded values, either its own or those of the party, in its stories.

### **Methodology**

These hypotheses were tested through a content analysis of the national news in five daily newspaper over two constructed weeks in each of 2012 and 2013, using the coding book agreed by the international project team. These titles were chosen to reflect, as far as possible, the range of newspapers in China, although limited resources meant that only a small and non-representative selection could be studied. Because China is so large, very few newspapers can even claim to have national circulation and many local papers carry extensive national news. Newspapers in China are controlled by different levels of the Communist Party's organization: there are central, provincial, city and county level daily

newspapers. Of these, the central and provincial papers have the widest influence. The level of economic development varies widely, with the East of the country, and particularly the South-East, being highly developed, while the West is much less prosperous. There are also differences between newspapers published in the morning and in the evening. Most newspapers belong to press groups that publish several titles, notably an “official” party organ dedicated to the task of expounding current party views and one or more “market-oriented” titles that seek to be successful commercially. The titles chosen were selected purposefully with the intention of trying to reflect as much of this variety as was feasible within the resources available. The titles selected were as follows:

1. *People’s Daily* (Renmin Ri Bao, hereafter PD). PD is a “central party organ” responsible to the national CP leadership. It is published in Beijing and circulates throughout the country. It may be taken as the most authoritative newspaper in China and is one of a group of media including Xinhua news agency and China Central Television (CCTV) that is tasked with propagating the world view of the party leadership.
2. *China Youth Daily* (Zhongguo Qingnian Bao, hereafter CYD). CYD is also a “central organ,” but it is also a “specialist” organ in that it is the voice of the Communist Youth League. It is published in Beijing and circulates throughout the country. At the time of our sampling, it was considered to be the most innovative of the central media organs.
3. *Southern Metropolis Daily* (Nanfang Dushi Bao, hereafter SMD). SMD is a market oriented paper published as a supplementary title to the *Southern Daily*, which is a “provincial party organ” responsible to the Guangdong Provincial Party leadership. It is published in Guangzhou and circulates throughout the province, although its online edition has wider influence. At the time of our sampling, it was regarded as the most “liberal” daily newspaper in China.

4. *Xinmin Evening News* (Xinmin Wan Bao, hereafter XME). XME is an evening paper published in Shanghai. It is in fact a provincial-level paper, because Shanghai has provincial status, but is nevertheless a reasonable representative of big-city evening newspapers with strong commercial orientations. As previous studies have shown, the Shanghai press tends to be rather uncritical towards the party in its outlook (Lee, He, & Huang, 2007).
5. *Chengdu Economic Daily* (Chengdu Shang Bao, hereafter CDE). CDE is a provincial-level paper published in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. Apart from being one of the best-known papers in the less-developed West of the country it is also famous in China for being one of the pioneers of the advertising-driven model in the newspaper business.

This selection is not representative, but it does go some way to reflecting the main lines of division within the Chinese newspaper industry, namely: national-level papers versus provincial-level papers; official papers versus market-oriented papers; papers in more economically-developed provinces versus those in less developed provinces; newspapers published in the morning versus those published in the evening; papers published in provinces thought to be more “liberal” and those published in those thought to be more “orthodox.”

Five coders were trained and a total of 3,264 items of national news in the main sections of these papers published on the dates selected by the project were coded. 1,685 of these were from 2012 and 1,579 were from 2013. Inter-coder reliability was measured by Krippendorff’s Alpha at 0.7 or above for all of the variables used in this analysis, with a range of 0.71 to 0.88. So far as the project team is aware, this is the first-ever large scale content analysis of a range of titles amongst the Chinese press. Many previous generalizations have

been made about the Chinese press, but these were mostly based on informed comment rather than the kind of evidence presented here. All the statistics presented below are significant at least at the 0.05 level unless otherwise specified.

### **Sample description**

PD was the newspaper with the highest number of national stories: with a total of 1301 it had almost twice as many as the next paper, SMD, with 733 stories. The stories were overwhelmingly classified as “articles” of more than three paragraphs: this category accounted for 83.8 per cent of the total. More than half of the stories (54.6 per cent) were written by the newspapers’ own staff, although this overall figure conceals substantial divergences between titles. The national papers each had more than 60 per cent of the stories written by staff members while none of the others had more than 45 per cent. The gender of the author was not evident in 96.4 per cent of the cases.

The classic public concerns of journalism with politics and economics were strongly represented. “Government and legislature” were the most covered topics. Together with the economy and business these stories accounted for more than half of the total (53.3 per cent). The concentration, however, was very much upon the sphere of official politics, with topics like human rights, demonstrations, protests and other social problems together accounting for only 0.7 per cent of stories.

While most of the stories (60.5 per cent) contained a predominance of factual and verifiable information, relatively few of them contained different sources and points of view (18.2 per cent). Only 10.7 per cent of stories contained no sources. The average number of sources was 3.13 per article, but the total ranged up to an astonishing 30. The average number of sources quoted was highest for education, at 4.1 per story, while the lowest was for “Defence, military and national security”, with an average of 2.3 sources. In line with

the concentration upon public issues, the majority (53.4 per cent) of sources were from politics and business, with the political sphere dominating (39.5 per cent). The reliance on official sources is clear when we consider the main source quoted in a story: politics and business accounted for 75.1 per cent of the total and politics alone accounted for 68.9 per cent. Overall, then, we may say that the newspapers correspond quite well with the common-sense definition of the Chinese press: they concentrate on official politics and economics, dissent is marginally covered, and they tend to use a relatively homogenous set of official sources.

### **The overall pattern of the models**

Five of the six models analysed were present in the sample. The missing model was the civic one. The service model was missing from CYD, but was weakly present in the other cases. Because the models are indicated by different numbers of variables, it is not possible to make direct comparisons from the number of occurrences. An 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. As Table One shows, the interventionist model was very much more strongly present than any other model. The overall order of presence of the indicators, however, is rather different from that expected. The infotainment model is the most strongly represented of the substantive models, with the loyal facilitator in second place. The third substantive model, the watchdog, trails by a considerable margin, and the service model is even more weakly represented. The interventionist model is most strongly present in stories covering energy and the environment, the economy and business, and education. It is least present in coverage of the police and courts. The watchdog model, on the other hand, is most present in the coverage of the police and courts and completely absent in stories about military affairs, which is the field in which the loyal facilitator is most frequent. These findings support the



more general hypotheses H2a (the presence of the interventionist model), H2c (the presence of the loyal facilitator model), H3a (the presence of the watchdog model), H4b (the less marked presence of the civic model) and H4c (the less marked presence of the service model). In fact, the civic model is completely absent. The service model is present, but its occurrence is an order of magnitude smaller than that of either the watchdog or the loyal facilitator models. However, they clearly falsify H5a (the less marked presence of the infotainment model). Very far from the infotainment model being less present in the Chinese press, it is in fact more evident than are any of the other substantive models, including that of loyal facilitator.

[Table One about here]

The models are also attributable to different patterns of authorship. The interventionist and the loyal facilitator models are both most frequently attributed to staff journalists while the watchdog model is most frequently attributed to other media. This suggests that newspapers are prepared to offer opinions supportive of the official order on their own behalf, but that journalism that might risk offending powerful organisations or individuals is most often attributed to other media. This conclusion is supported by the facts that the two generally-supportive models are found most often in features while the more critical term is found most often in the more analytic and factually-based genre of reportage. Similar evidence of caution can also be observed in the placement of stories fitting the different models. Both interventionist and loyal facilitator models are more likely to appear on the front page of the newspaper but those stories fitting the watchdog category are more likely to appear in the less-prominent position of the front of a section. This finding supports H3a (the presence of the watchdog model) and H3c (that this model will make significantly greater use of qualifying devices), in that the newspapers tend to handle critical material by

distancing themselves from direct responsibility, displaying it less prominently, and presenting it in a fact-heavy genre .

The overall dominance of the interventionist model conceals the fact that it can be understood as a continuum of positions between intervention and dissemination. Strictly speaking, all stories will lie somewhere between “pure” dissemination, in which none of the indicators of intervention were present, as was the case with 30.1 per cent of our stories and “pure” intervention, in which all of the indicators were present, which made up 0.1 per cent of the stories. As Table Two demonstrates, the stories coded in this exercise most frequently displayed one or two indicators of the model, with 64.5 per cent falling in to these categories.

[Table Two about here]

Given the distinctive status of the interventionist model, it is likely that its presence will be associated with the presence of indicators of other models. In fact, its presence correlates positively and most strongly with the loyal facilitator model, less strongly with the infotainment model, and weakly with the service model. The only other model that correlates significantly with others is the loyal facilitator model, which correlates negatively but weakly with the watchdog and service models and positively but weakly with the infotainment model.

Overall, then we can say that in many respects the journalism present in the Chinese press can be shown to correspond quite well with expectations based on existing views. It does indeed use journalistic models that are opinionated and which portray the powerful in a positive light. Its coverage concentrates upon political and business news and it relies very heavily on official sources. To the extent that it engages in watchdog journalism, it does so using techniques that minimise its own responsibility for any criticism. It provides little information about issues of daily life, and none whatsoever addressing the audience as

citizens. The major surprise is the prominence of infotainment journalism, with its stress upon sensational material and the personalization of news.

### **Differentiating between titles with regard to models**

Within this overall structure, there are marked differences between titles. In order the better to understand these differences, an exploratory cluster analysis was undertaken<sup>1</sup>. Two approaches were employed: hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's Method and K-means cluster analysis, whose results are summarized in Table Three. Both of these methods produced a consistent pattern of clusters, one of two clusters and one of four clusters.

[Table Three about here]

The hierarchical cluster analysis produced a two-cluster solution in which CYD was clearly differentiated from the other titles. An independent T-test of this solution demonstrated the interventionist and infotainment models were significant in differentiating the clusters. A three cluster solution distinguished both CYD and PD as separate clusters from the three other titles. An ANOVA test demonstrated that the loyal facilitator model was significant in differentiating between clusters.

[Figure One about here]

A four cluster pattern was finally adopted, as shown in Figure One, in which CYD, PD and SMD were distinguished from the other two titles. In this solution, intra-cluster differences are significant in both the loyal facilitator and infotainment model. The K-means cluster analysis yield the same pattern. A discriminant analysis showed that all of the cases were correctly grouped. In other words, this approach shows that the party press are distinguished from the other titles by their stress on the loyal facilitator model but

differentiated from each other by their different use of the infotainment model. Within the commercial model, SMD is distinguished from the other two titles by both of these models.

These findings clearly support H1a (that there are significant differences in the journalism in the Chinese press), although given that the available number of titles is very small, they should be viewed as tentative guides to further analysis. In fact, additional detailed explorations demonstrated that the patterns suggested are borne out very clearly, falsifying H1b (that the press is best considered as consisting of two groups, one “official” and the other “commercial”).

As Table Four shows, PD and CYD are more likely to display the presence of the interventionist and loyal facilitator models than are the other three titles, supporting hypotheses 2b (the interventionist journalism model will be significantly more present in the party press) and 2d (the loyal facilitator model will be significantly more present in the party press). Two of the three commercial titles are more likely to display indicators of the “watchdog” model, which lends some support to hypothesis H3b (that this kind of journalism is significantly more present in commercial papers. The third title, CDE, has the least of any of the five titles, so overall the hypothesis is not supported. These data are empirical verification of the common observation that, at least during the period in which the sample was drawn, SMD was more likely to take a critical position towards official Chinese society than the norm, and certainly much more likely to do so than were central Party organs. This conclusion needs to be moderated by the observation that, while PD and CYD are significantly more likely than the other titles to display indicators of the “loyal facilitator” model, SMD is somewhat more likely to exhibit these features than the other two market-oriented titles. Overall, SMD is the least likely of the titles to display interventionist

journalism and the most likely to contain watchdog journalism, which suggests very strongly that this title needs to be considered separately from the other two commercial titles.

[Table Four about here]

The second major conclusion that can be drawn from this table concerns the infotainment model. Although this is the second most prominent model overall, the breakdown per title reveals that presence of these indicators is strongest in CYD, where they are twice as likely as with XME, the second title in this respect. The fact that CYD scores highly for the presence of the indicators most likely to characterise an “official” newspaper and those most likely to characterise an “entertaining” paper suggests that it is a title whose overall characteristics are rather different from both the purely official PD and the three other highly market-oriented titles. That this is a distinctive phenomenon is borne out by the fact that SMD, which is a highly market-oriented newspaper, is the title least likely to embody these indicators, scoring even lower than PD on this measure. Thus, while the overall evidence contradicts H4a as to the marginality of infotainment journalism, had CYD been removed from the sample this effect would disappear. The strong presence of infotainment is thus a specific phenomenon associated with CYD.

These findings confirm that treating the five titles as a single group, while revealing some of the key features of journalistic performance, equally conceals very important differences. One possible way of exploring this problem, which corresponds to popular conceptions of the shape of the Chinese newspaper industry, is to group the titles into two clusters, one of which is the central, official, media (PD and CYD) and the other the market-oriented, local, media (SMD, XME and CDE). If this is done, then analysis reveals significant differences in the presence of indicators of the various models, apart from the service model, can be detected. This conventional opposition suffers from the drawback that

the figures suggest that the official media are characterised by a higher level of indicators of the “Infotainment” model than are the more market-oriented newspapers, and in fact the cluster analysis did not reveal these groupings. Further exploration, however, confirms that the categorization of the newspapers in the sample into three, rather than two, groups, which may be labelled “official” (PD) “popular official” (CYD) and “market” (SMD, XME and CDE), also differentiates significantly between the character of their reporting, except with regard to the service model, a finding confirmed by the cluster analysis. As Table Five shows, PD is characterised by a high score on the presence of indicators of the interventionist and loyal facilitator models, and a low score on the infotainment and, particularly, the watchdog models. CYD, on the other hand, shares the high scores on the first two categories but has a higher score on indicators of the watchdog model and a very much higher score for the infotainment models. The market media has the lowest scores for indicators of the interventionist and loyal facilitator models but the highest score for the watchdog indicators, while recording a score for infotainment indicators that places it well below the popular official title.

[Table Five about here]

The market media, however, can be further differentiated. SMD not only has a higher index of watchdog indicators but the proportion of this index relative to the loyal facilitator index indicators is also much higher than any other title. This finding tends to support the popular view that this title occupied, at the time of the investigation, a distinctive position in the spectrum of Chinese newspapers as one of the most highly “critical” titles in the country. Overall, while the two-cluster differentiation of party and commercial press (H1b) is clearly not supported, all of the evidence points to the fact that the four-cluster result best explains the differences between these papers.

### **Implications**

At the general, level, these findings confirm that there is significant diversity in the mainland Chinese press. The indicators cover a wide range of journalistic activities and they were originally developed in a context different from China. Some of the indicators, notably those of the civic model, are striking by their absence but overall they demonstrate the kind of diversity that one would expect in a press that is strongly oriented on the market.

There remains a clear uniformity accompanying this diversity: the interventionist model is by far the most strongly present in all of the titles, but the manner in which it is embodied varies significantly between them. There is a range between those titles, notably PD, that have a high presence of indicators of intervention and others, notably SMD, which are marked by a lower presence. The relationship of these indicators of intervention to other indicators differs significantly between titles. In the case of PD, for example, the interventionist model correlates most closely with the loyal facilitator model, and less strongly with the infotainment and watchdog model. In SMD, on the other hand, while there is a significant correlation between the interventionist model and the loyal facilitator model, it is much weaker than in the case of PD and, while there is a significant correlation with the infotainment model, there is none with the watchdog model. In the case of CYD, the strongest correlation is with the infotainment model and the only other correlation is the much weaker one with the loyal facilitator model. This suggests that while all of the papers tend to display the indicators of interventionist journalism, in the case of the official press it is most strongly present not only when playing the role of loyalist but also in its role as watchdog. SMD, on the other hand, shares the interventionist dimension with regard to its loyalist reporting, but its watchdog reporting, which is more prominent than in any of the other titles, is much closer to dissemination.

More surprising is the fact that the second most-commonly occurring model is that of infotainment, which is much more strongly present than the loyal facilitator model, which stresses those characteristics like praise for political leaders and the extolling of the country's achievements, which might be thought to be most closely associated with the propaganda functions of the media.

As the more detailed analysis shows, this result is heavily influenced by the character of the reporting in CYD, which displays high scores both on the more propagandistic and the more entertainment-oriented indicators. This suggests, first, that the simple opposition of official and market media is mistaken in that CYD, a central organ with a strong official orientation, is distinct both from the more obviously official PD and the more obviously market-oriented titles. Secondly, it demonstrates that there is no fundamental opposition between journalism that contains material strongly supportive of the official line of the party and journalism that is concerned to drive circulation. The prediction that the development of a newspaper market would *necessarily* lead to what Shirk thought might be “revolutionary consequences” is clearly mistaken (Shirk, 2011, p. 32).

### **Conclusion**

This study makes a contribution to our understanding of the development of Chinese media. The market has proved compatible with the adoption of “popular” journalistic techniques, not only in the notoriously “liberal” press of the South but also in a Beijing-based official party organ responsible to one of the central level authorities.

The differences which emerge from the analysis suggest that the intuitive divisions of the Chinese newspaper press into political and commercial or central and provincial are, at the very least, underestimations of the ways in which it is differentiated. There are four different groupings visible in this data. The first, represented by PD, does indeed correspond



to the standard categories of a newspaper that is both political and central. The other central paper, while also bearing many marks of the political type, is clearly differentiated in that it devotes significantly more space to entertaining material, which is generally associated with a more audience-building, popular, version of journalism better suited to a commercial paper. Surprisingly, the intuitively commercial titles put less emphasis on this kind of journalism than does CYD although in a number of other ways they are clearly distinct from both of the central and political titles. It is possible further to divide this commercial grouping, with SMD confirming its well-known status as a distinctive kind of newspaper with a greater emphasis on the watchdog functions of the press than its fellow commercial titles or either of the political titles.

Given that these conclusions are based on a very small number of cases, they should be treated with caution. Although all of the approaches we applied produced consistent results, it is nevertheless only possible tentatively to suggest that the groupings we identified represent larger constellations of Chinese newspapers: it may be the case that CYD and SMD are the unique representatives of the groupings to which they are here assigned. Further investigation, with a larger number of cases, would be necessary before any definitive claims could be made.

The analysis of the Chinese case also illuminates both the strengths and the weaknesses of taking the national state as the unit of analysis. Despite the evident difference, there is a common, very strongly marked, presence of indicators of the interventionist model, which can be compared with its presence or otherwise in the press of other countries. It should be remembered, however, that this model has a different status from the other five models in that it is part of the necessary “narrative logic” of all news stories and so it would be expected that it would be the most commonly present model in all of the systems. Its real

value lies in the ways in which it combines with the other models to form a distinctive national pattern of professional practice in the Chinese case that can be compared with other nations.

Concentrating on “the Chinese media system” thus tells us something about the realities of the press in China, but it also conceals important differentiations. This is an important finding since one can make out a very strong *prima facie* case for China having a coherent “media system” in a way that other countries, for example India, do not. The basic structures of the Chinese media are determined by conscious political choices made at the level of the central party leadership in a way that does not occur in most other countries. On paper, at least, it is possible to draw up a coherent account of the ways in which the media in China are tailored to suit a particular conception of what the media is, to whom it should be responsible, what it should do, to whom it should be addressed, and the manner in which it should address them. In reality, however, this paper has shown that there are significant differences in the way in which “journalism is done” between different sections of the press, which casts considerable doubt upon the explanatory power of the theoretical account.

Naturally, such a conclusion should be qualified by recognition of the aspects of the press which were not studied in this project. In particular, an analysis of the substantive discursive practices of the different newspapers, say around the current anti-corruption campaign, might be expected to reveal a much higher degree of overlap between the different titles. Here, indeed, we would indeed expect to find a coherent system of meaning making present everywhere, in a way that it would likely not be present in most of the reporting of internal affairs in many other countries. It is likely that political developments in China since our sample would make this degree of overlap even more pronounced with regard to the content of journalistic writing. In May 2013 President Xi Jinping issued a “Seven Nos”

document cracking down on any expressions of press freedom, liberalism or the promotion of “universal values.” This new policy, the most severe limitation on the media since 1989, has produced a much greater degree of ideological convergence than was present during the period that we sampled. Within these limitations, however, this part of the overall project has illuminated important aspects of the Chinese press that were previously either obscure or known only through qualitative analysis

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**Note**

<sup>1</sup> An initial exploration of the data suggested that the distribution of the variables was complex. We generated spider graphs which confirmed this intuitive judgement. We therefore employed statistical techniques to establish to explore the data more fully. The existing literature proposed a clear difference between, on the one hand the commercial and on the other the party press but we could find no other theoretically grounded hypothesis to test. We therefore adopted an inductive method, cluster analysis. This is a classification scheme for grouping objects into a number of classes such that the objects within classes are similar in some respect and unlike those from other classes (King, 2015) It can be used find “natural” groups of cases that exist in a data set (Spencer, 2014). Hierarchical cluster analysis is the most commonly used technique which does not require prior knowledge of the number of clusters; while for K-means cluster analysis, as a technique of partition clustering, the number of clusters must be specified in advance (King, 2015). Therefore, we first explored the data with hierarchical cluster analysis and decided to adopt the four cluster solution. We checked this by further running a k-means cluster analysis, predicated upon the existence of four clusters, which confirmed the validity of the finding.

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**Tables****Table 1.** Overall Indices of Journalism Models in All Papers.

Model	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal facilitator	Service	Infotainment	Civic
Index score	0.2425	0.0115	0.0295	0.0031	0.0314	0.0

Note: The range of index score is 0-1, with 0 meaning a journalism model not present at all and 1 meaning full-blown presence. Method of index calculation is explained in the text above. The formula used:  $\sum \text{Occurrence Frequency of Indicator} / (\text{Number of coded cases}) \times (\text{Number of Indicators})$

**Table 2.** Occurrence of indicators of the interventionist model in all papers.

Number of indicators	0	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Percentage of stories	30.1%	25.0%	39.5%	4.6%	0.8%	0.1%	100%
Number of stories	981	817	1288	149	27	2	3264

Note: Zero occurrence of indicators means pure disseminator model, while 5 occurrence of indicators means pure interventionist model, and the rest lie in between the continuum.

**Table 3.** Cluster Analysis of the distribution of model indices (Ward method).

Title	Interventionist	Watchdog	Loyal-Facilitator	Infotainment	Service	QLC 1	QLC 2	QLC 3
People's Daily	0.2449	0.0055	0.0453	0.0246	0.0042	1	1	1
China Youth Daily	0.2990	0.0102	0.0357	0.0601	0.0000	2	2	2
Chengdu Economic Daily	0.2246	0.0092	0.0093	0.0291	0.0055	1	3	4
Xinmin Evening	0.2358	0.0166	0.0101	0.0304	0.0071	1	3	4
Southern Metropolis Daily	0.2000	0.0211	0.0129	0.0206	0.0010	1	3	3

**Table 4.** Index of Journalism Models per paper.

Model	All	People's Daily	Southern Metropolis Daily	Xinmin Evening	Chengdu Economic Daily	China Youth Daily
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

Note: The range of index score is 0-1, with 0 meaning a journalism model not present at all and 1 meaning full-blown presence of this journalism model. The method of calculation is the same as in Table 1.

**Table 5.** Indices of Journalism Model per Paper Type.

Model	All	Official	Official-Popular	Market
Interventionist	0.2425	0.2449	0.2990	0.2144
Watchdog	0.0115	0.0055	0.0102	0.0178
Loyal facilitator	0.0295	0.0453	0.0357	0.0115
Infotainment	0.0314	0.0246	0.0601	0.0249

Note: The range of index score is 0-1, with 0 meaning a journalism model not present at all and 1 meaning full-blown presence of this journalism model. The method of calculation is the same as in Table 1.

Figure

Figure 1. Dendrogram using Ward Linkage rescaled distance cluster combine).

