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MEDIA POLICY IN CHINA IN THE ERA OF CONVERGENCE: IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS AND INSTRUMENTS OF INFLUENCE

The media market in China is undergoing continuous transformation, with decisive influence exerted by media elites representing the Communist government. Emphasis is placed on modernizing national governance capacity and systematically integrating new technologies into media production and control, shaping the distinctive “Chinese style” of media policy implementation. This study explores the phenomenon of media convergence and the development of We-media in China as a duality between the illusion of “Chinese democracy” and strict state control over media and citizens. These dynamics underscore the relevance of the research.

The article aims to identify key trends in the evolution of Chinese media, their impact on audiences, and changes in media law and editorial policy. It outlines the management features and development concepts within Chinese media management, examines the We-media phenomenon, and defines priority directions in editorial policy development and the influence of media convergence. The vision of Chinese media elites is analyzed, highlighting convergence as a tool of manipulation and propaganda.

The methodological framework is based on a comprehensive approach, combining descriptive methods, analysis, and synthesis to present the theoretical and methodological foundation. An interdisciplinary research method is applied to examine the specific characteristics of media elites and their communicative strategies. The central thesis of the study posits that China’s media governance policy gradually employs media convergence as a high-tech driving force to enhance control over media and as an effective instrument for influencing civil society. Media convergence is a vital component of China’s governance philosophy. A comprehensive analysis of media evolution and the trajectories of convergence expansion reveals the patterns of media governance in China, the state of public media development, and modes of citizen self-expression. Further research into the evolution of Chinese media, their global expansion, and their role as a tool of state control remains essential.

Key words: Chinese media elites, Chinese We-media, media convergence, propaganda, persuasive communication, editorial policy, ideological expansion

Statement of the problem. In recent decades, journalism as an academic discipline has evolved within the broader field of communication studies. It now explores journalism not only as a form of communicative activity but also as a business model and a subject of legal regulation within the information space. Media studies provide the theoretical foundation for understanding the mechanisms of communicative power across all forms and levels – from the influence of traditional media to the ideological imperatives of new mass communication platforms. These inquiries constitute the core scientific objectives of contemporary journalism studies.

This article examines the theoretical dimensions of media convergence in its Chinese manifestation, focusing on the ideological foundations that frame media as a tool for societal governance and global-scale audience manipulation. The aim of journalism studies today extends beyond analyzing the nature of

various media types, the evolution of communication processes, and the forms and genres of media. It also includes identifying the interrelations between media and society, culture, politics, and other spheres. As such, it serves as a vital research platform that encourages the pursuit of practical objectives, such as analyzing the methods and forms of Chinese media influence on the media landscape, exploring the potential for Chinese media expansion, and learning to identify the strategies employed by contemporary Chinese media to promote their narratives.

Analysis of recent research and publications. In media research reveals the impact of modern media technologies on social and cultural integration, as well as the phenomenon of cultural decomposition resulting from this influence. Chinese media strategically employ mechanisms of persuasive communication and cultural decomposition to subtly introduce authoritarian ideology – what Daniel Bell

refers to as “tyrannies” [4]. The target audience of this influence includes not only countries of the so-called Global South but also Western democracies.

In his work, Daniel Bell describes the structure of the Chinese social model as “democracy at the bottom, experimentation in the middle, and meritocracy at the top” [4, p. 180]. He also notes the gap between expectations and reality. China’s political culture fosters a top-down governance model that necessitates a ruling organization such as the Communist Party of China. Even within the Chinese regime, this model has led to numerous social conflicts, as citizens demand greater democratic participation at the middle and upper levels [4]. It is precisely in this context that We-media begins to play a role. However, the understanding of freedom of expression among Chinese users and scholars differs from Western interpretations – it does not imply public criticism of China’s socio-political issues but rather focuses on moral and ethical concerns within the family and everyday life, issues of inclusion, gender inequality, and micro-level environmental problems.

Equally important is the analysis and understanding of the strategic development of Chinese media, their editorial policies, governance principles. The regulatory capacities of media elites shape media ecosystems and determine their societal impact. From this perspective, universalist media policy [2] is examined, including news subsidies, frequency allocation logic, and how particularist policies may exacerbate inequalities in media access, along with the real consequences of such policies [2]. The article also considers the significance of governmental organizational policy in managing social platforms and digital media, highlighting the potential for political interventions that generate tension between institutional control and individual media actors [12].

Current research on editorial policy and the interaction between media management and government focuses on several key areas: content analysis and disinformation control, information warfare and fake news [14]; the relationship between media governance and the public sphere [1]; critiques of corporate dominance in digital platform governance and the role of artificial intelligence in media control [8]; media governance and digital authoritarianism, and human rights advocacy in media [5]. Scholarly interest in the behavior of Chinese media elites, the phenomenon of digital media, convergence processes, and the implementation of editorial policy worldwide underscores the importance of studying China’s media governance strategies and manipulation techniques for societal control.

It is essential to investigate the integration of new media into the state system of citizen control and the consolidation of communist and authoritarian imperialist ideology within the media space under the label of the “Chinese model of democracy” [10].

The theoretical foundations of the relationship between ideology and media influence are articulated in several works by Chinese scholars [16, 17]. These studies advocate for the active implementation of digital technologies and emphasize the potential of social networks in promoting Chinese ideology and lifestyle. This is the so-called We-media era, officially recognized as one of the driving forces behind the development of Chinese media.

Task statement. The primary objective of this article is to identify the key trends in the development of Chinese media, their impact on audiences, and the transformations in media law and editorial policy. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are set:

- To determine the specific features of governance and development concepts at the level of media management in China.

- To analyze the phenomenon of We-media in the Chinese context.

- To outline the main priority directions in the evolution of editorial policies within China’s digital media landscape.

- To examine the vision of Chinese media elites regarding convergence as a principal instrument of manipulation and propaganda.

Outline of the main material of the study. The development of Chinese media, along with its ideological and moral-ethical approaches to journalism and audience engagement, follows a distinct trajectory. The evolutionary path of Chinese media differs significantly from that of Western liberal democracies, largely due to the unique characteristics of China’s state model and its contemporary shift toward authoritarianism.

From the perspective of Western-oriented researchers, the role of executive media elites (owners, media managers) is grounded in the ideals of Western civilization, perceiving media as the “fourth estate” and operating according to principles of market autonomy [11]. While some studies interpret changes in Chinese media as a departure from the foundational principles of Western democracies, this article argues that Chinese media have historically combined elements of communist philosophy with inherited traits of Eastern despotism.

China’s media philosophy underwent significant modernization following changes in national governance in 2013. By 2015, the government had

declared media convergence a strategic priority. The Chinese media governance system is institutionally and strictly regulated by the state, operating under a totalitarian logic. Media function not only as instruments of influence and business mechanisms but also as infrastructural pillars and primary communicators of the dominant communist ideology. This structure is considered essential for maintaining social stability and ideological unity [13].

From this standpoint, close attention to the development of Chinese media, the nature of their content, and the dominant political narratives is necessary to understand China's true objectives and its ambitions for technological, cultural, and ideological expansion.

Historical and cultural themes are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the prospects for media development in China, their intentions, and political goals. These texts serve as key channels for conveying the philosophy of contemporary life and the adaptive evolution of Chinese media within the consumer market. The evolution of Chinese media, their convergence, technological sophistication, and ideological framing reflect enduring ideological principles and dynamic technological transformations within a distinct socio-technological matrix at the national level.

Let us examine the past two decades of Chinese media evolution.

2014–2020 Period [12]. This phase marked the beginning of substantial media convergence, driven by the technological expansion of digital media and social networks. Media in China operated within a techno-legal regime that combined algorithmic control, bureaucratic efficiency, and strict adherence to legislative requirements. The digital space was tightly regulated: every participant in media production – including online platforms, social networks, and streaming services – was required to be registered, monitored, and officially licensed. The Cyberspace Administration of China oversaw national-scale news internet services, while local authorities exercised jurisdictional control.

Service providers introducing new technologies or features with potential for public opinion mobilization were subject to government security assessments at the national or local level. These requirements were codified in the Provisions on the Administration of Internet News Information Services (2017).

2021–2024 Period [12]. This period was characterized by the active integration of human-centered artificial intelligence capabilities into media services. These innovations further unified and

enhanced control over media and audiences. Media management in China from 2021 onward has been defined by the deepening consolidation of social platforms and the expansion of AI-driven digital media – under the strict supervision of state agencies oriented toward total influence.

The evolution of Chinese media shifted from superficial oversight to predictive-preventive paradigms, with social relations increasingly governed by quantitative evaluation systems and dynamic regulation through digital governance tools.

Content innovation in mainstream media has been marked by increased centralization of information dissemination channels, achieved through the creation and ongoing technological development of government-affiliated media platforms and official portals. Accountability has been reinforced through the certification of registered media accounts. In this process, artificial intelligence technologies have served as auditors of online informational content. Continuously updated regulatory frameworks in media law now establish threshold compliance values as “red lines” and introduce multi-tiered incident classification systems.

Within China's tightly regulated media system, the emergence and evolution of the We-media phenomenon is both understandable and inevitable – a synthesis of strict state control and a space for individual creativity. We-media refers to user-generated content platforms that serve as tools for self-expression. While such media are typically defined as independent, in China We-media remain under rigorous state supervision.

A clearer understanding of the real conditions surrounding the development of digital media in China can be gained by examining the findings of Freedom House regarding internet censorship. Their recommendations include: “End online censorship that blocks Chinese users' access to global social media platforms and websites providing news and information on political, social, religious, and human rights topics; end the practice of requiring social media providers to delete posts or user accounts on issues of public interest; end technological and legal restrictions on the use of virtual private networks (VPNs)” [7]. Despite these calls, the Chinese government's strict control over digital media continues unabated.

The understanding and strategic use of social media influence is an integral part of China's official policy. On August 19, 2013, at the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work, General Secretary Xi Jinping called for “accelerating the integrated development of traditional and new media.” Since then, media integration in China has entered a phase of rapid acceleration.

In 2014, the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms reviewed and approved the “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and New Media.” Today, the development of new media in China is embedded within the national strategy. This process has not only transformed China’s media ecology but has also significantly influenced the modernization of media in the “Chinese style.”

In 2023, the Cyberspace Administration of China announced new regulations requiring platforms to take responsibility for user-generated content, including false information and rumors. Authorities now mandate the registration of accounts that publish news and issue warnings or block those who violate the rules. Platforms such as WeChat and Weibo are required to implement moderation mechanisms and report violations.

The term *We-media* was originally introduced by Bowman and Willis [16], referring to the widespread use of social platforms by active contributors for real-time communication. The activities of these contributors have had – and continue to have – a significant impact on society, culture, and broader social processes, extending globally through international platforms.

In China, the term *We-media* (自媒体, zì méitǐ) encompasses blogs, microblogs (e.g., Weibo), video platforms (such as Bilibili and Douyin), public accounts on WeChat, and other channels where ordinary users or small groups can create and distribute content independently of traditional media institutions. These platforms have rapidly gained popularity among youth, entrepreneurs, bloggers, and even government agencies, which use them to communicate with the public.

Among the key characteristics of *We-media* development in China today are:

Rapid Growth: The blogosphere and video content sectors in China are expanding at an extraordinary pace, with millions of active creators. For instance, one of China’s most popular bloggers, Li Ziqi, had amassed an audience of 23 million subscribers and 3.26 billion views by 2024. Her blog was launched in 2017.

Active Commercialization of Media Activity: Many bloggers have transformed their accounts into profitable businesses, collaborating with brands, monetizing content, and launching auxiliary ventures.

An Effective Tool for Interpersonal Communication and Self-Expression: The young technocratic generation uses *We-media* to exchange opinions, experiences, and news, making it a vital medium for personal expression.

Integration with State Communication: Government institutions actively disseminate information and promote propaganda narratives to the young technocratic generation, a key segment of society.

Convenient Mechanism for State Control over Youth: *We-media* enables the expansion of propaganda boundaries, reinforcing communist ideology and the cult of personality among younger audiences.

The concept and implementation of *We-media* today offer China a strategic opportunity to expand its ideological convictions and ultimately shape perceptions of the superiority of the Chinese social model, culture, and imperialism – not only domestically but globally. In essence, it is a program aimed at global acceptance and endorsement of modern Chinese imperialism through media, all under strict state supervision.

The *We-media* era involves the use of advanced technologies to broadcast targeted content across platforms, aiming to increase subscriber bases and influence. It spans business, politics, and cultural expansion.

According to Chinese scholars [17], the *We-media* era in China represents a present-day reality in which individuals and groups boldly express their views through media. It marks a societal shift from passive information consumption to active opinion expression, segmented into distinct historical phases.

Chinese research emphasizes the positive evolution of *We-media* in China: within a short time, these digital media have progressed from early stages associated with human trafficking to a state of continuous development, quality content creation, and the empowerment of participants with a voice. A classic example of what Chinese scholars consider “freedom of criticism” and “self-expression” in *We-media* raises the question: what is the nature and scope of this “criticism,” and what defines its “freedom”?

In June 2023, Chinese newspapers published photos and a story about an incident on the streets of Chengdu [6]. Mr. Hu, a senior executive at a PetroChina subsidiary, was seen walking hand-in-hand in an intimate setting with Ms. Dong, a young female employee. The scene was captured and quickly spread online. The publication sparked heated public debate, focusing on the fact that Mr. Hu, a married man, was allegedly having an affair with a subordinate. The discourse centered on public moral judgment, largely ignoring privacy and respect for personal life. Due to Mr. Hu’s high status, the incident escalated rapidly and became a subject of widespread criticism.

We-media users actively participated in discussing and disseminating information about the event via social networks, blogs, and other channels. Online communities expressed outrage and disdain toward Hu and his subordinate, claiming they had tarnished the image of state-owned enterprises and undermined social justice. These comments and opinions, to some extent, reflected public sentiment and the stance of national leadership, thereby influencing the course of events.

Shortly after the photos surfaced, Mr. Hu was dismissed from his position, and Ms. Dong was also terminated. This illustrates the influence of public opinion and the boundaries of “freedom of speech”: a domestic personal situation that could – and should – be discussed and condemned because such behavior contradicts the principles of communist morality. A key element of communist propaganda followed: expressions of satisfaction with the government’s response. Network users praised the deserved punishment of the officials, demonstrating discipline and adherence to the rules governing state-owned enterprises.

Criticism and freedom of expression that align with government policy and ideology are welcomed and declared as legitimate forms of self-expression. Criticism is permitted when it targets violations of the behavioral code for state enterprise leaders or challenges to the culture of governance within state institutions.

Traditional media, alongside We-media, and representatives of media elites also play a significant role in shaping public opinion. In disseminating government-approved news, traditional media rely on their professionalism and authority. Their task is to publish timely information and detailed reports that are perceived as authoritative and provide the public with clear guidance for responding on social media. The objectivity of such information remains difficult to assess.

This collaboration reflects the complementary relationship and shared resources between traditional media and We-media platforms in China. It also illustrates a key trend in the development of contemporary Chinese media – namely, the deep integration of multiple media forms to achieve effective information transmission and generate added value.

Media convergence in China has contributed to the modernization and restructuring of the media system and regulatory mechanisms, transforming contemporary Chinese media into a multi-level, innovation-driven system closely linked to state-controlled social development.

Media as a tool of propaganda in China are deeply embedded in social structures and actively influence societal development, facilitating expansion in politics, economics, and culture. The dissemination of authoritarian and communist narratives through digital media is simultaneously governed by three logics: technological, market-driven, and political.

In China’s social space, traditional media utilize digital media to build public service systems and enhance state control over data systems and media infrastructure.

Digitization is a leading component of China’s media expansion in the global media market, unlocking the potential for deep media integration not only domestically but also internationally.

Digital media transformation integrates communication infrastructures with societal frameworks, facilitating the spread of official narratives. In the context of content distribution, digitization has enabled Chinese media to achieve broad reach and precise targeting.

According to Chinese scholars, the modernization of media in the Chinese style should be interpreted from two perspectives: “Chinese style” and “modernization.” The “Chinese style” implies that the modernization of social development must incorporate the foundational features of Chinese culture and political structure. “Modernization,” in turn, entails strict state control over the development of various social systems. Media modernization is used to build a powerful socialist state and to promote the idea of national rejuvenation beyond China’s borders.

Conclusions. We-media in China represents a paradoxical space where, on the one hand, there is considerable freedom of self-expression, and on the other – intense censorship and regulation. These platforms serve as alternatives to traditional media, simultaneously function as instruments of state propaganda and control over the information environment.

The expansion of the national governance system entails a model of full-scale media communication. The modernization of the media system is viewed as an additional tool for total control over individuals.

In China, the capacity of media elites to manage and intensify control over citizens’ lives constitutes the institutional foundation for the implementation and utilization of innovations – this is what defines “modernization in the Chinese style” within the media sphere. New digital media, We-media, are part of the national governance system, deeply integrated through the incorporation of comprehensive media communication into

administrative structures. This transforms digitization, platformization, and interactivity into levers of state control over society.

The construction of a transactional model of communication in media is a pathway toward modernizing propaganda tools. Establishing such a

system is key to strengthening the discursive power of media – comprehensive control over the content, nature, and purpose of user communications, their communicative capacities, and influence – all in full alignment with the Chinese-style modernization paradigm.

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Іванова І. Б. МЕДІЙНА ПОЛІТИКА КИТАЮ В ЕПОХУ КОНВЕРГЕНЦІЇ: ІДЕОЛОГІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ТА ІНСТРУМЕНТИ ВПЛИВУ

Медіа ринок в Китаї знаходиться у постійному розвитку, де вирішальна роль належить медійним елітам, представникам комуністичному уряду. Акцент зроблено на модернізації національного управлінського потенціалу та постійному впровадженню нових технологій у медіа виробництво та контроль за медіа, що й визначає «китайський стиль» в реалізації медійних політик. У цьому дослідженні розглянуто феномен медіаконвергенції, особливості становлення та розвитку We-media в Китаї як своєрідного дуалізму ілюзії «китайської демократії» та суворого державного контролю за медіа та громадянами. Усе це визначило актуальність цієї роботи. Мета статті полягає

у встановленні основних тенденцій в розвитку китайських медіа, їх вплив на аудиторію та зміни в медіа праві та редакційній політиці. Встановлено особливості управління та концепції розвитку на рівні медіаменеджменту Китаю; розглянуто феномен We-media в Китаї; визначено пріоритетні напрями розвитку редакційних політик та вплив медіа конвергенції на них. Проаналізовано візію китайських медійних еліт щодо конвергенції як головного інструмента маніпуляції та пропаганди. Методологічний підхід у статті має за основу комплексний підхід, для презентації теоретико-методологічної бази використано описовий метод, аналіз та синтез. Метод міждисциплінарного дослідження використано з метою розгляду специфічних характеристик медіаеліт, розгляду комунікативних стратегій. У дослідженні центральною є теза: політика управління медіа в Китаї поетапно використовує медіаконвергенцію як високотехнологічну рушійну силу для збільшення ефективності контролю над медіа; ефективним інструментом для впливу на громадянське суспільство. Конвергентність в медіа є важливою частиною китайської філософії управління. Комплексний аналіз еволюції медіа, напрями експансії медіа конвергенції можуть розкрити закономірності управління медіа в Китаї, ситуацію з розвитком громадських медіа та способами самовираження громадян. Варто продовжувати розгляд еволюції китайських медіа, їх світової експансії та інструменту державного контролю.

Ключові слова: китайські медіаеліти, китайські we-медіа, медіа конвергенція, пропаганда, персуазивна комунікація, редакційні політики, ідеологічна експансія.

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