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Media and Communication in Asia in Early 21st Century

Changes, continuities, and challenges

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Editorial

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Jun Liu, Kjetil Sandvik and Christian Hviid Mortensen

Asia has some of the largest, most dynamic, diversified, and complex media industries in the world (McKinsey & Company, 2015). As we enter the 21st century, Asia's rapid economic and political developments are further energizing local and global media growth. This has been subject to both general discussion (e.g. Keane, 2006; Thussu, 2006) and country-specific discussion concerning, for example, Korea (Kim, 2013), Japan (Iwabuchi, 2004), and China (Sun, 2009). As a reflection of the increasing importance of Asian players in global communication industry, Keane (2006: 839-840) describes how "Asianness is colonizing international communications markets," influencing the production of hardware (e.g. East Asian technology), content (e.g. Japanese manga, anime, and TV formats as well as South Korean popular culture), and the cross-over of directors and actors from Asia to Hollywood and the rest of the world. Yet, a lack of timely understanding of media and communication in a rapidly changing Asia is hindering not only our interpretation of the significance of media in Asian social transformations but also efforts to de-westernize (e.g. Park & Curran, 2000; Wang, 2010) or internationalize communication studies (Lee, 2014).

This special issue contributes to the field by examining the current situation of Asian communication research, the unique characteristics of media and communication in Asia, the relevance of media and communication to Asia's social transformations, and the ways in which media and communication are influencing Asian socio-political change. The five articles explore both scholarly work and various media in Asia and ask questions such as: What trends have emerged over the past 20 years in published articles concerning Asian

communication research? Will greater access to information for journalists (including independent journalists), the professionalization of media, and the widespread use of online media have practical effects on the media ecology and journalistic practices in countries such as Vietnam, Singapore, and China? Will the proliferation of new information and communication technologies advance the process of democratization in authoritarian regimes such as China? Do we need new approaches to understand journalistic practices in territories such as New Caledonia, where the media bear the marks of a colonial legal regime? The researchers in this special issue undertake in-depth theoretical and empirical examinations of the continuities, challenges, and changes in media systems and communication studies in Asia. These studies illustrate the opinions and experiences of a diverse range of actors in Asia, including journalists, the party-state, propaganda authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and businesses.

The first article, "Trends and patterns in communication research on Asia: a review of publications in Top SSCI Journals, 1995-2014," written by Xun Liu and Ran Wei, dissects the current stage of communication research in Asia. To explore the extent to which Asian communication research has risen during the transition into the 21st century, a total of 558 publications on Asian communication research in 14 top-ranked Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) communication journals from 1995 to 2014 were analyzed. Although results indicate an increase in Asian communication research in the 21st century, they also suggest uneven patterns in the published scholarship in terms of publication, journal, region, research topic, and methodology: Asian communication research has been dominated by East Asia, which has itself been dominated by China, South Korea, and Japan. In terms of research topics, Asian communication scholarship has focused on a few areas, including media effects, political communication, communication technology, and health communication. In terms of research methodologies, quantitative approaches have dominated the publications, occurring twice as often as qualitative approaches. This overview sheds light on possible future directions in Asian communication research.

The next three articles scrutinize journalistic practices in different contexts in the Asia Pacific. Lehmann-Jacobsen's article "Challenged by the state and the internet: struggles for professionalism in Southeast Asian journalism" explores the pressure being felt by Southeast Asian journalism, which has needed to develop professionally while struggling to adapt to changing market conditions, increasingly demanding audiences, different degrees of authoritarian states, and growing competition from the internet. Based on qualitative interviews and drawing upon a combination of organizational role theory and Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, Lehmann-Jacobsen's article compares the role performances and different expectations confronting journalists in Singapore and Vietnam. It illustrates how journalists continue to feel conflicted about conforming with the state expectations regarding their profession. However, online actors entering the journalistic field are making a progressively greater impact. Though online actors push the boundaries and set the

media agenda, journalists fear they are changing the journalistic habitus, devaluing journalistic capital and eroding years' worth of progress in professionalization.

Journalists on the Chinese mainland are similarly struggling to expand the boundaries of news coverage, particularly with regard to politically sensitive events. However, they are employing different tactics in a context in which politicians possess absolute control over the dissemination of political information. Using data from participatory observation and in-depth interviews with journalists, Kuang's article "Negotiating the boundaries of news reporting: journalists' strategies to access and report political information in China" reveals that to gain more access to political information, journalists on the Chinese mainland not only serve as political advocates but also seize the opportunity to act as watchdogs. In order to report sensitive news without being sanctioned or denounced by the authorities, they coordinate with peers both within and outside the news organization.

Marie M'Balla-Ndi's article "Division and contestation in the land of 'the unspoken'" discusses journalistic practices in contemporary New Caledonia, a French colonial society in transition. Based on archival research, participant observation conducted in two New Caledonian newsrooms, and interviews with local journalists, M'Balla-Ndi shows that journalism practice in New Caledonia reflects a state of liquid modernity in which colonial and traditional values are contested and negotiated. In a liquid modern context, the impact of the globalization of media coupled with a heritage of Western colonialism and local customs require journalists in New Caledonia to navigate winds and swells coming from many directions.

State control over political information not only affects journalistic practices but also influences ordinary people's information-seeking behaviors, generating a variety of practices against censorship. As Jingyi Zhao's article "Hong Kong protests: a quantitative and bottom-up account of resistance against Chinese social media (Sina Weibo) censorship" argues, most scholarship on Chinese internet censorship maintains a top-down perspective and concentrates on the macro-level. Few, if any, existing studies feature a bottom-up perspective while exploring the micro-level aspects of online media censorship. To fill the gap, Zhao takes a bottom-up approach to the "Occupy Movement" in Hong Kong, analyzing social media users' resistance under conditions of heavy censorship. This article demonstrates the novel ways in which Weibo users seek to circumvent censorship. Instead of using traditional text format, Weibo users tended to use embedded pictures and user ID names to camouflage sensitive information shared with other users. They also tended to create new accounts once their original accounts had been closed or monitored by authorities.

The articles in this special issue provide insight into the stage and uniqueness of Asian communication studies as well as the role of mass and digital communication as a societal force in the ongoing socio-political change in Asia. I hope and believe that this special issue will contribute to theoretical discussion on potential alternative paradigms in communication studies from the Global South (e.g. The special issue of *International Communication Gazette* "the unbearable Lightness of Communication Research," 2016) and will encour-

age further research into media and communication as well as media systems, journalistic practices, and news production in non-Western and non-democratic settings.

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Open Section

Kjetil Sandvik

This issue's Open Section include two articles. The first – "My boss is 18,000 people: journalism practices in a crowdfunded media organization" by Adilya Zaripova – studies journalists' attempts to launch new media publications solely or partly financed through crowdfunding. The article analyzes three crowdfunded media organizations in three different countries and demonstrates that journalism practices in a crowdfunded newsroom are very different from those in other media. It is concluded that direct funding from the audience is financially unstable, affects journalists' professional self-perception, changes journalists' relationships with the audience, and generally increases the amount of work journalists must do.

The second article in this section (in Danish) – "Tid og timing – et metodisk perspektiv på produktionsanalyse [*Time and timing: a methodological perspective on production analysis*]" by Kirsten Frandsen and Hanne Bruun – contributes to media production analysis as a growing research field. The article discusses the importance of time and timing as important factors in production analysis when it comes to sensitivity towards the time factor embedded in production processes and the continuous changeability of media in themselves. The article highlights the aspect of timing in production analysis and argues that timing includes both performative and strategic dimensions.

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