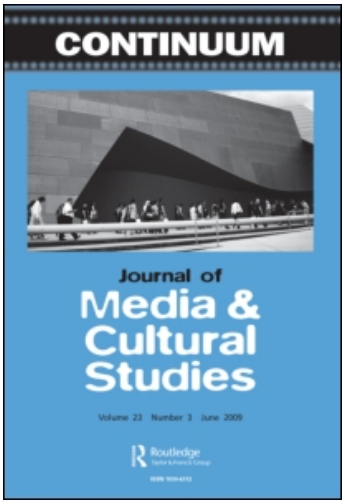
This article was downloaded by: *[Ingenta Content Distribution Psy Press Titles]*
On: *24 November 2010*
Access details: *Access Details: [subscription number 911796916]*
Publisher *Routledge*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Continuum
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713411120

The Uses of Media in the People's Republic of China

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald[a]
[a] Queensland University of Technology,

Online publication date: 01 July 2010

To cite this Article Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk(2003) 'The Uses of Media in the People's Republic of China', Continuum, 17: 3, 229 — 231
To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/10304310302740
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10304310302740

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,
Vol. 17, No. 3, 2003

Carfax Publishing
Taylor & Francis Group

The Uses of Media in the People's Republic of China

STEPHANIE HEMELRYK DONALD, *Queensland University of Technology*

Downloaded By: [Ingenta Content Distribution Psy Press Titles] At: 04:24 24 November 2010

The motivation for this issue of *Continuum* is the continuing sense that Chinese and Asian regional media are still not fully acknowledged in the thinking of media and communications teachers and scholars in the Anglophone societies of Australia, the United Kingdom and significant parts of the Academy in the USA. It also celebrates the work that is being done, of which the contributions here are a small sample.

Australia is a known and immediate worst-case scenario of Asian disappearance. The island state is coterminous with the Asian region, its population is increasingly drawn from its neighbours, and its long term security and prosperity depend in good measure on good relationships with Asia. It has a history of excellent Asian Studies scholarship and a number of established international figures in the field are working in our universities. Australia's Asian status is significant in terms of scholarly activity, and ought to be so in all our national policies. As has been made very obvious in the past few weeks of war with Iraq, the present Australian Government does not accept this mantra. Indeed, the playing out of post-Imperial ambition in consort with the UK and the US, seems clearly to be a 'poke in the eye' for Australia's nearest potential allies, and for those who argue for mateship with our own pluralistic community.

The damage is being done on many levels. Australian schools are no longer to be funded to teach Asian languages, Asian Studies teams in universities are not valued as integral to cultural learning for students wishing to work here and in the region. 'Here' is not 'Asia', but then nor is it anywhere else, and Australia is small enough to need connections. Perhaps the shift of some Asian Studies academics to Business Studies is a good thing as it indicates that there at least the importance of Asia is accepted and prioritised.

Meanwhile, international students in all disciplines and departments nationwide, many of whom come from Asia, are welcomed for their dollars more than for their socio-cultural input and relevance to mainstream Australia. A second year student from Indonesia articulated the problem to me when she said that a guest lecture from an Indonesian-Australian in an Asia-oriented subject was her first encounter with a non-white tutor, lecturer or supervisor. I should add that the particular student was not enrolled at my current institution but her comment applies across the Australian board.

In this environment the intervention of public intellectuals is vital if hard to achieve. The activities of the University of Melbourne and the Myer Foundation's Asialink are exemplary in this respect, providing venues for informed debate, access to public broadcasting (especially through Radio Australia's and Radio National's lecture series on

ISSN 1030-4312 print/ISSN 1469-3666 online/03/030229-03 © 2003 Taylor & Francis Ltd
DOI: 10.1080/1030431032000111983

current Asian affairs, and on the regular Asia Pacific programme), and—crucially—a presence in major cities (specifically Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney). Again, it is noticeable at many such events that business leaders are present, and cultural and media experts are not. Without their presence, there is a depressing sense for their Asia-specific colleagues that thin air is wafting around the academy. Experts in Asian politics, cultural economy, media, fashion, history, advertising, film and the visual arts debate together in open but unvisited circles. They move back and forwards between a self-styled mainstream and their enforced isolation, without seeing the courtesy returned. Intellectual debates are worked over without an international—or at least an Anglo audience—showing (really) much interest.

This diatribe is necessary as it refers to a dominating and increasing isolationism in Australian public life. This is not, I contend, simply the fault of a regressive government and recalcitrant voters. It is also lodged in the Anglo-centrism of colleagues and friends. And it is there first, close to our various collegial homes, that interventions should make a difference.

This current intervention serves also as an introduction to a collection of essays on Chinese uses of media. 'Uses of media' is an emerging term that tries to capture the intersection of research aims and methodologies in a rapidly expanding area of enquiry. Audiences use media, as do the producers of content, the distributors of that content, and the national and international bodies and corporate agencies which regulate and sometimes appropriate media platforms and media messages. The uses of media involve multi-layered processes in both practices and intentions. China—where producers, government and audience are in constant and sometimes un-stated negotiations over meaning—is an excellent case in point. Occasionally those negotiations become concrete, a commercial/ideological trade-off in the currencies of power and revenue. As Jane Sayers has discovered in her work on environmental activism, the negotiations between state structures and grassroots outcomes are nuanced and cautious. In some instances there is no negotiation possible, and arguably that has been the case in China for many of the years since the 1989 debacle in Tiananmen. As Michael Keane argues, however, the fracturing of mediated knowledge and information, both through technological advance and internationalisation, makes the non-negotiable canon of the Chinese state's model of control management less and less realistic or tenable. Steven Lewis and Jing Wang substantiate this contention, showing in their contributions how the topographies of marketing and public consumption are creating new dynamics of media ownership, diverse gender and class-specific media-users, and colonisations of mediated space for consumption oriented praxis, rather than in the service of state-described functions. In similar vein, Zhong Yong demonstrates the flexibility of media use in an account of the multiple uses of television, where a domestic karaoke machine is as likely to be 'on TV' as the CCTV (Chinese Central Television) 6 pm news bulletin.

The uses of media are also necessarily understood in their historical contexts. As Megan Ferry points out in her paper here, the modern woman has been around for a long time, and one needs to know that in some detail before making claims on her current incarnations. One of the uses of media is to reclaim and re-describe the past as and when it fits our needs for the present.

The emphasis in this collection is quite noticeably on advertising and the media that are harnessed to that industry. That decision was not made before the call for papers, but forced itself on the editors as potential contributions were submitted for review. The relationship between political communication, public information and marketing is extraordinarily hard to delineate in media-spheres worldwide. At what point does a

Downloaded By: [Ingenta Content Distribution Psy Press Titles] At: 04:24 24 November 2010

public communication about a one-child policy in China, a war against terror in Australia, or the UK poll tax of the 1980s, drift from public communication to direct propaganda, with or without the sophistication of direct marketing specialists on the creative team? Advertising in all three discrete and overlapping categories are 'reference points' (Gittings, 1999, p. 27) to the times and to the priorities of those who manage, and inhabit public space. As John Gittings has said of the Cultural Revolution:

> Deprived for most of the time of the normal contacts that help build up understanding in a foreign culture—the casual strolls, chance encounters, and random conversations—we searched for other reference points among the abundance of visual images on display. These ranged from stark slogans in red and black characters to colourful posters on billboards, or smaller printed versions on sale in bookshops. Designed to catch the eye and to convey propaganda—*xuanchuan*—the posters, literally 'propaganda pictures' (*xuanchuanhua*) were emphatic and exuberant, often stating topics with greater emphasis and clarity than our own guides (Gittings, 1999, p. 27).

Propaganda and marketing are the continuum which best exemplify the Chinese journey in the People's Republic. The ideological shift from ultra-leftist rhetoric to pragmatic but nonetheless highly controlled cultural economy is peculiar to China but also a paradigmatic cousin of Anglo-practices of ultra-racism in colonial and post-colonial eras, and current governmental pragmatics of border control and global alignments. All of the above find their voice through certain uses of the media.

The contributors to this issue address media as functional, symbolic, innovative and politically sensitive. The uses of media are neither wholly of one ideological structure nor another—they are tied to past political protocols as well as to current commercial aspirations and to future international challenges. Media are used to communicate, to negotiate, and to substantiate cultural change. They are also used to develop, market and sustain China's self-fashioning as a socialist–capitalist economy. The tensions of such careful pragmatism are instructive for scholars who advocate recognition of change as well as for those who argue that political continuity is the burden of progress in Chinese communications.

The case of China is an intensely pertinent case for media and cultural scholars. China is dealing with issues of internationalisation, globalisation, local development, poverty reduction, environmental protection and, crucially, the problems of security and stability in a vast, culturally disparate and ethnically non-homogeneous geo-political landscape. It has a large, diverse, and developing demographic base. Its education system, although extremely uneven, is working to educate skilled and multi-literate graduates. The uses of media in China exemplify our collective focus on power, communications and culture, and the more of us that work together here, the more relevant we become.

Correspondence: sj.donald@qut.edu.au

Reference

Gittings, John (1999) Excess and enthusiasm, in Evans and Donald (eds), *Picturing Power in the People's Republic of China: Posters of the Cultural Revolution*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 27–46.

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald is Associate Professor and Head of Film and Television at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Downloaded By: [Ingenta Content Distribution Psy Press Titles] At: 04:24 24 November 2010

Downloaded By: [Ingenta Content Distribution Psy Press Titles] At: 04:24 24 November 2010