

# **New Role of Chinese Mass Communication in the Globalized Era**

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In the epic poem of the ancient Greek poet Homer, the Orient and the Occident were already clearly distinguished, and Aischylos' *The Persians* as well as *The Bacchae* of Euripides created a Persian image representing the Orient to the Occident. Since then, along with the development and changes of history, Greece and Hebrew formulated an Occident with the West at the center, while the Islamic culture created an Oriental culture which is opposite to the Occident. Looking at old books of the Occident from *La Chanson de Roland* to *La Divina Commedia*, the Orient has been depicted as heterogeneous and with an unfavorable image.

According to Edward Said, U.S. author and post-colonialism theorist, the Orient is referred to as all the regions and nationals other than the Occident. As Chinese who are now active across the world, we are definitely one of the representing members of the Orient.

Based on statistical data presented by a Shanghai Foreign language University professor in 2002, 60% of Americans had negative attitude toward China 20 years ago. Even now, 20 years later, still Americans have maintained the same attitude toward China at the same rate, although China implemented reform and an open policy, and showed responsibility of a great country. According to statistics, out of the

total news reports on China and the Chinese by the Associated Press, the New York Times, The Washington Post, and CNN, 77 % is said to be leaning towards a negative view or a negative inclination. In addition, Americans have a very negative attitude toward the overall image of the Chinese. In TV dramas, movies, and literary works, the vast majority of the ethnic Chinese and Asian immigrants have been depicted as a low level in the society.

Why have Americans maintained the same attitude toward China for the last two decades, while a number of Chinese have now taken a positive attitude toward the U.S.? One important thing is that Chinese mass media still has a limited influence in the West. China's mass communication companies don't stick to Western game rules, which sometimes cause misunderstanding or antipathy. Therefore the Chinese mass communications need to make an effort to create a new order and to play a new role.

#### 1. Move from a silent listener to an active speaker

A scholar said that due to globalization, five "defaults" will be carried out in the media circulation environment at a rapid pace: default circulation of the world information, default occurrence of world trends, default transfer of world information, default operation of disputed areas across the world, and default sharing of transfer manner. In this context, globalization is to equally provide the most convenient exit for both media and its perspectives, and everyone can freely express his or her voice and opinion. Yet, if one person's voice can't reach others using the existing media, then how much freedom does the media have?

Already the Western culture-led media has been widely spreading throughout the world across national borders. The radio and satellite TV are covering the world. With its gigantic size and influence, the International Satellite TV of the US has become a speaker with the world's most powerful output capacity, and 137 countries across the world are now the audience of CNN news. Within this speaker, a Western perception of the Orient and the Chinese is created based on Western culture, Western scientific standards, and Western thinking. The image of the Chinese that we can sense from their words and writings is the one that they feel and believe. Chinese people in their own image are 'speakers' representing the entire Chinese, but rather we, the real Chinese, have been reduced to having a 'silent tongue'.

— The Media and the Chinese —

Like this, a monopoly of voices has resulted in the only one single voice in the world as well as only one culture. The absence of equality has led to the absence of freedom, and naturally to the absence of fairness. Due to the monopoly of mass communications, cutthroat market competition has led to nowhere.

— The Media and the Chinese —

Currently the world has recognized that globalization is a huge revolution, and at the same times a painful transformation. What the West should understand is that when we need to discuss an issue, people from the every way of life have to participate, so that a new starting point can be given to a global way of thinking. Western mass media needs to provide a forum where the Chinese media can discuss issues and express their ideas on an equal footing. In addition, Chinese mass media has to play a strong role as the window to show Chinese culture, give 'different voices' in order to complement the W

estern media monopoly, and finally, grow to become a mighty force, thereby creating a new order of 'One World, Various Voices' to strike a balance.

The West is a powerful 'stranger', who Chinese mass media has to catch up with and learn lessons from. Yet, Chinese mass media mustn't forget that we should start speaking by ourselves. This means, Chinese people should broadcast our own culture to the outside world along with the Western counterpart, and culturally interact by changing Chinese culture into a living spirit with modern senses.

At the 6<sup>th</sup> World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention in 2001, I, on behalf of Phoenix Satellite Television, already emphasized that 'making the Chinese voice heard on the world stage' has consistently been a business operation policy of Phoenix Satellite Television, and to this end, we have been making concerted efforts. Currently, we had interviews with leaders of 100 nations and regions, and as a result the U.S. government thinks highly of us as a vehicle by which it delivers information to the Chinese community.

## 2. Stop being a by-stander and participate in important issues of the world

A country and a colony with outstanding quality must understand and take part in international affairs. The reason why the New York Times of the U.S. was able to grow into a world-renowned media company is because it aimed at 'the world's best international news report'. It shows tenacious conviction not to miss any single major news by saying that 'we cover all the news fit for publication'. Through

international news reports with high standard and wide range of perspectives, the newspaper publisher has been equipped with an international viewpoint and ambitious aspiration as a 'big player'. With this, it has become an impervious media giant that will stay with us forever.

During the last century, Chinese media usually didn't participate in reporting internationally important news. However, this practice of automatically becoming a 'silent tongue' has already been changed as we have been entering the new millennium. As a Chinese media, we, Phoenix Satellite Television, has set three goals we must achieve in order to join the mainstream of the world's mass communications. First, we will be on the scene whenever a big event breaks out. Second, Phoenix Satellite Television will always cover breaking news. Lastly, when given 30 minutes, we will show our audience every nook and corner of the world.

Phoenix Satellite Television's information program under the honorable name of 'CNN in Chinese' is now being watched in 50 countries around the world and more than 200 million viewers watching our news channel. For the first time ever, our news channel covers Chinese regions of mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong and this standard Chinese language news program can be viewed in densely-populated region with Chinese people. 24 hours a day, the channel airs international issues 'on-live'. With 66 reporters (excluding 26 correspondents spreading across the world), we are able to arrive on the scene faster than anyone else. On September 11, 2001, Phoenix Satellite Television's information broadcasting debuted on a tragedy

scene, and it was the first opportunity for the audience in mainland China to watch Chinese media air a tragic event on-live in response to unpredicted out-breaking news. This was the outcome of a rapid response of Phoenix Satellite Television. In February 2002, 'World Media Museum' in New York performed a special burial at sea of the Phoenix Satellite Television '9/11 Terrorism' report. Other than English-speaking countries, the Museum buried reports in only two languages: The Arabic TV station Al Jazeera and Chinese Phoenix Satellite Television. Mr. Chenxiaonan, a TV reporter, even interviewed U.S. anchor Dan Rather at the water burial ceremony. Phoenix Satellite Television's report on the Iraq war was also well accepted by the Chinese audiences across the world. What is noteworthy is that in the school tragedy in Beslan, Russia, one of our reporters, Noh woo kwang, became the third foreign and the first Chinese reporter who made it to the scene after walking 20 kilometers all night with a backpack containing tens of kilograms of equipment, while soldiers and police forces blocked the road. Footage and articles he sent were quoted or reproduced by famous foreign media companies. His shouting through a phone, "terrorists are running towards us" has entered a chapter of the world's news history. Since then, whenever there was major out-breaking news, including Arafat's death, the massive earthquake and tsunami that battered south Asia, and the London Subway Bombings, Phoenix Satellite Television was on the scene faster than any other reporters and aired on live, gaining keen attention from the world media.

### 3. Transform from speaker to provider of a forum for discussion

Propaganda is a popularized job of persuasion. Yet, propaganda exaggerates achievements or hides shortcomings, and effects can turn out to be opposite. Singapore's daily newspaper Yonhapjobo said in its column, "In China, huge change, even hard to imagine, has occurred. However, still numerous problems and difficulties remain there. .... Foreigners shouldn't obliterate their achievements, judging only from shortcomings of the Chinese, and in turn, China should neither boast of its performances nor blame other countries for criticizing its weak points." Hiding or whitewashing problems will only lead to distrust and animosity. Therefore Chinese media across the world should change their way of thinking. Rather than propagating towards the Chinese community, it is better to provide a forum for open discussion where all the important issues related with the public should be discussed.

In the process of carrying out this new role, Chinese media shall create a trustworthy image that contributes to the public interest, shall allow people from various quarters to participate in reporting and expressing criticism in a way that is affordable, free, and fair, and shall ensure a normal course of social development by studying the same event from the various point of view and from a multi-faceted angle, in addition to securing high level of information.

When the Chinese media plays this role, its goal is not to come to a conclusion, not to stick to public order, but to secure a sound forum for discussion. That forum is not a simple choice of the public, but a fair selection after thorough considerations based on general information.

On top of this theory, Phoenix Satellite Television has adopted to provide a forum for discussion on its own by producing multiple news and information programs including 'Current Issue Discussion', 'Phoenix Global Online', 'Online Broadcasting, Popularization', 'Telling the History'. In addition, in terms of several issues surrounding the relationship between Japan and China, we also held a discussion program where Tahara Soichiro, the news program host of Asahi Broadcasting Corporation and Okamoto Ukio, foreign affairs expert and aid to the Japanese Prime Minister appeared to discuss hot issues between China and Japan. This program led to new discussion among viewers. New ideas and responses these discussions brought about might not have been gained at all just through one-sided propaganda and simple reporting.

4. Shift from a person who conceals his weakness and only highlights good points to an interpreter of truth.

A number of scholars point out that China is a society focusing on 'face-saving'. The 'face-saving' culture has continued for thousands of years in the Chinese speaking community, having an influence on our behavior and way of thought. However in the notion of Western intellectuals and media, seeking truth is the first priority. That's why we have come across the following situations. When the relationship between the U.S. and China improves, or natural disaster occurs in the U.S., Chinese media rarely reports negative news or doesn't report at all in favor of the national image of the U.S. In this way, Chinese media shifts to another story in a well-behaved and generous manner rather than revealing the pain of others.



Western media believes that their responsibility is to find out the truth. Based on their notion, they never understand our elevated thought and good wishes; rather they just think of our practice of shielding weakness and highlighting strong points as unprofessional and distorting the essence of speech. A case in point is, in terms of the Iraqi war, the U.S. media was busy to report that there were no mass destruction weapons in Iraq, that U.S. agents had provided false tips, and that the U.S. Army abused Iraqi POWs. Due to this, the reputation of the U.S. government and the U.S. Army got immensely hurt. However, thanks to these reports, U.S. media gave an impression to viewers both within and outside the country that they are brave enough to speak up and report truth. Furthermore they even made the U.S. government change policies about how to carry out the war and how to put things in order after the war.

From the perspective of joint game rules, Chinese media has to become an objective interpreter of truth. They should provide all the news to move people's mind in a simple and clear way and in the careful language of a civilized society. We have to provide news without being lopsided, fearful, or having a biased attitude. With good will and sincerity, we need to bring the truth to light.

For example, reporting about 'SARS' and airing a scene where many people demanded independence of Tibet when China's premier Wen Jiabao visited the U.S., Phoenix Satellite Television let the public know the truth as it is. At the same time, our good will garnered favorable acceptance from the Chinese government and all quarters.

Chinese Tai chi emphasizes 'tui shou(推手)', meaning pushing hands. This is about feeling the movement of the other person through contact of hands, and about showing corresponding responses. Phoenix Satellite Television has played the role of flexible 'tui shou' with goodwill towards Chinese politics. This is neither about showing a fist or an iron hammer, nor is it 'sha shou(殺手)' meaning hurting others. These actions are a search for eliminating hostility, barriers, and misunderstandings, and rational and productive building blocks of the human society development.

Only when the Chinese media can truly play its role and build a new order of world mass communications based on that, the Chinese accounting for one fifth of the total world population can be seen with a strong and friendly image to global TV viewers.