



Knowledge Workers in Contemporary China: Reform and Resistance in the Publishing Industry. By Jianhua Yao. Lanham, USA: Lexington Books, 2014. 191 pp. ISBN 9780739186640.

The study of knowledge workers is one of the most popular subfields of political economy in communication research today. With their numbers growing dramatically in developing countries, knowledge workers are playing an increasingly important role in labour movements globally. Focusing on China's publishing industry, Jianhua Yao's *Knowledge Workers in Contemporary China* presents a panoramic view of the challenges confronting media workers, particularly editors, in China. The book aims to address four interrelated questions: 1) What changes have occurred in the labour process of Chinese media workers, especially editors? 2) How do we understand these changes in the context of China's media reform as well as social transformation? 3) What are the impacts of technological innovations and China's integration to global capitalism on Chinese editors? 4) How are Chinese media workers responding to their deteriorating working environments today?

This book is written as a benchmark analysis for scholars interested in labour issues associated with China's evolving media sector. The book makes three overarching arguments. First, the accelerating commodification process in the Chinese publishing industry has turned it from a state-subsidized propaganda organ into a state-controlled yet advertising-supported economic entity. Second, along with this structural transformation, Chinese editors have been forced to serve the state's political interests and deal with the increasing obligation of profit-making, which have led to deteriorating working conditions. Third, although worker organizations and trade unions have engaged in protecting the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese media workers, such engagements have been ineffective over the past three decades, which leads to the author's proposal that plausible solutions for the problems encountered by Chinese media workers can be achieved via improved information technologies, reforms within the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, and emerging labour non-governmental organizations.

The book has been guided by two influential theoretical frameworks: Vincent Mosco's (2009) discussion of the three fundamental processes underlying capitalism (i.e., commodification, structuration, and spatialization) and Yuezhi Zhao's (1998) conceptualization of China's media reforms as being between the "party-line" and the "market line." Built upon both frameworks, the book is organized as follows: starting with a comprehensive introduction to China's evolving media sector and the political economy approach to communication research, the book lays out its arguments in five chapters, with each addressing a particular aspect of the structural transformation in China's publishing industry and its impacts on Chinese editors. To be specific, Chapter 1 creates a solid theoretical foundation by offering a brief overview of political economy and then links it to media reform and knowledge workers, the book's two

main subjects. Following Zhao (1998), this chapter offers a detailed explanation of the dual challenge faced by Chinese media workers: on the one hand, they still need to satisfy the state elite following the propaganda model; on the other hand, they are facing increasing pressure from the economic elite, as state-owned media are increasingly commodified. The chapter then links this dual challenge to the structural transformation of China's publishing industry and the changing position of knowledge workers within this sector.

Based on Mosco's (2009) framework, Chapters two to four elaborate the interrelated processes of commodification, structuration, and spatialization undertaken by the publishing industry in China. The commodification process is characterized by the transformation of publishing houses from public institutions to profit-driven companies, the formation of publishing conglomerates, and the expansion of private and foreign investment in the publishing industry, which together have created a series of challenges for Chinese editors, such as contingent employment, intense work pressure, and declining social welfare. Along with the commodification process, the structuration process has further led to dramatic changes in class relations and power dynamics, as marked by the devaluation of Chinese editors' professional knowledge and skills, the declining state protection of job security, and the increase in exploitative power relationships in workplaces. Finally, along with China's full integration into the global economy, Chinese editors now face new challenges from issues such as globalization, the global division of labour, and neoliberalization, which make them more vulnerable under the propaganda-commercial model.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores possible ways in which Chinese editors and media workers in general may respond to their precarious situation. In particular, the chapter emphasizes the regulation of employer-employee relationships by worker organizations and trade unions in China. On the one hand, these organizations have made legitimate efforts to represent the interests and rights of Chinese media workers. On the other hand, their efforts have been constrained by their lack of substantial political and economic power. As such, the chapter proposes that the adoption of new information technologies within these organizations and the emergence of other labour non-governmental organizations may aid in improving Chinese media workers' resistance to the challenges brought by the propaganda-commercial model.

This book's main strength lies in its fine-grained analysis of the reconfiguration of class power in China's market reform, and its analytical angle on editors in the publishing industry offers several insightful observations on the evolving relationships between industrial and knowledge workers and between the state and the working class in China. Arguing from a critical political economic perspective, the book places great emphasis on the wider economic, political, and social changes underlying a publishing industry in transition. As such, the book has made a timely contribution to a growing body of research on China's emerging media conglomerates. Structurally, the book is well organized, especially in Chapters 2 to 4, in which the commodification, structuration, and spatialization processes of China's media reform are supported by concise yet persuasive empirical evidence.

Despite the above merits, the book has a noticeable shortcoming: its predominant focus on the challenges faced by Chinese editors seems to be a little unbalanced given the book's subtitle is "reform and resistance in the publishing industry." The resistance side has only been explicated in Chapter 5, which feels somewhat inadequate in comparison to the vulnerable image of Chinese editors established in the previous four chapters. Admittedly, so far there is no strong resistance from Chinese editors since such action is strictly prohibited within the propaganda-commercial model. Yet it would be still helpful if the book included one more chapter further delineating the proposals addressed in Chapter 5.

Taken together, *Knowledge Workers in Contemporary China* remains an important book for understanding labour issues within China's fast-growing knowledge economy, and it is a worthwhile read for scholars interested in relevant research topics.

References

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