

Book review for the book of Brand China in the Media: Transformation of Identities

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Book Review

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Qing Cao, Doreen Wu and Keyan G. Tomaselli (eds.), *Brand China in the Media: Transformation of Identities*. Routledge, 2020, 248 pp. £36.99 (paperback), £120.00 (hardback) and £31.44 (e-book), ISBN 13: 978-0-367-33501-4

Qing Cao, Doreen Wu and Keyan G. Tomaselli (eds.), *Brand China in the Media: Transformation of Identities* (Routledge, 2020), 248 pp. £36.99 (paperback), £120.00 (hardback) and £31.44 (e-book). Contributors: David Feng, Dezheng Feng, Doreen Wu, Duncan Harte, Hugo de Burgh, Ian Weber, Jiayu Wang, Jieyun Feng, Lejin Zhang, Natalia Riva, Patrick Ng, Peng Wu, Qing Cao, Qiyun Han, Shaoyan Ding and Yanan Li.

Brand China in the Media: Transformation of Identities (hereafter: *Brand China in the Media*), is a ground-breaking study that examines the complex relationship between China's identities, self-representation and China's own representation in the mass media. It focuses on the internal dynamics of change in China and in Chinese mass media (*i.e.* newspaper, films, social media and television programmes), and how it forms the 'hybridised identities' (Guo and Huang, 2002) of contemporary China, the new discourse of 'multiple modernities' (Mahbubani, 2013) and 'contested modernities' (Jacques, 2012) in the Chinese context, which is arguably very different from the Western media's discourse of China and its imagined (re)representations, that are more or less orientalist-oriented and/or politically determined.

Compared with previous studies concerning the images of China in the mass media that are bound and influenced by the Western media's narrative discourse, viewing contemporary China more as a 'China Threat', whilst the Chinese media as being dominated and manipulated by the Chinese government that is fundamentally different from the western world's free press, and 'how China uses the news media as a weapon in its propaganda war against the West' (Kumar, 2021), *Brand China in the Media* offers readers a fresh perspective by highlighting the growing role of non-state actors (*i.e.* online media in China, the proliferating Chinese middle-class and cinematic (re)representations of 'Chineseness' in films) and their influence on contemporary China which often tend to be neglected and thus, worthy of consideration.

Brand China in the Media is an insightful research publication – employing a holistic approach that incorporates a variety of analytical methods, including: case study analysis as qualitative analysis (in all chapters from chapter 1–13); corpus-based analysis as quantitative analysis (chapters



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1 and 11); and a variety of interdisciplinary approaches and theories in areas of cultural studies, sociology and philosophy – all of which, raise the in-depth study of media representations of China to a more solid, nuanced and empirical level. Through these heuristic instantiation, *Brand China in the Media*, synchronically and diachronically explores the dynamic relationships between Chinese modernity, (self)identities and its traditional roots in Confucianism, which also represents a crucial issue in China's 21st century identity (Cao et al., 2020) – an issue that is imbued with the tension and struggles between tradition and modernity (Cao, 2019).

It is customary for writers to focus their attention on criticising the Chinese government and CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and their roles in manipulating Chinese mass media which tends to be self-evident. *Brand China in the Media*, however, has dispensed its judicious criticism and critical review of the CCP/the Chinese government in a more balanced and rational manner, thus helping the reader to look at something new and emerging below the undercurrent which can be easily repressed by the swamping critical discourse of 'China Threat' in the Western media. For example, in Chapter 7: 'Promoting moral values through entertainment: a social semiotic analysis of the Spring Festival Gala on China Central Television', through analysis of the popular Chinese Spring Festival Gala (SFG) on China Central Television (CCTV), the author, Dezheng Feng, reveals how the Chinese government educates its people by promoting its own moral values through entertainment, not via political propaganda. In Chapter 5: 'Becoming global, remaining local: the discourses of international news reporting by CCTV-4 and Phoenix TV Hong Kong', Doreen D. Wu and Patrick Ng examine the issue of 'globalisation' as seen in contemporary Chinese media practice, by comparing the discourses of international news reports on CCTV-4 (a Beijing-based television station, owned and run by the Chinese government as its media outlet) with Phonexi TV (a Hong Kong-based television station, but widely known as a pro-China media outlet). These two authors have discovered through their analysis that though 'globalisation in the linguistic practice of Chinese broadcasting took place only marginally' (Cao, Wu & Tomaselli, 2020: 94), native broadcasters 'no longer avoided news of a negative nature' (p.94) and reporting structures have seen a gradual transformation from 'monologic story-telling' to an increased use of a 'dialogic story-telling structure', which is the globally acceptable pattern of news reporting (p. 94). In Chapter 9: 'Articulating for Tibetan experiences in the contemporary world: a cultural study of Pema Tseden's and Sonthar Gyal's films', the author, Shaoyan Ding examines and explores the re-representation of Tibet and the 'genuine' experience of Tibetans in films directed by local Tibetan directors, Pema Tseden and Sonthar Gyal, which 'diverge greatly from the stereotypical images of Tibet' depicted in the West, that are 'simplified, essentialized, naturalized and fixed' (Hall, 1997: 258) and the 'mystery of Tibet' (Hansen, 2001) as the 'object of imagination' (Cao et al., 2020: 147).

While acknowledging the outstanding levels of research in this volume, the Methodology section (p. 87) in Chapter 5 'Becoming global, remaining local: the discourses of international news reporting by CCTV-4 and Phoenix TV Hong Kong', lacks a rationale for the sample of data collected between '17 and 23 May 2007' (p. 87). With a reason for selecting this particular period, it would help signpost readers more. Chapter 12: 'Conflicting Images of the Great Wall in cultural heritage tourism', provides a detailed analysis of stakeholders' depiction of the Great Wall (e.g. Chinese domestic tourists, the business operators and the government regulators), by evaluating online travel reviews on Chinese travel websites. However, the theme of this chapter is primarily 'tourism', which tends to dilute the overall cohesion and structure of the volume and its focus on Chinese mass media, (self)identity and modernity.

In conclusion, *Brand China in the Media* is a very good read, and the research outcomes by various authors hit the ground running by presenting clear and empirical arguments. The volume makes a valuable and worthwhile contribution to the understanding of a phenomenon that is

increasingly important in the dynamics of an emerging Chinese civil society, contested Chinese modernity and Chinese mass media that combines both tradition and global features. It represents a noteworthy contribution to the field of Chinese Studies and provides scholars and students of transnational society and mass media with useful tools for analysis.

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