

UDC 327

## **BASIS FOR THE FORMATION OF MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY IN CHINA (PHILOSOPHICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS)**

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Due to the development of media resources, the influence of the Internet in China has led to significant changes in all spheres of life. As a result of the widespread use of media, we have witnessed changes in culture, lifestyles and individuals. Through analyzing the current media culture in China, we have concluded that the media has had a significant impact on education, democracy, aesthetics, literature, language and communication. Through media, human problems are exacerbated. Examples include, dependency on online media leading to the loss of subjectivity, excessive information without classification resulting in the “disappearance of childhood”, online media affecting the socialization of adolescents, etc.

By examining media culture, we can say that a new philosophical orientation has been establishing in China, namely media anthropology, which focuses on the impact of media culture on people, both in virtual and real life. This is evidenced by the latest data from scientific publications. Turning to research in the field of philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, education and adding an ethnographic method, we analyzed the specifics of media culture in China and came to the following conclusions. First, the historicity and humanity of traditional culture have been transformed. Moreover, the value of culture has been disparaged due to the unconscious influence of online entertainment and the general commercial nature of network platforms. Second, people have accustomed themselves to communicating via online media in China. Yet this virtual communication eliminates the emotional component, leaving only instantaneous text input. Hence, by trying to maintain digital social contact, people have “fallen” into social dependence, and leading to exhaustion. Researchers have also noted that online reading is beginning to dominate over paper reading, especially for the younger generation. Because online media is extraordinarily complicated, mixed with images, colors, animation, and other elements, it distracts and prevents the reader from focusing on the content, as well as disrupting logical reading. Thus, under these new conditions of existence man’s issues are discussed under the direction of such philosophy as philosophical media anthropology.

**Keywords:** media culture, media anthropology, modern China, human problem, cyberspace, network society, Internet, traditions, culture.

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## ПІДГРУНТЯ ДЛЯ ФОРМУВАННЯ МЕДІА-АНТРОПОЛОГІЇ В КИТАЇ (ФІЛОСОФСЬКО-АНТРОПОЛОГІЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ)

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Дякуючи розвитку медіаресурсів, завдяки впливу Інтернету в Китаї стали відчутними зміни в усіх сферах життя. Як наслідок масштабного застосування медіа ми стали свідками змін в культурі, в житті і в самій людині. Аналізуючи поточну медіа-культуру в Китаї, ми прийшли до висновків, що вона значно впливає на освіту, демократію, естетику, літературу, мову і людське спілкування. У медіа-просторі загалом створюються проблеми людини, залежність від мережевих медіа призводить до втрати людської суб'єктивності, надмірний масштаб трансляції інформації в мережі приводить до «зникання дитинства», впливає на соціалізацію підлітків тощо.

Досліджуючи медіа-культуру, ми можемо стверджувати, що в Китаї розвивається новий філософський напрямок – медіа-антропологія, яка зосереджується на впливі медіа-культури на людей як у віртуальній, так і в реальній площині життєдіяльності. Про це свідчать останні дані наукових публікацій. Звернувшись до досліджень у галузі філософії, соціології, культурології, освіти і додавши ще і етнографічний метод, ми проаналізували специфіку медіакультури в Китаї і прийшли до таких висновків. По-перше, історичність та гуманізм традиційної культури трансформувались, а їхня цінність знизилась за рахунок прихованого впливу культури розваг і за рахунок загальної комерційної природи мережевої платформи. По-друге, люди звикли спілкуватися мережевими медіями в Китаї. Але цей віртуальний спосіб комунікації нівелює емоційну складову частину, залишаючи лише миттєвий вхід тексту. Намагаючись підтримувати цифровий соціальний контакт, люди «впали» в соціальну залежність, вони почувають себе втомленими. Вчені також зауважили, що читання он-лайн починає домінувати над читанням паперової літератури, особливо це відноситься до молодого покоління. Але мережеві медіа занадто змішані із зображеннями, кольорами, анімацією та іншими елементами на веб-сторінці, що відволікає читача і заважає зосередженості на змісті. А логічне читання часто стає перерваним. Отже, проблеми людини за нових умов існування обговорюються в такому напрямку філософії, як філософська медіа-антропологія.

**Ключові слова:** медіа-культура, медіа-антропологія, сучасний Китай, проблема людини, віртуальний простір, мережеве суспільство, Інтернет, традиції, культура.

**Relevance of the research.** Under the influence of the Internet and media resources, changes have begun to occur in Chinese lifestyles, most significantly, we are witnessing changes in culture under media influence. A person, their life and the main forms of its realization are directly linked to media culture.

**Novelty.** We assume that there are a number of researchers in China (philosophers and sociologists, anthropologists, educators) who are researching a new kind of culture – media culture. Having analyzed the works that describe human problems in media culture, the changes in tradition, basic human preferences and new types of cultural techniques, the author emphasizes the impact of Chinese media anthropology formation.

**Main part.** Today in China, media is of great importance, not only influencing culture, but also shaping it. Culture is undergoing a stage of drastic transformation thanks to mass media. Obviously, media broadcasting has had a huge impact on culture. People once received or delivered messages by natural organs during the

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oral communication age, and established direct and close relationships. Considering the extreme development of Internet in the present era, every new media forms not only influences cultural content and the manner of transmission, but remodels culture itself.

### **The philosophical study of the progress of Chinese media culture**

Chinese media cultural studies started late in the world, only drawing people's attention since the 1990s, yet are now considered a normal role in modern life. Scholastic research on media culture has been carried out from the following perspectives.

Firstly, trying to analyze and explain the current phenomenon of media culture in China by western media culture theory. For example, Yuan thought "mass media is the corn with two sides. It actively constructs culture, but to a certain extent, it has had some negative effects on mass culture" [Yuan Peng 2007], Jiang studied "for people in different fields, regions, ages and different media using, culture presents various" [Jiang Yuanlun 2007].

Zhou and An believed "at present, as a kind of mass culture, the rise of visual culture is closely related to the consumer society. Visual culture deeply affects and changes people's way of life and thinking" [Zhou Debo and An Shanshan 2007].

Secondly, the influence of film and television on public life. Tan stated "TV is not only for entertainment, but also a strong commercial consumption culture. TV has impacted childhood from three aspects" [Tan Xudong 2007].

Thirdly, literature is gradually marginalized because of visual media. Li gave his research findings by a series case study, "nowadays the society enters into picture-reading times" [Li Jing 2007].

Fourthly, network culture has become a hot spot of media culture. The research mainly focuses on how various social media generate new culture and impact on people. Wang discussed "network spoof culture, as a media culture, has its social and practical metaphor, as well as negative effects" [Wang Chengwen 2007], as for Micro-Blog, Liao thought "in the context of mass culture, network media provides Internet users with the conditions of a new entertainment life because of its characteristics of virtual, free, and equal" [Liao Chihui 2007]. He pointed out the four characteristics of cyber words as well.

Lastly, social media (or SNS) has had a dramatic impact on society. Scholar Wu observed the most popular social media in China – TikTok, and pointed out that "TikTok, as a network platform, has the basic elements of forming the public sphere. The video fragments of the diversified life released online are the processed information by network technique, presenting the characteristics both of authenticity and virtuality, which is difficult for audience to distinguish the situation of the facts" [Wu Hui 2020]. After studying Chinese mythology on TikTok, Zhang thought that "short video platform deconstructed the sanctity of mythology. Comparing with the narration of mythology and the faith of mythology in actual community, the nature of the mythology at the video platform is the most unapparent. The mythology became a resource for drawing more browsing, but not the culture itself. Furthermore, the video re-shaped the mythology by the way of deconstruction, spoofs or recreation" [Zhang Duo 2021].

Through studying the most frequently used social media Micro-Blog, Yuan pointed out that "Micro-Blog has the function of a public amplifier. It's no longer a simple

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network tool, but has actually become a window of public opinion. Furthermore, Micro-Blog and the other similar social media are the production of technique and commercialization. Under such circumstances, the media organization released information according to the economic interest, so that democratic characteristics are stifled by commercial interests. In addition, the characteristics of social media can easily lead to group acceptance of extreme public opinion and the broadcaster losing control, and threaten the rational and critical public opinion debating space construct” [Yuan Jinghua 2010].

Zhou and Wang studied the most influential online community website Bilibili, which has a high concentration of young people in China. They believed “the individualization of network communities provides youth with an opportunity to display and realize themselves. But this venue of individualized expression and multi-discourse accelerated the emergence of multi-values, which makes youth in virtual space vulnerable to impact by ‘visual colonization’, and there is a risk of pan-entertainment, blind worship and lack of value consensus” [Zhou Xuanchen and Wang YanLong 2021].

Among them, it is especially necessary to single out those who focus on the traditional philosophy problems. For instance, on the issue of media consciousness, Li believed “what really connects people with media space and real society is the consciousness symbols existing in network, as for which, it intensifies, switches and impacts people’s souls between virtual space and reality. Without the media, the Internet would not be accepted by human consciousness, but simply be a physical presence” [Li Jibing 2016].

On the issue of modern human subjectivity, Zeng pointed out “man is the creator of the network culture and the subject. When the network culture moves toward ‘anti-rationality, anti-tradition, anti-morality and anti-mainstream’, people for pursuing commercial interests, begin to lose control of their body and become disorientated, then indulge in virtual space. When people were objectified and instrumentalized, network culture actualizes the enslavement and domination of man” [Zeng Jing 2014].

On the negative impact of media culture for youth socialization, Wang found that “‘childhood’ means undefined, which appears to be an imperfection. Yet due to this, human beings are not limited and are adaptable. In the new media environment, youth and adults received indistinguishable information, the boundaries were blurred, and boys and girls were more willingness to realize socialization virtually than they were in reality. The direct result was ‘the disappearance of childhood’” [Wang Xinyi 2020].

### **China’s new philosophical paradigm: Media anthropology**

The study of media anthropology starts from western since 1930s. It was the focus of philosophy and anthropology in the field of western mass media over the past 20 years, but western scholars have had no agreement on its concept, so it is still under discussion. Among them, Rothenbuhler, E. W. once made a broad definition. He believed that media anthropology consisted of two aspects: “one is to study media by the anthropological concept and its methodology. The other is the anthropological study of media” [Rothenbuhler 2008]. However, anthropologist Askew, K. emphasized that media anthropology is a strict ethnographic field. He defined in his book *The Anthropology of Media: a Reader*, “media anthropology is

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composed of people's use and understanding of media technology by ethnographic, historical and contextual analysis" [Askew 2002]. "Budka, P. launched an Email group discussion on the definition of media anthropology, and concluded that 'media anthropology is the ethnographic study of (popular) (mass) media practice which allows, due to a fine-grained analysis of cultural difference, a (cross-disciplinary) critical theory building that uses anthropological theory and methodology to understand the relationships between explicitly mediated practice and the implicit mediated aspects of other practices'" [Li Chunxia and Peng Zhaorong 2008].

Media anthropology includes almost all branches of anthropology and most media studies. For instance:

In the ethnography study of TV audiences in northern Indian cities, Mankekar, P. analyzed the way that men and women in New Delhi viewed and interpreted Indian TV, and tracked the relationship between the audience's responses to TV and the continuous construction of national and gender subjects. She thought that "in the post-colonial context, for the integration and development of the nation, the concept of Indian women had become a popular discourse. Sexualization followed to the needs of the country and identity. She analyzed how television played a role in the construction of national and gender subjects, and explained how popular texts were conceptualized" [Mankekar 1998].

Larkin, B. has studied cinema, radio and digital media in Nigeria, among which his research perspective on cinema is particularly unique. In his study of cinemas in Kano State, northern Nigeria, he "examined how cinemas became part of public space under colonial rule. These new spaces – libraries, parks, theatres, cinemas – created new racial, social and gender interactions. The recognized appearance of cinemas – who can watch movies, how and where cinemas are built – is the result of the specific plan of colonial modernity" [Larkin 2008].

Ginsburg, F. studied Australian aboriginal media. She quoted many anthropological terms and theories to reveal the significance of media to identity shaping and cultural communication. She called the content shot by the aboriginal people as "screen memory", and believed that "aboriginal people do not use screen media to cover the past, but to restore their collective stories and history, some of them are full of pain, some stories and history have been erased by the national narrative of mainstream culture, and there is a risk of forgotten in the aboriginal world" [Ginsburg 2008].

Fisherkerler, J. did research on imagination and identity construction in the context of media culture. By combining TV with local culture (including family, community, school and peer culture), she studied the use of TV programs in the process of creating and supporting their own identity for junior students in New York. She thought that "different learning modes are related to teenagers' exposure to local culture and TV. Teenagers get guidance from local culture to determine their wishes, and get imaginative strategies by watching TV, which help them take appropriate actions" [Fisherkerler 1997].

On new media anthropology study, Miller, D. used ethnographic research on the use of mobile phones and philosophically analyzed that "the phone, as a new media, impacts on low-income people in Jamaica" [Miller 2021].

Since there is already a number of works in China that deal with similar topics, we can conclude that a new type of scientific research is also emerging in



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China – Chinese media anthropology. We would include the following works in this direction.

The philosophy of Chinese media anthropological study is mainly completed by scholars engaged in anthropology or news and broadcasting. Although they do not directly and clearly classify themselves as belonging to the category of Chinese media anthropology, the media culture related study object and its ethnography study method are equal with the western media anthropology.

Chen and Wang found that “villagers in northern rural areas were used to gathering outside the house to eat or chat, and exchanged information concerning the village, forming a unique information spreading mode, namely ‘meal market’, which undertook the functions of information communication, socialization, inheritance of regional cultural traditions and community order. The appearance of TV had provided a very tempting world for villagers, people and society were gradually connected by electric wave. More and more villagers are willing to stay home and watch TV. Younger community members did not recognize traditional lifestyles and cultural concepts any more. Urban lifestyles had found supporters in rural areas. The mass media squeezed and displaced traditional public forums. The popularity of TV had made the original group communication mode and typical village public forum decline, such forums also include fairs, tea houses, temples, concert halls, cafes, etc” [Chen Xingmin and Wang Xusheng 2009]. Through this, we realize that there is a new media culture appearing following the introduction of a new media source (television). Meanwhile, this new media culture deconstructs the local culture, and then alteration of the citizens’ concepts and lifestyles followed.

Zhang studied how the digital “red envelope” impacted traditional family relationships. “Traditionally, ‘red envelope’ for spring festival in China is a gift among family members, and always presented by elders to younger. Younger must gain it by a ceremony (such as kneeling down or New Year greeting, etc.). This behavior reflects the respect to elders and the care to the younger. However, as the digital ‘red envelope’ was popular, the distribution form of ‘red envelope’ began to change. Firstly, the business company began to hand out it to users, which became a way of sales, moreover, the distribution expanded outside the family members to friends, classmates and colleagues. Secondly, the digital ‘red envelope’ developed a function of entertainment. Through observation, it was found that the digital ‘red envelope’ had violated the traditional family ethics and the blurred boundary between family and society. The holy family festival time were merging into the common daily life” [Zhang Fang 2016]. From the philosophical analysis, the scholar indicated that the ritual sense and family ethics were gradually being lost while people accustomed themselves to social media. Social exchange remains nothing but only entertainment.

“A study based on ‘KuaiShou’ video platform in China with the method of ethnography, shows that the context of Chinese society is changing rapidly from text, voice and picture to video in the era of networks. The most important thing is that the direction of the change is no longer the top-down model dominated by the elite in tradition, but a subversive change with the direct participation of the grassroots population” [Zhao Xudong 2020]. Nowadays the media culture in China is dominated by visual culture, and the elite’s control of culture has been subverted, a new media culture mode of “grassroots culture” is fashionable.

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Scholars have put forward their own understanding of media culture. The following analyzes how media culture affects man in China through specific issues.

Huang believed that “current network culture presented a tendency of pan-entertainment, which was roughly divided into two aspects: one was the entertainment packaging of problems and events to attract attention and pursue sensational effect, leading to the obscuration of the meaning and reflective issues contained within; the other was to amplify the entertainment attribute and function of network culture, weakening or even abandoning education, guidance and the function of self-restraint, making the audience more shallow and mediocre in intelligence, interest and aesthetics. Concerning networks, all cultural forms need to measure their value by the standard of entertainment. Only if they meet the standards of entertainment can they be developed and disseminated to the greatest extent. In 2012, the spoof culture, so-called ‘Du Fu is very busy’ (short video) by playing trick on ancient notable Chinese figure, appeared on the Internet, then took the great attention, however it focused on the superficial entertainment rather than the humanities and history” [Huang Yiling 2016]. Although the decentralized and unauthorized network space allows everyone to speak freely, the commercial nature of the network forces the culture to surrender to the interests of capitalism, resulting in the erosion of the main social value.

As for statistics, “25% of people communicate by WeChat (the largest SNS software with 1.15 billion users as of 2021 in China) for over 4 hours per day, and 88.1% users talk by it for 7 days a week” [WeChat 2021], Jiang observed that “with the wide use of WeChat and Micro-Blog, social media had greatly changed the concept of time and space of interpersonal communication. The new social culture had been innovated the connotation of body, emotion and culture to a great extent. Unfortunately such digital exchange does not mean communication. According to the majority of WeChat users, the content they view online was casual, there was no specific theme for communicating, typing input was free without expression of completed idea, two parties could not focus on one point” [Jiang Jianguo 2014]. From observing such specific media culture, we found that it is hard to form a deep emotional relationship by digital communication. Although the mass media conquers the obstacle of space and time, the “absence” lacks a sense of presence, it largely dispels the concentration and emotional value of realistic social communication. The more people rely on social media communication, the more they feel fatigued and emotionally alienated.

“The research reported by ‘China Press and Publication Research Institute’ in 2013 shows that digital reading in China continues to grow, with mobile reading increasing by 13%, and more than 50% of digital reading groups being teenagers. Reading online, such as magazines, books and newspapers, has given birth to a new type of reading style, namely E-reading, which is a revolutionary change” [Cai Yi and Qi Weiping 2014]. However, compared with traditional ways of reading, E-reading is different, “as the carrier of information in print media, words and pictures are orderly and static, but readers are relatively mobile. Information can be obtained through continuous browsing. In mass media, there are rich elements including words, pictures, colors, animation, and other dazzling multimedia elements. These dynamic things distract readers’ attention and destroy the logic of reading” [Chen Qimei 2004]. Currently E-reading has become the main form of reading, but reading behavior is often fast and jumpy due to the ‘McDonaldization’ characteristics of

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network culture, furthermore readers lack critical thinking with a specific issue. Such a way of “rich” information reading leads not to thoughtful reading, but the decline of reading ability.

Through analyzing media culture works in China through the point of view of media anthropology, we can summarize that modern Chinese media anthropology mainly focuses on the practical research of the relationship between mass media and society. Scholars concentrate on the impact on people in the intertwined development of actual and virtual culture, so the modern Chinese media anthropology can be defined as the research on human related media culture in the era of new media.

**Conclusion.** Thanks to the development of media resources, the influence of the Internet in China has led to significant changes in all spheres of life. As a result of the widespread use of the media, we have witnessed changes in culture, in lifestyles and in individuals. Analyzing the current media culture in China, we have concluded that it has a significant impact on education, democracy, aesthetics, literature, language and human communication. In the media medium, human problems are exacerbated. Examples include, dependency on online media leading to the loss of subjectivity, excessive information without classification resulting in the “disappearance of childhood”, online media affecting the socialization of adolescents, etc.

By examining media culture, we can say that a new philosophical orientation has been established in China, namely media anthropology, which focuses on the impact of media culture on people, both in the virtual and real life. This is evidenced by the latest data from scientific publications. Scholars have researched Chinese media culture in the field of philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, education and have added the ethnographic method. We analyzed the specifics of media culture in China from the philosophical perspective, and came to the following conclusions. First, the historicity and humanity of traditional culture has been transformed. Moreover, the value of culture has been disparaged due to the unconscious influence of online entertainment and the general commercial nature of network platforms. Second, people in China have accustomed themselves to communicating using online media, which does not enhance emotion, but aggravated and isolates people. Although online reading has become mainstream among younger Chinese, readers find it difficult concentrating on content due to too many network elements. And logical reading is often interrupted. The above phenomenon of Chinese media anthropology has attracted more and more attention of Chinese scholars. Thus, the problems of man in the new conditions of existence are discussed in such a direction of philosophy as philosophical media anthropology.

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