STATE, *DANWEI*, AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN CHINA: A STUDY OF ACADEMIC JOURNALS IN COMMUNICATION

Hongtao LI

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
NOVEMBER, 2009
State, Danwei, and Knowledge Production in China: A Study of Academic Journals in Communication

國家、單位與知識生產：以中國傳播領域學術期刊為中心的考察

Submitted to Department of Media and Communication

在 Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

哲學博士學位

By

Hongtao Li

李紅濤

November 2009

二零零九年十一月
**Table of Contents**

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. III

TABLE OF CONTENTS ....................................................................................................... VI

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES ....................................................................................... X

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................... 1

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ............................................................................................. 2

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .................................................................................... 3

   1.2.1 The Production-of-Culture Perspective .............................................................. 3

   1.2.2 Journal Publishing as a Field of Restricted Production ..................................... 6

   1.2.3 An Integrated Approach .................................................................................... 10

1.3 METHOD ...................................................................................................................... 13

   1.3.1 Settings and Cases ............................................................................................ 14

   1.3.2 Field Observation ............................................................................................. 15

   1.3.3 In-depth Interviews ........................................................................................... 17

       1.3.3.1 Interviews with Editors ............................................................................. 17

       1.3.3.2 Interviews with Researchers .................................................................... 19

1.4 PRÉCIS OF THE ANALYSIS ..................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER 2 POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS .......... 23

2.1 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COMMUNICATION ...................................................... 24

2.2 STATE POWER, DANWEI AND LEGITIMATION OF JOURNALS ....................... 27

   2.2.1 Legitimate Journals versus Alternative Outlets ............................................... 27

   2.2.2 Chains of Danwei as State Control Mechanism ................................................ 31

   2.2.3 Unintended Consequences of Danwei System .................................................. 35

2.3 STRATIFICATION IN THE ACADEMIC MARKETPLACE ........................................ 36

   2.3.1 Scholarly Publishing and Academic Evaluation ................................................. 36

   2.3.2 State-planned Knowledge Production in Transition ......................................... 37

   2.3.3 Quantitative Evaluation and the Codification of CSSCI .................................. 40

   2.3.4 Polarization of Scholarly Journals .................................................................... 47

2.4 COMMERCIALIZATION TOWARDS NOWHERE ..................................................... 50

   2.4.1 Journals at the Edge of Commercialization ....................................................... 50

   2.4.2 “Golden Rice Bowl”: Publication Space as Scarce Resources .......................... 53

   2.4.3 Paying the Way into Print: Rent-seeking and Academic Corruption ................ 54
CHAPTER 3 BEYOND THE BOUNDARY OF DANWEI:
THE SPATIAL EXPANSION OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS AS ACADEMIC INSTITUTION

3.1 NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES
3.2 SCHOLARLY JOURNALS AS AN ACADEMIC INSTITUTION
   3.2.1 Journals in the Organizational Field
   3.2.2 Institutional Structure of Journal Publication
3.3 SPATIAL EXPANSION (Ⅰ): SEEKING FOR OUTSIDE PATRONS
   3.3.1 Internal Marginalization: A Brief History of Journal X
   3.3.2 The Web of Subsidies
   3.3.3 Co-sponsorship and Collaboration: the Dialectics of Reciprocity
      3.3.3.1. Co-sponsorship
      3.3.3.2. Collaboration
3.4 SPATIAL EXPANSION (Ⅱ): BECOMING ACADEMIC
   3.4.1 Restructuring the Network of Contributors
   3.4.2 Manuscript Solicitation as a Routine
   3.4.3 Vested Interest and Local Resistance
3.5 INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE IN TRANSITION?

CHAPTER 4 NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF GATEKEEPING

4.1 GATEKEEPING: FROM GATEKEEPER TO ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS
   4.1.1 Mr. Gates: Gatekeepers as Individuals
   4.1.2 Getting the Work Done: Organizational Dynamics in Cultural Production
   4.1.3 Gatekeeping in Scientific Enterprise
4.2 INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL PRESSURES ON EDITORIAL WORK
   4.2.1 Space Shortage and Editorial Workload
   4.2.2 Time Constraints: Publication Frequency and Editorial Duration
4.3 PARADIGMATIC STATE AS EXTERNAL PRESSURES
   4.3.1 Paradigm Development and Journal Publication
   4.3.2 Scholarly Consensus in Chinese Communication Studies
4.4 THE ORGANIZATION OF EDITORIAL OFFICE
   4.4.1 Typology of Gatekeepers
   4.4.2 Formal Positions and Role Differentiation
      4.4.2.1 The editorial committee
      4.4.2.2 Editorial Executives as Contact Men
4.5 DISCRETIONARY POWER OF GATEKEEPERS
4.5.1 Editorial Office as Workplace .............................................................. 111
4.5.2 Editorial Routines in Reviewing Process ............................................. 114
4.5.3 Individual Discretion in Preliminary Screening ................................. 116
4.6 ASSESSING THE PUBLISHABILITY OF MANUSCRIPTS ...................... 119
  4.6.1 Compliance with Editorial Orientation ............................................. 120
  4.6.2 Poor Academic Quality ................................................................. 121
  4.6.3 Political Incorrectness and Self-censorship .................................... 124
4.7 NEGOTIATION OF CONTROL .............................................................. 126
  4.7.1 Patterns of Interaction among Gatekeepers .................................... 126
  4.7.2 Final Scrutiny and Manuscripts Planting ....................................... 128
  4.7.3 Negotiation over Manuscript Placement ....................................... 130
4.8 SUMMARY ......................................................................................... 132

CHAPTER 5 PURSUING LEGITIMACY:
ANONYMOUS REVIEW AS A STRATEGIC RITUAL ..................................... 135
5.1 LEGITIMACY OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION ...................................... 137
  5.1.1 New Institutionalism and the Legitimacy Problem ............................ 137
  5.1.2 Legitimacy Foundation of Cultural Institutions ............................... 138
  5.1.3 Peer Review as a Rationalized Myth .............................................. 141
5.2 THREE-STAGE REVIEWING: OFFICIAL LEGITIMACY AND CHALLENGES 143
  5.2.1 Official Legitimacy of Three-Stage Reviewing ............................... 143
  5.2.2 Three-Stage Reviewing as an Agent of Control ............................. 145
  5.2.3 Challenges to the Official Legitimacy ............................................ 147
5.3 ANONYMOUS REVIEW IN PRACTICE .............................................. 149
  5.3.1 Domesticating Peer Review .......................................................... 149
  5.3.2 The practice of Anonymous Review: Three Cases .......................... 150
    5.3.2.1 Case One: Restricted Conception of Anonymous Review .......... 151
    5.3.2.2 Case Two: Practical Considerations and Community Support .... 151
    5.3.2.3 Case Three: Tension between the New and the Old ................. 152
5.4 ANONYMOUS REVIEW AS LEGITIMATING RESOURCE ...................... 154
  5.4.1 Anonymous Review and Procedural Legitimacy ............................... 154
  5.4.2 Distinction between Formal Structure and Day-to-Day Practices ....... 156
  5.4.3 Strategic Use of Anonymous Review ............................................ 158
5.5 SUMMARY ......................................................................................... 159

CHAPTER 6 INSTITUTIONAL HOLES AND GUANXI PRACTICES .................. 162
6.1 GUANXI PRACTICES IN CHINESE SOCIETY ..................................... 163
  6.1.1 Guanxi as Particular Instrumental Ties ......................................... 163
6.1.2 Cultural and Institutional Explanations of Guanxi

6.1.3 Guanxi, Social Resources, and Strong Ties

6.2 INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF GUANXI PRACTICES

6.3 GUANXI PRACTICES AS MULTI-LAYER PARTICULARISM

6.3.1 Guanxi Facilitates Information Flow

6.3.2 Guanxi Enhances the Priority of Manuscripts

6.3.3 Guanxi Increases the Probability of Acceptance

6.4 GUANXI NETWORKS AND DANWEI EFFECT

6.4.1 The Danwei Effect

6.4.2 Organizational Production of the Danwei Effect

6.4.3 The Danwei Effect and its Cumulative Advantages

6.5 EXPLOITING THE GUANXI WEB: CONTACT STATUS, NETWORK BRIDGES, AND GUANXI CULTIVATION

6.5.1 The Extended Web of Guanxi

6.5.2 Contact Status and Power Division

6.5.3 Indirect Ties and Network Bridges

6.5.4 Instrumental Ties and Guanxi Cultivation

6.6 SUMMARY

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

7.1 THE DANWEI MODEL IN FLUX

7.2 VALIDITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND DEGREE OF ACADEMIC AUTONOMY

7.3 FUTURE RESEARCH

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR JOURNAL EDITORS (IN CHINESE)

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RESEARCHERS (IN CHINESE)

REFERENCES
Abstract

Knowledge is not driven by the “immanent laws,” but produced and reproduced in the orbit of a given power structure and social milieu. The dissertation aims to explore the nexus between power and knowledge in China by examining how social science journals produce and disseminate academic knowledge. Scholarly publishing serves as the quality control mechanism and communication channel in science. Since the 1990s, the significance of core academic journals has been further strengthened by the sweeping diffusion of quantitative evaluation system which made journal raking the most salient yardstick. This central position calls for a thorough empirical study of the nature, structure and practices of journal publication in transitional China.

The thesis focuses on the institutional practices of journal publishing. It addresses questions around the political-economic contexts and institutional structure of journal publication, the nature and dynamics of gatekeeping, and the mechanism of academic hegemony. Specifically, there are three broad clusters of questions. (1) How do scholarly journals situate in the larger contexts of state power, academic marketplace and the danwei system? How do journals as a homogeneous institution establish ties with other organizations and develop practices of gatekeeping to cope with the uncertainties posed by these forces? (2) What is the nature and dynamics of editorial work and gatekeeping processes? To what extent editorial decisions are reached through personal discretion and negotiation among gatekeepers? (3) How do state power, money, local interests and guanxi networks influence the process and outcome of scientific gatekeeping? How do these external or internal factors determine the authors’ access to journal editors and the editorial decisions done to the manuscripts?

Theoretically I draw on the literature from a variety of fields that examine the
political economy, sociology, and organization of cultural production. The empirical data used in this study includes (1) field notes, (2) transcripts from semi-structured interviews with editors and researchers from different universities, and (3) published journal articles from sample issues and archival materials collected from field observation and in-depth interviews. Following a general approach of grounded theory, I try to provide a “thick description” of the contexts, determinants, processes, consequences, and limits of journal publication.

I shall begin with a political economic analysis of the legitimation, stratification and commercialization of scholarly publishing, in relation to state power and academic marketplace. It then describes the institutional arrangements of local support system, internal appointment of editorial personnel and the editor-dominated reviewing approach; such arrangements were developed to cope with the political, economic and professional uncertainties of the macro-level environments. I shall then analyze the social practices of editorial decision making, the rise of anonymous reviews and its implications for the legitimacy of journal publication. I shall also examine the influences of guanxi networks on the process and outcome of scientific gatekeeping.

The study concludes that journal publication in China is based on a “danwei” system, distinct from the peer review system in the US and other countries. Under the danwei model, journal organizations are co-opted into the state orbit through corporatist relationships of licensing and danwei affiliation. This model also results in a review process primarily controlled by internal editors. Overall, the privileged organizations monopolize the decision-making power, and the decisions are often made for non-academic reasons. The danwei system has kept academic autonomy of social sciences in general and communication in particular at bay.
List of Tables and Figures

Table 1- 1: The negotiation between agency and structure in scholarly publishing…11
Table 1- 2: Profile of sampled journals (n = 6).................................14
Table 1- 3: Sociodemographic characteristics of interviewed editors (n = 16)………18
Table 1- 4: Sociodemographic characteristics of interviewed researchers (n = 20)…19
Table 2- 1: State-led or state-funded projects in Chinese higher education and social sciences..........................................................41
Table 2- 2: The quantitative evaluation of research outputs in sample universities…44
Table 3- 1: The information of Core journals (some CSSCI) specializing in media and communication studies............................................67
Table 3- 2: Magnitude of gains and pressures of different subsidies............72
Table 4- 1: The rejection rate of a sample of journals in media studies............95
Table 4- 2: The publication frequency of journals in social sciences.............97
Table 4-3: The paradigms in Chinese and American leading communication journals........................................................................102
Table 4- 4: Approaches other than the three paradigms in Chinese journals........103
Table 4- 5: The presence of the following items in research articles..............103
Table 4- 6: The typology of editors in Chinese social science journals..........106
Table 4- 7: Occupational characteristics of editors of communication journals.....108
Table 4- 8: The publication schedule of a bimonthly communication journal......112
Table 4- 9: The profile of the gatekeepers and editorial comments.............120
Table 5- 1: Practices and procedures of editorial peer review................142
Table 6- 1: First author’s institution * journal crosstabulation..................178
Table 7- 1: comparison of two scholarly publishing models......................193
Figure 2-1: The number of annually established journals in humanities and social sciences (1926-2005) .........................................................28
Figure 2-2: The number of annually established book-journals (1957-2005)........31