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(IN)DEPENDENT ON THE HEGEMONY TO BE HEARD: STUDY CHINESE ETHNIC MEDIA IN AUSTRALIA THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH

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Introduction

Studies have argued that ethnic media in the Western multicultural societies provide spaces for ethnic communities that are frequently under-represented or misrepresented in the dominant media discourse (Hardt, 1998; Ojo, 2006; Budarick, 2019). With an emphasis on the advocacy role of ethnic media, this strand of research often situates ethnic media in an antagonistic position with the dominant English media or the so-called 'mainstream' society defined by the hegemonic power. This argument may have considered 'ethnic media' and 'alternative media' as synonymous genres. To be ethnic does not mean to be against the hegemonic. This paper addresses the relations between ethnic media and the dominant society in Australia by exploring the Chinese ethnic media industry in Australia.

Chinese ethnic media in this research are characterised by the Chinese-language legacy or digital media developed by Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in Australia. They play a critical role in keeping Chinese diasporic communities informed about the Australian society. The analysis of this paper is conceptually informed by postcolonial approaches to migration studies. Based on the 27 interviews with Australian-Chinese media professionals, I argue that Chinese ethnic media perform an advocacy role for the Chinese diaspora with financial independence; however, they are dependent on and aspire to be part of Australia's hegemonic postcolonial structure to be heard. Inter-ethnic racism is thus reproduced by Chinese ethnic media and Chinese ethnic media are perceived as inferior to the dominant English media.

Postcolonialism and migration studies

There have been empirical studies understanding immigration through the postcolonial framework. This strand of work has gone beyond the cultural aspect and the

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transformations in identities by exploring the socio-structural forces that shape migrant daily experiences. These studies involve the postcolonial structuration of race and ethnicity (Keskinen and Andreassen 2017; McIlwaine 2008), systemic inequality structured by race and identity to normalise structural inequality (Czaika 2013), and the politically discursive Otherisation of migrants in the country of destination (Koh 2015). Instead of understanding migrants' experiences as peculiar contemporary phenomena, these studies trace long-standing and deep-seated colonialism that has been reproduced and extended to contemporary postcolonial societies and thus has shaped different migration experiences across the geographical borders (Mains et al., 2013). Using postcolonialism to address ethnic media is one of the first attempts.

Independent of the hegemony: autonomy and advocacy

The news consumption need of Chinese migrants and advocacy are the two main interlinked reasons propelling Chinese migrant entrepreneurs to establish their media business.

Migrants' news needs cannot be satisfied by either the media in China or in Australia. This argument suggests that migrants' news consumption demands correlated with their identities are more complicated than the binarism of here/there could encapsulate. Participants affirm that immigrants from China want to open themselves to a different informational sphere. However, this does not indicate that Chinese migrants show uncritical satisfaction towards the content provided by Australian dominant media.

Although some of the Australian dominant media platforms provide multilingual channels to cater to cultural and linguistic diversity communities, the political and ideological divide between China and Australia foregrounds how China or Chinese people are (mis)represented in Australian national or local media. This geopolitical divide hinders Chinese migrants from consuming news from Australian media.

The financial independence situates Chinese ethnic media in a counter-hegemonic position when it comes to the misrepresentation of Chinese people by Australian media. Ethnic affairs are yet to feature significantly in the existing news-making process operated by mainstream media (Husband 2005). The media landscape in Australia defines the idea of 'public interest' through the lens of the dominant social groups while excluding the need of ethnic minorities. Non-hegemonic media have been struggling to engage in the dominant political cultures (Budarick 2018: 2407). Chinese ethnic media provide opportunities for the Chinese diaspora to have their voices presented and circulated within the communities. In this way, news translation is not just limited to making news linguistically friendly to Chinese readers but to rearticulate Chinese migrant issues within its own communities.

Dependent on the hegemony to be heard

Chinese ethnic media are attached to Australian media without being completely independent. Translating news stories from Australia is structurally influenced by Australia as an immigrant-receiving country and Australia's multiculturalism with a cultural assimilation approach. This integration-driven multiculturalism left by Australia's

postcolonial legacy impels Chinese ethnic media to an uncritical dependence on Australia's hegemonic media. This dependence leads to profound social implications. Firstly, the lack of critical thinking on race represented by Australian media leads towards the transmission of inter-ethnic racism from Australian dominant media among Chinese ethnic media. Secondly, Chinese ethnic media imitate Australian dominant media to be part of Australia's mainstream media system to be recognised by the hegemonic society.

The discussion of 'race' with Chinese-Australian media professionals presents an opposing side of the image of Chinese ethnic media's advocacy role. The interviews inform that Chinese media professionals do not extend much solidarity towards other immigrants of colour or Indigenous people when it comes to Australian media's misrepresentation of race. In light of the discussion of 'race' or 'racism', media professionals demonstrate two main stances—misunderstanding and/or ignorance. Racism is thus stretched from Australian dominant media to Chinese ethnic media and is rendered in the form of inter-ethnic racism against black people (Martin 2018).

With the accumulated resources to support independent reporting, being part of Australia's mainstream media system motivates some influential Chinese ethnic media to apply their access to Australia's Press Gallery. Here comes the dilemma. Chinese ethnic media are excluded from Australian dominant media due to the systemic closure—Australian dominant media's refusal of endorsing Chinese ethnic media to join the Press Gallery or providing constructive suggestions for ethnic media's self-growth. On the other, Chinese ethnic media aspire to imitate Australian English media to be recognised by the mainstream society which is institutionally designed to exclude such a non-English media genre.

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