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Preface to Chinese edition of *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (translated by Ice Zhangbin, 张斌), written June 2014

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A decade has now passed since *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* was first published. The book has accomplished its stated purpose of introducing Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to English-speaking media scholars and students, journalists, and other interested publics. As we stated in the original introduction, our aim was not to impose a dogma but rather to spark a debate, to think "with," but also "against" and "beyond" Bourdieu. We have been gratified with the response.

Bourdieu's unique framework for analyzing journalism and other realms of cultural production has evidently resonated with scholars and journalists around the world. *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* was widely reviewed, cited in hundreds of articles and books, used in dozens of courses, and debated on blogs. The book has served as an entryway into Bourdieu's sociology for countless PhD students across the social sciences and humanities, as well as prompting thoughtful reactions from many senior scholars, and in so doing has helped spark a wave of research that is generating new insights about our increasingly media-saturated world.<sup>1</sup> Both of us, in our own ways, have also sought to elaborate – and critique – Bourdieu's version of field theory in subsequent writings.<sup>2</sup>

From the outset, our aim was to reach an international audience. Although the book offered primarily French-American comparisons, scholars across Europe and on virtually every continent quickly found connections to their own national and regional concerns. We are delighted that *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* will

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the authors already represented in *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, we are referring here, among many others, to English-language books and articles by Jan Fredrik Hovden, Orayb Najjar, Ida (Schultz) Willig, Nick Couldry, Aeron Davis, Stephen Reese, Piers Robinson, David Hesmondhalgh, Tom Medvetz, Giselinde Kuipers, Adrienne Russell, Tim Vos, Stephanie Craft, Thomas Hanitzsch, Ron Jacobs, Eleanor Townsley, and Angela Phillips; and French-language scholarship by Olivier Baisnée, Julie Sedel, Vincent Goulet, Jérôme Berthaut, Eugénie Saitta, Sandra Vera Zambrano, Benjamin Ferron, and Aurélie Pinto. If we do not acknowledge the growing body of literature in German, Spanish, Italian, and many other languages, it is only because of our own linguistic limitations.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Erik Neveu, "Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of media, or sociologist for media scholars," *Journalism Studies* 8, 2 (2007): 335-347; Rodney Benson, "News Media as a 'Journalistic Field': What Bourdieu adds to New Institutionalism, and Vice Versa," *Political Communication* 23, 2 (2006): 187-202, and *Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

now be coming to China in Chinese. We are grateful to Zhang Bin and Zhejiang University Press for taking the initiative to bring this important translation to fruition.

Can field theory really “travel” to China? We believe it can. Field theory is a flexible model that nevertheless aspires to universal validity. As Bourdieu maintained, when his breakthrough book *Distinction* was translated into English:

The model of the relationships between the universe of economic and social conditions and the universe of life-styles which is put forward here, based on an endeavor to rethink Max Weber’s opposition between class and [status], seems to me to be valid beyond the particular French case and, no doubt, for every stratified society, even if the system of distinctive features which express or reveal economic and social differences ... varies considerably from one period, and one society, to another.<sup>3</sup>

For the study of journalism, field theory provides a universal framework capable of analyzing journalistic practice at multiple levels, such as: the societal position of journalism vis-à-vis the state, the market, and other fields of cultural production (literature, science, popular culture); the logic(s) of professional practice shared or contested by journalists working at diverse news organizations; and the hierarchically-organized differences across media outlets and news beats and their audiences.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, what is universal here is not any particular set of practices (e.g., American or French approaches to journalism), but an injunction to analyze, in any given national, regional, or transnational context, the complex relations between multi-layered social structures and cultural practices. In contrast to the political economy and “new institutionalist” schools, field theory is attentive not only to homogenizing forces shaping journalism as a whole but also variations linked to social stratification across media outlets. Field theory also calls attention to the ongoing struggle for the symbolic capital of prestige and legitimacy as well as for economic capital.

All these steps are anchored, for Bourdieu, in the constant quest for reflexivity. The researcher must always be on guard to ensure that he or she does not impose his or her own preconceptions, rooted either in personal trajectory, national culture, or professional presumptions, on the object of study. This

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. xi-xii. See also Bourdieu’s discussion of the challenges and merits of internationally transporting field theory in his essay “Social Space and Symbolic Space” in *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 1-13.

<sup>4</sup> See elaboration of this argument to attend to field position, logic, and structure in Benson, *Shaping Immigration News*, pp. 23-27.

injunction makes Bourdieu's version of field theory especially well-equipped for research beyond the Western world.

How can this framework be applied to the study of Chinese journalism? We hesitate to make too many specific references given the rapid pace of change, but it seems clear that many important developments in China can be illuminated by field theory's conceptual toolkit. Just to note a few research questions that might be asked in "field" terms:

Rather than speaking about media in terms of absolute "freedom" from the state or market, a field approach emphasizes the ongoing struggle for some measure of autonomy from both sets of constraints. Thus, the difference between journalism in the West and China should also not be understood in absolute but relative terms. The Chinese case represents a particularly difficult puzzle in understanding the complex relationships between political, market, and media power at the national and regional levels, and in the interplay between these levels.

Field theory would also call attention to the variety of ways that journalists – both official and non-official as in the case of bloggers – carve out spaces of critical autonomy, whether political or more broadly intellectual or creative. What are the political, commercial, and social (class) conditions underlying investigative reporting and commentary, across a range of outlets such as CCTV's *Focus*, *Southern Weekend*, *Caijing* magazine, and the ever-emerging (and ever-suppressed) independent bloggers?

Whereas political economy analyses have rightfully called attention to the interplay between political and economic power, a field approach would also emphasize the ways that media production and reception – as with Chinese society as a whole – increasingly operate in stratified homologous circuits that tend to reproduce inequalities.<sup>5</sup>

Not only is China likely to benefit from the insights produced by field theory, but we would also hasten to add that field theory is likely to be refined and extended in the process of being applied in China. For Bourdieu, theories were never made to be mummified into dogma or locked behind the thick glass windows of display cabinets: they were tools to solve puzzles, concepts to be used not polished. Checking the footnotes of many of his books is a good test of the depth and magnitude of his own curiosity for other research, of his ability to improve field theory with new materials and contributions. We heartily concur with Zhongdang

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<sup>5</sup> In "Cultural Capital, the State, and Educational Inequality in China, 1949-1996," *Sociological Perspectives* 51, 1 (2008): 201-227, Yuxiao Wu confirms this increasing educational stratification post-Cultural Revolution while also using the Chinese case to engage with and challenge western scholarship on cultural capital. Wu shows how state policies (selecting students according to their class background during the Mao years) can and in fact did modify the effect of cultural capital on children's educational attainment.

Pan – citing Bourdieu – that the Chinese case adds to the international research community’s “social stock of knowledge,”<sup>6</sup> and in so doing, generates new empirical puzzles in which to test existing theories and generate new ones.

We cannot yet fully predict the ways in which this encounter between field theory and Chinese media research -- surely bolstered by this important and timely translation -- will modify or extend the paradigm. We begin only with questions, the same for China as for elsewhere: To what extent and in what ways are political, economic, and cultural forms of power opposed and/or allied? To what extent and in what ways do journalistic practices (official or unofficial) “refract” external pressures in the ongoing quest for autonomy? And to what extent and in what ways are the diverse ways of producing and consuming journalistic content parallel to or “homologous” with societal stratification rooted in class, education, occupation, region, or other divisions? We eagerly await the answers, knowing only that whatever they are, they will be unique to China and illuminating for the development of field theory and comparative research.

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<sup>6</sup> See p. 518 in Zhongdang Pan, “Articulation and Re-articulation: Agendas for Understanding Media and Communication in China,” *International Journal of Communication* 4(2010): 517-530, and p. 21 in Pierre Bourdieu, “For a scholarship with commitment,” in *Figuring back: Against the tyranny of the market*, 2, pp. 17-25, New York: New Press.