

Narrative Logic and Value Functions of New Mainstream Media in Chinese Modernization (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Objective] As media convergence advances in depth today, the narrative discourse of new mainstream media facilitating Chinese-style modernization development is undergoing transformation. Examining the narrative logic and value functions of new mainstream media within the process of Chinese-style modernization not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic embedding process of new mainstream media into Chinese-style modernization development, but also provides new analytical perspectives for comprehending the modernization transformation of new mainstream media. **[Method]** This study employs case analysis and textual interpretation methods to investigate how new mainstream media construct narrative logic and articulate value functions centered on Chinese-style modernization development. **[Results]** The narrative logic of new mainstream media is primarily manifested in three dimensions: narrative themes concentrate on story expressions of Chinese-style modernization; narrative perspectives integrate three approaches including zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization; and multi-platform cross-media narratives deepen three-dimensional communication. The Chinese-style modernization narrative of new mainstream media fully demonstrates its value functions as the “flag-bearer” of the Party and the state, the “weather vane” of journalism, and the “eyes and ears” of the people. **[Conclusion]** In the new era of frequent technological iteration, new mainstream media should adeptly leverage the advantages of technological communication, continuously innovate the discourse system of Chinese-style modernization communication, and contribute “mediatized” power to advancing Chinese-style modernization construction.

Full Text

The Narrative Logic and Value Functions of New Mainstream Media in the Process of Chinese-Style Modernization

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Abstract

Purpose: As media convergence advances in depth today, the narrative discourse through which new mainstream media contribute to Chinese-style modernization is undergoing significant transformation. Examining the narrative logic and value functions of new mainstream media within this process not only deepens our understanding of how these media are dynamically embedded in Chinese-style modernization but also provides fresh analytical perspectives for comprehending their modernizational transformation. **Method:** This study employs case analysis and textual interpretation to investigate how new mainstream media construct narrative logic and articulate value functions centered on Chinese-style modernization. **Results:** The narrative logic of new mainstream media manifests in three primary dimensions: narrative themes that focus on storytelling about Chinese-style modernization; narrative perspectives that integrate zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization; and multi-platform cross-media narratives that deepen three-dimensional communication. The Chinese-style modernization narratives of new mainstream media fully demonstrate their value functions as “flag-bearers” for the Party and state, “weather vanes” for the journalism industry, and “eyes and ears” for the people. **Conclusion:** In this new era of rapid technological change, new mainstream media must leverage the advantages of technological communication to continuously innovate the discourse system for communicating Chinese-style modernization, thereby contributing “mediatized” power to advancing Chinese-style modernization.

Keywords: Chinese-style modernization; new mainstream media; narrative logic; value function

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The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states: “From now on, the central task of the Communist Party of China is to unite and lead people of all ethnic groups in building China into a great modern

socialist country in all respects, achieving the Second Centenary Goal, and comprehensively advancing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernization.” [1] In this great journey of Chinese-style modernization, new mainstream media such as *People’s Daily*, Xinhua News Agency, and China Media Group have vigorously promoted its development through their capacities for information dissemination, social mobilization, and cultural integration, thereby becoming well-embedded within the internal mechanisms of Chinese-style modernization.

1. Penetration and Integration: New Mainstream Media Embedded in the Mechanism of Chinese-Style Modernization

As a crucial media form in contemporary society, new mainstream media deeply practice the mission of “holding high the banner, gathering public support, cultivating new generations, invigorating culture, and showcasing China’s image” by transmitting information, guiding public opinion, and inheriting culture. Funded by the Henan Provincial Soft Science Project “Research on Short Video Production and Enhancement Strategies of Rural Youth in Henan Under the Background of Rural Revitalization” (Project No. 232400410121), the Key Project of the China Youth Research Association “Research on the Media Ritual of Youth Live-streaming to Assist Agriculture from the Perspective of Rural Revitalization” (Project No. 2023A02), and the 2022 Henan University Graduate Education Teaching Reform Research and Practice Project (Project No. YJSJG2022XJ053).

1.1 New Mainstream Media: Modernization Platforms Integrating Internet Thinking

In the morphological interpretation of mass communication, mainstream media have traditionally been provincial-level or above media institutions that rely on mainstream capital, target mainstream audiences, and focus on serious news reporting, characterized by substantial influence, strong credibility, and high authority.[2] However, with the internet—a high-dimensional medium—forcefully intruding into the field of news communication, new media institutions have mushroomed. In this contemporary context of frequent media morphological changes and clamorous communication discourse, traditional mainstream media have gradually declined while new media has flourished. Clearly, China’s news communication landscape has been reconstructed by the internet. Faced with this continuously evolving communication environment, how to salvage traditional mainstream media and explore development paths for them in the new environment has become a core issue for China’s journalism industry. Since “media convergence” was elevated to a national strategy in 2014, China’s journalism industry has broken through the constraints of traditional development concepts, committed to building new mainstream media with new thinking, new concepts, new technologies, and new measures.

New mainstream media refers to new types of media entities constructed under the guidance of internet thinking, serving users as the principal value orientation, open platforms as the main functional direction, and product iteration as the core technical support.[3] Internet thinking generally refers to the reflection of internet development and application practices in people's minds, which gradually becomes a cognitive mode or thinking structure for considering and solving problems after sedimentation and internalization.[4] In the construction of new mainstream media as modernization platforms, this internet thinking manifests primarily in three aspects. First, it promotes all-around media convergence and builds all-media platforms guided by the open thinking of the internet. Currently, mainstream media such as Xinhua News Agency and China Media Group have adapted to the open information communication environment, absorbed the advantages of new media platforms—high integration, strong interaction, and high openness—and achieved three-dimensional information dissemination of “one platform, multiple media, and multiple terminals.” Second, it constructs service-oriented media platforms according to internet service thinking to realize segmented communication. Specifically, by employing big data, 5G communication, blockchain, and other emerging technologies to refine user profiling, they push differentiated media products tailored to audience demands in diverse media forms, thereby satisfying personalized needs and enhancing communication efficiency. Third, it strengthens position construction guided by internet operational thinking, achieving re-centralization of mainstream media in a decentralized media ecology. Currently, major new mainstream media have established criss-crossing communication matrices on new media platforms, continuing and strengthening the high communication power and strong influence of traditional mainstream media, and once again becoming the core of China's news narrative system in the new era.

1.2 Chinese-Style Modernization: Modernization with Chinese Experience and Characteristics

The term “modernization” originates from the West as a translation of “modernization,” referring to the process by which capitalist modes of production replace feudal self-sufficient modes of production.[5] Historically, modernization began during the Industrial Revolution. As Marx stated: “The distinction between different economic epochs does not lie in what is produced, but in how it is produced, and with what means of labor.” [6] The Industrial Revolution brought advanced production tools to Western capitalist countries, transformed modes of production and lifestyles, and subsequently achieved all-around modernization in political, economic, cultural, and social dimensions. Although modernization began in the West, it is not exclusive to Western countries. Modern China was forced to embark on its exploration of modernization under the attack of Western powers' strong ships and powerful guns.

The path of modernization does not singularly represent capitalist organizational structures. Marx divided it into two forms according to differences in pro-

duction relations: socialist modernization and capitalist modernization. China's modernization belongs to the former, essentially a socialist modernization path rich in Chinese experience and Chinese characteristics. On the one hand, as a pioneering country in socialist modernization, China's exploration of the modernization path relies on rich Chinese experience—a correct development path explored by the Communist Party of China uniting and leading the Chinese people. Over the past century, from socialist transformation to reform and opening-up, from building a moderately prosperous society in all respects to actually building it—the great practices of the Communist Party of China have not only accumulated valuable practical experience for Chinese-style modernization but also proved that Chinese-style modernization is a modernization path suitable for China's national conditions, possessing correctness, rationality, and historical inevitability. On the other hand, Chinese-style modernization is socialist modernization led by the Communist Party of China, having both the common characteristics of modernization in various countries and distinctive Chinese characteristics based on China's national conditions.[7] These “Chinese characteristics,” rooted in the excellent traditional Chinese culture and based on China's fundamental realities, manifest primarily as modernization with a huge population scale, modernization with common prosperity for all people, modernization with coordinated material and spiritual civilization, modernization with harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, and modernization following a path of peaceful development, which have long injected an “aura” into Chinese-style modernization through coupling with Marxism.

1.3 The Intersection of Meaning: The Coupling of New Mainstream Media and Chinese-Style Modernization

As the country's primary “mouthpiece” and “voice,” new mainstream media are deeply connected with Chinese-style modernization through their attributes as both information industry and superstructure. They constitute an essential component of Chinese-style modernization construction, dedicating themselves to its tide through self-construction, while also shouldering the heavy trust of the Party and state, assisting the nation in achieving Chinese-style modernization through their instrumental attributes as superstructure.

On the one hand, new mainstream media are constituent elements of Chinese-style modernization construction. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that Chinese-style modernization is modernization with coordinated material and spiritual civilization. Journalism and communication constitute an important domain of spiritual civilization construction, and China's new mainstream media are core media institutions in this field. Their modernization construction not only helps enhance the nation's communication power but also effectively promotes high-quality social development and enriches the people's spiritual world. Thus, new mainstream media naturally become constituent elements of Chinese-style modernization construction and have long been integrated into its mechanisms under the guidance of national policies.

On the other hand, new mainstream media are boosters for Chinese-style modernization development. Historical materialism emphasizes that the people are the main body of social history and the creators of both material and spiritual wealth; Chinese-style modernization must uphold the principal position of the people. Meanwhile, the report of the 20th Party Congress explicitly states that Chinese-style modernization is modernization with a huge population scale. China has a vast territory and large population, with significant spans in age, occupation, region, and class among its people. Therefore, to consolidate the people's power for building a modernized country, the state has designated authoritative news institutions in the ideological field—new mainstream media—as boosters for Chinese-style modernization development. By providing multi-dimensional interpretations of the connotations and essence of Chinese-style modernization, they help the people understand it, bringing grand theories into ordinary households, and utilize media functions such as topic guidance and public opinion propaganda to occupy the high ground of ideology and mobilize the broad masses to participate in Chinese-style modernization construction.

2. Narrative Logic: New Mainstream Media Telling Chinese-Style Modernization Stories

In the process of Chinese-style modernization, the field of journalism and communication has undergone profound transformations: diversified production subjects, digitalized communication methods, and virtualized narrative environments... Obviously, traditional news editing concepts and production architecture models can no longer adapt to current narrative practices. The narrative logic through which mainstream media tell Chinese-style modernization stories concerns not only “how to represent” these stories but also “how to penetrate” them. Therefore, new mainstream media strive to break traditional narrative discourse, reconstructing news narrative logic from the dimensions of narrative themes, narrative perspectives, and narrative modes, dedicated to telling Chinese-style modernization stories well, enhancing value identification, and improving the nation's communication power and influence.

2.1 Narrative Themes: The Content and Purport of Chinese-Style Modernization

In Chinese-style modernization construction, mainstream media often play the role of “propagandists,” with thematic propaganda and achievement reporting as their main content, which has become increasingly rigidified in development. Notably, previous achievement reports typically employed “grand narratives” with serious content and monotonous expression styles, whose communication effects have substantially attenuated in today's era of lightweight and diversified information dissemination. To break through this outdated narrative system and tell Chinese-style modernization stories well, new mainstream media actively reform narrative content.

First, they adhere to the mass line, telling grand themes through small entry points. By making the people the protagonists of news narratives and telling Chinese-style modernization stories from perspectives of historical stories, local customs, and social changes, they use language that resonates with ordinary people to “install” Chinese-style modernization theory into the masses’ minds. For instance, *People’s Daily* has planned special topics such as “Our New Era” and “Forge Ahead on the New Journey, Build Meritorious Service in the New Era,” reflecting the historic achievements of Chinese-style modernization construction through the extraordinary deeds of ordinary people like Wang Ying, founder of the “Country Girl Goes to City” brand, Yuan Xiaomei, a post-1990s youth returning to her hometown in Pan’ a Village, Nayong County, Guizhou Province, and Fan Dongdong, a technical backbone in afforestation, thereby making grand themes soft and approachable through civilian-oriented narrative content.

Second, they emphasize the refinement of narrative content, highlighting the theme of Chinese-style modernization through detailed brushwork. By finding highlights in news events and depicting them emphatically, new mainstream media not only enhance the interest and appeal of news narratives and present rich and diverse Chinese-style modernization stories but also move audiences with details to highlight the era’ s theme. For example, in Xinhua News Agency’ s “Ten Years of Two Sessions · Warm Memories” special topic, “Endless Stories of Oil Camellia Trees, Inexhaustible Bonds Between the Military and Civilians” demonstrates the remarkable achievements of Ganzhou City in lifting more than 200,000 people out of poverty through the tea oil industry in recent years, focusing on the key detail that veteran Red Army soldiers in Ganzhou wrote to General Secretary Xi Jinping hoping to develop the city’ s oil camellia industry, enabling audiences to genuinely understand the connotations of Chinese-style modernization and feel the fruitful results of China’s modernization construction through storytelling.

2.2 Narrative Perspective: Narrative Methods for Chinese-Style Modernization

Mieke Bal argues that narrative perspective refers to the position or angle adopted by the narrator in narrative activities—the relationship between vision and what is “seen” and perceived.[8] Gérard Genette, in his work *Narrative Discourse*, suggests replacing “perspective” with “focalization,” dividing it into three types: zero focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization. Zero focalization refers to omniscient narration without fixed characters, similar to a God’ s-eye view, mainly used to explain story backgrounds in news narratives. Internal focalization unfolds narration from the perspective of a character in the story, also called limited-knowledge perspective narration, sometimes completed by journalists and sometimes by news protagonists, with multi-character limited-knowledge perspective narration helping enhance audience reading experiences. External focalization never allows the audience to know characters’

thoughts and emotions, recording stories like a camera, also called pure objective perspective narration, which can greatly guarantee the “authenticity and objectivity” of news narratives.[9]

New mainstream media comprehensively employ diverse narrative perspectives in telling Chinese-style modernization stories, striving to break up fragmented and detached news narratives to construct an immersive narrative atmosphere. For example, Xinhua News Agency’s special report “Ten Years of Two Sessions • Warm Memories” titled “The Road of Light, We Walk Wider and Wider!” begins with zero focalization to introduce the story background: Medog was once the only county in China without highway access. In 2013, Baima Quzhen, deputy secretary of the Dexing Township Party Committee in the county, traveled more than 3,000 kilometers across mountains and rivers, taking six days to reach Beijing to attend the National People’s Congress, thereby introducing the narrative theme—the “road” in Medog is becoming wider and wider. The narrative perspective then switches to internal focalization, telling the story of Medog’s years of poverty alleviation and modernization construction from Baima Quzhen’s perspective. In her interview, she emotionally stated: “Although Medog is far from Beijing, we can always feel General Secretary Xi Jinping’s concern and the Party Central Committee’s care.” Baima Quzhen’s sincere emotional expression pulls audiences directly into the news scene, letting them feel her joy for her hometown’s development and yearning for a better future. Meanwhile, throughout the news narration, the camera follows journalists and interviewees as an objective bystander, recording the widened township roads and improved people’s lives in Medog. The composite application of diverse narrative perspectives by new mainstream media not only enhances the immersive experience of news narratives, enabling audiences to more intuitively feel news stories, but also closely aligns with era themes, demonstrating the great achievements of Chinese-style modernization construction and boosting people’s confidence in it.

2.3 Converged Media Narrative: Three-Dimensional Communication of Chinese-Style Modernization

In recent years, with the revolution of digital technology, information technology, and media technology in journalism, the field of news communication has undergone earth-shaking changes: cyberspace has become the main battlefield for news communication, and the integrated development of newspapers, broadcasting, television, and the internet has created a new news narrative mode—converged media narrative. The converged media narrative mode refers to a news production model that, based on news facts, uses diverse narrative discourses to create news products suitable for the attributes of various media platforms, then forms a communication matrix through joint distribution to achieve resource integration, content compatibility, promotional mutualism, and benefit sharing. Practice has proven that the converged media news narrative mode conforms to the trend of the times, satisfies audience needs for obtaining information

and participating in interaction, maximizes benefits in communication, and has gradually become the main narrative mode for current media institutions.

As the “navigator” of the journalism industry, new mainstream media have long broken free from the shackles of traditional narrative modes in news reporting, employing converged media narrative modes to achieve three-dimensional communication of Chinese-style modernization stories. First, they create personalized news products based on media attributes to form a three-dimensional news communication system. Xinhua News Agency’s “Extraordinary Decade” series of special reports distributes tailored news products according to platform characteristics: short video news on short, fast-paced new media platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, and Kuaishou; and graphic news on relatively more serious platforms like official accounts and websites, thereby multi-dimensionally showcasing China’s extraordinary achievements during the decade from 2012 to 2022. Second, they enrich product attributes to break restrictions between media platforms, establishing converged media communication matrices and expanding coverage through multi-chain communication paths. For example, CCTV.com’s “Our Decade: Flowers Blooming Along the Road,” leveraging its high interactivity and strong diffusibility, coordinates multi-chain communication paths to expand its reach. By simultaneously broadcasting on CCTV.com, Sina Weibo, Douyin, WeChat official accounts, and other platforms, it presents Chinese-style modernization stories to a broader audience.

3. Value Functions: The Mechanism of Action of New Mainstream Media Narratives

As previously discussed, new mainstream media possess dual attributes in the process of Chinese-style modernization: they are both important constituent elements and boosters for its development. Consequently, the media practice of new mainstream media telling Chinese-style modernization stories carries significant meaning. First, through media practices such as agenda-setting and public opinion guidance, new mainstream media penetrate the Party and state’s major policies, assisting political modernization construction. Second, in their news narrative practice, they promote media self-innovation, perfect media narrative systems, and lead Chinese-style journalism communication modernization. Finally, in news communication practice, they help the people understand Chinese-style modernization thought, sowing seeds of ideological modernization.

3.1 “Flag-Bearers” for the Party and State: Public Opinion Guidance Assisting Political Modernization

According to the 50th *Statistical Report on China’s Internet Development* released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of June 2022, internet penetration reached 74.4%, up 1.4% from December 2021, with netizens numbering 1.051 billion, an increase of 19.19 million from December 2021.[10] The large-scale popularization of the internet and significant growth in

netizen numbers have made cyberspace an important field for political modernization construction. As “flag-bearers” for the Party and state, new mainstream media have gained unprecedented influence in cyberspace through their media status and resource advantages, assisting national modernization through media practices such as public opinion guidance.

Public opinion guidance refers to the positive guidance of public opinion through setting agendas or evaluating existing public opinion, thereby achieving social consensus and forming collective action. The public opinion guidance of new mainstream media concerns ideological security and social harmony and stability, serving as an important standard for measuring media work capacity.[11] After entering the network ecosystem, new mainstream media first break the opposition between “two public opinion fields” by reconstructing narrative discourse systems, using diverse discourses to interpret political theories and build harmonious public opinion atmospheres. Second, they subtly permeate national political thought through telling Chinese-style modernization stories, achieving deep integration between public opinion guidance and news narrative. This can both enhance the communication strength of new mainstream media’s public opinion guidance and provide the public with opportunities to acquire political knowledge, political capabilities, and political consciousness, helping strengthen public identification with the Party and state and promoting political democratization and socialization. Finally, new mainstream media utilize the interactive functions of converged media narrative platforms to create open public opinion environments, interacting with audiences on diverse platforms such as short videos, official accounts, and live streaming rooms. The social turn of public opinion guidance enhances media affinity while also broadening communication coverage, granting the public equal opportunities to participate in politics.

3.2 “Weather Vanes” for the Journalism Industry: Self-Innovation Leading Media Modernization

“As the wise adapt to the times and the knowledgeable adjust to circumstances,” Chinese-style modernization is modernization full of opportunities. New mainstream media led by Xinhua News Agency and *People’s Daily* have seized the pulse of the times. In telling Chinese-style modernization stories, they have innovated themselves, constructed new narrative systems, and led Chinese-style journalism communication modernization with high-quality news products.

On the one hand, new mainstream media practice journalistic professionalism through innovative narrative content, assisting the modernization turn of media editing concepts. With the popularization of the internet and lowered access thresholds, new media institutions have grown wildly like mountain ferns, injecting fresh blood into journalism while also causing frequent incidents of fake news and reversed news, severely impacting journalistic professionalism. To salvage the credibility of journalism, new mainstream media actively play the guiding role of “weather vanes,” breaking outdated narrative concepts, reforming narrative content, upholding journalistic professionalism, maintaining objectivity and

fairness in interviews and reporting, strengthening their sense of social responsibility, and building public trust,[12] thereby providing a reference benchmark for the conceptual turn of other media institutions.

On the other hand, new mainstream media deepen supply-side structural reform through daily-renewed narrative paradigms, assisting the modernization turn of media news production architecture models. Supply-side structural reform in content production concerns not only narrative content but also changes in news production models. Throughout the present, traditional news narrative models can no longer adapt to the current information communication environment. New mainstream media are actively reforming production models, applying emerging technologies such as digital technology, communication technology, virtual technology, and information technology to news production, and advancing supply-side structural reform in all-media institutions' content production through narrative paradigm innovation, thereby guiding the modernization turn of news production. Thus, in the process of Chinese-style modernization, new mainstream media have become an important lever for 撬动 Chinese-style journalism communication modernization.

3.3 “Eyes and Ears” for the People: Theoretical Interpretation Promoting Ideological Modernization

As a correct guiding theory at China' s macro level, Chinese-style modernization both summarizes the common characteristics of modernization construction in various countries and possesses distinctive Chinese characteristics based on national conditions. It represents a major innovation in the Party' s modernization thought, a scientific theory on comprehensively building a modern socialist strong country, and the latest theoretical achievement in adapting Marxism to the Chinese context and the times,[13] requiring the people to understand and internalize it as a fundamental value guide on the forward path. However, theories essentially represent the abstraction and generalization of objective experience and intuitive cognition, and their expressions are usually serious, obscure, and not easily grasped by the public. At this point, new mainstream media must play a “bridge” role, making the Party' s advanced theories accessible and popular through diversified theoretical interpretations, sending the “spring breeze” of Chinese-style modernization into ordinary households.

On the one hand, new mainstream media use diverse narrative discourses to explain Chinese-style modernization theory, helping the people understand it. Reports on Chinese-style modernization theory by Xinhua News Agency and other media incorporate both relatively serious and objective official discourse and plain, down-to-earth popular discourse. The organic integration of the two bridges the gap between official and folk discourse, allowing the Party' s advanced theories to enter people' s hearts. On the other hand, new mainstream media interpret Chinese-style modernization theory from multiple dimensions, deepening the people' s identification with it. As the “eyes and ears” of the people, new mainstream media adhere to the mass line in their series of re-

ports on Chinese-style modernization theory. For example, *People's Daily* has opened columns such as “People’s Viewpoints,” “Thoughts in Depth,” and “New Knowledge and Awareness,” comprehensively employing multiple perspectives including official, popular, and industry expert viewpoints to provide audiences with multi-dimensional theoretical interpretations that deepen popular theoretical identification.

In the process of Chinese-style modernization, new mainstream media such as *People's Daily* and Xinhua News Agency are breaking traditional narrative systems, telling Chinese-style modernization stories well through innovative narrative logic, and comprehensively promoting national political modernization, popular ideological modernization, and journalism communication modernization. However, we must also soberly recognize that with the deep involvement of artificial intelligence and digital technologies, new mainstream media’s story expression, content production, and communication paths are encountering unprecedented challenges. If they cannot innovate their communication discourse system in step with the times, their pace in assisting Chinese-style modernization construction will slow. Therefore, as the mainstay of mass communication media, new mainstream media must be adept at innovating their narrative discourse system concerning Chinese-style modernization construction in contexts of rapid technological change, continuously forging new mainstream media with greater guiding power, communication power, and influence through self-improvement, determined progress, and upholding integrity while innovating, thereby contributing “mediatized” majestic power to boosting Chinese-style modernization development.

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(Executive Editor: Li Jing)

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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