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In the Name of the People: Reporting Public Opinion in China
以人民的名義：中國民意報導

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Abstract

With the socioeconomic development and Internet popularity, public opinion has gradually played an increasing role in public affairs. However, it is undeniable that China has not established a practical mechanism to institutionalize popular will in its governance yet. Such paradox brought questions about the nature of public opinion in authoritarian China. In the current institutionalization of public opinion expression, news media, as a part of the state apparatus, has been a crucial agent in channeling public sentiment to the policy makers. This study draws on the framing theory to examine how political system, poll agencies, media organizations and journalistic routines shape media’s coverage of public opinion. Through a longitudinal observation and comparative content and discourse analyses, I argue that polling news in China can be seen as a consensus-building process to reinforce government legitimacy. Historically speaking, the nature of public opinion in China evolves from “propaganda”, to “supervision”, to “participation” and then to “surveillance”. By comparing official and commercial media as well as print and online media, party principle overweighs other media features in poll reports published by *People’s Daily* in a general picture, while the economic pressure shape poll reports published by *Southern Metropolis Daily*, People’s Daily Online and Sina Weibo in most cases. Through a comparison between initial survey and their corresponding news stories, the influence of polling agencies on both its own reports and news reports can be observed, and news media re-construct the news frames to pursue economic benefits. The professional routine works a marginal role in both procedures of conducting and reporting polls.