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Media Gravity: Cross-region Information Flows and Local Accountability in China

11 March 2026 (Wed)
10:00-11:30

WYL314, 3/F, Dorothy Y. L. Wong Building, Lingnan University

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BIOGRAPHY

Yanhui Wu is Area Head and Professor of Economics at the University of Hong Kong. He is directing the Digital Economy Research Institute (Shenzhen) of the HKU Business School and the Future of Work and Wellbeing Lab of the HKU Centre for AI, Management, and Organization. His research focuses on the political economy of the media in China and the impacts of AI on jobs, education, and wellbeing. His work has appeared at top economics, management, and statistics journals, including the *American Economic Review, Econometrica, Management Science,* and the *Journal of American Statistical Association.*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the provision and political effects of watchdog journalism in China. Modeling newspapers as profit-seekers under political constraints, we derive a "media gravity" equation where information flows toward strong economic markets and weak political links. Based on the coverage of over 2000 highly visible events by 120 general-interest newspapers during 2001 and 2020, we document evidence consistent with the media gravity equation -- Chinese local newspapers report more negative events in their neighboring cities where the advertisement markets are larger and the connections between officials are weaker. Using a shift-share instrumental variable design based on advertising revenue shocks, we estimate the impact of this "imported" monitoring on local governance. We find that exposure to nonlocal watchdog journalism significantly pressures local governments to increase responsiveness to citizen complaints, fiscal transparency, and entry of new firms.

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