

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

Environmental Pollution and the Media

Political Discourses of Risk and Responsibility
in Australia, China and Japan

Glenn D. Hook, Libby Lester, Meng Ji,
Kingsley Edney and Chris G. Pope

with contributions from Luli van der
Does-Ishikawa



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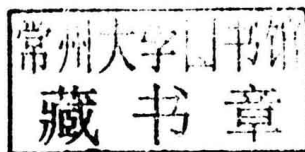
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Environmental Pollution and the Media

This book offers a theoretically informed empirical investigation of national media reporting and political discourse on environmental issues in Australia, China and Japan. It illuminates the risks, harms and responsibilities associated with climate change through an analysis of pollution, adopting an interdisciplinary approach drawing on both the social sciences and humanities. A particular strength of the work is the detailed analysis of the data using a range of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, enabling the authors to reveal in rich and compelling detail the complex relationship between risk and responsibility in the climate change discourse.

The case studies of Australia, China and Japan are set in the current literature as well as in the historical context of climate change in these three countries. The analysis of the media discourse on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia demonstrates how the mining of coal for overseas markets has led to devastating harm to the life of the reef. A critical discussion of the Chinese documentary, *Under the Dome*, shows how this medium has played a crucial role in building awareness of the harm from atmospheric pollution among the citizens, shaping attitudes and promoting action. The first case study of Japan elucidates how cross-border atmospheric pollution from China forges a chain of responsibility for responding to climate change, running from the state to society. The other case study of Japan demonstrates how 'smart cities' have emerged as a way to mitigate the risks and harms of climate change. The Conclusion draws together the similarities and differences in how climate change is addressed in the three countries.

In all, *Environmental Pollution and the Media: Political Discourses of Risk and Responsibility in Australia, China and Japan* uncovers the dynamics of the triadic relationship among risk, harm and climate change in Australia, China and Japan. By so doing, the book makes an original and timely contribution to understanding comparative media, discourse and political debates on climate change.

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Preface

This book is an experiment in translation. First coming together in 2014, our small team of authors reflected the diversity of many contemporary research efforts taking place around the world. We worked across three continents and represented six nationalities – Japanese, Chinese, British, Dutch, Australian and New Zealander – and had diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including political science, area studies, linguistics, translation studies and media studies. Our common language was English, but it was not everyone's native language. We drew on an array of methods and theories to study our range of interests – methods that had overlapping features but had variously evolved and been named and renamed to disguise common histories – and interests were siloed from each other. We published in different journals and participated in different conferences.

Could we find a common disciplinary language? Or, if not that, at least a shared problem which we could each express in our own terms and yet all understand? Our attempt to do so is reported in the following chapters. The responsibility for each chapter was: Chapter 1, Libby Lester and Meng Ji; Chapter 2, Glenn D. Hook, Libby Lester and Kingsley Edney; Chapter 3, Libby Lester and Meng Ji; Chapter 4, Kingsley Edney; Chapter 5, Luli van der Does-Ishikawa and Glenn D. Hook; Chapter 6, Chris G. Pope; and Chapter 7, Glenn D. Hook.

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1 Introduction

This book represents research from a range of disciplines from the social sciences and humanities, six nationalities, divergent theoretical and methodological approaches and numerous spoken languages, although we use English here as our vehicle for communication. It is an exercise in scholarship under globalisation or, more precisely, an experiment in translation. As Silvio Waisbord has written of globalised research efforts in the field of communication:

The question is whether academic interest in promoting dialogue across intellectual heteroglossia is as strong as the desire to live comfortably within homophonic academic tribes. If the way the field historically developed foreshadows the future, then globalization will continue to facilitate conversations among specialized academic cultures around the world, but it might not prompt wide enthusiasm in transcending difference. In a field brimming with academic diversity cultures, difference may be tolerated, yet toleration might not imply actual engagement with difference and the politics of translation.

(2016: 881)

Here, Waisbord is not focused purely on linguistic translation – on ‘semantics and the biases of language’ (although this is always a factor) – but on the ‘translatability of differences across intellectual traditions and the institutional logics of academe’ (2016: 872). Such a focus, he suggests, reveals why the growth in cross-national comparative studies has not been accompanied by a similar trend across theoretical or methodological approaches. ‘Translation’, he writes, ‘demands commonalities as well as a willingness to overcome differences’ (2016: 879). He continues:

Bridge crossing might be desirable, but it will not gain much traction as long as scholars are, at best, mildly interested in finding intellectual kinship across difference. Without kinship, there is no translation – no search for commonness among difference. Finding and nurturing intellectual kinship requires openness to others. A dialogue between self and stranger, translation requires mutual curiosity and the welcoming of differences . . . It

2 Introduction

demands that participants are willing to engage with others and be open to mutual understanding. Interscholarly interest, cultural open-mindedness, and receptiveness to difference are basic conditions for translation across academic cultures.

(2016: 880)

Our group worked to these conditions. Teasing out scholarly definitions and meanings that are presumed knowledge within disciplines, and stripping down terms, methods and different approaches, we sought to find common ground: a shared problem and a translation. We had come together to examine the media and political communication of the risks posed by pollution and climate change. Whether we studied Japanese government policy, Chinese political activism or Australian media discourses, each of us had been confronted by these risks. But our commonalities went deeper. We were all interested in how the nexus of climate change, media and policy has become increasingly amorphous, often disconnected from its causes and impacts, as well as the responsibility to respond to them, at the governmental and societal level. Given that this is a crucial point for the formation and enactment of public opinion and decision-making, it is worthy of serious investigation. It is a problem that well illustrates why we need to cross bridges.

Numerous studies have now charted a rise and fall in interest and action on environmental risks, including climate change, with media acknowledged as playing a central role in how publics and policymakers understand and respond to these risks. Research has drawn attention to the ways in which the professional practices of journalists and the logics of news organisations inadvertently gave voice to powerful interests (Hutchins and Lester 2015) and scepticism and denial, specifically when ‘balancing’ news coverage on climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff 2007; Boykoff 2013) or negotiating scientific ideas of ‘uncertainty’ (Allan 2002; Pollack 2005). Media carriage or containment of spectacular and symbolic images and messages to create awareness of risks and suffering is now better understood (Boykoff and Goodman 2009; Lester and Cottle 2009; Doyle 2011; Hansen 2011), as is the existence, deployment and impacts of strategic political communications and framing within environmental media discourses (Carvalho 2007; Hulme 2009; Nisbett 2009; Anderson 2013). The relationship between public opinion on climate change, mediated awareness and political affiliations has also been explored, including in terms of trust (Leiserowitz *et al.* 2013), patriotism (Tranter and Lester 2015) and fear (O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole 2009).

International comparative work has provided insight into the dynamics of and differences within environmental coverage at a national level (Painter 2013; Schmidt *et al.* 2013; Schmidt and Schafer 2015), although this work still needs to confront the significant challenges posed by: (a) various media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004); (b) dominant US and European paradigms, foci and/or personnel within the study of media and communications and mediated environmental conflict; and (c) looking behind texts to identify different cultural,