

**WEBINAR ON THE UKRAINIAN PLATFORM FOR CONTEMPORARY CHINA:
«THE WAR IN UKRAINE IN SINOPHONE MEDIA».**

On August 29, 2022, the Ukrainian Platform on Contemporary China held a thematic roundtable discussion "How Chinese-language media cover the war in Ukraine". The event was organized by A. Krymsky Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists, and the Helvetica Publishing House (information support).

The event was devoted to the peculiarities of the coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the Chinese-language resources of PRC and Southeast Asia. During the event, experts discussed the following questions:

- What moral issues arise in Chinese-language coverage of the conflict? Can we talk about violations of journalistic ethics?
- Are there significant differences between public and private media?
- How does the vocabulary used in the coverage of the war in Ukraine reveal underlying political agendas and biases?
- Are there significant differences in the coverage of the conflict by state media depending on whether they are targeting a domestic or international audience?
- What fact-checking and sourcing procedures are applied to reports on Ukraine in the Chinese media?

The speakers:

- David Bandurski, director of the China Media Project research platform;
- Rose Luwei, expert at the School of Communication, The Chinese University of Hong Kong;
- Chun Jian, professor at the National University of Singapore;
- Yevhenia Hobova, junior researcher at A. Krymsky Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine;
- Oleksiy Coval, international journalist and board member of the Ukrainian Association of Sinologists;
- Kyrylo Chuyko, Director of Chinese Interpretation (consecutive and simultaneous) at the Crimean Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

The event was chaired by **Isabel Hilton**, founder of the China Dialogue platform.

Kyrylo Chuyko started the discussion by describing his personal experience of communicating with Chinese journalists since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion. He noted that Chinese-language media from China avoid using the words "war" and "invasion" in their

coverage of events in Ukraine, while foreign news agencies with Chinese-language bureaus (Deutsche Welle, BBC, and others) provide reliable information. At the same time, there is only one Chinese journalist, Wang Zhiyan, who has received accreditation from the Ukrainian Armed Forces, but his organization is actually registered in Japan, as he is not allowed to work in China. Kyrylo added that, in general, due to China's position and incorrect coverage of the war in Ukraine, Chinese reporters have a bad reputation in Ukraine and face obstacles in obtaining visas, accreditation, access to information, etc. Kyrylo spoke about the information defense of volunteer sinologists since the first day of the war, and reported on the great work being done by Ukrainian translators and scholars in the field of Chinese studies. But to achieve a greater effect, there is a lack of state information support in China.

According to **David Bandurski**, the Chinese media lack humanity in their coverage of the war in Ukraine and, in general, Chinese news about Ukraine is not about Ukraine or the war, but about a "crisis" or "situation." The official party press hardly ever uses the word "war" in relation to Ukraine, mostly in relation to the United States. Ukraine is not central to the reporting on the war in Ukraine - it is mostly about sanctions, the economy, rising prices in Europe, etc. In particular, in 2022, the country's main newspaper, the CCP's flagship newspaper, the People's Daily, mentioned the name of Ukraine's president only once, on February 24, in a greeting on the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations. The positive role of China in resolving the "Ukrainian crisis" is also emphasized, in particular in providing humanitarian aid. The main focus is often on the "destructive role" of NATO and the United States. The Xinhua News Agency has a large network of reporters, but news about Ukraine comes from remote locations, not even from Ukraine's neighbors, mostly from Beijing. Over the past ten years, the opportunity for independent journalism has significantly decreased, which is attributed to Xi Jinping's rise to power.

According to **Chun Jian**, the perspective from Chinese-language sources in Southeast Asia (primarily Malaysia and Singapore, which have the largest share of the Chinese population) is significantly influenced by narratives from the US and Chinese media. The spread of conspiracy theories about biolabs and NATO's manipulation of Ukraine at the beginning of the war. State media use Ukraine as an example of the negative influence of the United States and NATO on the world, as a warning to other countries. Independent local media and private media have a more positive attitude towards Ukraine in their reporting, but do not have enough resources to cover the situation fully. In addition, there is a general caution against too much negation of narratives by Chinese media, which leads to self-censorship in some cases. Opportunities for fact-checking are very limited, sometimes almost non-existent, and in general, the situation is not clear, it cannot be said that the Western or Chinese point of view prevails, and the strength of these influences will most likely change.

Yevheniia Hobova noted that the lack of humanity in Chinese media on Ukraine is caused not only by China's official position on the war, but also by the lack of sufficient understanding of Ukraine in China. Chinese experts on Ukraine do not speak Ukrainian and view Ukraine as a part of the former USSR, not as an independent country, and ignore the social and political changes that have taken place in recent decades. Journalists, in turn, rely on their inaccurate and irrelevant

comments on the current situation. On the other hand, it is almost impossible to cover events from a position acceptable to Ukrainians because of the editorial policy of the Chinese media. Nevertheless, there is a slight trend toward more humane coverage of the war in Ukraine, most likely due to the decreased attention to the conflict. At the same time, the statement that the Chinese media completely repeat Russian propaganda is not entirely correct, as they choose the most favorable and convenient stories for China, mainly those that shift the blame for the invasion to the United States and NATO.

Oleksiy Coval emphasized that editorial guidelines allow Chinese journalists to disregard journalistic ethics standards. At the same time, Chinese reporters often do not have access to direct sources of information about the war in Ukraine, in part because of the lack of cooperation from the Ukrainian side - the Chinese media are not trusted, treated with caution, if not bias. There are also technical obstacles to the work of Chinese journalists, in particular, they sometimes cannot obtain visas to enter the country. Because of this, foreign freelance journalists, for example, from Europe, are now working for Chinese media in Ukraine. Oleksiy noted that recently, the Chinese side has been trying to adhere to an objective presentation of the material and striving for a balance of positions. However, one should not expect any "pro-Ukrainian" position from the Chinese media. In general, an important problem is that the Chinese media market is "saturated" with Russian sources of information that spread propaganda, thanks to huge and long-term investments by Russia. In addition, Ukraine's relations with China were at a low level before the invasion, and thus the work of Chinese reporters in Ukraine was limited. In his opinion, Ukraine and the Ukrainian vision are not represented in China, and Ukrainians should find their own ways to communicate with China without blatantly imposing their narratives.

David Bandurski also noted that despite the formal absence of private and independent media in China, some media outlets (including Caixin) reported on Ukraine in the first weeks of the invasion using the word "war" and identifying Russia as the aggressor in this war, which indicates that the Chinese media have some room for more objective and humane coverage of events.

At the end of the conversation, the experts had a brief discussion about whether Ukraine is doing enough at the official level to engage in a dialog with China. According to **Oleksiy Coval**, Ukraine's communication with China is one-sided and cannot be effective in this format without full-fledged political relations between the countries. By contrast, **Kyrylo Chuyko** noted that for other countries, such as Indonesia, the lack of established political relations is not an obstacle to active support for Ukraine, and the problem lies in the reluctance of Chinese leaders to intervene in the current situation.

The following conclusions were drawn from the roundtable discussion "How Chinese-language media cover the war in Ukraine":

1. National and private Chinese media cover the war in Ukraine more from a pro-Russian position and lack independent expertise. In an attempt to maintain neutrality, they often quote

statements from officials on both sides of the conflict without fact-checking. The emphasis is on what is of strategic interest to the Chinese authorities;

2. Intensifying cooperation with international media that have Chinese-language branches can have a positive effect;

3. In covering the war in Ukraine, Chinese-language media should focus more on domestic events rather than international cooperation, so that the words "Ukraine" and "Ukrainian" prevail in the Chinese-language press;

4. Continued cooperation with independent Chinese journalists and bloggers who objectively cover events in Ukraine without violating the Chinese government's "blacklist" will increase the pro-Ukrainian audience. Easing the visa policy for independent Chinese journalists who want to report on the war will help Ukraine's media presence in the Chinese media space;

5. Establishing close ties with the media in Singapore and Malaysia, where there is a significant Chinese-speaking diaspora, will help the local population better understand events in Ukraine, which is geographically remote and therefore not in the focus of local news;

6. Chinese experts on Ukraine are mostly fluent in Russian, not Ukrainian, and were formed as specialists at a time when the pro-Russian lobby in Ukraine was strong. There is a lack of a state information strategy for Ukraine in China (in the coverage of the war in particular), and there are no representative offices of Ukrainian news agencies, unlike Russian ones. Urgent measures should be taken to establish an information policy in China and to cooperate closely with a new generation of Chinese experts on Ukraine, who will consider Ukraine as part of the European space outside Russia's sphere of influence;

7. The presence of official Chinese media agencies in Ukraine is sufficient, but full coverage of the war is limited by clear instructions from the official Beijing. This is due to the lack of high-level political interaction between the two countries since 2014, strict information censorship, and the specifics of Chinese journalism (influence on public opinion), which differs significantly from Western journalism;

8. Personal stories of Ukrainians, both civilian and military, find maximum support in China and are not censored. Therefore, the coverage of the war should focus on non-political stories;

9. In the event of a direct dialog between the leaders of Ukraine and China, Chinese narratives about the war in Ukraine are likely to change for the better.