Image Capital, Field and the Economies of Signs and Space

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Foreword

Winning an award at a peer-reviewed conference is an honor that most academics cherish. We like it because we enjoy being recognized by the research community. In addition, when rightly done, an award speaks to the quality of a paper. All this probably explains why the annual conventions of major communication associations of the world—ICA, NCA, AEJMC, WAPOR, IAMCR and the like—have set up awards for top student papers. While the authors will find the awards encouraging, the award-winning papers can be a source of inspiration to many others. Graduate students and budding scholars are particularly curious about these papers.

The graduate students in our School have been very active in joining all the aforesaid conferences. As teachers, we are happy to find that quite a few have won awards for their outstanding works. To meet the demand for easy access to these papers, the Centre for Chinese Media and Comparative Communication Research (the C-Centre) has launched this Award-winning Student Paper series as part of its e-publication plan. As the copyright owner, the authors are expected to revise and publish the e-papers in the more traditional venues of journals and books later. We publish the e-version as working monographs in order to speed up the dissemination of research ideas. We encourage you to share the e-papers with others. You are also invited to refer student award-winning papers to us for possible inclusion in the series.

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- Field of Cultural Production
- The Field of Cultural Production and the Political Economies of Signs and Space
  - Cultural field and mass media production
  - Globalization and network society
  - Culture and economy entwinement
  - Change or reproduction
- Conceptualizing Image as Bourdieuveauan Capital
Abstract

Drawing upon Bourdieus concept of cultural capital, this paper develops image as a form of Bourdieusean capital to examine what Lash and Urry identify as the economies of signs and space, which in turn is characterized by the dual process of semioticization and spatilization. By image capital, it refers to the accumulated labor of visual resources that allows agents possessing it to yield power. I argue that the theoretical apparatus of image capital does not only help differentiate the power of images from the power of linguistic signs in the age of mediation. The fact that Bourdieusean capital has to be understood in relation to field theory provides also an effective framework for the study of both possibilities and struggles brought about by the ascending role of a particular form of resource.

This paper was awarded the Best Paper Award in the Philosophy of Communication Division of International Communication Association (ICA) annual conference 2012. It has also been accepted for publication in The Communication Review.