Gender is a ‘safe topic’ in China that can be discussed in the media, academia and elsewhere. But gender is still mostly understood as a women’s issue. Two leading professors from the prominent Sun Yat-Sen University (SYSU) based in the capital of the most economically prosperous Chinese province, Guangdong, are challenging that very concept of gender, especially in journalism and media reporting. The Media Diversity Institute (MDI) invited Dr Haiyan Wang and Dr Zhijin Zhong to visit the UK and various universities that have modules on gender and media. They also talked to professors from MA Diversity and the Media, an innovative postgraduate course developed and designed through partnership between MDI and the University of Westminster.

MDI’s guests from China also visited Kings College, City University, Goldsmiths, LSE and Cardiff University. They learnt that the average ratio of female to male students attending journalism courses in the UK is 60:40, but also that when it comes to Gender and Media Courses this ratio dramatically changes, as hardly any men join in. For instance, out of 50
Gender and the Media students at Cardiff University, only 6 are men.

Dr Haiyan Wang and Dr Zhijin Zhong met Aidan White from the Ethical Journalism Network who is working with media partners across the globe on ethics, good governance and self-regulation in journalism. They also visited the Frontline Club in London and met with its chairman John Owen (pictured above).

Summarising their visit to the UK, Dr Wang and Dr Zhong introduce their ideas of developing new courses on diversity and media back in China. They think of running courses in English language because, as Dr Zhong who teaches research methods and new media culture says, “it would be easier to find materials, guidebooks and publications, but also such courses at the SYSU would attract international students”.

Amongst the MA Diversity and the Media students who come from different parts of the world, many are from China. The Chinese students bring their own understanding of gender and diversity, different from the one prevailing among Western students.

“My Chinese students write a lot about so-called Chocolate city, Guangzhou, where many African traders live. Analysing their writings we discuss communicative narrative and how to better understand other people’s perspectives in order to create empathy,” said Dr Rosa Tsagarousianou who is in charge of MA course at the University of Westminster.
MDI Brings Leading Chinese Professors to the UK

Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong, enjoys more press freedom and has many good quality media outlets. It is also a city, according to several reports, with the largest African community in Asia. Migration is a very important topic for China and Guangzhou offers an opportunity to study closely how media react to demographic changes within society. "A perfect place to initiate Inclusive Journalism courses," says MDI Executive Director Milica Pesic.

"Media portrayal of women in China reflects social and cultural attitudes towards women. Although one would expect that decades of communism have given a more prominent role to women in Chinese society, it seems as if that has not been the case. Like in many other parts of the world, treatment or, rather, mistreatment of women derives more from tradition than from political ideology," adds Pesic.

Talking about cooperation with the MDI, Dr Zhong praised MDI efforts in promoting equality of people with diverse background. "In terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, as well as political orientation, such work is of a great importance because inequality exists in almost every part of the world, including China," says Dr Zhong.

MDI established a cooperation with SYSU in 2014. As one of the reasons for planning new course on diversity, Dr Zhong said: "We as teachers can be a good influence on students who could later on, practice diversity reporting in journalism, PR and other industries. Critical thinking of media, diversity, awareness of inequality between people with diverse background and education in general, encourage people to communicate and debate. With such course our students would grow with idea of diversity and equality and even if they don't become journalists one day, they would carry that idea and help equality in the world".

MDI Executive Director Milica Pesic was pleased to be able to introduce two leading Chinese communication academics to different ways this topic is taught at British universities. "We hope that MDI experience in working with communication academics from more than 60 universities across the world, would help our Chinese partners in developing new modules at their universities, whether these modules are Reporting Diversity in general, or Media and Gender in particular. Our partners and ourselves believe that a 'harmonious society' is impossible to achieve if women do not 'hold up half the sky' as Chinese proverb says," says Pesic.