

# Mainstream Narratives Can Also Be Fresh and Light—A Review and Analysis of *Guangming Daily's* Column "Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story"

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**Abstract:** Since its launch in July 2021, the column "Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story" in *Guangming Daily* has centered on the grand theme of "Xiaokang" (moderate prosperity), adopting the principle of "holding high, placing gently." Through innovative approaches—such as identifying small entry points within large narratives, focusing on ordinary individuals amid great historical transformations, and highlighting fresh, intimate storytelling within weighty themes—the column has broken away from conventional stereotypes associated with mainstream propaganda. By employing the form of oral history journalism, it positions ordinary citizens as narrative subjects, using vivid colloquial language, local dialects, proverbs, and rhymes to enhance authenticity and emotional resonance. Furthermore, through an integrated multi-media dissemination strategy across platforms, it achieves both online-offline synergy and broad audience reach. This practice not only fulfills the journalistic requirements of strengthening the "Four Strengths" (footpower, vision, brainpower, penmanship) and improving writing styles, but also aligns with the creative ethos of "warm realism"—confronting social realities while conveying warmth, hope, and human dignity. As such, the column provides a successful model for innovation in contemporary mainstream news reporting, effectively bridging ideological content with readability and enabling stories of moderate prosperity to genuinely resonate with readers.

**Keywords:** Mainstream Propaganda; Grassroots Perspective; Warm Realism

## 1. Introduction

General Secretary emphasized that positive publicity must focus on improving quality and effectiveness, enhancing appeal and influence. Conventionally, "positive publicity" is often perceived as solemn in form and stable in content—focused on singing the praises of mainstream values and disseminating positive energy. Precisely because of this perception, audiences frequently experience aesthetic fatigue or feel emotionally distanced when engaging with mainstream media reports.

Yet, just as monumental works enter public consciousness through repeated transmission—and people through their form, content, spirit, or character—journalistic works must first possess the charm that invites engagement before their deeper meanings can be truly perceived. Every program or column must thoughtfully construct a bridge leading directly to its readership, meticulously designing this so that audiences willingly walk upon it, enjoy the view along the way, and ultimately experience inner resonance and spiritual elevation.

In this sense, *Guangming Daily's* column <Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story> precisely such an effort. Launched in July 2021, although carrying the significant banner of "Xiaokang," its concise format, fresh tone, and humorous style offer readers accustomed to conventional, formulaic mainstream reporting a refreshing sense of sincerity, kindness, and beauty—a hallmark of the "spiritual home" that *Guangming Daily* strives to embody.

## 2. Finding Small Entry Points Within Grand Narratives

Grand narratives are inherent to mainstream discourse. From the column's title alone <Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story> its central theme is clearly defined: Xiaokang, a term now ubiquitous

in both political discourse and everyday life.

As stated in the "Editor's Note," after sustained efforts by the entire Party and people of all ethnic groups, the millennia-old dream of moderate prosperity has finally become reality. At the centenary celebration of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary solemnly declared: "We have achieved the First Centenary Goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects on Chinese soil." These brief lines establish the context, logical starting point, and thematic foundation for the column. As veteran journalists suggest, one must "think from the perspective of Tiananmen Rostrum"—ensuring that reporting targets the core issues of the era with precision. Like plowing a field, the direction of the plow must be firm and accurate, ensuring the reporting hits its intended mark without deviation.

But how can we sing the main melody more effectively? The first question is: what should we sing about? For China, "Xiaokang" signifies material abundance—but what concrete, lived experiences lie behind this abstract concept? The editor's note offers insight: Across the vast land of China—from south to north, cities to villages—warm and happy stories of moderate prosperity abound. As shown in Figure 1. Xiaokang means adequate food and clothing, stable employment, care for the elderly, access to healthcare, psychological well-being, spiritual fulfillment, and tangible feelings of gain, happiness, and security.



Figure 1 Helan County, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region: Specialized breeding, the road to prosperity.

It is precisely this philosophy of "holding high, placing gently" that shapes the column's distinctive style—grand in vision yet grounded in detail, high in perspective yet low in landing. This duality permeates every piece published. For instance: <The Silkworm-Raising Path to Prosperity> centers on targeted poverty alleviation, anchored in silkworm farming; <Look! There Really Is 'Golden Treasure' in the Soil> tells the story of a university graduate returning to his village to launch an ecological agriculture business; <My Dumpling Shop Went Viral> narrates urban environmental renovation and inclusivity through a family-run dumpling shop operated by migrants in Shanghai; <Beijing Is Becoming More Culturally Rich> follows a traditional Beijing storyteller whose craft thrives under urban cultural development policies; <This Kind of 'Subtraction' Feels Great!> reveals the wisdom of modern farmers who "sell scenery" rather than crops; <The Kids Call Me a 'Livestream Salesperson'> shares the joy of an elderly relocated resident embracing e-commerce.

A single falling leaf signals autumn. Reading these stories allows us to perceive the pulse of the times through protagonists' joys and sorrows. They remind journalists that grand narratives must be embedded in everyday moments. As the saying goes, "draw wisdom from the people's practices." Ordinary individuals weave their dreams into daily labor, resonating with the rhythm of the era. Like countless streams converging into a mighty river, they propel national progress forward. Journalism, as a reflection of objective reality, must begin with these minute details—using drops of water to reflect the

ocean-and honor the dignity and enduring spirit of those who live earnestly and strive tirelessly. As senior editor Liu Kun of Guangming Daily noted, the column achieves this by "telling small stories—stories of ordinary people"—to closely link the grand theme of Xiaokang with everyday happiness, transforming the abstract concept into tangible, relatable life scenes<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 3. Centering Ordinary Individuals in a Great Era

No one shines entirely alone—we exist in mutual reflection. Yet affirming individual agency and respecting ordinary lives remain essential values in any era. In the symphony of mainstream discourse, every voice matters; and highlighting those subtle notes is precisely the mission of journalism today.

Once criticized for its top-down approach—"I report, you read"—traditional media has been forced to adapt due to shifting media landscapes and evolving public opinion ecologies. In this context, *<Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story>* exemplifies innovative practice. This shift is evident not only in the column's name but also in its textual form, fulfilling the promise in the editor's note: "inviting ordinary people from various regions and fields to share their own Xiaokang stories."

Each article typically includes a title, narrator, narrative, and interviewer. All elements emphasize the narrator's subjectivity. Titles like *<My Dumpling Shop Went Viral>*, *<They Call Me 'Kung Fu Grandma'>*, *<The Kids Say I'm a Livestream Salesperson>*, and *<I'm Overjoyed!>* adopt a first-person perspective, making them accessible and evoking a sense of immediacy.

The narratives themselves unfold entirely from the narrator's subjective viewpoint, creating strong visual and situational presence. Seemingly tangential remarks add authenticity and liveliness. For example, the closing line of *<My Dumpling Shop Went Viral>* reads: "Our story isn't special—if it gets published, please send me a copy. I'll show it to my grandchildren someday, so they know how we earned our good life." Another piece ends with: "Every Saturday noon, I continue my storytelling at Lao She Teahouse—do come and support me!" One begins: "Come on, Journalist Su, let me show you my room." Such spontaneous, context-specific greetings, though casual, enrich the narrative texture. While other columns have used first-person narration, many still bear traces of editorial reworking. Here, the voices are raw, authentic, and intimately familiar.

One might ask: How were these compelling narrators discovered? The answer lies with the interviewers. Contributors include both Guangming Daily reporters and correspondents, reflecting diverse sourcing. Crucially, identifying representative storytellers tests a journalist's "Four Strengths": footpower (on-the-ground reporting), vision (perceptiveness), brainpower (analytical thinking), and penmanship (writing skill). The narrators featured include poverty alleviation leaders, farmers, peasant writers, shop owners, intangible cultural heritage inheritors, volunteer team captains, and female returnees launching rural startups. Though engaged in ordinary work, their lives intersect meaningfully with broader societal changes. Discovering these connections requires sustained observation and deep reflection—ultimately culminating in the ability to identify, excavate, and elevate these individuals as microcosms of a great era. As shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Qidong County, Hunan Province: the harvest of daylily is abundant, bringing prosperity to local farmers.

Journalism, at its core, is about discovery. The art of mainstream storytelling lies in curation and composition. It demands greater recognition of individual value and a rigorous exploration of the intrinsic links between personal struggle and societal advancement. This is the essence of <Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story>, and indeed, the secret to journalism's enduring vitality. As scholar Rao Shuguang emphasizes, warm realism must uphold a people-centered stance, respecting individuals' authentic experiences within historical contexts—a principle that aligns perfectly with the column's grassroots narrative logic<sup>[2]</sup>.

#### 4. Seeking Freshness Within Weighty Themes

Storytelling is the essence of compelling journalism. Once we determine what to tell and who tells it, the next challenge is how to tell it well—this is the crux of journalistic expression. Even the most powerful stories lose impact if poorly told. Thus, narrative technique deserves careful attention.

From major event editorials to the classic "Xinhua Style," grand narratives often adopt sweeping, majestic forms designed to stir emotion. While effective, introducing moments of elegance within intensity, or freshness within profundity, creates a distinct sensory experience. Particularly for a concept like "Xiaokang"—a term constantly on people's lips, minds, and lived experiences—a gentle, conversational, and tranquil journalistic approach may be more fitting.

Reading <Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story>, one is struck by its humor and wit. Consider phrases such as: "Today I raise silkworms; tomorrow, they feed me—that's my path to prosperity." "Hehe, I've suddenly turned from a farmer into a shareholder!" "Once, bandits tried to rob me in the mountains—I knocked two down with my fists, and the rest fled faster than rabbits." "Even mountain gullies can master cloning!" "When luck turns bad, even sipping cold water chokes you." "We used tiny boats; in strong winds, waves nearly swept us off. If wind exceeded Force 5, we'd squat on deck chanting 'Amitabha.'" "Painting tigers? That's painting blessings, wealth, and Xiaokang!" These concise, vivid expressions convey the narrators' emotions and inner joy, transforming static reading into dynamic emotional engagement.

"Flavor comes from authenticity". Regional dialects and folk idioms further enrich the language. Examples include: "Shiyang Town is something special! Chuanxiong—you know it? No? How about Chuanxiong pork?". "What's a little hardship? So what!" "Life keeps getting better and better!" "This kind of job is backbreaking!" "At its worst, rivers turned soy-sauce color and stank from afar." "With such hard labor, becoming rich was nearly impossible." Such regionally flavored speech not only diversifies linguistic style but also conveys genuine emotions, narrowing the gap between speaker and listener.

Moreover, the use of rhymes and allegorical sayings adds rustic charm: "Mulberry fields fragrant, silkworms busy spinning silk. Cars fill the village, families live in villas. Everyone works hard, every household rushes toward Xiaokang." "Leave closed, bowl covered, eat one prefab slab a year." "Cucumber shed lost its reeds—all fell apart." "One sugarcane, sweet at both ends—I've healed the desert and made my fortune." "One painting, fifteen beams, riding a tiger into Xiaokang."

And yet, amidst this lightness, profound insights shine through: "Prosperity for one is not true prosperity." "Zhongnanhai and our Xiaogang Village—our hearts are connected." "Here, I earn money through hardship but spend it with joy—I am content." "Only words that reveal human nature are worth writing." "In Yumai, every household flies the Five-Star Red Flag—every person is an immovable boundary marker." "Isn't improved quality of life simply about being happier, freer, and more meaningful?"

These heartfelt utterances—spoken from the soul—reveal not only the internalized joy brought by Xiaokang life but also the spiritual growth that follows material abundance. As the ancient saying goes: "When granaries are full, people learn propriety; when clothes and food are sufficient, people understand honor and shame." This dual sense of material and spiritual fulfillment cannot be fully captured by ornate prose—only those who have lived it can speak with authority. As shown in Figure 3. And in this column, that authority is given back to the people. As scholar Hu Zhifeng argues in his advocacy of "warm realism," we must "focus on the new era and emerging phenomena, attend to grassroots narratives, confront real-life challenges, and express, with warmth as the dominant tone, humanity's pursuit of truth, goodness, beauty, light, and the future"<sup>[3]</sup>. This column embodies precisely such an approach in journalistic practice.



Figure 3 Ankang City, Shaanxi Province: Developing the plush toy industry to help people gain employment and increase income.

## 5. Conclusions

From promoting "short, truthful, and novel" writing styles, to years of "going to the grassroots, changing work style, improving writing," to emphasizing the "Four Strengths" in journalistic practice, both academia and industry have continuously explored innovations in journalistic expression. Especially with the rise of digital media, new linguistic styles have emerged. Yet, regardless of change, written language remains responsible for conveying meaning and emotion. Therefore, journalistic language must uphold the principle of innovation within tradition. In this regard, "Let Me Tell You My Family's Xiaokang Story" sets a powerful example—listening to the people's words, then conveying them in the people's own voice. Years ago, Oriental Horizon famously proclaimed: "Telling stories of ordinary Chinese people." Today, allowing ordinary people to tell their own stories may be an even more valuable practice.

Almost simultaneously with the launch of the print column, Guangming Network and the Guangming Daily WeChat account began releasing synchronized multimedia content titled "Audio Scrapbook" and initiating Weibo topics. Using text, images, audio, and video, they extend the column's reach across multiple platforms—an innovative response to evolving media consumption patterns. This multimodal presentation enriches the column's impact and meets audience expectations for diversified content delivery.

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