Is the Internet an Agent of Empowerment in News Making?

A Case Study of Chinese Journalists

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Abstract

This study adopts the mediationist perspective to explore the impact of the Internet on Chinese journalists by examining in what ways the Internet can be an agent of empowerment in news making.

From the mediationist point of view, the social impact of the Internet is contingent upon the interaction of a number of social and political factors which thus shape outcomes. The inherent properties of the Internet make it a potential liberalizing force in journalistic practices in China, which have historically been restricted by the Party's control. It has been found that, in the news making process, the Internet assists journalists as a news resource, as a reference framework, and as a supplementary media outlet channel. The Internet has made an impact on news making by reinforcing the surveillance role of the media, facilitating news value reorientation, promoting news timeliness, and improving job efficiency. However, the power of the Internet is limited, affected by constraining and facilitating factors at the individual, organization and institutional levels; the Internet therefore empowers journalists in a situational way, characterized as time-specific, genre-specific, media status-specific, and location-specific. Such situational empowerment is mainly driven by commercialization and propaganda reforms.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the Internet's liberalizing potential, the shifting of the journalistic paradigm in China, and more broadly the impact of the Internet on journalistic practices in authoritarian countries.

Keywords: Internet, Chinese journalists, mediationist, empowerment

互聯網是新聞製作中有解放性的作用嗎？

以中國新聞記者爲例

摘　要

這篇論文採用“中介”的觀點，通過考察互聯網作爲一種新的資訊科技在中國怎樣對新聞製作過程起到解放性的作用，研究互聯網對中國新聞記者的影響。

“中介”的觀點認爲，互聯網對社會的影響結果取決於一系列的社會和政治因素的作用，這些因素之間互動並影響最後的結果。中國新聞歷史上長期以來受到黨的宣傳控制，互聯網作爲一種資訊科技的內在特徵使得它成爲中國新聞實踐中具有解放性的一種潛在力量。研究發現，在中國記者的新聞製作過程中，互聯網扮演著“新聞資源”、“參考框架”和“補充傳播渠道”的角色，互聯網也對這個過程有著不同的影響結果，包括“加強記者關於媒體監督性角色的意識”、“促進對新聞價值的轉向和重新定位”、“促進新聞時效性的提高”和“提高記者的工作效率”。但是，由於受到來自制度、組織和個人層面的限制性因素和促進性“中介”因素的影響，互聯網只能給記者帶來“情境性”的解放，因特定的時間、新聞類型、媒介組織的性質和媒介所在地域而異。這種解放性的推動力來自於商業化和黨的宣傳自身的改革。

這個研究對於暸解互聯網的解放性的潛能和轉換中新聞範式作出一些貢獻。同時，也將有助於進一步去理解互聯網對於威權主義國家新聞實踐的影響。

關鍵字：互聯網、中國新聞記者、中介性、解放性

致 謝

Chapter 1　Introduction

On October 26, 2004, Song Yan, an editor of the National Social News section in the *Beijing Youth Daily*, came across a posting on Kaidi BBS[1] that was generating a great deal of debate. She usually begins her work day by browsing various BBS websites for possible news clues. This posting was about an official letter released by a Shenzhen local education authority forcefully requiring middle school students to watch a movie directed by and starring Niuniu, daughter of Li Yizhen, a municipal officer in Shenzhen. Song Yan made a quick decision to dispatch her reporter to the frontline to cover this story. In the following weeks, this posting not only appeared in many Internet chat rooms but also attracted the intense attention of other national news media outlets. However, it was the *Beijing Youth Daily* that was first to disclose the scandal and stir nation wide media interest.

Like Song Yan, increasing numbers of journalists in China are using the Internet to assist in their everyday news making in a number of ways: as a resource for finding important or interesting story ideas, for sourcing background information to contextualize news reports, for contacting news sources via email and for gaining an idea of public opinion as expressed in online discussions. The Internet, as a new form of communication technology, seems to be playing an increasingly important role in the everyday news work of Chinese journalists. By adding value in such a way, the

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[1] Kaidi BBS (http://club.cat898.com) is the affiliated BBS community website of the Kaidi Network (www.cat898.com), whose strategic cooperative partner is Eastday. com (Dongfang wang) in Shanghai.

Internet not only complements but also modifies existing journalistic practices: it could even be argued that the Internet helps Chinese journalists push forward the propaganda boundary.

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Standing at this historical intersection, an exploration of the Internet's impact on the news practices of Chinese journalists should examine both the social impact of the developing communication technology and the ongoing media reform that has been evident in China since the end of the last century.

The impacts of communication technology on journalism

Looking back at the development of journalism, every step of technological advancement has enabled, if not driven, the distribution of information on newsworthy events and contributed to changes in journalistic practice. Journalism has always been shaped by technology (Pavlik, 2000). Gutenberg's printing press made the printing of the Bible and other religious texts possible; moreover, it laid the foundation for mass literacy and the invention of the newspaper. The potential for mass production evident in printing technology also increased mass circulation capability and facilitated the expansion of the penny press. Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone not only made widespread telecommunications possible, but also transformed the way in which journalists gathered and reported news,

resulting in interviews and news distribution via the telephone. In the telecommunication era, the telegraph wire broke down national boundaries to transmit the latest news from abroad, facilitating the emergence of news agencies. Additionally, it resulted in the development of the inverted pyramid writing style and gave objectivity a new value. The telegraph transformed the newspaper from a personal journal and party organ into a disseminator of news, and was a landmark in the development of journalism. Radio and TV again changed the format of news reporting, introducing simultaneity and co-presence to the news.

The Internet has played a significant role in shaping social development in the interactive era. Its immediacy and interactivity mean the Internet provides greater access to information, civic and community involvement and social interaction (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). In this new cybertopia, the Internet is seen as a tool to both empower civic society and promote democracy (Ebo, 1998). Media study researchers reveal that the Internet has been prominent in facilitating the integration and convergence of the media, and has changed the one-way model of mass communication into an interactive two-way model. Growing numbers of scholars are conducting research on online journalism, and they conclude that the Internet not only influences the way journalists do their job and the structure and organization of the newsroom and news industry, but also the nature of the relationship between news organizations and their public (Pavlik, 2000).

Since 1995 the Internet has been rapidly spreading in China. The Internet's information infrastructures developed rapidly due to China's ambition to become a technological power state (Chan and Qiu, 2003). Together with rapid economic growth, e-commerce is booming nationwide. As ordinary Chinese citizens, journalists are early champions of the Internet cause. They have made instrumental usage of it both in their private lives and in their reporting. The Internet's penetration into Chinese society and its adoption by the media organization is a part of the process of media reform that has been ongoing since the 1990s, during which time the Chinese media has undergone fundamental changes.

Chinese journalism reform and journalists in current China

China is chosen here as a representative authoritarian country. It is a typical example due to its enduring communist system and ongoing reforms to establish a market economy under authoritarian political control. Chinese media reforms have brought fundamental changes to the everyday news practices of journalists, and have been characterized as a wave of commercialization and marketization (Chan 1993) taking place within a context of continuing political and ideological control of the media by the Chinese Communist Party (Chan 1993, 1995). China's journalistic reforms can be depicted as a process involving two contradictory forces - state control by the Communist Party on the one hand and commercialization on the other (Lee, 1994). During this reform, marketized tabloids have burgeoned, competing with party organs for the media market. Today, although the Chinese Communist Party has the

will and power to control the media, two decades of economic reforms have allotted the media some financial and operational autonomy (Chan and Qiu, 2002). In general, media control is mainly ideological and occurs at different levels in different types of media, tighter in party organs and looser in the marketized press. Similarly, control is tighter over political hard news and looser over non-political soft news. The government has established comprehensive rules to regulate both the traditional media's usage of online information and news dissemination on the Internet.

Although commercialization and marketization have promoted media liberalization, press freedom in China is still in the "bird cage" (Chen & Chan, 1996) and Chinese journalists are described as "dancing with shackles" when news making. They have to serve two masters—the "Party" and the "public" (Polumbaum, 1990). This means their job autonomy is limited, being greatly restricted by propaganda commands from the party-state. However, Chinese journalists have improvised reform in their journalistic practices through media marketization (Pan, 2001). In the process, Chinese journalists' perceptions of the media role have also evolved. Some scholars have noted a rise in professionalism that has accompanied rapid media marketization in China (Pan & Lu, 2003). They also argue that professional journalism has emerged as a direct competitor to the party-journalism paradigm in China. This new paradigm emphasizes the disseminating role of the media and the desire for more liberal arts training in journalism while Party journalism focuses on the interpretive and popular advocacy role of media in communist propaganda (Pan

and Chan, 2003).

Is the Internet a liberalizing force in China?

The Internet, with its immediacy, interactivity, channel capacity, decentralized structure, global accessibility and connectivity, is seen by many scholars as an instrument with an inherent scope of political influence, supporting a more democratic mode of communication than traditional mass media. Some scholars argue that the Internet has the ability to empower the underprivileged, and they expect the Internet to make a powerful impact upon totalitarian and authoritarian countries, facilitating revolutionary changes in favor of democracy. However, others are pessimistic about the Internet's democratic potential. They argue, quoting the "continuity thesis", that the Internet does not undermine but actually reproduces, and perhaps even reinforces, the existing social structure, political system, and cultural hegemony of a society (Chan, Pan & Lee, 2003). In China, after two decades' market-oriented economic reforms, the nation is emerging as a leading player in the global information technology industry. Profound economic and technological development has led people to argue that "China should be the world's newest and greatest democracy by now" (Pfaffenberger, 2000). Indeed, the Internet has gradually promoted greater autonomy and content diversity and its liberalizing power is underestimated by many. The Chinese government has been investing heavily in constructing the Internet infrastructure on one hand, and establishing an institutional process to mediate the liberalizing potential of the Internet in China on the other (Qiu,

1999). In addition, China's political foundation remains largely unchanged, resting constitutionally and practically upon the primacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Consequently, many scholars have observed that the Internet has not promoted in a dramatic way the process of democratic political activities within the nation.

Unlike the utopian and pessimistic approaches prevailing in existing literature, this thesis argues that the Internet has limited political impact upon authoritarian countries because the effects occur only through the process of mediation of social factors embedded in the context of Chinese journalism. Mediation means the interaction between the facilitating factors initiated by the introduction of the Internet, propaganda reform and media marketization, and constraining factors, such as propaganda controls and organizational interests. This thesis proposes a "mediationist" framework to explore the Internet's impact on Chinese journalists and to examine the factors, processes and consequences of mediation in journalists' news making through in-depth interviews and case studies.

A historical and theoretical background will provide a general scaffold in the organization of this study. This thesis has explored the Internet's impact on Chinese journalists by addressing the following general questions: Is the Internet an agent of empowerment in news making for Chinese journalists? If yes, how? If not, why not? The significance of the current study lies in the fact that it contributes to a

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comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Internet on journalism in a socialist setting in particular and on the social impact of information technology in general.

Thesis organization

This thesis has adopted in-depth qualitative interviews and case studies as the basic methodological approach in the collection of research data. In-depth interviews of fifty-one frontline journalists, journalism professors and administrative officers have been conducted in seven representative news media in Beijing and Guangzhou. The informants have provided comprehensive information on their Internet usage and news making practices. Four news events mentioned by journalists as exemplars have been chosen as typical case studies for further analysis. These case studies are used to explore the different patterns of the Internet's impacts and to identify its mechanisms of empowerment. The data is organized in three categories: the use of the Internet by journalists in their news making, the impacts of the Internet on Chinese journalists' news making practices, and the effects of social factors on those impacts. Following this logic, the thesis is composed of the following eight parts:

Chapter one introduces the general research background (historical background and theoretical background) and the research goals of this thesis.

Chapter two locates the argument of the thesis in the debates on the social impact of communication technology. Various existing theories, including the "technology determination theory" and "the continuity thesis" are discussed, helping shed light on the "mediationist" perspective that is adopted in this research as a general theoretical framework.

Chapter three reviews the background of China's Internet regulation, journalistic practices, and media reform with its unique Chinese characteristics. Both the constraining and facilitating social factors that affect Internet-assisted news making are identified at the individual, organization and institutional levels.

In Chapter four, the specific research questions are proposed and the research methods are elaborated.

Chapter five provides a comprehensive picture of the Internet usages among journalists in the news making process. Use of the Internet in the three areas of news gathering, decision making and news dissemination are discussed accordingly.

Chapter six explores the impact of the Internet on news making. Four different aspects of its impact patterns are illustrated as the consequences of mediation through specific case studies.

Chapter seven examines the empowerment effects of the Internet's impact by examining how social factors interact with each other to shape the outcomes of Internet-assisted journalistic practices, and in what situations the Internet can and can not empower journalists. In addition, the mechanism behind the Internet's possible empowerment is discussed.

Chapter eight concludes with a final look at the mediation process and the consequence of the Internet's effects on news making. Implications for the current research on the shifting of journalistic paradigms in current China are discussed. Limitations of the current study are also pointed out.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Background and "Mediationist" Perspective

As for the social impact of the Internet, the first thing that must be acknowledged is the Internet's inherent properties towards liberalization in comparison with the traditional mass media. The Internet networks are globally accessible, interactive services, with low production costs and infinite channel capacity. The anonymous virtual mode of communication makes the Internet an easier media for ordinary users to obviate traditional sociopolitical controls and real-life punishments against "subversive" or "harmful" speeches and publications. These attributes of the Internet are undeniable. Due to the Internet's inherent properties, many scholars are optimistic about the Internet's influential power and stress it as a liberalizing force for social change.

Changing technology, changing human communication

Impact of technology on human communication

Tracking back the development of human communication, it is found that communication technologies are gradually changing the natural of human communication, and scholars regard differences of human communication as results of new technologies.

Gutenberg's invention of the movable types labeled the printing era. The printing

press not only made possible the printing of the Bible and other religious texts, but also laid the foundation for mass literacy and the invention of newspaper. The mass production potential of printing technology also brought about mass circulation capabilities and the penny press boom. 380 years after the invention, *New York Sun,* a penny press, became popular in American. Newspaper turned to be "news paper" instead of "opinion paper", and mass newspaper challenged the church's monopoly on written communication, so that information was possible to flow from bottom to top.

John B. Thompson (1990) traced the early history of printed newspaper, and said news, especially foreign news, circulated before print, mainly through word of mouth, troubadour performance, and handwritten news. Printing made possible the widespread dissemination of news, and through the mass circulation individual citizens had rapid and widespread access to information, especially economic and politician information.

In the telecommunication era, telegraph, telephone, radio, and televisions have a great impact on the human communication.

Beginning with the telegraph, messages could travel faster than messengers. Communication over distance was no longer tied to the available means of transportation. This breakthrough allows information can be free from a dependency

on the transportation for speedy delivery. James W. Carey (1998) regards telegraph has marked the decisive separation of "transportation" and "communication". The telegraph also influenced the newspaper and the development of journalistic practices. International money and commodity markets demonstrated for the first time through telegraph as news. News agencies that specified in providing national news and international news boomed, and *Associated Press* was a typical one. Due to the technological property of telegraph, the "Inverted pyramid" news writing style was adopted by news agencies, and "objectivity of news" was brought about to journalism, and finally became the professional value for the new journalism. The telegraph transformed journalism primary work to be disseminating news. Michael Schudson (1995) sketches out two kind of journalism that prevailed: the information press and the entertainment press. The former was oriented to political and economic news and the business community; the latter to the dynamics, scandalous and everyday-life world of a growing urban working class. Both were tied to a new system of reportage: feeding stories into major centers where they could be pooled and forwards elsewhere through the growing influence of the telegraph-based wire services, such as *Associated Press*.

Telephone emerged in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and developed in the urban context of business and government. The first use of a telephone for news reporting was on April 3rd 1877 when word of one of Bell's lectures was transmitted from Salem to *the Boston Globe*. The proprietor of a burglar alarm system installed

telephones so that his customers could summon messengers and express service.

Broadcast radio was born during the 1920s, and it was an outgrowth of the "wireless" and sometime referred to as "radio-telegraphy". Stephen Kern (1983) argues that the wireless enables people to experience distant events as they occurred. Radio played an important role in reporting the big events and disaster, and the reports on sinking of "Titanic" through radio highlighted the potential of wireless. In addition, since the early conscious suppression of radio by the newspaper publishers in US and UK, radio reporting had developed complex forms, that are different from news bulletins and other sorts of factual programming ("talks" or "documentarily") to create an ideologically powerful culture of objectivity and neutrality.

Mitchell Stephens (1996) shows us how radio and then television imitated and eventually altered the news-gathering role of other media. Radio news originally adopted the reporting style of newspapers, but found complex sentences were not suitable for "on the air broadcasting" in World War Second. He argues that the Vietnam War plays a similar role in giving television news its distinct format of almost instant televisual reporting. During the 1950s television facilitated the suburban life and the new postwar pattern of consumption, and television addicted to realism and narrative so that it reinforced the industrial and economic perceptions of needs.   As well, simultaneity and co-presence became possible in news reporting.

Coming into the interactive communication era, interactivity and media integration became the developing trends. Bolter and Grusin (1999) echo Marshall McLuhan's provocative aphorism that old media tend to become the initial content of new media. However, they deepen the logic considerably by inviting us to consider the interconnectedness of media, old and new. Their term *remediation* is intended to alert that not only the ways in which media continually borrow form and refashion older media, but also the countervailing tendency in which older media in turn can borrow from and refashion emerging media.

Summarizing these scholars' remarks, they consider that communication technologies have facilitated the changes of human communication. First, they gradually brought the communication process certain degree of interactivity, which combines mass media with interpersonal channel and allows feedbacks. Interactivity thus becomes an inherent property of communication process and a unique concept in communication. Second, communication technologies are increasingly de-massified the audiences. This means they allow a special message to be exchanged between each other in large audience. This also implies that the control of mass communication systems begins to move from the message producer to media consumer. Third, asynchronous is brought about to human communication, since communication technologies have the capability for sending or receiving a message at a time convenient for an individual.

Impact of the Internet on journalism

As a new form of information technology, the Internet not only embraces all the capabilities of the older media (text, images, graphics, animation, audio, video, real-time delivery) but offers a broad spectrum of new capabilities, including interactivity, on-demand access, user control , and customization (Pavlik, 2001). In the recent year, many scholars have conducted plenty of researches on impact of the Internet on journalism and "online journalism" as a new journalism paradigm.

The impact of the Internet on journalism can be classified into four categories. First, the Internet changes the way journalists do their job. Traditionally, journalists' interview and news reporting are traditionally called "shoe-leather" (Pavlik, 2001), that is journalists had to go to the news fields to observe and gather information. With the development of technologies, "shoe-leather" journalism is partly taken place by technology-assisted journalism (Pavlik, 2001). Advances in new media technology transforms these technical tools offer new ways to process raw new data in all its forms (Pavlik, 2001). Steve Ross's *Media in Cyberspace* (1998) reported that five aspects on how the Internet affects journalistic practices, that is: (1) journalists are able to use online tools for researching and reporting, such as gather news, improving quality of news gathering, checking facts and finding sources; (2) the Internet assists journalists to report breaking news stories by providing news clues in the non-business hours and delivering information from various websites; (3) journalists also often obtain story ideas from listserves, email, webs and usenets on

the Internet; and (4) sometimes, the Internet is powerful to easily provide editors images and other materials that traditionally had to be gathered physically; the news deadlines are more or less blurred by the Internet since it is able to publish news at any time.

Second, the Internet gradually changes the news contents. Just as the video, television and broadcasting facilitate the high-speed of news transformation, and lead to news network, MTV-style news, the Internet lets the printing products go online, and original contents published by audience have been significantly grown. Interactive multi-media news reports and non-linear narration gradually become popular.

Third, the structure and organization of the newsroom and news industry change by the Internet as well. Nowadays, in the news industry, the Internet and World Wide Web become new forms of media, and 5000 news websites have been made and maintained by the classical news organizations. As to the organization structure, the technologies gradually change the separation between the editorial and business functions of the traditional media, and the Internet has made the boundary between editorial and advertising blurring. Technologies also affect the centralization and hierarchical character of news room, and make the newsroom become flatter in structure, especially in online editions, as well as the combined newsrooms. In addition, technologies, especially the Internet has refined the newspaper distribution,

and online distribution is gradually adopted by many traditional newspapers.

Four, the Internets has great impact on the changing nature of the relationships between and among organizations and their public. Traditionally, the communication model of press and broadcast is "one to many" with little feedback, but now, the communication model has turned to be "two-way symmetric model", in which a dialogue between the press and the public takes place. In addition, the Internet refines the notion of "who is journalist" since the gate keeping declines due to the easy publication on the web, and scholars point out that providing impartial reporting is increasingly important for journalists.

Many new questions are raised with the emerging of the "online journalism". Online journalism is a kind of journalism activities on and through the Internet and concerned with the use of such journalism products and services by general public as well as within the professional of journalism itself (Singer, 1998). The Internet as a new form of communication technology becomes an interactive media and blurs the sender and receiver. In online journalism, the sender does not just face with a new delivering method but with what may be a fundamental shift in their role in communication process. Thus comparing with the traditional journalism paradigm, online journalism paradigm is shifting to focus on "news dissemination" rather than "news gathering" (Singer, 1998). This kind of paradigm changing can be illustrated at four levels. At the individual level, the "gate keeping theory" should be revised.

Gate keeper still exists, but who as gate keeper and how to make news judgment are the questions that should be answered. At the organizational level, diffusion of innovation works in the newsroom, and computer-assisted reporting is adopted by journalists to gather information, analyze data and search online record, and the Internet becomes a valuable journalistic tool. But what the perceived advantage of online information source are and whether the online media is going to become separate entities or arms of existing media form are significant questions the scholars should dig out. At the community level, the sociology of news work is also modified by the Internet, such as the deadline and geographical territory of news, the news value, and the online news making process. So the conceptualization of "news", the news making routine and the value of online journalists should be revised in online journalism. At the social system level, the Internet creates a new media environment, in which a new social cohesion should be achieved. Benefit from new communication technologies, such as the Internet and weblog, civic journalism is now rising. How the interactive, non-linear, instantaneous, multi-sensory communication technologies affect the culture of journalism? This question is also of great significance.

There are quite a lot of discussions on impact of the Internet, as well as other technologies, on human communication. The common theme that binds the scholars together is their concern about the implications for human communication which underlies a particular application of the new technology. The mention of possible

implications raises the question of how we see the impact of communication technology, such as the Internet. There exists a fundamental distinction between two differentiated approaches: on the one hand there are scholars argue that information technology strongly determines the social context in which it is implemented. This supports that a given technology always has specific and predicable consequences. On the other hand, there is a view that the effects of the communication technology are not solely predicable from the particular technology. The effects are variable depending on how and in what context it is implemented. In the following, the discussions on the two kinds of theoretical approaches will be reviewed, and a "third way" which is adopted as the theoretical position by this thesis will also be elaborated.

The Internet as a liberalizing force

Throughout the twentieth century, optimistic viewpoints on technological development are widely reflected across the cultural, from popular futuristic works of fictions to academic discussions in various fields. Quite a number of scholars discuss the democratizing potential of the Internet in political communication, and also plenty of researches have conducted to discover the Internet's impact on whole society.

First of all, research literature has a lot of discussion on the democratizing potential

of the Internet, and classified it into three clusters corresponding to the trends of current politics. The first cluster focuses on the empowerment effect of the Internet for the marginal or subordinate social groups. Most researches yield some optimistic reports that the Internet has the ability to empower the marginal groups (Arnold and Plymire, 2000; Berry and Martin, 2000; Mallapragada, 2000; McLean and Schubert, 1995; Pullen, 2000; Shaw, 1997). The second cluster examines how the activist groups and non-governmental organizations use the Internet as a tool, facilitating some new forms of political agitation (Bach and Stark, 2002; Danitz and Strobel, 1999; Diani, 2000; Hand and Sandywell, 2002; Klein, 1999; Lax, 2000; Mele, 1999; Scott and Street, 2001; Uncapher, 1999; Washbourne, 2001). The last cluster investigates the broader issue of whether the Internet can make this world more democratic, and in particular by providing a public sphere for the citizens. Since the emergency of tele-democracy, cyber-democracy, electronic democracy and civil society networks all point the direction for the Internet's future, applying the Internet to politics is not only feasible but also desirable because the technologies will bring decentralization, pluralism, equality, efficiency, or in short, the exact fulfillment of perfect democracy. These optimistic and idealistic views towards the potential of the technology have been labeled as technology utopianism (Segal, 1985). This view maintains that freedom and democracy is fueled by the advancement of technologies, from the development of broadcast radio and television videos, cable television and now finally through the Internet.

Since the early 1990s, academics and policy makers have largely assumed that the Internet is inherently a "democratizing" force in China. The *Intermedia* special report in 1997 finds that the Internet can work as a democratizer to wither away the traditional centers of control as the "medium, the message and the audience" are "interacting and merging to become parts of civil society". Taubman (1998) draws this conclusion concerning China's efforts to curb the Internet that "despite the intentions of regimes like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), their sway over the ideational and organizational character of domestic affairs will be diminished as a result of the Internet." The common line of this kind of reasoning is that since the Internet allows unprecedented opportunities for access to previously prohibited news and an opportunity for relatively anonymous mobilization, China's growing Internet class will be enabled to shake off the blinders placed upon by the government, eventually leading to a more democratic potential framework. The most often cited argument for the impact of the Internet on democratic change is that the Internet forces China's media to respond to the ability of Chinese people to view external news sources, thereby bringing the Party-controlled press into disrepute, and thus facilitating democratic change (Kedzie, 1997; Hachigian, 2001; Sheff, 2002). Another related argument is that the Internet not only allows citizens access new source of information, but also allows them to express themselves in ways that are unprecedented (Kluver and Qiu, 2003).

In addition, in the discussions on the Internet's impact on society, "Cybertopia"

proponents see the Internet as a great equalizer because it has a significant impact on social relationships. Responding to whether the Internet will be the greater equalizer and whether the Internet create universal and inclusive modes of socialization, their initial evidence suggests that access to cyberspace will be necessary element in economic and political empowerment and cultural representation in society. Also, virtual communities do not use disenfranchising criteria for community building (Edo, 1998). The Internet deemphasizes hierarchical political associations, degrading gender roles and ethnic designations, and rigid categories of class relationships found in traditional, geographically bound communities. The Internet is not inhibited by the inherent biases manifested in sexism, racism, and classism found in face-to-face encounters. Instead, the Internet presents a forum that encourages broad participation and emphasizes merit over status. Virtual communities allow isolated individuals to communicate in a manner that protects them from the social expectations and sanctions associated with physically defined communities (Turkle, 1995). Proponents point to the potential of the Internet to disrupt gender-induced biases in communication as one of its strengths. Virtual communities are cohesive and meaningful social expectations and sanctions associated with physically defined communities. In addition, from such a perspective, information society is viewed as representing a major historical shift, changing the bases of political power and social classes with a growing role for information workers and knowledge class (Miles, 1988). Information technology is seen as revolutionary technology with practical benefits which will promote repaid diffusion. The viewpoint is built on long term

forecasting based typically on generalizations of leading-edge experience.

The optimism about the liberalizing effects of the Internet was mostly coherently presented in the "technology determination theory", which is one of the most popular theories on the social impact of technology.

In the early 1930s, Lewis Mumford in his classic *Technics and Civilization* (1934) traced the development of technology and pointed out the qualitative advantages provided by electricity would lead to improvements in environmental, social, and economic spheres. Honard Innis wrote the famous book The bias of communication (1951) which focused on the social history of communication media, and for Innis, a key to social change was found in the development of communication media. Influenced by his colleagues' previous researches, Marshall McLuhan has greatly developed "technology determination theory". In his *The Gutenburg Galaxy* (1962), he describes how the printing machine alienated human beings and how the electronic media might bring back our dream of a plural and equal way of social life, bearing a mark of his previous identification of "new media as political forms" in 1954. McLuhan also says that the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale, pace or pattern that introduce into human affairs. "Media is the message, the content is the user" means the forms of information people perceive are infinitely more central to the nature of their consciousness, and consequently, to the patterns of social interaction than any merely visual or verbal content of the message

received. McLuhan's vision was shared later by the futurists, such as Toffler (1980), Naisbitt (1982), Becker and Scarce (1993) and Barber (1996).

The technological determinists' view is a technology-led theory of social change. Technology is seen as "the prime mover" in history, and specifically that media technology shapes how people as individuals in a society think, feel, and act, and in turn how a society as a whole operates as people move from one technological age to another. This theory is built on two technological-determinist arguments, which claim that: (1) the nature of technologies and the direction of change are unproblematic or predetermined by factors like "inner technical logic" or "economic imperative", and (2) technology has necessary and determinate "impacts" upon work, economic life, and society as a whole. Technological determinists interpret technology in general and communications technologies in particular as the foundation of society in the past, present and even the future. In its most extreme form, the entire form of society is seen as determined by technology, and social arrangements are seen as secondary. That is new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals, and at the very least a wide range of social and cultural phenomena are seen as shaped by technology.

Change or just continuity?

Although the conceptualization of the Internet as a powerful force in social change is popular, it is always challenged by its opponents. Critiques in the existing literature are mostly concerned about the domination or continuity situations bought about by the Internet.

An opposing view against technological utopianism is that the advances of the media lead to domination rather than democracy in society as a whole. Harold Innis (1964) contended the "the conditions of freedom of thought are in danger of being destroyed by science, technology, and the mechanization of knowledge", and that this trends was accelerated because of the increasing global dominance of Western civilization, which embodies commercialism, imperialism and expansionism. Luke (1989) pointed out that "the means of communicating information become critical tools for producing power and privilege for those who own, control or manage them, who are at the same time using these cultural circuits to extend their domination over others".

In addition, recent researches in American and Western Europe often agree with the theme of "continuity", which regards technology as not radically overhauling the existing democratic structures but rather reinforcing existing hegemonic structures. Generally, they argue, "On the whole, existing social, economic, and political forces continue to shape the development of political system, and/or cultural hegemony of a society, no matter what potential the technology itself has, whether the potential is realized would depend on who would use the technology, for what purposes and with

which degree of effectiveness." (Chan, Pan and Lee, 2003). The basic conclusion of all these studies is that content producers' access to audience is highly unequal.

For example, studies of the "digital divide" (Norris, 2001; Mack, 2001; Bucy, 2000) have found different social groups have differential amount of access to the Internet. In political communication researches, scholars have found that the Internet is still likely to reinforce existing patterns of political participation and information acquisition even with equal access, because it is the already informed and interested who are most likely to use the Internet for political purposes (Davis, 1999; Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Dahlgren, 2001). Web traffic is also heavily concentrated to a very small percentage of websites owned and operated by large corporations (DiMaggio et al, 2001). From such a perspective, Miles (1988) points out that "continuism" claims about the information society, information technologies, and the predicted rate of diffusion of the technology are regarded as overstated. Main features of society and basic of power structures are thought unlike to alter, although social and political initiatives may lead to change. And this perspective mainly forecasting for short and medium term, based on extrapolating past experience.

Scholars found that online discourse has been still dominated by the idea of coherent subjects and the culture of consumerism, and they address the cyberculture on the Internet have described the Internet as a "Cyberghetto" or "Dystopian" (Haubem, 1997; Kedzie, 1997; Jodan, 1999; Kitchin, 1998; Poster, 1995; Roper, 1998; Slevin,

2000; Nguyen and Alexander, 1996). They have made critiques on the utopians both philosophically and empirically (Dutton, 1996; Ess, 1996; Graham and Marvin, 1996; Kichin, 1998; Luke, 1998; McChesney, 1995; Resnick, 1998; Schuler, 1995; Streck, 1998). The literature shows that virtual communities as just another dimension of traditional communal relationships with the same built-in biases of race, class, and gender. Visual identities may be de-emphasized on the Internet to some extent, but the same codes of conduct moderate social relationship in medium. Virtual communities fulfill the same traditional essence of associations and bonding, and invariably promote social relationships that are orchestrated by inherent inegalitarian tendencies in society. Some critics argue that the Internet will not change gender-induced biases because the constructive philosophy and covert tendencies of the medium are male-centric. And race, gender and class biases on the Internet are inevitable because medium is conductive to the philosophy of a class-structured economy.

As to the Internet in China, quite a number of researches adopt this critical perspective to refine the political impact of the Internet. The most prominent line of argument focused on the government's attempts to control the Internet through both regulation and technological means, and thereby the presence of the Internet tends to strengthen state control, rather than loosen it and empower the populace (Kluver and Qiu, 2003). A second line regards the Internet's primarily commercial natural displaces the anonymity and fee access that was promised (Zhao and Schiller, 2001;

Kluver and Qiu, 2003).

The third way: Mediationist perspective

When coming to the discussion of the social impact of the Internet, there exist at least three probabilities that may not be determined by the liberalizing attributes of the Internet or the society alone. First, the existing political power may respond with new measures to the challenges posed by the Internet, which may soften authoritarian rule to certain degree. Second, the society may harbor some characteristics that do not unanimously determine the Internet's social impact since there may be disagreement or even contradictions among the different agencies as social factors. Third, the discrepancies and tensions among the latent role new media are likely to grow in the actual process of utilization. Thus, using the Internet in journalistic practices in an authoritarian country may result in a complex consequence including both the empowerment for journalists in news making and hegemonic adaptation of the Internet to existing institutions set by the authoritarian countries. So if juxtaposed with each other, the views of the "the Internet as a liberalizing force" and those of the Internet as an instrument of dominance and continuity constitute a binary opposition. Between the two ends of the spectrum, there lays a third approach stressing the moderate or limited social impact of the Internet under the constraints of the users, activities, and contexts. From this point of view, social change is neither exclusively blessed nor doomed with the introduction of new communication technology such as

the Internet. Rather, the impacts have to be studied analytically with regards to different aspects of politics, economics, society and culture.

Early in the 1980s, Ian Miles and his colleagues (Miles et al, 1988) proposed the "structuralist" approach to describe the social impact of technology. They recognize information technology does have revolutionary implications, but the implications will depend upon social and political factors since both barriers to change and openings for far-ranging innovation exist. It also acknowledges that the diffusion will be uneven both within and across societies, and social change mainly comes in new organizational structures, styles and skills. Brian (1998) looks back a history of electrical and electronic system of communications to against the concept of technological determinism, arguing instead that social, political, economical and cultural factors are the prime determinants of technological change. Disputed the concept of an Information Revolution, he has suggested that change is accomplished slowly, and he introduces the model of "technological innovation, diffusion and suppression" to indicate the primacy of the social sphere in conditioning the technologists' work. He shows how social forces both push and hinder these developments, forcing a social "fit" upon them in the process. This "fit" is essentially achieved by suppressing the disruptive power of the technology to impact radically on pre-existing social formations. He formulates this as a "law" of suppression of radical potential. In one of the case studies of "democracy" on the Internet in China, Huang (1999) argues that the Internet does provide a unique and novel means for

political expression in China, but that the presence of the technology itself is not a determinative factor in the development of democracy in China. Political will and social purpose are more important, and the role of the Internet will be merely supportive of that will.

Fermented on the previous theoretical discussions, the concept of "mediation" is proposed to account for the possibilities and to capture the dynamic, interactive and dialectical relation between the Internet and its social contexts, out of which the outcomes of the Internet take place. The word "mediation" has multiple meanings, one of which is "interceding between adversaries" that is the conflicting parties intervene with each other to promote reconciliation, settlement, or compromise (Webster, 2005). Thus, this thesis conceptual the liberalizing potential embedded in both the Internet's inherent property and society as the facilitating factors, and the sociopolitical constrains imposed by the authoritarian government as the constraining factors. The facilitating factors and the constraining factors are opposing adversaries. Thus, the social impact of the Internet in this perspective can be interpreted as a mediating process in which juxtaposing adversaries initiated by the Internet and the social context, contact, interaction, and reconciliation with each other and affect the outcome. The actual utilization of the Internet by users in a given society will give rise to new means of social practices, which operate neither in complete defiance of nor total compliance with the existing working routines or social orders.

To be more specific, the mediation has three meanings. First, the facilitating factors in the Internet's inherent property potential and society are juxtaposed with the constraining factors imposed by the authoritarian government as the constraining factors. Second, these two kinds of factors interact with each other during the process in which the Internet's impacts on journalism take place. Third, the consequence of adopting the Internet in journalism may not lead to a clear-cut effect of empowerment. Rather, the consequence will not be pre-destined but contextual; not unidirectional but two-way; and not revolutionary but moderate, since different social forces balance and counteract one another, resulting in partially democratizing and partially pro status quo and leading to limited liberalization.

In sum, the mediationist perspective interprets the Internet's impact on journalism in authoritarian countries as a transplantation of the liberalizing potential of the Internet's inherent property into the journalism in non-democratic society as well as the extension of the authoritarian forces into the Internet assisted journalism. It is a two-way incorporation between the technology with liberalizing potential and the journalism under strict controls, and it is possible to bring about empowerment to the journalistic practices. In a broader sense, it means that the social impacts of the new media are contingent upon the contexts of social utilization, in which the relationship between technology and society is interactive. Changes towards liberalization accompanying the introduction of new technologies are deemed as not radical and inexorable but moderate and reversible. The thesis takes this mediationist perspective

as its theoretical foundation.

In addition, the alternative perspective provided by the mediation concept is founded not on the denial of the existing perspectives but on the linking of their values and evaluating them through the observation and analyses of actual situation in which new technology is utilized. Although the mediationist approach recognizes the liberalizing effect of new technology, it also does not dismiss the significance of constraining factors. Although the phenomena caused by the introduction of the new medium should be examined, the pre-existing context for the utilization of the new medium also needs to be acknowledged. Thus by considering multiple factors and processes, the mediationist perspective, as a holistic approach towards the subject matter, can bridge the gap between the technological determinism/utopianism view and continuity/domination view of the impact of the Internet on society.

Concluding remarks

This thesis adopts the mediationist perspective to analyze the Internet's impact on Chinese journalistic practices. It describe how the Internet as a new communication technology is used in the news making process, and how the Internet's impact is mediated by social factors embedded in existing journalistic practices. The consequence of the mediation is examined to determine how the Internet's usage reinforces or modifies the news making in the tug-of-war of media reform. Research

questions will be answered by providing a comprehensive picture of the factors, processes, and consequences on the mediation of the Internet's power in news making.

Chapter 3 Internet, Journalists, and Media Reform with Chinese Characters

The Internet, journalistic practices and media reform in China are marked unique Chinese characteristics. Hegemonic political control and ongoing commercialization are in the tug-of war (He, 1996), and greatly affects the development of both the Internet and the journalistic reform in the media. This chapter will provide a comprehensive picture of the Chinese context in which the interplay between the Internet and news making takes place. Various mediation social factors that affect the Internet usage and journalistic practices will also be illustrated.

Hegemonic control: Institutional settings for China's Internet

The Internet comprised a huge interconnected network of electronic services and functions, many of which are practically invisible to the casual observer. This network takes the form not only of the World Wide Web, but also various interanets, viral private networks, and financial networks of various kinds, all of which contribute to greater economic integration and modernization. In 1995, China's first commercial Internet services were first made available to the general public, and since then China boasts the world's fastest-growing Internet network, with the number of users doubling approximately every ten months or so (Kluver and Qiu, 2003). According to the July 2005 report of China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC, 2005), the country has 103 million Internet users, 45.6 million

online computers, and more than 622,000 ".cn" domain names. The huge exploration of both the infrastructure and the number of users is not just because of the inherent attraction of the Internet for Chinese users, but also a heavy government-led investment (Kluver and Qiu, 2003) on infrastructures of communication technology due to China's ambition to become a technological power state (Hartford, 2000). In the first decade development, China's grand project[2] on the Internet construction has succeeded on establishing a pluralistic and multi-level infrastructure (Peng, 2004). Currently, the main body of China's online news media is a group of the media websites certificated by the State Council Information Office. These official online media outlets are divided into four categories: (1) media websites of central government news units, such as China. com (zhongguo wang), People. com (renmin wang), Xinhua.org (xinhua wang); (2) media websites of news units of departments of central government agencies, such as China Youth Online (zhongqin zaixian); (3) media websites of the news units directly under provincial government, autonomous regions, and independent municipalities, such as Qianlong.com (qianlong wang), Eastday.com (dongfang wang), and (4) non-news unit websites, such as Sina.com, Sohu.com. Except for the non-news commercial websites, the formal three are all news portals affiliated with the traditional media.

During the early period of the Internet development in China, the online media was basically an intension of the traditional media's own attempts. In early 2000 when

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[2] In 1995, the China Telecom started to provide commercial Internet services to the general public through its ChinaNet. Since then, the growth of the technology has been phenomenal.

few industries in China paid attention to online business, news media outlets had already set up more than 2000 independent domain names or websites (Min, 2000). The government did not enact the Internet regulations until 1996 (Peng, 2004). Since then, the relevant policies and regulations have formed the basic legal frame in which the Internet media has been allowed to develop. Currently the four major Internet regulations have been issued by China's central government concerning the Internet usage[3]: (1) *Measures for the Administration of Internet Information Services* by National People's Congress on September 25, 2000; (2) *Interim Provisions for the Administration of Internet Sites Engaging in News Publication Services* by National People's Congress on November 1, 2000; (3) *Provisions Governing the Administration of Internet Electronic Bulletin Board Services* by National People's Congress on November 8, 2001; and (4) *Interim Provisions on the Administration of Internet Publishing* by Ministry of Information on August 1, 2002.

The legal statutes concerning the Internet regulation in China impose powerful controls in four areas – backbone service providers (national Internet service providers, that is ISPs), Internet content providers (ICPs), domain names provision, local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and individual users (Chan and Qiu, forthcoming). According to *Measures for the Administration of Internet Information Services (2000)*, "There will be national implementation of a licensing system for commercial Internet information services and a registration system for

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[3] Please refer to: http://www.cnnic.net.cn/policy

non-commercial Internet information services." Regarding the provision of backbone services, international connections must obtain approval from the State Council. In 1996, only four companies had the privilege of international Internet connection: ChinaNet, GBNet, CERNet, and CSTNet (Qiu, 2000). According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), this number has increased to nine by the July of 2005 (CNNIC 2005), but government control on foreign content has been retained through infrastructure planning so that all incoming and outgoing information can be more easily monitored and filtered.

As for the ICP sectors, which are most related to journalists' everyday news practices, the law states that *"general interest non-news unit websites may engage in operations of posting news promulgated by central government news units, the news units of departments of central government agencies, and the news units directly under the provinces, autonomous regions and independent municipalities, but may not post news from their own sources or news from other sources. Other Internet websites that are established by a non-news unit in accordance with the law may not engage in news posting operations."* That is to say, both content and use of content is subject to control and ICPs are required to obtain all political and financial news from state-approved news providers such as the *Xinhua News Agency* that retains a virtual monopoly on both online and offline content provision. Furthermore, ICPs must register with the State Council and are responsible for policing the content that appears on their sites.

While the laws ensure tight control, China's Internet laws and regulations as a whole are notoriously unclear and ambiguous (Chan and Qiu, forthcoming). Rather than possessing a unified national law, the Internet is under the supervisions of different departments and state bodies such as the Ministry of Information Industries, the State Administration of Radio, and Film and Television. These bodies use a maze of regulations, licences and permits to control the Internet (Zhao, 2001). This organisational fragmentation resulted in a similarly fragmented legal system, which is often changing and rarely uniformly enforced (Chan and Qiu forthcoming). Also, the lack of clarity in legislation actually works as a form of government control by prompting widespread self-censorship (Hartford, 2000).

The Internet control in China is also carried on by technology such as content filtering and blocking. Filtering is employed to foreign content on a national level through the control of international connections, and through the national firewall system that has been popularly referred to as the "China's Great Firewall" (Barme and Ye,1997). Blocking is accomplished through two techniques. The first involves blocking specific sites that are known to disseminate seditious viewpoints, and the second is to target packets containing certain keywords. (Chan and Qiu, forthcoming). Following inconsistent logic and totally unpredictable timetables, Chinese Internet regulators have banned and sometimes unblocked, major international new outlets such as the websites of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *CNN*. However,

although the state has been more successful at controlling content produced by domestic organizations, there is less success in regulating content produced by individuals in online forums such as the now popular and lively online Bulletin Board System (BBS) and chat rooms. The cat-and-mouse game between those who hope to control information and those who hope to gain access to prohibited content happens from time to time.

In addition, online surveillance is used to supplement t blocking and filtering technology. At the top of the hierarchy lies these three: the public security forces, branches of Ministry of Culture, and the "cyber-police" in general whose power stems directly from the Internet laws and official regulations. They direct the technocrats, or "sysops (short for system operators)," at the middle level in charge of regional or local networks, whose compliance is ensured using a set of real-world punishments such as fines, revocations of licence, and suspension of network connections. In their lowest level, the board master, always on a volunteer basis, and many government employed writers and often keep some control over online discussion and nationalist zealots and dissident voices through emotional attacks and hostile speech.

By using the above active methods, the Chinese government has used both crude and sophisticated means of achieving hegemony within China's national cyberspace (Chan and Qiu, forthcoming). This intent of achieving hegemonic control of the

Internet is also reflected on the remarks of Ding Guangen, head of the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2001, that the government's goal should be to "occupy the online battlefront of public opinion". He stressed that China should accelerate the development of the Internet news services and build a large, influential on-line propaganda system as soon as possible. Ding emphasized that *Xinhua News Agency* should continue to concentrate its recourses to build the website into a high quality "on-line information hub" which enjoys popularity both in China and the world. He continued by urging other key news websites in the country to strive to develop their own brand names and authority by adopting unique characteristics and high standards.

The booming development of the Internet and its hegemonic institutional settings are the context of Chinese journalists' news practices with the Internet. On one hand, the Internet provides a much freer space for communication, but on the other hand, it is still strictly controlled by the Party-state. These settings will greatly affect how much and what kinds of resources the Internet can provide journalists, and in what ways the Internet and traditional media co-exist and cooperate.

Dancing with shackles: Journalists in China's media reform

Journalists describe their news practices just like "dancing with shackles". No matter in central official media or in provincial ones, the propaganda controls strictly constrain journalists' professional practices, and limit their job autonomy. However, commercialization, in China has allowed media liberalization, in which the commandist Chinese media system is transformed into one that enjoys greater relative autonomy from the party-state. So in the media reform in current stage, Chinese journalists' everyday practices are in the tug-of-war of Party-state and market. Both the constraints in the traditional media control and liberalizing forces embedded in market co-exist, and they can be further elaborated in the following three clusters: institutional, organizational and individual levels.

The institutional level

At the institutional level, China's "commandist" control of journalistic practices institution (Lee, 1990) is the most powerful constraints. China's commandist media system is built upon one cardinal principle: the media is not first and foremost commercial entities; rather, they are instruments through which the party can propagate the party line and party policies of its revolutionary struggle (Pan, 2001). These ideas have legitimized a series of common practices of the party press system (Cheek, 1989)

First, the ownership of media organizations and facilities for production and transmission of media content belongs exclusively to the party and the state. Since

the intricate relationship between the Party and the state in China makes media administration especially complicated, the Chinese media is under the dual leadership of both the Party and the government (Zhao, 1998). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government have ultimate authority over all media organizations in China, not only over what are formally called "Party organ", the official papers of the Party and government at different administrative levels, but also over non-Party papers such as those published by quasi-official organizations, educational institutions, and economic enterprises. China's press regulations do not permit independent papers. Newspaper must be licensed by the government in the name of organizational units such as government departments or industrial entities. At the very least, all papers are broadly answerable to Party policy and more directly supervised by Party groups and committees both within and above the units that publish them. In addition, committees at various levels of the Communist Party hierarchy appoint and remove leading personnel at new organizations, which fully controls the personnel management (Polumbaum, 1990).

Second, the Chinese media, especially the party organs, are the mouthpieces of CCP and have the burden of "propaganda tasks". The central concept that underlies the Party's domination over the media is the "Party principle". The principle means that is the news media must accept the Party's guiding ideology as its own; they must accept the Party's programs, policies and directives; and they must accept Party's leadership and stick to the Party's organizational principles, policies and decisions.

According to Lenin's ideas, the party newspaper should be the Party's collective propagandists, agitators, and organizers and at the same time, it must educate the people, raise their consciousnesses, and guide and support them in their struggles (Zhao, 1998). The Party principles and the mouthpiece theory are constantly being emphasized and reinforced as the party struggles to maintain control of the media. Although media reform has brought many changes in the media's functions as information, knowledge, culture and entertainment provider, the "mouthpiece" role has not changed. That is only *Xinhua News Agency* has the rights to release important political news, only *People's Daily* can publish important political commentary (He, 1994).

Third, as the supreme commander of propaganda control, the Central Propaganda Department oversees the content control at all levels through official publication and editorial guidelines as well as through prepublication censorship. General rules and parameters for news operations can be found in Party resolutions, directives, announcement, internal bulletins, speeches and informal verbal messages of leading Party figures. Also, the Party sometimes sets specific editorial guidelines on news reporting, especially on news about leaders and important personalities, collective or conflict events, disease, disasters and fatal accidents. Party leaders' speeches have been carefully studies by media workers and constantly interpreted by media theoreticians since the speeches often define the nature of journalism and set out general and specific guidelines. In addition, the Party is almost involved in the

high-level news decision-making. Important news items of the media are often previewed by Party officials that are in charge of propaganda, and on important occasions, Party leaders become directly involved in news and editorial writing. Media monitoring is usually performed by special teams of veteran Party ideological workers.

In addition, the Party often decides major topics for news coverage to be given attention for a specific period as the focus of campaigns. It also censors journalists' works by news suppression. Many events in China go uncovered, or at least covered only in internally circulated bulletins. The reason is not to be found in official lists that inform journalists. Censorship on which topics are limited and what issues could be reported are really contingent upon the current social situation, for example, the collective conflicts events, disastrous accidents or ethnic problems are not allowed to reports; negative reports and sensitive events are avoided in the "Double conferences" periods.

The monopolistic control the Party's exerts on China's news media is relatively complete while still being full of ambiguity and uncertainty. There is no uniform press law in China. Rather the media regulation and propaganda control in China is better explained to a larger extent by the "rule of men", which serves the immediate political needs of Party. For decades, Chinese news management had operated through a complex and changeable mix of general policy pronouncements, official

instruments, ideological persuasion, personalized channels, and varying levels of prospective punishment for transgressing ill-defined boundaries. The CCP preferred a broad and implicit "directive mode" of media supervision rather than specific, explicit media censors. Although the stratified-checking prepublication reviews have been adopted by propagandists and ideologists, there is no formal, institutionalized, and universalized prepublication censorship apparatus in China. That is to say the Party sets the overall tone and direction for the press implicitly through general policy statements, specific instructions and priorities for the press via documents, bulletins transmitted from propaganda authorities to news organizations. In addition, how the party's directives or guidelines are interpreted in practice is largely up to local Party committees and the news organizations themselves.

However, the development in propaganda that aims to enhance the Party's ruling capabilities cannot be ignored. Together with the increased commercialization, the Chinese government has pursued the economic reform with out yielding political control of ideology. As a result, a set of far-reaching changes have taken place in media operations (Li, 1995), and the microenvironment of media operations is expected to move towards loosing political controls and relaxing ideological orthodoxy. The original state of hegemony is threatened and sometimes weakened by the changing social environments. The new propaganda guidelines are often created and promoted to "repair" the existing party lines. Propaganda reforms are adopted to work at "cross purposes" (Polumbaum, 1994). On one hand, the new guiding

political directions dealing with the news media continued an evolutionary process set in motion by the reforms, with an ostensibly progressive intent. On the other hand, the new ideology guidelines also grew out of hegemony in China's party leadership to reinforce their power. So the propaganda reforms are simultaneously to foster changes to adapt to the changing social environment while maintaining the ideological supremacy of the Communist Party.

Since early 2003, top Chinese leaders have urged the media not only to reflect the Party's line, but also the opinion of ordinary people. The official *People's Daily* newspaper insisted in February that China's media should follow the "Three Closenesses (sange tiejin)[4]" according to the remarks by top leaders, that is, close to reality, close to the masses, and close to real life. Also, the propaganda chief Li Changchun said at a meeting of senior media and culture officials that media reports "must have substantial and reliable content as well as news value." These top-down propaganda reforms inspired new ideas on journalistic practices and promoted a new wave of changes in both party organ and marketized media, such as the editorial reform in *People's Daily*. The promoting of news ideology guidelines is a process of reinforcing the supremacy of the ruling ideology by employing new symbolic

4 Three Closenesses means "Close to close to reality, close to the masses, and close to real life". As a refinement and specific interpretation of "Three Represents (sange daibiao)" by Jiang Zemin, On May 15th, 2003, Li Changchun, the director of the Central Propaganda Department wrote article on the *Qiush (Vol.10,2003,)* the central party organ magazine, titled "Reform and reinforce news propaganda through 'Three Closenesses' (cong 'sange tiejin' rushou, gaige he jiaqiang xinwen xuanchuan)." He urged the media to reflect not only the Party's line, but also the opinion of ordinary people. Top Chinese leader Hu Jintao also delivered an important speech on the "National News Propaganda and Ideology Conference" on December 2003, titled "Insisting 'Three Represents' as the important ideology guideline for news propaganda" (jianchi 'sange daibiao' zhongyao sixiang tongling xuanchuan sixiang gongzuo'). He pointed out that news propaganda should be close to reality, close to the masses, and close to real life, and deepen the news propaganda for better leading, mobilizing and educating people.

resources and improvising new practices to expand the boundary of the dominant ideology (Pan, 1997a)

The organizational level

Since the journalistic reform that started in the late 1980s, three major measures brought significant changes to the politico-economic environment of media operations in China. First, state subsidies to almost all media organizations except a handful of party organs were reduced and gradually terminated (Chan, 1993; Song, 1994). The reducing of the state subsidies forced media organizations to plunge into the market. Between 1992 and 1993, the marketization of the media industry starts to appear in the official vocabulary of journalistic reform laws (Liang, 1992; Liu, 1993), allowing the newspaper and broadcast media to compete in a market environment. Second, the reestablishment of the State Press and Publication Administration (SPPA) in 1987 (Polumbaum, 1994) reflected the call for a separation between party and state powers. As the deepening economic reforms moving towards marketization increased the tension between the party and the state, the re-creation of SPPA made it possible that the Party continues its ideological domination while transferring enforcement of these ideological principles to the state apparatus (Song, 1994). Third, there was a boom in the advertising industry (Pan, 2001), as well as the establishment of a market-driven distribution structure. These three factors coincided to form the contexts in which organizational facilitating and constraining factors on

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. The official *People's Daily* newspaper also insisted that China's media should practice the "Three Closeness".

journalistic practices were generated and co-existed.

Commercialization refers to the process by which media come to respond to the profit motive as a driving force and to depend on advertising and other business activities for revenue (Chan, 1993). On the one hand, commercialization is no doubt a facilitating factor that brings media liberalization in current China. The revenue allows media organizations to survive in spite of the decreasing subsidies from the Chinese government. In the 1990s, the advertising became an indispensable source of revenue, at first as a supplement to and finally as a substitute for the subsidies for all but a few national media outlets. The shift in income source has immense implications for media content, media function, and the relationship between media organizations and government. Advertisements not only constitute a new form of information, but also embody a new media role reaching the consumers and serving the market. Coupled with the political and economic dynamics of marketization, the depoliticized conception of the "audience" is a new media ideology as well as a rhetorical device in journalistic discourse, and the ideational change makes it possible to incorporate audience surveys into media organizational routines in their journalistic practices (Zhang, 2000). Some journalists are tempted to test the ideological boundaries in the name of the market. With commercialization, market logic has partially become a mechanism in "mass-line" journalism whereby the media becomes no longer detached from the people, since the media can no longer afford to ignore their audience in the competitive advertising environment. The tough

competition for readers and audience among the news media has forced them to change their content and programs. Many of them have to publish or broadcast more "soft" or sensational news. Since the late 1980s, most newspapers, even some major party organs, have put out tabloid-type weekend editions or evening newspapers (Polumbaum, 1994). In their pursuit of market success, the marketized media have revived a tradition of mass-line journalism to some extent by adopting a robust rubric of "serving the people", such as the investigative reports that carry on the supervision by public opinions. Theories and practices of mass-line journalism have been employed to rationalize and legitimize marketing strategies.

However, commercialization is a double-edge. The rapidly expanding market force since 1992 have also been eroding journalistic ethics as journalists become allured more to the logic of the consumer market than that of professionalism (Pan, 2002), such as paid journalism. The media also has to be mainly concern a lot with its commercial interests, especially the advertising and local media markets. Although the advertising department and editorial department are usually separated in the media organization, much negative information on the big adverting entities should be carefully dealt with in order to guarantee the advertising incomes.

In addition, in the decade of liberalization and decentralization in which the commercial imperative and local protection have grown much stronger, media organizations have become more and more concerned about bureaucratic and local

interests. One journalist said that although the bureaucratic interest is officialdom between the government departments and not justice, journalists must obey the bureaucratic hidden rules to maintain the media organization's survival. So the editorial decisions should be made much more cautiously when the events happening in the region where the newspaper has a large market or the events involve certain senior officials.

The individual level

At the individual level, journalists bear contradictions in their journalistic practices between self-censorship on one hand and professional aspiration on the other. Since media regulation has established a set of relatively standard punishment mechanisms, Chinese journalists are under constant pressure to avoid political mistakes, and many professionals learn to play it safe. In addition, there are often ambiguities in the editorial control system which coupled with the lessons of past political campaigns in which bold journalists did not fare well, so it generally works to keep China's press corporations in check. More often than not, journalists themselves may have acted as the most effective news censors in their everyday practices. Journalists more or less self-suppress on the sensitive news, especially in the party organs. In general, journalists will not touch any sensitive topic unless there is permission from the above leaders. They often say they represent the authority position and that their every word has great implications for the local government; so they deal very carefully and follow the guidance from the governments. Punishment ranges from

being forced to write self-criticisms to demotion to unemployment.

In addition, journalism reform in China is under way in which the changing Chinese journalistic practices constitute the essence of China's journalism reforms (Pan, 2001). China's media reform calls for incorporating the principles of market economy and some "extraordinary" or "non-routine" measures has been invented, implemented and justified collaboratively by journalists (Pan, 2001). Journalists interact with the commandist institution and "negotiate" the boundary of the official ideology by broadening the sources of symbolic resources and by diversifying social practices within the official ideology. Localizing the western professionalism in their journalistic practices is such a discursive attempt.

Media marketization has brought Chinese journalists a higher degree of day-to-day operational freedom in the past twenty-five years of media reform. Although the operational freedom allotted to journalists is limited, media reforms allow them to improvise practices derived from diverse normative models. Traditionally, the Chinese journalists were all supposed to share the perspective and practices of the Soviet model of the press that define them as party propagandists. Professionalism, as the normative model of journalism, in a broad sense refers to the conception of journalism as an institution independent from the control of political and economical powers. Practitioners' activities are guided by and justified in terms of professional norms and values. Universal professionalism is paved the way for the rise of

knowledge-based occupations as the dominant ideology (Freidson, 2001; Larson, 1977). In China, media professionalism is a concept shaped by the historical trajectory of the triangular dynamics among the party ideology, media marketization and western professionalism (Pan and Lu, 2003). The localization of professionalism in China is a discursive construction process in which the Western professionalism is employed to deconstruct the dominant party journalism ideology system through reconstruction in which three different discourses, party, market and professionalism, are manipulated. Scholars have found that professional journalism has emerged as a direct competitor to the party-journalism paradigm (Pan and Chan, 2003). In this process, many Chinese journalists treat Western counterparts as models, and import the Western vocabulary of professional journalism into China's local context. They may do this in order to navigate through the political land mines and/or justify their entrepreneurial adventure in financial or consumer markets. In addition, the Chinese journalists have a deep-rooted commitment to the interests of the public to quality journalism based on the principle of factuality, and practices consistent with ethical principles. For examples, the investigative reports by *News Probe* in *CCTV* and *Southern Weekend* are regarded as the "conscience of Chinese journalism". Although the party press model remains hegemonic for most Chinese journalists, they look to their Western counterparts for inspiration (Pan and Chan, 2003). They attest to the persistence of Chinese journalists' professional aspirations, which are future-oriented as an imagined future rather than a static belief system.

In the intertwining of the constraining and facilitating factors in the above three levels, Chinese journalists keep on "dancing" although "with shackles on their feet". The enduring communist system and ongoing marketization in the media reform also comprise the context in which journalistic practices take place, and they not only affect Chinese journalists' everyday news routine, but also how journalists incorporate the Internet in their news making and what kinds of impact the Internet will impose on the existing journalistic routine.

Empowerment of journalists in Chinese context

From the discussion above, we can identify various "mediation" factors, both facilitating factors and constraining factors, which affect Chinese journalistic practices (Table 3-1).

Table 3-1: The facilitating and constraining factors in Chinese journalistic practices

	The Mediation Factors	
	Facilitating factors	**Constraining factors**
Institutional	- Propaganda reform initiated by the Party-state - Development of the Internet led by the government	- Mass media regulation and propaganda control - Institutional settings of the Internet
Organizational	- Motivation of serving the audience to win media market	- Bureaucratic interest, local interest, commercial interest
Individual	- Professional aspiration	- Self censorship

As elaborated earlier, the facilitating and constraining factors come from both Internet itself, and the society's political and economic contexts. The facilitating factors, at the institutional level are the Party-state initiated propaganda reform and

the government-led of the Internet infrastructure construction; at the organizational level is the media organization's motivation of serving the audience in order to win media market; at the individual level is the journalists' professional aspiration. The constraining factors, at the institutional level are regulation and propaganda control on mass media, and the institutional setting of the Internet; at the organizational level are the various interests closely related to media organizations, such as the bureaucratic interest, local interest, and commercial interest; at the individual level is the journalists' self censorship in news making. All these mediation factors constitute as the component independent variables in the mediation process. They interact with each other and finally shape Internet-assisted journalistic practices in China. Whether and how the Internet can be a liberalizing force to empower Chinese journalists is contingent upon the interaction between the factors.

In a broad sense, empowerment is a process of giving people more control over their own lives or situations (Webster, 2005). Within the Chinese journalism context, the political control is the biggest constraint for news freedom and professional journalistic practices in current stage, so if the Internet empowers Chinese journalist, the Internet will affect the way journalists do their work or think of their work, and what's more, the changes in ways of working and thinking by the Internet should help journalists to get rid of the constraints imposed on their news practices and lead to their more job autonomy, resulting in pushing the boundary of news propaganda control. That is the specific meaning of empowerment of Chinese journalists.

Therefore, empowerment can be conceptualized as a composite of (1) attributes that relate to how journalists do their work, that is the news making process and some activities directly related to it, and (2) attributes that relate to how journalists think of their work, that is the journalists' perception of the role of media. To be more specifically, if the Internet empower Chinese journalists, first, when journalists do their work, the Internet will (1) help journalists to access all kinds of news resource to achieve objective and balance reporting, (2) allow journalists' independent decision making according to news values, (3) circumvent the media censorship in the news dissemination and promote news timeliness; second, (4) the Internet will play an important role in changing journalists' perception on media role from "media as propaganda advocacy" to " media as fourth estate". If all these impacts universally exist when Chinese journalists adopt the Internet in news making, we can assert that the Internet is definitely an agent of empowerment for Chinese journalist, and its liberalizing power is strong. If none of these impacts are discovered, we should say that the Internet cannot empower Chinese journalists, and it is fully institutionalized as a part of the existing communist media system. If only some of these impacts are seen or they can only detect in certain social situations, we should admit the Internet has liberalizing potential towards Chinese journalism, and then we should trace in what specific process the empowerment takes place, and what are the specific consequences in order to provide a comprehensive picture for the answer.

Concluding remarks

The Internet, as a new technological tool and a new public space, provides a new communication channel. With the booming of the Internet, the Party-state has established an institution to execute hegemonic propaganda control on China's cyberspace. Propaganda penetrates into different levels Chinese society, and it also dominates the journalistic practices. Although commercialization has brought media liberalization in China, journalists still dance in their limited autonomous spaces, and the constraining shackles on their foot cannot be broken loose. In sum, Chinese journalistic practices are the result of intertwining constraining and facilitating factors at institutional, organizational and individual levels, and these factors will affect how Chinese journalists use the Internet, whether and how the Internet can be an agent of empowerment in news making.

Chapter 4   Research Questions and Methodology

Research Questions

The theoretical basis and conceptual focus explicated in the previous chapters have led me to ask my research question: whether and how the Internet can serve as an agent of empowerment in news making to Chinese journalists. Adopting the mediationist perspective, the answer to this question is neither a simple yes or no. The mediation factors, processes and consequences should be elaborated to provide a complete picture of whether there is some empowerment in news making? If yes, how? If no, why not? So the research questions can be specified into the following three:

RQ1: How do the Chinese journalists use the Internet in news making?

RQ2: How does the Internet usage affect journalists' news making?

RQ3: Whether and how can the Internet empower the journalists in news making?

The first research question does not directly address the impact of the Internet, but it provides descriptive information about Chinese journalists' usage, on which the analysis of impact will be based. It also allows us to see how the Internet's inherent properties incorporate into and help with news making.

If the Internet usage affects journalists' news making, it can be expected that the Internet not only makes some changes towards news making, but also will bring

changes that can be categorized into different impact patterns in different conditions as the consequences of the mediation. From a mediationist perspective, the impact of technology is contingent upon social and political factors (Miles et al, 1988), and changes towards liberalization accompanying the introduction of new technologies are deemed as not radical and inexorable but moderate and reversible, resulting in partially empowerment and partially pro status quo. Therefore, the second question will explore the mediated consequences of the Internet usage on Chinese journalism.

Finally, whether the Internet use could empower Chinese journalists in the news making process is dependent upon the "added value" which the Internet brings to journalism (Chan, Pan, Lee 2003). The "added value" that the Internet could bring is contingent upon the interactions among existing journalistic institutional, organizational and individual characters. The third question aims to analyze the process of the mediation factors' interactions, which result in different impact patterns. The process will be elaborated in the specific contexts of time periods, types of news, news organizations and spatial locations. The social mechanisms that facilitate the Internet's empowerment, if any, towards journalists, will also be discussed.

Therefore, by answering these three questions, it is possible to provide a comprehensive picture of the Internet's impact on Chinese journalists.

Research Methods

The aim of my research is to explore the impact of the Internet usage on Chinese journalists' news making. In order to see whether and how the Internet can empower journalists, I first listen to how the journalists interpret the relationship between the Internet usage and their everyday news practices, then I analyze some important news case studies, which the Internet has played a significant role in and were mentioned by the journalists as exemplars of the Internet's impact on Chinese journalism.

Therefore in this study, I have adopted in-depth qualitative interviews as the basic methodological approach. I conducted in-depth interviews with forty-seven frontline journalists. Since different news genres, media types, organization types and locations of media will affects newsroom structures and news routines, the Internet usage and its impacts will depend upon the above conditions. Therefore I choose my interviewees in two major cities in China: Beijing and Guangzhou. Beijing is the capital and political center of China. Most of the central party organs are located there, and Beijing's media marketization is relatively developed. I choose *People's Daily* and *China Central Television* to represent the central party organs, *Beijing Television Station* to represent the Party's provincial television station, and *Beijing Youth Daily* to represent a marketized newspaper. Guangzhou is the central city in the Pearl River Delta in South China. Having benefited from the economic reforms,

Guangzhou is one of the most developed and richest cities in China. The first media group "*Guangzhou Daily Newspaper Groups*" was formed in Guangzhou in 1996, and the news media in Guangzhou is highly marketized and in a mature competition. *Guangzhou Daily* and *Southern Metropolis News* have been chosen to represent the local marketized news media, and *Guangdong Television Station* is used as the local official Party's provincial television station. The interviewees are located in political news desk, economic news desk, social news desk, international news desk, cultural technological and educational desk, and commentary desks. Since different media organizations have different departmental arrangements, the news desks indicated here are given the general names, referring to the news genres in which the journalists work.

Most of these interviewees are obtained by using the snowball-sampling method. I begin by asking my former classmates and friends who are now working in the above five media organizations to introduce their colleagues who are in the above five news desks as my interviewees. In addition, I ask these interviewees to recommend others who are in charge of the same kind of news in other media originations in the same city. These interviewees are either reporters or editors in the newspaper or TV station, and range from twenty-five to forty years old. The journalists are asked to provide me information on how they use the Internet in their everyday life, how the Internet assists their routine news work, how they carry out some important reports with the Internet, how their news making is constrained by various factors, how they consider

the Internet in journalistic practices, and how they interpret their roles as journalists. The journalists are both my research subjects and my informants to provide relevant information on the relationship between the Internet and Chinese journalistic practices.

In addition, I interviews three professors who are active and expertise in the field of the Internet and Chinese journalism studies in Renmin University of China and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and one administrative officer in charge of the Internet and media regulation in Information Office of Beijing Municipal Government. All of them are participants of the intellectual ferment of understanding the Internet's social impacts. As my important informants, they mainly provide me insights on the Internet's historical development and impacts in current China, as well as helping me understand how administrative regulations are carried out in both on the traditional media and the Internet.

The interviews were carried out on December 2004 and January 2005 in Beijing and Guangzhou respectively. In sum, I have conducted in-depth interviews with fifty-one informants, forty-six via face-to-face method; five are via telephone interviews, each of which lasted one to one and a half hours. In the interviews, I generally asked them (1) how they used the Internet everyday, (2) what kind of the Internet website they browsed for their work, (3) how they accessed their news source, (4) how they dealt with the hot news topics on the Internet, (5) what were the Internet-assisted news

cases that they consider significant, and how they viewed the Internet's role in news

making. Names and identities of the interviewees, specific interview dates and the

questions asked are listed in the Appendices.

Table 4.1 List of interviewees[5]

Media organization	News desks and Ranks	Amount
People's Daily	*Political news desk* , Junior reporter and junior editors *Economic news desk*, Senior reporter *Social news desk*, Junior reporter *International news desk**, Junior editor *Technology news desk*, Senior reporter *Commentary* desk*, junior editor	9
China Central Television	*Political news desk*: Senior reporter and junior editor *Economic news desk*: Junior reporter *Social news desk*: Junior reporters and senior editor *International news desk*: Junior editors *Cultural news desk**: Senior reporter and junior editor	11
Beijing Youth Daily	*Political news desk*: Junior reporter *Economic news desk**: Junior reporter *Social news desk*: Senior editor and junior reporter *International news desk*: Junior editor *Cultural news desk**: Junior reporter *Commentary desks*: Senior editor	6
Beijing Television Station	*Political news desk*: Senior reporter *Economic news desk*: Junior reporter *International news desk*: Junior editor	3
Guangzhou Daily	*Political news desk*: Junior editor *Economic news desk*: Junior reporter *Social news desk:* Junior reporter *International news desk*: Junior editor	7
Southern Metropolis News	*Political news desk*: Junior reporter *Economic news desk*: Junior reporters *Social news desk*: Junior reporter *Commentary desk*: Senior editor	7
Guangdong Television	*Political news desk*: Junior editors *Economic news desk*: Junior reporter *Social news desks*: Junior reporter	5

[5] Five informants (with *) were interviewed via telephone

Second, case studies are adopted to explore the different patterns of the Internet's impact and its mechanisms of empowerment, if any. Researcher Robert K. Yin (1994) defines the case study research method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context". Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships, and allow researchers to understand a complex issue or object and extend their experience or corroborate what is already known in previous research.

In this research, I choose four typical news cases to find out how and to what extent the Internet use is incorporated into news making, and also to explain how social factors interact to affect the Internet's impact on news making specifically. Through these cases, different mediation factors, mediation processes and mediation consequences will be analyzed in different patterns of Internet's impact on news making. Social mechanisms behind Internet's impact will also be discussed through these typical cases. The criteria I used to choose the four news cases are: first, the cases are highlighted by the journalists in my interviews as exemplars of how the Internet has affected their news work; second, these cases have their unique characters to represent the Internet's different impacts on journalists' news making in different kinds of situations. The four cases may have some overlaps on journalists' Internet use behaviors, but each has unique mediation factors, processes and consequences which significantly differentiate them from the others to represent the Internet's specific impact in each situation.

These four cases adopted here are: "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen", "Nandan mine blast disaster", "Debate on rise of ticket prices at Beijing tourist sites", and "*CCTV*'s political leaders' foreign affairs news reporting". (1) "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen" concerns Li Yizhen, a vice president of the Chinese Communist Party Shenzhen Municipal Committee, who in October 2004 caught abused his authority to force the middle school students to watch a movie directed by his daughter, nick named Niuniu. Later it was disclosed that the Li's family was heavily invested in the film's production company. *Beijing Youth Daily* took the lead to investigate and uncover the scandal, and national media followed up. The scandal ended with a public apology from Li and Central Propaganda Department's intervention on reporting. (2) "Nandan mine blast disaster" happened in July 2001, a disastrous mine explosion, which caused the death of eighty-one people in Nandan City of Guangxi Autonomous District, was covered up because of the collusion of local officers and commercial interests. It was finally disclosed by the *People's Daily*, enabling the central government to respond to the disaster. (3) "Debate on rise of ticket prices at Beijing tourist sites" arouse in December 2004 about the rising ticket prices of the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, ant the Great Wall. The representative in the hearing all supported the price rising; however, a great number of common people expressed their strong disagreement on rising the ticket prices. *People's Daily* carried on a series of reports on the public debates, not only concerned with the ticket price issue, but also concerning the public hearing institution in mainland China. (4)

"*CCTV*'s political leaders' foreign affairs news reporting" is about a changing in reporting news routines on *CCTV*'s current political news. Traditionally, the political leaders' foreign affairs news, as all political news in China, is under strict and stratified news censorship. However, due to the pressure from outside media sources, *CCTV* has reduced news censorship on stories of political leaders' foreign affairs to guarantee the news timeliness.

These four news events are closely related to the journalists' use of the Internet usages. The Internet has played an important role in each of these news making processes. Most of the information on the four case studies was gathered in my in-depth interview data. The interviewees who covered the news offered me exclusive details on their whole reporting process and also introduced me how other media outlets dealt with the events. They have also analyzed how the Internet and other social factors affect or change their works, and examined what Internet's roles are in news making. In addition, I have collected the actual news reports from *Beijing Youth Daily, People's Daily, CCTV* and *Southern Metropolis News* on the four news case using the WiseNews Database[6]. This documentation of reports supply relevant information on the news events and help me to get a comprehensive view of how the four events developed in these news media.

In sum, the in-depth interviews provide me the basic qualitative data on how

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[6] The database is on in the "Dao E-Resources" of the University Library System in The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

journalists use the Internet in news making and what impacts are. Based on the qualitative data, case studies are chosen to advance the findings to examine the specific impact of the Internet on news making in different social situations, and to explore the mechanisms of empowerment by the Internet. These two methods supplement with each other to provide a whole picture on the Internet's impacts on Chinese journalists.

Chapter 5   Chinese Journalists' Internet Usage in News Making

"I always start my computer when I get up in the morning, browsing the latest news on different news websites. Except some interviews outside, almost all of the time I am online," an economic news reporter tells about the Internet's role in her everyday news works. "As well, I quite rely on the Internet to quickly provide rich background information, especially when I write a big feature story." Just like her, many journalists in my interviews reiterated that the Internet has become a part of their work, and some even asserted, "I cannot work without the Internet". With the rapid development of computer technology and the Internet, more and more journalists have adopted the new technology tool to assist in their news reporting.

In the U.S, many scholars who have studied on the computer-assisted reporting (CAR) find that journalists use online computer information for a wide purpose. Research shows that journalists use the Internet's World Wide Web and commercial online services to enhance the newsgathering process (Garrison, 1995a; Reddick and King, 1997; Ross and Middleberg, 1997). Among the most-cited uses are finding people and news story sources, locating experts for stories, checking clips of other news organizations while preparing stories, conducting background research about businesses and individuals, identifying new story ideas, and locating both public and private information stored in digital form. These online tools save time and money and can link information in widely diverse locations (Ross and Middleberg, 1997;

Garrison, 1996b; Garrison, 1996c; Garrison, 1996d; Anon, 1996a; Reddick and King, 1997; Paul, 1996; Grossman, 1994; Anon, 1996b). Online resource is among the most basic CAR tools (Houston, 1996), and have become essential to the newsroom (Garrison, 1995). Reporters and their editors are increasingly dependent on commercial online resource and other networked computers for information gathering (Reddick and King, 1997; Simon and Napolitano, 1999). Using the Internet as a newsgathering tool becomes universal (Ross and Middleberg, 1999).

The Internet adaptation in China is growing fast. The latest survey by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) in July 2005 indicates that netizens in the country reached 103 million in the middle of 2005, resulting in an annual increase of 18.2 percent. The figure was only 670,000 when the first such survey was conducted in 1997. By the end of last year, 45.6 million computers had been connected to the Internet on the Chinese mainland, compared with 330,000 in 1997. In addition, journalists' adoption and usage of the Internet in China has been studied in the past five years (Bu and Liu, 1998; Min, 2000; Zhou, 2004). In their studies, journalists have a much more favorable perception of the Internet than that of the general population (Zhou, 2004). Also in the early 2000 when few industries in China paid attention to online business, new media outlets had already set up more than 2000 independent domain names or websites (Min, 2000), proving that journalists are more likely to take advantage of technological opportunities afforded by the Internet (Zhou, 2004). Research also shows that Chinese journalists use the

Internet mainly for news writing, background, data searching, and edition organizing (Bu and Liu 1998). The Internet enriches the news contents, provides various reporting angles, and accelerates the speed of information communication (Bu and Liu 1998). The Internet has become a necessity for journalists' news work, and it has been gradually incorporated in their everyday news making routine, although may be utilized to different extents.

News making, in a broad sense, refers to journalistic practices including news gathering, decision making and news dissemination as well as the practices directly influence the way and context in which the above activities are carried out. In the news making process, journalists use the Internet to meet their different needs in their journalistic practices and the Internet plays different roles in assisting journalists' work. Journalists regard the Internet as an indispensable tool and their different Internet usage patterns can be categorized as the followings: making use of the Internet as (1) news resource, (2) reference framework, and (3) supplementary channel.

News resource

Just like in the U.S, the Internet is a news resource for Chinese journalists in news gathering. As a new resource, the Internet provides a rich source of news information that may not be available by traditional means. It also works as the journalists' news

network to integrate the latest news from the nation wide media; and it serves journalists as an information database by providing comprehensive news background and relevant factual information.

News source

First and most importantly, the Internet provides a new way for journalists to access the news source. Journalists in China are always appointed to take charge of certain kinds of news, and traditionally news in China was gathered from official government press releases, contracted informants, readers' letters or telephone tips, and other news publications including newspapers, magazines and books. Nowadays, the situation has gradually changed since the Internet has been incorporated as an important news source for journalists and becomes a very important news clues provider.

Many social news journalists rely on the Internet to find news stories. They often browse BBS in public portals (such as Qiangguo Forum[7], Sina forum[8], Kaidi Community), university BBS (such as Unknown Space[9] and Shuimu Qinghua[10]), small-scale online discussion boards (such as Journalists' Home in Xici Community[11], and Media World in Tianya Community[12]) and even the personal

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[7] The website of Qiangguo Forum is http://bbs.people.com.cn/
[8] The website of Sina Forum is: http://people.sina.com.cn/
[9] Unknown Space is the university BBS affiliated to Perking University in Beijing. Its website is http://bbs.pku.edu.cn
[10] Shuimu Qinghua is the university BBS affiliated to Tsinghua University in Beijing. Its website is http://bbs.tsinghus.edu.cn
[11] Journalists' Home is one of discussion board on the *Xici Hutong* Community, whose website is www.xici.net

webpages (such as "Journalist Zheng Zhi"[13]). They try to find some original information that has not been reported by the media but may have high news value. BBS is a much freer space for information publishing and public discussion, as any one who has registered an ID on the BBS is able to publish information on the broad. BBS provides an alternative space for people to discuss, comment and communicate with others that may not be always available in the traditional media. The above BBSs are the more famous and influential among the Chinese netizens. Postings on these BBSs have first disclosed or brought public attention to critical events and social problems. Journalists often gaze at the BBS to wait and find some important or even sensational news. A social news reporter describes that, their routine news sources from press conferences are quite "vegetarian (su)", and they always hope to "smell" and "taste" some "meat" (wendao rou de weidao) from online sources. She continued by asserting that that much influential news is always first noticed by journalists on the Internet.

Reporters from *Beijing Youth Daily* and *Southern Metropolis News* list many of their famous reports that benefited from the Internet sources, such as "Shenzhen: Who Cast You Away?" in 2002 , "Sun Zhigang's Death" in 2003 by *Southern Metropolis News,* and "Shenzhen Niuniu Scandal" in 2004 by *Beijing Youth Daily*. Not only in marketized newspapers, journalists in party organs, such as *CCTV* and *People's Daily,*

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[12] Media world is one of the discussion board on the Tianya Community, whose website is www.tianyaclub.com

[13] Zheng Zhi is a reporter of Beijing Youth Daily. She established a personal homepage named "Journalist Zheng Zhi", and its website is www.zhengzhi.com

also treat the Internet as an effective news source to find out social problematic or public issues. A social news reporter in *CCTV* says she pays much attention to the university BBS and discovered some fresh ideas about education. One of her reports on "family teacher mediator" problem was originated from one of the top ten posting in Perking University's BBS "Unknown Space". Those editors in *People' Daily* admit that the Internet provides them plenty of news tips, and that it is their habit to browse Qiangguo Forum, Sina Forum and Sohu Forum[14] everyday to find the hottest public topics for their top news stories on their social news pages.

Using the Internet as a news source is also popular among editors at the international desk at the local papers, although this is not allowed in principle. Since local newspapers are not able to set up their own international news stations, but are not likely to frequently send their own reporters to frontline cover international events, they usually buy the international news from *Xinhua News Agency*, *China New Agency*, and sometimes order the special international features for their special pages from the above agencies. However, these stories cannot always meet the newspaper's editorial needs. So many local editors often hire some part-time translators or ask their own reporters to find soft news stories from foreign news websites, and then translate, rewrite and integrate the international stories for their own use. Sometimes they even directly remediate stories published by other newspapers, as long as the news is from authentic media outlets. "Since there does exist management blankness,

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[14] The website of Sohu Forum is: http:// bbs.sohu.com

we often adopt it as a hidden rule to use online resource for the soft international news." an editor explains. Editors in *Southern Metropolis News, Guangzhou Daily* and *Beijing Youth Daily*, all report that they often use the Internet as an important international news source, and so do the editors in charges of the sports match news and entertainment news.

In addition, as a news source, the Internet supplements, or even replaces the traditional press releases. In 1999, the state established the "Government Online Project (Zhengfu Shangwang Gongcheng)" (Peng, 2004), marking the significant development of China's E-government. Since then many government departments and Party committees have set up their own websites for news released and public access to governmental documents and information. Journalists can get the latest policy information by browsing the related official websites of government organizations. Journalists say that they can be kept up to date with government policies through accessing online news releases and directly making use of the information published on official governmental websites. In the past, reporters could only keep up with government news by keeping contact with official information officers and attending official press conferences. In addition, more and more government departments' press releases are synchronously publishing on the Internet, on Xinhua.org, People.com, China.com, and even commercial portals like Sina.com, on which the information is updated every few seconds.

News networks

The Internet has provided a place for the development of a nation wide news network. Although the Internet portals, except People.com and Xihua.org, are not allowed to gather and make their own news according to the state's Internet regulations, the Internet is still powerful in news integration. The Internet portals often select and integrate news stories from newspapers, magazines and national TV programs, and their news is updating 24 hours a day. The Internet news networks are composed of domestic news media websites on different administrative levels, such as People.com, Xinhua.org; official news portal different administrative, such as Qianlong.com[15], Dayang.com[16] and Rednet.com[17]; commercial portals, such as Sina.com, Sohu.com, and some foreign news portals and media websites, such as Zaobao.com, CNN.com.

First, every day, journalists browse the news websites to read the latest news online instead of reading newspapers as before. Since online news is hyperlinked, reports on the same topics can be integrated into a special volume and form an independent topic page on the Internet. Journalists consider it a fast and efficient way to browse the online news to get a comprehensive picture of what is currently happening. They also prefer online reading because online news is well edited and organized both chronologically and topically, so that journalists can easily get the latest and also the most important news by just browsing news channels on the Internet portals. For example, a political news reporter in *Southern Metropolis News* says it is her

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[15] Qianlong.com is the official news portal of Beijing Municipality. Its website is www.qianlong.com
[16] Dayang.com is the official news portal of Guangdong Province. Its website is www.dayang.com

work routine to read the online news. Her most frequently browsed website is Sina.com, on which she finds the latest policy news, both from the central government and other provinces. She always localizes her stories by interviewing local government officers about how these policies are executed in Guangzhou.

Second, the Internet's news network assists journalists to get local news in other provinces, municipal cities, or rural towns. Due to the small number or even lack of local station reporters, media organizations traditionally often contract with other newspapers and local TV stations, and mutually provide local news. Journalists can also read local newspaper to find possible news stories. Now, the Internet has become their most important resource to provide local news. Editors make use of reports online from their contracted press, and they also search local news portals for more interesting and important news stories for further investigative reports. *Beijing Youth Daily*'s social news editor recalled that their investigative reports once were most influential in China because they have set up a large number of station reporters in different provinces and municipal cities to get exclusive news sources; however, they have lost the advantage with the wide adoption of the Internet as more and more journalists at other newspapers could easily find the local news breaks just by accessing local news portals. This editor's response was to ask her reporters to search even smaller local paper's websites in order to find and break important or interesting local news stories at earliest time.

[17] Rednet.com is the official news portal of Hunan Province. Its website is www.rednet.com

Third, online news networks play an important role in assisting spot news reporting. Many breaking stories are first disclosed by local media, and then are posted on local news portals, which remediate and integrate relevant information from different local media quickly. With the help of the Internet, journalist can respond quickly to identify where the accident happens, who and what is going to interview, and keep themselves updated with the latest progress. The Internet also provides journalists with a comprehensive picture of the events, especially the reactions from the outsiders such as the government's actions and attitudes, which can guide the next step of their reporting actions next step. Journalists at *Beijing Youth Daily, Southern Metropolis News, CCTV* and *People' Daily* all use the Internet in this way.

Information database

Searching news backgrounds, finding relevant information, checking news facts through search engines are journalists' basic forms of Internet usage. When planning a special topic, journalists first search the Internet for all relevant information and historical background. For example, editors of *People's Daily*ay they always find and buy news photos on the commercial website; So do the *CCTV* editors, in the reports of "Eastern Airline's plane fell "in *CCTV*, they found instructive picture of the plane type on the Internet when they lack of these pictures in their own database. The Internet's search engines helped them to locate the possible experts for interviews and even provided them possible contact emails and telephone numbers. Journalists

also make use of the Internet to verify names, titles and positions of important people, and to check numbers from certain government reports. What's more, some newspapers even evaluate their own journalist's work by searching the web to see how many times his or her reports have been quoted on other media.

Reference framework

The Internet is also used as a framework by journalists, as they refer to the viewpoints provided by the online media or public forums to shape their own news value judgment and professional thinking. The reference framework which the Internet provides can be further classified into three roles, as (1) probe, (2) public opinion framework and (3) knowledge framework.

Probe

Sometimes the Internet can help journalists to probe the appropriate time to disclose certain sensitive news items. Journalists put political safety in the priority position in their news making. So in order to guarantee that their reports on some events will not bring them trouble, journalists always turn first to the Internet and watch how the news information is treated there, that is, by observing whether the government intervenes in the reports or whether the news is deleted by virtual censors. As the Internet often quickly disseminates news by remediating what has been published on the traditional media, so journalists can decide whether it is possible for their media

to involve in the event according to the reactions reflected on the Internet. A social news reporter in *Beijing Youth Daily* says, when reporting on the "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen", her editors decided to take a risk to publish the report when they observed that news on Niuniu has been reported by *Chengqing Morning Post* and *Hong Kong Phoenix TV*, even having received no circulars from the propaganda department concerning the issue. They feel a little bit safe but still sensed that they should take quick action to report the story before a propaganda circular reached their editorial office. "The Internet provides a chance for journalists to throw stone forwards to see whether it is an appropriate and available way; behind their actions on the Internet are media's attempts at reform", a professor in Renmin University of China says.

Public opinion framework

The Internet is an open space where public opinion can be quickly accumulated, so journalists often refer to online discussions to get a sense of public opinion on a certain issue. The public opinion will help journalists to decide, or even change, their reporting angles.

The technology news reporter at *People' Daily* reports that he and his colleagues often conduct online polls to get viewpoints from the netizens and choose their reporting angles according to their poll findings. Social news journalists at *People's Daily* browse the Qiangguo Forum every day to observe public responses on hot

topics and important events. They select and use the most representative online opinions in their news stories the next day, or they may continue their previous reports to form a news series when the public discussions keep on a certain reported issue.

Another case is "Zhao Wei and Japanese vexillum event". In 2001, a photo of the famous film star Zhao Wei, wearing clothes with Japanese vexillum appeared in the American *VOGUE* magazine, stirred Chinese anti-Japanese sentiment and brought about fierce criticisms on the Internet. Many reporters had to turn to follow up the public discussion to report and comment this event, although they did not initially consider it was such a big event. A reporter in *Beijing Youth Daily* says, "The news value judgment between the journalists and the public sometimes are quite different, however, we have to respond and follow public opinion to change our news judgment when the events become more and more influential among the public."

Although public opinion on the Internet sometimes imposes on the journalists, sometimes they can s make strategic use of the pressure of online public opinion to facilitate their initially prohibited reports. Reporters at *Southern Metropolis News* report using the Internet to their advantage in this way. They have utilized the pressure of online public opinion to defend their professional actions in report their report on "Shenzhen Niuniu scandal" even when the Guangdong Provincial Party Propaganda Department had already warned that reports on this events were not

allowed.

Knowledge framework

The Internet is a reference framework for journalists not only in news decision making, but also in the construction of their professional knowledge. By reading academic papers on the professional websites and weblogs on journalism and communication, comparing their reports with other domestic and international media about the same stories, and joining in the online discussions on various news events with colleagues across nation, journalists benefit in this way by using the Internet to reflect on their own works and to learn how to be a professional news worker.

A social news reporter in *Guangzhou Daily* says she often reads news on foreign media outlets, domestic BBS and even weblogs when she has the time, she commented "(Browsing the news is)not just for work, we need to learn, too. " Another reporter says that the Internet helps her to keep a good news sense and political mind. Although she is only in charge of the health news in *Guangzhou Daily*, she also considers that "as a journalist, I should know what happens today, what other journalists do and which direction Chinese journalism heads for". A culture reporter tells that he often goes to professional websites on the journalism and communication researches to help his knowledge of theory, "MediaChina.net[18] and

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[18] MediaChina.net (zhonghua chuangmei wang) is academic research Internet portal on journalism and mass communication. Its website is www.mediachina.net

Zijin.net[19] are my favorites" he said. Many journalists mention that they regularly join in the discussions in "Journalists' Home" on Xici BBS, which is the biggest and most influential online community for journalists. They interact with journalists nation wide, forming a new social network online. They admit that the Internet facilitates their professional learning and self-improvement, and gives them some guidance on their professional practices.

Supplementary media outlet channel

In news dissemination, the Internet is able to assist the traditional media's news publishing and can help them to achieve influence. The Internet's supplementary roles can be classified as providing (1) alternative outlet and (2) cooperative publisher.

Alternative outlet

Due to the fact that online censorship is less rigid, suppressive and manipulative than that over the traditional media controls in China, journalists make use of the Internet as an alternative outlet to disseminate sensitive, some do this through the media affiliated websites, while others use public portals' BBS.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, since virtual censorship is post-publication

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[19] Zijin.net (zijin wang) is the civil academic research Internet portal on journalism, communication, Internet and theory. It is established on March, 2000. Its website is www.zijin.net

censorship, less hierarchical and central, no "propaganda task" and ideology burden (Qiu, 1999), the virtual censorship on the Internet is relatively looser than on mass media. When certain news items are not suitable to publish in the traditional press due to propaganda regulations or pre-publication "stratified checks", The Internet provides a possible alternative channel through which journalists can strategically disseminate the news while reducing the possible political or social risks involved. The "Nandan mine blast disaster" was one such case. The disaster was first disclosed by *People's Daily* on its website People.com, and this report is a breakthrough in journalistic practices. People.com acted in this case as an alternative channel for *People' Daily* to deal with the disastrous mine explosion. Usually, such a sensitive and influential event could only be reported by party organs after the Central Propaganda Department set the tone by releasing a standard announcement through *Xinhua News Agency*.

Also, some journalists choose to publish their "killed" news stories on BBS, such as Tianya Community and Xici Community. They call this practice "throwing a ball". Whoever is able to "catch" the ball can then continue the investigation and reporting. Since different provinces and areas always have different political and cultural environments, some reports prohibited in one city may be able to be disseminated by other media outlets. In these situations, journalists also often use the Internet as an alternative outlet for their individual efforts, and they disseminate internal information through public portals' BBS or through their small-scale internal virtual

communities to find a possible and available way out for the important news.

Cooperative Partner

As a supplementary channel, the Internet, especially media affiliated websites, is often a cooperative partner to the traditional media. The interaction between the press and their websites which assist reports on certain topics is what journalists call "interacting between the paper and the web (bao wang hu dong)".

People's Daily often cooperates with Qiangguo Forum on its People.com website to facilitate the reports. The report which praised Niu Yuru as a "Party pioneer model" for society is such a case. After *People's Daily* reported the good deeds of Niu Yuru, the former vice chairperson of Inner Mongolia's Autonomous Region, the Qiangguo Forum invited Niu's relatives and friends to join in an online chat session with netizens. The contents of the online interaction including various opinions and comments on her good deeds were recorded and selected to publish on the next day's *People's Daily.* This kind of cooperation of the traditional media and its affiliated website facilitates *People's Daily*'s propaganda. *Beijing Youth Daily* has also adopted this kind of reporting for years. The cooperation between the press and its website is adopted by the culture news desk: on its affiliated website YNet[20], "Hot online" is formed as an online interactive program in which popular figures are invited to join in online chat sessions, and then interesting stories will be written on *Beijing Youth Daily* the next day. The interaction of online and offline sources provides a good opportunity for readers' participation and discussion, and "Hot line" has become one

of the most popular columns in *Beijing Youth Daily*, too.

In addition, many newspapers and the Internet portals have contracts in news exchanging and cooperation. Since the Internet portals have no legal right to gather news by themselves and since the circulation of the traditional press is usually small, cooperation between these "old" and "new" media forms gradually become symbiotic. They are mutually beneficial and rely on each other to achieve a double-win situation.

Concluding Remarks

As a necessary tool in news making, the Internet has been adopted by journalists and gradually routinized in their news practices. The inherent properties such as immediacy, interactivity and crossing border, allow the Internet to act as a news resource, reference framework and supplementary channel in Chinese journalists' news making. Journalists can make use of BBS and the World Wide Web to access more news sources, form their trans-local news networks, and search for background information to assist in news gathering. The Internet also plays a significant role in providing a reference framework to help journalists make their news decision and help with their professional learning. In order to reach a greater audience, the Internet has becomes a supplementary channel of the traditional media for news

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[20] YNet is the news portal affiliated to Beijing Youth Daily, and its website is www.ynet.com

dissemination. On the one hand, the Internet works as an alternative outlet for sensitive news; on the other hand, it becomes a cooperative partner to facilitate interaction between the audiences and the journalists. In the news making process, the Internet fits in or modifies the existing news routine. We can conclude that the ongoing usage of the Internet has undoubtedly brought about some changes in the news making process. How this kind of frequent Internet usage affects journalists' new making, and whether or how the Internet can empower journalists are what I would like to find out in the following chapters.

Chapter 6   Patterns of the Internet's Impact on Journalists' News Making

Journalists' Internet usage is closely related to their news making. Although almost every Chinese journalist has been equipped with a personal computer hooked up to a high speed Internet connection, the impacts of the Internet usage on journalistic practices vary from case to case. In some situations, the Internet has become an agent of change in the newsroom, while in other cases the Internet has only been utilized as an ordinary office tool that fits into the existing work routine. Different impact patterns are categorized from the in-depth interview data, and some important news events have been adopted as cases to study the processes of how the Internet affects the journalists' news making. The following salient levels of the Internet's impacts have been found in the data, which are named as "reinforcement of the media's surveillance role", "facilitation of news value reorientation", "promotion of news timeliness", and "improvement of news making efficiency", respectively.

Reinforcement of the media's surveillance role

Surveillance is one of most important social functions of mass communication, and it is carried out through public opinion supervision by media outlets in China. Supervision by public opinion in China has two different kinds. One is the top-down supervision by the central party organs, such as the programs "News Probe" and "Focus Times" of *CCTV,* which carry on nationwide investigative reports to disclose

the social dark sides. Most of the successful supervisions by public opinion are top-down, because the central party organs are on top of the administrative hierarchy and thus the most powerful. However, this kind of supervision sometimes turns into "leader-agreed supervision" due to its power origins, and loses its true nature as a kind of surveillance. The other type is the cross-city supervision, in which media in one province or city watch other governments or economic and social entities in another province or city. Since local media are under the guidance of the local government, it is not easy for them to report the negative news in the local region, which may challenge the local power and interests. But cross-city supervision sometimes works. Because the media in different regions are under different guidance of local party propaganda departments, it is easier to report on discrepancies or corruptions non-locally.

Currently, this sort of cross-city supervision in China benefits from the Internet, since the Internet provides national exposure for local news items and is able to amplify the news event, and thus raising nationwide awareness and facilitating a speedy resolution. Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen is a typical case of cross-city public opinion supervision assisted by the Internet.

On October 26, 2004, Song Yan, an editor of *Beijing Youth Daily*, followed her practice of gathering news ideas from different public BBS at the start of her work day. On the Kaidi Community (http://www.cat898.com/) she was suddenly attracted

by a posting, which was under hot discussion and also widely cited by several influential online communities. The postings disclosed that the Shenzhen local education authority had required middle school students to watch a movie acted by Niuniu, the daughter of a municipal officer in Shenzhen. In just a few hours, a great number of people had replied to this posting, and some anonymous netizens disclosed important information on Niuniu's identity and her family background. As a senior editor in charge of the national edition of *Beijing Youth Daily*, Song Yan said "I had a strong feeling that this must be a big and influential event."

Discovering crucial news tips on BBS is common for many social news journalists, and they expect to find important events of high news value on the Internet. "On most days, our news is quite 'vegetarian'. But when coming across some social problems, we are excited as if the smell of meat is near." In a few days, the Niuniu event had been the subject of netizens' fierce discussion and criticism. *Beijing Youth Daily* sent its reporter to Shenzhen to investigate. Meanwhile, many other news media have joined the competitive news war as well.

When the story was first reported, almost all of the traditional mass media remained silent on this possible big scandal, although the online discussion was heating up. Song Yan told that "My colleagues and I were also a little bit unsure whether to report the event or not, since it was a scandal involving the political figure of Shenzhen. So as usual we browsed the Internet to probe the situation and determine

whether it was possible and safe to report." She noticed that *Hong Kong Phoenix Television, Chongqing Morning Post* and *Beijing Entertainment Daily* had published brief stories on Niuniu and her film, and until then local government had no intervention in publishing this story on both the traditional media and the Internet. After discussion with the editorial leaders, she decided to take the risk and quickly publish the first part of their investigative report on Niuniu before a possible propaganda circular reached their newsroom. "We must beat the clock to guarantee that our investigation can be published. What's more, we should win the news competition to be the first to disclose the scandal." The Internet, as a reference framework, has helped journalists make appropriate news decisions. In the morning of November 4th, *Beijing Youth Daily*'s investigative reports "Where did the actress's million assets come from? (nvzhujue de baiwan zichan cong nali lai)" hit the street, which is the first comprehensive disclosure of the event. Soon the article was widely remediated by various news portals and public BBS, and the online discussions became extremely fierce.

The next day, *Southern Metropolis News* also published its own investigative reports "Who gives the sheep wings? Two dialogues between Niuniu and reporters from *Southern Metropolis News* (shui gei mianyang chashang le chibang: Niuniu he Nanfang Dushibao jizhe de liangci duihua)"and "Disclosing Niuniu's assets (jiekai Niuniu de zichan)". The social reporter in *Southern Metropolis News* recalled that "My colleagues had also noticed the allegations of scandals on the web at the same

time as the reporters in *Beijing Youth Daily*, and were immediately assgined to carry on their investigation as well." However, *Southern Metropolis News* intentionally published the news after *Beijing Youth Daily*. He explained that "That's becasue the Guangdong province propaganda department has already issued circulars to local media not to report the Niuniu event. In addition, *Southern Metropolis News* has a enormous media market in Shenzhen, so we should be more careful dealing with it." He told that "So we have been waiting for another media to break the story and raise wide public discussion. Then it is safer for us to publish the reports to criticize related officials in Shenzhen government, under the protection of public opinion."

Internet is powerful in amplifying the events by integrating all relevant media reports on one hand, and accumulating public opinion online to promote further media reports on the other hand. In a quite short time period, nationwide media had joined in the coverage and commentary on the events. The cooperation between traditional mass media and the Internet finally forced Li Yizhen, a senior government official and Niuniu's father, to make a public apology.

In this case of cross-city supervision by public opinion, the Internet acts as an active agent to facilitate the reporting process by amplification, which is achieved through two processes: first, the BBS provides news tips and relevant information to help journalists investigate the facts; second, the Internet integrates the reports to raise public concern and accumulate public opinion, which can not only protect journalists

from the propaganda department's intervention but also force the government to take action and solve the problems.

It should be noted that "Niuniu scandal" was finally suppressed by the Central Propaganda Department. After several weeks of coverage, the Central Propaganda Department started to prohibit the media nationwide from carrying on further news reports, and set the tone for the event as well. It also released a propaganda circular demanding the control of online "irrational" public discussion on the topic, giving the reason that the hostility towards the rich should be cooled down to guarantee social stability. Since then, the mass media and the Internet became silent again. All the postings contained the key words "Niuniu" would be deleted or automatically filtered. However, even though the Party-state has absolute power to control the media, it cannot ignore the enabling power of the Internet in amplifying cross-city supervision. Without the Internet, the local government or interests group would be able to suppress important local news already. Even if issues are disclosed by small media outlets, nationwide concern is difficult to be raised without the amplifying and disseminating effects of the Internet.

The Internet not only helps the local media's cross-city investigative report, but also empowers journalists in party organs to keep watch on the society top-down. *People's Daily*'s reports on the "Nandan disastrous mine blast" on August 2001 is such an example.

On July 17th, 2001, a disastrous mine blast caused the death of 300 mineworkers in Nandan city in Guangxi Autonomous Region. However, the malignant event had been rigorously hidden from the media due to local evil interests and protection. *People's Daily* has played an important role in investigating and disclosing this incident. Its quick and accurate reporting has helped arrest 15 persons who tried to cover up the disaster. The success could not have been achieved without the assistance of the Internet.

The collusion between the merchant and government officials prevented local media outlets from disclosing the accident. Even the central government knew nothing about it. A reporter who once worked in *People's Daily*'s Guangxi Station said that "We noticed accident on a BBS posting. It reported that there was a disastrous mine blast in Nandan, killing around 200 people, and was calling for the media to investigate immediately." Under the guidance of the director of *People's Daily*, Guangxi Station, reporters were immediately sent to contact online informants and other friends in Guangxi's local media, who might know the truth but be afraid of disclosure the events. Finally, they confirmed the existence of the blast and that there might be complicated reasons behind it." Due to the "cross-border" information dissemination on the Internet, it is possible for journalists in any media to be involved in reporting, and even those in central party organs.

With high risks, the journalists at *People's Daily* had to strategically circumvent the intervention from local power force, making all efforts to find clues and carry on their investigations. The turning point of reporting the accident occurred at 15:46pm on July 31th. The reporter told that "Our group published the first original reports entitled "The Nandan mine blast accident: complicated and confusing (Guangxi Nandan Kuangqu shigu pushuomili)"on our website People.com, under the collective name as 'Ren Gui Zhan' (a phonogram meaning "*People's Daily,* Guangxi Station")." Actually, the accident was not likely to be first published by the *People's Daily* due to the editorial principle. But the Internet, with relatively loose news censorship, provided an alternative channel for journalists of *People's Daily*'s to disclose and publish such sensitive news. The reporter also mentioned that "When the truth of the accident was finally unveiled, relevant investigative information was immediately sent as internal reference to the former State Council and Premier Zhu Rongji to urge the government to take action."

The report of *People's Daily* was widely remediated by the Internet portals and soon disseminated to the whole country. The central party organ's involvement in the investigation inspired the following up of many local media outlets. Meanwhile, a great number of Nandan citizens were inspired by the media's disclosure. The reporter recalled that "Many citizens in Nandan went to the Internet cafes to post what they knew about the events on BBS, and through the postings, our reporters found that similar accidents had once happened in the 1993, but was also covered up,

showing there were serious local protections in Nandan."

Though the local government insisted on denying the accidents, the Internet not only supplies valuable clues for further investigation, but also amplifies the event, allowing a strong online public opinion to emerge. *People's Daily* made use of the Internet to garner public support to facilitate their following reports. It is told that, on People.com, 150 reports and ten commentary articles were published as an investigative series, arousing the attention of worldwide media. On the Qiangguo Forum, in the first week after *People's Daily*'s reports, the number of postings concerning the event reached over 10,000. In newspapers, twenty articles had been published in *People's Daily* and its Southern China Edition. He said: "These reports represented the voice of the central mainstream media. 'Let people who discuss on the Internet and journalists who report for newspapers interact, keep the Internet the main battle field' was our editorial guideline." The cooperation between the Internet and newspapers changed the governments' policy agenda, and enabled officials to respond and investigate the cover-up. It also greatly facilitated the enactment of the National Security Production Law in that year.

The Internet's amplification of public opinion supervision has a great impact on evolutionary changes in journalists' perceptions on the role of the media. The traditional Party journalism emphasized only the advocacy roles of news media. Although public opinion supervision has gradually emerged as investigative

programs and reports in *CCTV*, *Southern Weekend*, *Beijing Youth Daily*, media's surveillance role as adversary or watchdog has not been fully developed due to the Chinese propaganda institution. Now the Internet is providing possibilities for more and more journalists in various media to make reports, garnering public opinion and forcing the government to take action. When asked whether the Internet will help to enable journalists in their public opinion supervision, a large number of the journalists in the interviews are optimistic. They highly praise the disclosure of the "Niuniu scandal" and predict that there will be more and more successful public opinion supervision with the help of the Internet, especially the cross-city supervision. A commentator in *Southern Metropolis News* says, "I always regard the media as the 'fourth estate', and now the Internet provides us a chance to have breakthrough on topics which may not be easy to report on before. I expect we journalists will be able to change society through the Internet." A reporter at *People's Daily* also says that recently *People's Daily* has made some attempts to defend that the party organ is also the watchdog of the society. "It is possible to achieve news breakthrough in the traditional party journalism though the Internet, although 'Nandan disastrous mine blast' is only one case and currently the number of such cases is very small."

In summary, in these two cases, the Internet reinforces the media's surveillance role towards the society in China by amplifying public opinion supervision, both in cross-city cases by the local media and top-down cases by central party organs. In the

amplification process, the Internet cross-border dissemination allows local news items to attract nationwide attention, and assists journalists' investigative reports in traditional media. In addition, the Internet is a place where events can be quickly disseminated, remediated, and integrated. The Internet is also helpful to accumulate wide public discussion to form a strong public opinion. The pressure from the Internet on one hand can protect journalists' follow-up reports; on the other hand, it forces the government to take action to solve problems. Although some of these practices may be finally suppressed by the Propaganda Department, it has already influenced journalists' news judgment and has gradually affected journalists' perceptions of the media role.

Facilitation of news value reorientation

Traditionally, Party organs are full of "commanded information (Zhilingxing Xinwen)" with little news value, and the news about leaders' administrative activities, governments' news release, and special educational topics set by the propaganda department are always of priority to Party journalists. Even the social news should also serve the propaganda needs. Reporters in party organs consider themselves as "mechanical hands" of the Party rather than true journalists. However, propaganda and party journalism gradually become problematic with the ever-penetrating commercialization. The fierce media market competition makes the party organs, especially the central party organs, loose their influence and authority gradually. In

order to "advance with the times", propaganda policies are proposed by the central party leaders to adapt to the changing social situation, modify the problematic propaganda, and reinforce the Party's reign. As mentioned in previous chapters, "Three Closenesses" becomes the new guideline for media, and "reinforce news value" is also emphasized by the propaganda leader in journalists' news making. These are new symbolic discourse resources created by Party propaganda to encourage and legitimate party organs' reformative practices under the party's hegemonic control.

In this propaganda reform, the Party organs begin to rearticulate "people principle" and "serve the public". They turn to focus on people's livelihood in their news and reorient their news value based on public needs. The "Focus News" of *People's Daily*'s Fifth Page, established on January 2004, is a result of such propaganda reform. The Fifth Page is the social news page of *People's Daily*, and it is regarded as an experimental field of news and editorial reform according to the Party's new "Three Closenesses" principle.

The "Focus News" on the Fifth Page reorients its news value by changing the news themes, reporting angles, and writing styles. An editor in this page introduces that "The news themes are mainly social hot events, public topics and new grass root figures; the reporting angles adopt those viewpoints from online netizens and mass readers, seeing large from small; the writing styles should be vivid with simple

words, avoiding exaggeration and empty words." He admits that the Internet has facilitated the news value reorientation of the social news page, and contributed to *People's Day*'s editorial reforms. A series reports about the "Hearing of witnesses on the ticket prices rising of world heritage sites in Beijing" is such a case.

On December 7th, 2004, the *People's Daily* published an article "Rising of ticket prices of world heritage sites: Part representatives' first response to the questions from the readers (Beijing "Shi Yi" jingdian zhangjia: tingzhenghui bufen daibiao shouci huiying duzhe zhiyi)", in which four big questions on the hearing conferences were raised. The reporter who wrote the news story said: "I picked up this topic online when I noticed netizens on BBS had a hot debate on the issue; that is, most people are against the price rising, yet the price-rising proposal has passed without any opposite opinion on the witness hearing conferences. So I followed the clues to carry on the first responsive reports." In a few days, this event became a widely discussed issue, and people commented on the Internet to seek for an official statement and a final solution. So on the second day, he said: "*People's Daily* selected various opinions from the readers of People.com and Sina.com and put them on the 'Readers' Message Board' to form a volume of 'The hearing of witness should be concrete', in which both the supportive and opposite opinions were presented."

On December 10th, based on the questions of the readers, *People's Daily* interviewed the managers of tourism sites, and provided corresponding answers and responses to

the netizens and readers. The editor said "We discuss and decide to write the report in a dialogue format, first questions from the netizens and readers, then the responses. In addition, the information on the tourism sites' ticket rising in Hunan and Beijing are presented as supplementary reports." Sensing that the online public opinion has tended to blame the rising ticket price, on December 15th, he told that, they continued their fourth reports on "World heritage is not 'a ready source of money' ", in which reporter interviewed experts of the world heritage research and environment protection. It provided professional opinions on the rationale of ticket price to guide the wide popular online opinions. In the following days, it reported the ticket price changes in other cities, such as "Proposal of suspension the ticket price rising of Xiamen Gu Lang Yu Island".

These reports have a great influence during the interaction and cooperation between the mainstream media and the online discussion. This event attracted the central governments' attention, and finally led to the drop of the ticket prices. The editor mentioned that "Many netizens expressed their surprise as well as their praise on *People's Daily*'s reports about this events". The Central Propaganda Department also gave positive evaluation on this series of reports, which is a good execution of the 'Three Closenesses' principle."

The reporter of the *People's Daily* Fifth page introduced that "Just as this 'tourism sites ticket price rising', reports on "Village among the Shenzhen City",

"Circumvallation in Ping Yao" and other 'Focus News' reports are all carried out in this way. These reports are widely disseminated by the Internet, and some of the articles even have become the special volume of news portals such as People.com, Xinhua.org, Sina.com, Sohu.com, and so forth."

In the case, it is found that the Internet plays an important role in facilitating the reorientation of the news values. This impact is achieved through the following two processes: first, the Internet as a news resource provides the journalists various social or public topics and facilitates the change of news themes. A reporter working for this edition says that they spend lots of time reading online news and looking for news tips on various BBS in order to locate the hottest topic among the public. Due to the traditional limited news sources and less-expedite news channels, a great number of reporters often update news tips through the Internet. Second, the cooperation between the *People's Daily* and the Internet facilitates the change on news angles and news writing styles. On one hand, the news in "Focus News" is remediated on the People.com, where netizens often comments on events and provides their opinions. Journalists pay much attention to the feedbacks on their previous reports, as well as feedbacks from short messages by mobile phones as well; they may continue to report the events if the evaluation of online discussions are favorable. Journalists often refer to the online public opinion to decide news angles. In addition, they often select representative online opinions as a significant part presented in their reports, which are always made up of questions from the netizens

and answers from the experts. The online opinions are not only from Qiangguo Forum but also from large public portal's BBS such as those of Sina.com and Sohu.com. Their news is written in an interactive style, which is much closer to the public readers.

To summarize, the Internet facilitates news value reorientation of Party organs in the trend of hegemonic propaganda reform. That is to say that the Internet is possible to allow journalists' independent decision making according to news values, and it enables journalists to access all kinds of news resources to achieve objective and balanced reporting. During the process, the Internet can provide journalists rich news clues and contents close to people's livelihood, and assist their news angle finding and interactive reports writing, and the Internet also cooperates with the traditional media to help with news dissemination.

Promotion of news timeliness

The immediacy and crossing-border information transformation of the Internet imposes time pressure on traditional media's news dissemination. Quick news publishing demands less bureaucratic news censorship, and may consequently threaten the news controls in China, especially that of the highly-controlled political news. News about political leaders' foreign affairs in *CCTV* is such a case in which media have been affected by the Internet and have to promote its news timeliness.

China's political news can be divided into two kinds, one kind is the domestic political news, which is usually about the political leaders' activities in the nation and only the four central Party organs[21] have the rights to interview; the other kind is the leaders' foreign affairs news. Traditionally, the reporting time and tone of domestic political news are set and standardized by the Party Propaganda Department, and no news organizations is allowed to publish the news ahead. Also due to the political and propaganda concerns, the reports should pass stratified news censorship in the media organizations. So does the news about foreign affairs. Although reporters in foreign media are able to cover the Chinese leaders' visiting in other countries, the Chinese audiences cannot read/watch their reports due to technology access barriers.

However, the Internet has changed the situation. The political reporter in *CCTV* told that "The Chinese leaders visiting, activities, and conferences outside the country are also covered by other foreign media, and they always disseminate news much faster than Chinese media which is under stratified censorship. Now the reports by foreign media, such as *BBC* and *CNN*, are simultaneously published on their affiliated websites, and sometimes even live broadcasted on the Internet, and their programs could be easily accessed by the Chinese people before *CCTV* release its news. This poses a great pressure on *CCTV*, both the news timeliness and the media authority." In response, she said *CCTV* had to reform on how to publish the news about political

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[21] The for central party organs are *Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily, China Central Television* and *Central People's Broadcasting Station.*

leaders' foreign affairs. " Now as long as approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affair, Information Office of the State Council, *CCTV* can immediately broadcast the news on political leaders' foreign visiting or related events, without stratified news censorship by the media organization. And the news timeliness is greatly improved by the Internet that acts as a kind of external force." she admitted.

Although publishing cycle of newspapers is fixed, the Internet affects their news timeliness as well. The Internet has led to a scrolling news release in news agencies and other central official media, such as *Xinhua New Agency, China News Agency* and *People's Daily.* Editors often update the latest information of ongoing news stories during every certain time phrase on their own websites, and the whole news events have been divided into different story pieces. As an immediate publishing media outlet, the Internet promotes the news timeliness of some political news in central official media that own the richest news resources.

The political news reporter in *CCTV* also mentioned that "Chinese political news is actually not 'news' but 'propaganda', and too many restricts impose on the political news; we are just like the 'mechanism hands' of propaganda, and have little autonomy in news making. Although *CCTV* has the unique advantages of rich news resources, the good news contents often cannot find a suitable format to present, and this leads to a bad relationship between the media and audience." In addition, she told that "It is happy to see that, currently, our *CCTV* leaders have recognized the

necessary to change their minds on how to report the political news, in order to attract the audience. In addition, now we are freer to make some soft news on the leaders' foreign activities than before. A feature story on President Hu Jintao's first foreign visiting in June 2003 was one of our attempts." She praised the changes in political news routine, "we could once only disseminate the news in the same tone with *Xinhua News Agency*, but now we are allowed make some interesting feature stories to enrich some of our political news reports."

In sum, as a news reference framework, the Internet becomes an external pressure on news publishing of traditional media. In order to maintain media authority and communist ideology, the traditional media, especially those party organs which have the unique resources in reporting important events, have to accelerate its speed of news release in order to compete with the western media which sometimes misinterprets China. The Internet has forced the party organs to change their existing news publishing regulations and accelerate news publishing of some political news. That is to say the Internet allows journalists to circumvent the media censorship in the news dissemination and promote news timeliness. It can predict that, the Internet will have even greater impact on the news timeliness of those relatively liberalizing media or news genres.

Improvement of news making efficiency

In most of time, the Internet is used by journalists as a technical office tool in news making, and it contributes a lot to the improve job efficiency of journalists. It works as a trans-local news network and information database to provide latest news tips and comprehensive background resources in the shortest time. This impact of the Internet on journalism is widely discussed by the researchers in the West.

Traditionally, editors read various newspapers and magazines to know the latest news, compare how other media report the same events and find suitable articles for their remediation. The Internet has partly taken the place of the newspapers. *People's Daily, Beijing Youth Daily* and *Guangzhou Daily* even have their own Information Centers, which are in charge of collecting news on nationwide media from the Internet, and they also help their journalists to catch the most important news tips.

Some editors in marketized newspaper often treat news channels of the Internet portals as their references to help sense the most important news that day, since the online news selections and page layouts obey the editorial rules, and the most important news are always put in the salient place. In addition, quite a number of editors in the marketized newspapers make use of the social or international news on the Internet to enrich their news contents after verifying news sources. Many editors also directly edit press conference news from the government official portals. However, all the editorial activities related to the Internet are the editors' personal habits, and some of the activities are even not allowed in newsrooms in principle.

The Internet searching engines are also widely adopted by journalists to get the relevant backgrounds for feature writing or program producing. Before the Internet was widely adopted, journalists once had to spend much longer time to find relevant information in the libraries.

Although greatly improving journalists' job efficiency, the Internet is not an active agency as in this pattern of journalistic practices because it can hardly affect the news decision making or change of existing news routines, especially in the party organs or problematic news genres. And journalists' Internet usage in this situation is explained to larger extent by individual characters. Reporting the spot news is such a case. Many journalists now treat the Internet as the most important channel to provide the latest information on the breaking events. However, news decisions on spot news have to obey the propaganda commands strictly, and journalists have to change their reporting activities according to the specific propaganda circulars. Both social news reporters in *CCTV* and *Beijing Youth Daily* said: "We often rely on the Internet to get the tips about the breaking events, such as diseases, food poisoning and mine blast. When getting some information on spot news, we will contact our local media partners to cooperate in news gathering, or send our own journalists to cover the story in the frontline." However, they asserted that not all spot news can be approved to publish: "Because of irregular propaganda circulars or intervention from other interest groups, we are often forced to stop the investigations unconditionally."

This also happens in commentary department in *People's Daily* and Seven O'clock News Broadcast in *CCTV*, both of which are the products of Chinese party journalism. They are the "sounding boards" of party propaganda (He, 1994), and the Internet has little influence to their news routines. An editor in commentary desk said: "Our commentary voices for the party, and should always follow the tones set by Party-state. We comment on the political issues and most of our topics are given by the Party Propaganda Department." An editor in Seven O'clock News Broadcast also told that "Propaganda tones should be strictly adopted in our program, and we are directly supervised by the Party Propaganda Department and *CCTV* top leaders. The arrangement of our everyday news follows the political importance. Although the Internet helps us to get relevant background information quickly, it hardly has any impacts on our news making routine." The editor in commentary desk added, "In addition, most news desks in *People's Daily*'s, except the social news desk, should strictly follow the party propaganda commands. Many of our news are 'required' propaganda tasks, and journalists have no time, and also no need, to take so- called 'optical actions' to search tips on the Internet for more news stories."

In sum, the Internet is just like a neutral office tool in this pattern. It fits into the existing news routine and leads to high efficiency of journalists' news working, but this kind of the Internet usage hardly has any impacts on the organizational news routines.

Concluding remarks

The Internet has different impact patterns on journalists' everyday news practices. The most salient impact is that the Internet is able to "reinforce media's surveillance role". In this pattern, it works as a news source, probe, public opinion provider and even as an alternative channel. By amplifying the public opinion supervision, the Internet helps the media reinforce its watchdog role, and as well facilitates the evolutionary changes of journalists' perceptions of their roles. Second, the Internet plays an important role in facilitating the news value reorientation in the trend of "Three Closenesses" propaganda reform. The Internet assists the editorial reform by providing journalists more civil livelihood news tips and cooperating in news dissemination to help media regain authority among the readers. And this impact is quite obvious in the Party organs. Third, the Internet turns into an external pressure to force the media to reduce the stratified media censorship and promote news timeliness. This impact takes place in the strictly controlled political news in party organs, and it implies the Internet's powerful potential on facilitating news timeliness in other relatively liberalizing media types and news genres. The last but not the least, in most of the newsrooms, the Internet is an indispensable technical tool to improve the job efficiency of journalists' daily routine works. Here, although Internet is widely utilized in everyday journalistic practices, the Internet has little impact on news decision making due to the strict ideology controls.

Why the universal usage behaviors among the journalists lead to such diverse impacts? How do the social factors interact with each other and determine the impacts of the Internet? Whether and how the Internet is an agent of empowerment for the journalists in the news making? These important questions will be answered in the following chapters.

Chapter 7　Internet's Situational Empowerment on News Making Practices

"The Internet is only a tool in our work, although I cannot deny the Internet has affected our works. Chinese journalism is too complex; not a single force is powerful enough to change the whole situation, so does the Internet." "Chinese journalists still dance with shackles on their feet. The situation that the propaganda completely controls the journalistic practices has not changed. The Internet is also under the surveillance of the propaganda. However, I do sense that the Internet will bring some possible changes to Chinese journalism in the future, and there are some evidences." When talking about how the Internet will affect news making, Chinese journalists seem to have a complex feeling full of ambiguity, anxiety, and uncertainty. No journalist considers it only the propaganda apparatus, and is totally pessimistic about the Internet's liberalizing potential. However, nor are they very optimistic that the Internet will bring Chinese journalism a bright future, even the journalists who have benefited a lot from the Internet.

Journalists do tried hard to make use of the Internet to push forwards the boundary of propaganda control, no matter intentional or not; the Internet assisted successful investigative reports, such as "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen", "Sun Zhigang's Death" and "Nandan mine blast", have become professional exemplars among the Chinese journalists. However, just like the sparks lightening in the dark, the Internet's empowerment on journalists is situational rather than regular and predictable. Due to

the complex interaction of the facilitating and constraining factors on the journalistic practices, journalists are just like in a "guerrilla warfare (youji zhan)", in which they make use of the Internet to test the propaganda boundary. Their actions are flexible, and their successes are always achieved in a situation with relatively weak or loose constrains. So the Internet's liberalizing potential can only turn into a force under certain conditions, which is quite contextualized and situational. From the "mediationist" perspective, the Internet's impact is contingent upon certain social situations, which are determined by the complex interaction between the institutional, organizational and individual factors, mixing with facilitations and constrains.

Situationality of the Internet's impact

According to the conceptualization of "empowerment", three of the four patterns discussed in Chapter 6, "reinforcement of the media's surveillance role", "facilitation of news value reorientation" and "promotion news timeliness", reflect that the Internet can be an agent of empowerment in news making, and the rest one is regarded as no empowerment. These three patterns have affected both the journalists' way of working and way of thinking. In journalists' news making, the Internet first helps journalists access all kinds of news resources to achieve objective and balanced reporting, and allows journalists' independent decision making according to news values. In addition, journalists make use of the Internet to circumvent the media censorship in the news dissemination to promote news timeliness; in journalists' perception of media role, the Internet plays an important role in gradually reinforcing

media's surveillance role, and changing journalists' perception on media role from "media as propaganda advocacy" to "media as fourth estate". However, when looking deep into these kinds of empowerment by the Internet in China's social contexts, it is found that the situationality is embedded in each case of the four patterns. That is to say that the empowerment does not occur on each kind of news genre, in every media, at any time.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, journalists' news practices in China are just like "dancing with shackles on feet (daizhe jiaoliao tiaowu)"; the factors constraining or facilitating the journalistic practices are in three clusters: in institutional, organizational and individual levels. These factors intertwine with each other and form a specific political, economical and social-cultural context that mediates the Internet-assisted news making process and determines to what extent the Internet incorporates into newsrooms. The constraining factors are mainly the propaganda control and the institutional setting of the Internet control in the institutional level, media's own interests in the organizational level, such as profit making, local protection and bureaucracy relationship, and the journalists' self censorship in the individual level. Meanwhile, the facilitating factors also work, and they are composed of the Internet infrastructural building and he propaganda policy changes in the institutional level, media organizations' needs to serve the audience in the market, and the journalists' professional aspiration gestated in ongoing media reform process.

These factors lead to activities more or less characterized as "men-ruled", "temporary", "informal", and "improvising". First, in the institutional level, the propaganda controls are explained as "rule by men (ren zhi)" rather than "rule of law (fa zhi)", and the regulations are set and executed according to specific cases. Although the bureaucratization, such as the establishment of the State Press and Publication Administration, at high administrative levels has started to regularize the relationship between the powerful state and the media organizations based on the political bottom line, many of the traditional and less predicable propaganda controls on media still remain and dominate the everyday journalistic practices. Second, in the media reform periods, both media organizations and their journalists are facing an uncertain and ambiguous future, and they can only make their attempts by "touching the stone to cross the river". Non-routine journalistic practices are invented by journalists in various media organizations because of China's unique macro-environment. For example, there is no coherent conceptual framework of the reform; a great degree of uncertainty prevails among the journalists concerning the "true" meaning of the party line and policies and financial survival. What's more, journalists must design or engage in these improvising activities to help accomplish some immediate goals in a narrowly specified situation, and make tactical moves within a vaguely stated vision for an organization's future.

Therefore, situationality here means that, in China's complex social environments,

the journalists can only depend on the specific contexts to decide how to make full use of the Internet to assist their work, and the interactions between different social factors in specific contexts will shape the outcomes. Situationality does not assert that the Internet's empowerment just happens accidentally, it means that the every enabling event should be understood in a specific time, news genre, media status, and spatial location. The possible empowerment is the coincidental result of the intertwining and interacting between the factors in institutional, organizational, and individual levels. By re-examining specific social contexts of these four news cases, it is possible for us to dig out the situationality of the empowerment by the Internet.

Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen

The editor in charge of reporting Niuniu scandal in *Beijing Youth Daily* said that "We have paid intense attention to conduct this kind of investigative reports for many years, but success was not often achieved. Compared with other media, we are lucky to have seized the opportunity. "

Beijing Youth Daily is not the first newspaper which sent reporters to investigate this news story, the editor recalled that "We are busy with other reports at that time period, so it takes us two days to find an available experienced reporter to cover this story. Actually, *Southern Metropolitan News* started their investigations even a little bit earlier, and some newspapers like *Beijing Entertainment News* have already published brief stories about this event". She told that the propaganda environment is

relatively looser at that time period due to the appointment of new political leaders, and media seem to be more active than usual. In addition, most of their social news at that time was quite "tasteless", so she catched this valuable opportunity to carry on news investigation as soon as she realized the sensitivity of the event. The specific time with relatively looser propaganda control provides journalists a good opportunity to deal with this negative news.

Although Niuniu scandal is only a piece of social news, it is closely related to a senior government official in Shenzhen and thus become sensitive. The editor in *Beijing Youth Daily* admitted that "We must be quite careful in dealing with such a problematic news genre." Before publication of their reports, the editor told that, she had browsed the BBS and read online news about Niuniu event, and found there were no clear propaganda circulars issued to intervene in the reports. She said, "So we had a discussion with our editorial leader, and made a final decision to publish our investigative report as soon as possible". The editor explained that, "We have to release our report as the earliest, there are two reasons: first, the propaganda circular from the municipal or even central Propaganda Department can arrive at any time since the event has gradually attracted nationwide attention, so we should publish our report ahead of the propaganda circulars; second, many other media are working on the news as well, and we must make sure to be the first newspaper to provide rich investigative stories." The editor also said that "'win the time-lag (da shijian cha)' is quite important for us to report such sensitive social news stories, and the Internet

has helped us a lot on it." Therefore, sensitive social news in a problematic news genre, with the help of the Internet, is still possible to be carried out by journalists to achieve public opinion supervision.

"Although we have to take risk to publish such kind of investigative reports, it is worthy to do so. On one hand, it is our journalists' responsibility to be the watchdog of the society; on the other hand, our newspaper is marketized, so we have to attract audience and win media market by making successful influential news stories." Market is of great importance for newspapers, especially for the marketized press. The editor added, "Newspapers with prestige attracts more readers, so the professional fame (zhuanye de shengyu) always helps newspapers win media market. For our media, fame means profit." So, as a marketized press, journalists in *Beijing Youth Daily* made all their efforts to carry out reports that can attract readers. However, journalists in *People's Daily* and *CCTV* said that their media had no reports on the event although other media and the Internet had been involved in a fierce news battle. They only adopted the tone set by the Central Propaganda Department to give some comments on the event to cool down the nationwide criticism. The editor in *People' Daily* said, "Our party organ does not stir up trouble but solve problems; we do not follow the marketized press and popular online opinions but lead the public opinions." The reporter in *CCTV* also said, "The marketized press can deal with such sensitive social news, however, *CCTV* is under direct guidance of the Central Propaganda Department and should voice for the Party. Without leaders'

approval, we will not deal with it. " The status of media also matters in carrying out reports on Niuniu scandal. The marketized press, motivated by market and profits with relatively looser propaganda control, are more flexible in reporting sensitive social news, and thus the Internet can probably empower journalists in this case.

Last but not the least, the location of the media has a great influence on reporting Niuniu scandal. Although both *Beijing Youth Daily* and *Southern Metropolis News* sent their reporters to cover the news almost at the same time, reporters in *Southern Metropolis News* said that "We intentionally waited for *Beijing Youth Daily* to publish their reports before releasing our investigations." He continued that, "Our newspaper is under the guidance of Guangdong Provincial Propaganda Department, which has orally commanded newspapers in Guangdong not to report Niuniu's news. In addition, our newspaper has a large media market in Shenzhen, we have to be more careful to deal with the relationship with the Shenzhen government. " So he told that their leader made the decision to let other newspaper disclose the scandal first, and then they followed up by in-depth investigative reports. Beijing is relatively far away from Shenzhen, and *Beijing Youth Daily* has little bureaucratic or commercial interest with Shenzhen, so it is possible for *Beijing Youth Daily* to succeed in disclosing this scandal. Therefore, locations of the media organization often affect the outcomes of different media. Media in different locations have to deal with different bureaucratic and commercial interests in local areas, and the local cultures often shape the journalists' perceptions of their professional roles as well. So

journalists in different areas often made different news decisions on the same news story. A reporter in *Beijing Youth Daily* recalled their reports about "Sun Zhigang's Death", "although we got the news tips on the Internet at the same time as *Southern Metropolis News*, we cannot do more on it due to the bureaucratic interests and certain advertising concerns." Situations are similar to *Southern Metropolis News* this time on Niuniu scandal. The editor of *Beijing Youth Daily* commented "Whether the Internet can empower our journalists is a sophisticated question. Too many determining powers are hidden behind our journalistic practices, and the interaction of these powers will finally shape the outcomes. "

Looking into the news case of "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen", the specific time, news genre, media status and organization location provided the situationality of the success of *Beijing Youth Daily*'s reports on Niuniu event. Behind the situationality is the interaction between facilitating and constraining factors. The motivation of serving the audience to win the media market and the professional aspirations of the journalists are the strong force facilitating journalists in the marketized press to make attempts to deal with sensitive social news, so as to achieve the supervision by public opinion. The constraints from the traditional propaganda control, the bureaucratic, local and commercial interest also exist. Journalists have made use of the Internet to probe and raise public opinion to favor their reports and get rid of constraints. Since the traditional propaganda control is relatively looser on social news in marketized press in such a time period, and little bureaucratic and commercial interests are

involved in this report to *Beijing Youth Daily*, the facilitating factors become relatively stronger than the constraining ones. As a result, *Beijing Youth Daily*, a marketized press, has succeeded in the cross-city supervision by public opinion under the specific situation.

Nandan mine blast disaster

"The report of Nandan mine blast disaster by *People's Daily* is a great breakthrough in Chinese journalism." A professor commented. "In the news case, the Internet has enabled Chinese journalists to 'break the forbidden news areas (dapo xinwen jinqu)'. Although the number of such kind of breakthrough is quite small, it has great significance for understanding the Internet's impact on Chinese journalism." Traditionally, fatal mine blasts, disease breakouts, traffic accidents, ethnic conflicts, and social protests are the most sensitive topics, and most of them are veiled from media exposure by the propaganda departments for the reason of so-called securing the society stability. However, it was the central party organ *People's Daily* that took the lead to disclose this severe accident in Nandan. The specific context of this report shapes the final outcome.

A reporter in *People's Daily* told that, "Behind every report of *People's Daily*, there is the guidance of propaganda. The Central Propaganda Department often has different propaganda emphases, such as 'double conference (liang hui)[22]', 'issues

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[22] Double conference means annual National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

concerning agriculture, countryside and farmers (san nong wenti)', 'safety production (anquan shengchan)' and 'medical security (yiliao baoxian)', so *People's Daily* must understand the propaganda key points in a certain time period thoroughly, so as to arrange corresponding reports." He told that *People's Daily*'s reports on Nandan mine blast was actually correlated to the constitution of National Safety Production by the Party-state. A great number of fatal mine blasts happened every year, and the Party-state was working on the safety production regulations to solve this big problem at that time. The specific time period provides *People's Daily* an appropriate opportunity to report the mine blast. If this accident happened in the "double conference" period, such sensitive news genre would not be possible for publication.

As a central party organ, *People's Daily* is able to supervise the local governments and commercial interests. So when the local powerful interests collude and all local media were forced to keep silence, *People's Daily* was not intervened and succeeded in disclosing the accident. However, the reporter said, "Due to its media status, *People's Daily* found it not appropriate to publish this kind of sensitive news on newspaper according to its traditional editorial lines. Instead, editorial leaders made use of People.com, the newspaper's affiliated news website, to release this news in order to minimize the political risk." He said that, journalists in *People's Daily* took their responsibility to beat the local interest and serve the public in the whole reporting process, and he added "our reporters defend their professionalism to

disclose the social problem and facilitate problem solution."

In this case, the specific time, news genre and media status consist of the situational context under which the Internet influences journalists' news practices. Due to the propaganda commands in this specific time period, the traditional tight controls on sensitive news genre became relatively looser, so the party organ has the opportunity to join in such investigative reports. The high media status guarantees *People's Daily* not to be intervened by local powerful interests. So the constraining factors are also relatively weaker. The facilitating factors, such as the journalists' professional aspirations and *People's Daily's* concern for its authority among the readers, have promoted the journalists to make all their efforts to accomplish this influential investigative report. So the Internet has enabled *People's Daily* to achieve the top-down supervision by public opinion in such a specific context.

Debate on rise of ticket prices at Beijing tourist sites

People's Daily's reports of ticket price rising at Beijing tourist sites is one news series of the "Focus News" volume of the Fifth Page- social news pages of *People's Daily* . This page is the result of *People's Daily*'s editorial reform on social news. "Three Closenesses" has become the news propaganda guidance since 2003, and nationwide media, especially the party organs, pay much more attention to news reflecting social problems and concerning people's livelihood. *People's Daily* has treated its social news page--the Fifth Page as an experimental field to implement

"Three Closenesses". The top-down propaganda reform provides *People's Daily* a suitable time and freer macro-environment to make their reformative attempts on editorial lines. The "Three Closenesses" as the general guideline for news propaganda reform has brought journalists a new symbolic discourse resource for journalists to interpret their reformative activities and routinized their improvising practices. Without the command or approval from the Central Propaganda Department or top editorial leaders, it is not easy for *People's Daily* to make such big editorial reform.

In the report of ticket price rising at Beijing tourist sites, news story finding, opinion choosing, and news decision making are closely related to the Internet. According to their new editorial guidelines, "news value" is of priority for them to choose news stories rather than "propaganda concerns". And the Internet has enabled them to reorient their news value by providing reference framework, and it has helped editors sense public opinion to reflect people's opinions on social issues. An editor said "The editorial reform is only implemented on our social news page, other pages remain unchanged." Since social news is close to people's livelihood and relatively less-sensitive, the special news genre becomes the target of editorial reform.

He also told that "*People's Daily* has to make its news close to people, and care the readers' needs; otherwise it will lose its authority among people. In addition, *People's Daily* partly relies on adverting revenue, and it is in the same media market as other

commercialized presses, so it should adjust its news styles and reform some of its news editorial lines to adapt to the new media environment." He admitted that the Internet was "a useful tool" to facilitate the editorial reform in *People's Daily*. Although in the high media status, *People's Daily* still has a close and delicate relationship with other media outlets, including the Internet.

The success of the "Focus News" in *People's Daily* also reflects the situationality on time, media genre and media status. And behind this news case is the interaction between the facilitating factors and constraining factors. The Party-state initiated propaganda reform is the strongest facilitating factor that motivates the news value reorientation of *Peoples' Daily*. In addition, the market's concern to serve the public needs is also a facilitating factor. The constraining factors are relatively weak in this case. What's more, it has been found that the factors in the institutional level are the most powerful ones in determining the final outcomes. Therefore, the Internet has situationally empowered social news journalists in the party organ *People's Daily*.

CCTV's political leaders' foreign affairs news reporting
The change of the news reporting routine of foreign affairs in *CCTV* has also taken place in a specific social context. Similar to the editorial reform in People's Daily's social news page, *CCTV*'s changes in this news routine is also under the macro-environment of the "Three Closenesses" propaganda reform. A political news reporter in *CCTV* told that "This reform makes it possible for *CCTV* to take actions

to reform its traditionally conservative political news." She also reiterated "Only top-down reform can be effective. The bottom-up reform will only be cooled down by the leaders." Such a specific reform time period has brought journalists in *CCTV* a relatively liberalizing environment.

Based on the news genre, journalists have little autonomy in reporting the political news. The political news censorship in China is stratified and the propaganda control is quite tight. However, due to pressure from the online media outlets and fierce media market competition, *CCTV* as a party organ is adjusting their news to win back its authority both nationally and internationally. "A large number of our reports has felt the pressure and are willing to adjust the news routines". So *CCTV* leaders decided to reduce the news censorship on its political leaders' foreign affairs news to promote the news timeliness, and soft feature stories about political leaders has been allowed to broadcast. In the high media status, *CCTV* owns the richest resource of political news; however, as the political reporter said "good content should be presented in a good format". So the old regulation on news broadcasting and the traditional style of news presentation should be changed, in order to compete with foreign media on one hand and win the national audience on the other. Therefore, in the party organ with high status, the political news genre became the target for reform.

Through this case, the situationality on time, news genre and media status also

reflects the empowerment by the Internet cannot be fully predicted. The facilitating factors, such as the Party-state initiated propaganda reform and journalists' professional aspiration, interact with the constraining ones, such as the traditional media regulation and propaganda control. However, compared with the constraining factors, the facilitating ones are much stronger, both from the institutional level and individual levels, thus the empowerment has situationally taken place in the political news genre in the party organ *CCTV*.

In conclusion, from the above four news cases, it is found that the specific time, news genre, media status and location of media organization compose the situationality of empowerment, and the facilitating factors and constraining factors interact with each other in this specific social context. In the following, the characteristics of the four components of situationality of empowerment will be discussed.

Characteristics of situational empowerment

No matter in what kind of media organization and in what place, journalists are just like in the guerrilla warfare, they make use of the Internet to sense the appropriate time and take strategic actions on certain news stories, so as to win the battles case by case. The situationality of the Internet's empowerment is characterized as "time-specific", "genre-specific", "media status-specific" and "location-specific", and all these four specific components of situationality have their unique

characteristics to determine the final empowerment outcomes.

Time-specific: "There are different propaganda emphases in different time periods."

The party propaganda controls on media always depend on specific news cases and specific political time periods; in their words "there are different propaganda emphases in different periods of time". On one hand, the propaganda commands are different from time to time; on the other hand, the journalists themselves should have the political sense to detect whether the current media control is tight or loose in order to adjust their news contents and reporting angles.

Generally speaking, the propaganda controls are carried out through day-to-day documents by the sole authority Party's Central Party Propaganda Department. Sometimes irregular circulars are also sent by local party propaganda departments to direct news reports in certain time periods or on certain events. In the sensitive periods such as "double conference", the party propaganda departments will prohibit media from reporting any negative or sensitive news in order to suppress the adversarial voices and maintain the social stability.

Meanwhile, the media has to fully obey the propaganda instructions; otherwise it will be punished or even suspended for publication. *21st Century Global Report* is such a case. The newspaper published a sensitive report about Li Rui, the former secretary of Mao Zedong during "double conference" period in 2003, and within ten days, it

was suspended for publication by the Central Propaganda Department. At the same time of the year, *Southern Weekend* was admonished by the Central Propaganda Department due to its special report series on ex-premier Zhu Rongji. An editor in *Southern Metropolis News* told that "Since then we become much more careful in such sensitive times. The specific sensitive time period affects how the journalists deal with the news tips from the Internet. High self-censorship leads journalists not to touch any sensitive topic in order to guarantee political safety. "In 'double conference' period, journalists are often sent to the parks and zoos to discover soft stories. We may not deal with any adversarial opinions or sensitive topics, no matter from the Internet or other sources, and it is not wise to take risk and challenge the political power." He said it was also their strategies, "only when our media are able to keep alive, it is possible for us to do things to change the existing situation then."

Except the "double conference" period, the macro-environment for journalistic practices always depends on whether specific policies are issued by the government or how current social situation is. Journalists in *CCTV*, *Beijing Youth Daily*, *Guangzhou Daily* and *Southern Metropolis News* all mentioned that, they could get the news tips from the Internet in the earliest time, especially the spot news; however, whether they could go to cover the stories or whether the stories could be published or broadcast were contingent upon the propaganda commands and the editorial leaders' judgments on whether it was a suitable time period for such reports.

The economic news reporter in *People's Daily* told that, all stories from the Internet finally adopted by the newspaper were surely related to propaganda needs in that time period, because these reports would facilitate the policy execution. Such as *People's Daily*'s reports on Nandan disastrous mine blast discussed above. Since the government was trying to take great efforts to solve dangerous mines problems, and constitution of the National Safety Production Law was on the top policy agenda in that time period, the disclosure of the disastrous mine blast through People.com was fitted into a suitable time. But this kind of news breakthrough in party organs was quite unusual. "If it is not allowed by the propaganda department, the news, no matter how salient it is and no matter it is from the Internet or other sources, will be only passed to the senior leaders in the form of 'internal reference (nei can)', instead of publishing on the newspapers", the reporter added. Several journalists in *CCTV* also mentioned that whether certain general spot news can be broadcast depends on the editors' judgments of the current situation and their understanding of the current propaganda' demands, just case by case.

In sum, in the non-sensitive time periods or in the approved periods by propaganda, the Internet is more likely to empower journalists. The specific time is determined by the interaction between facilitating factor "propaganda reform initiated by the Party-state" and the constraining ones "mass media regulation and propaganda control" and "self censorship". However, these time periods are not fully predictable.

Genre-specific: "Red light, stop; green light, go; yellow light, strategically probe"

Journalists often describe their news making practices as crossing a road; they take different actions when dealing with different kinds of news contents in "red-light", "green-light" and "yellow-light" zones.

"Red-light, green-light and yellow-light zones", these three categories of news are identified by journalists in their long-time news practices. The news on or related to Chinese sensitive political issues and figures, such as the political institution reform, Tiananmen event and Zhao Ziyang, are in the red-light zone. Journalists often said "Politics is absolutely dangerous to touch, and the sensitive political events are absolutely forbidden on media." Other non-political content is relatively looser in Party's ideological controls, and most of them are in the "green-light zone", such as the general social, economic, cultural news and soft news features. Covering news stories in "green-light zone" is safe in politics, and journalists enjoy a relatively high autonomy in making this kind of news. They make use of the Internet to assist their work freely, such as enriching news sources, checking news facts, sensing public opinion and so on, as long as they guarantee accurate news facts.

However, there are still some non-political contents in "yellow-light zone", most of which are problematic news genres, such as spot news and societal news (Polumbaum, 1994). Most of these news contents are about social problems or negative issues, such as corruption, outbreak of disease, demonstrations and riots.

Although such kinds of news are not fully forbidden, propaganda departments always keep a close eye on the progress of the news reporting, and propaganda circulars will probably be sent out any time to forbid the reports as long as they appear to threaten the existing social situations and systems. The Internet is possible to enable journalists to cover news stories in "yellow-light zone", because it can help journalists strategically probe, circumvent or even get rid of the propaganda controls. The reporting of "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen" is such a case. In order to serve the audience and win professional fames, many journalists make their attempts in the "yellow-light zone" to cover influential reports. And it seems that more and more investigative reports have been carried out successfully in the zone due to the cross-city supervision by public opinion through the Internet's amplification.

However, the news genres in China are quite ambiguous, and the three categories of news sometimes overlap. Economic news usually contains lots of political implications and social news can also gradually turn to the policy issues after further discussions and investigations. Propaganda or other government departments often intervene in these problematic news genres, as long as the news seems to threaten the politics or other bureaucratic interests. In the news case "Niuniu Scandal in Shenzhen", at first the Internet had successfully helped journalists strategically circumvent the propaganda control and disclose the scandal; however, all the media had been prohibited from further reporting when the propaganda departments issued prohibition commands in the reason that the wide criticisms on the scandal would

lead to an ill anti-rich hatred emotion. The propaganda became the final results determiner. All the postings about Niuniu were deleted by the cyber-polices, and journalists cannot get further information from the Internet. In addition, when recalling the reporting on the "kneel-down" mayor, a reporter in *Beijing Youth Daily* told that he got the news tips online at the earliest time, but his editorial leader suppressed reporting of the news because it was related to an important local official and it is not suitable for *Beijing Youth Daily* to disclose. He also said, "(Within the political bottom line) there are no clear rules on what kinds of contents can be reported and what cannot. The nature of news event is changing in the progress; the propaganda instructions also change from time to time, and other interest groups may intervene at times as well. "

In sum, the Internet is possible to empower journalists in spot news and negative social news. However, not all news of this kind can be successfully reported. Although the Internet can empower journalists at the beginning in certain cases, it cannot guarantee the final success. From the above discussion, it can be found that journalists' situational success on news genres is also contingent upon the interaction between the facilitating factors, such as "motivation of serving the audience to win media market" and "professional aspiration", and the constraining factor such as "mass media regulation and propaganda control".

Media status-specific: "In my media, the relationship between the Internet and our

journalists is quite delicate."

In China, media controlled by the political center power enjoy less autonomy than those at the political periphery, such as party organs verse the commercial local media (Chan and Qiu, 2003). Directly regulated by Party's propaganda departments, both central and provincial party organs are considered to be the main conduits of ideological controls. The Central Propaganda Department is still at the pinnacle of the administrative pyramid organs. The marketized local media is under relatively looser propaganda controls since they are far from the political power center. Both kinds of media do not fully incorporate the Internet in news making, and they have ambiguous attitudes towards the Internet.

Generally, there is a "symbiotic" relationship between the Internet and traditional media, no matter the Party organs or the local marketized presses. On one hand, the commercial Internet portals are not allowed to make news by themselves, so they have to sign contracts with the traditional media to buy news; on the other hand, restricted by the spatial areas, newspapers have only limited circulations, so most of the local media rely on the Internet portals to remediate news for a larger readership and wider influence in the national scope. Sometimes the newspapers will negotiate with the Internet portals to put on their news stories to the salient space in order to attract more readers' attention.

Specifically, in the party organs, quite a number of important news events under hot

discussion on the Internet are turned to be an "internal reference" or even suppressed down by the upper editorial leaders in the reason that "party organ should stand with the government to maintain social stability". The journalists in party organs considered that their reports and comments on the events have a much greater impact than those in other popular newspapers, so they should be more careful in dealing with the events, especially issues related to some important interests. The journalists in *People's Daily* and *CCTV* always reiterated that "concern on the current social situation is quite important for our party organs because they are the mouthpieces of the Party", and one reporter also emphasized that "standing high to grasp the whole situation is the requirement for the party journalists; we should be responsible for the stability of the state and society." They also emphasized that they should guide the online public opinion and lead a rational discussion on the Internet; as an editor in *People's Daily* said, "We represent the central government and our reports are authoritative, and we should not follow the opinions of popular mass." In addition, the party organs were relatively more restricted in the online news using, since news on the Internet may be from unauthentic sources and misleading. Journalists in party organs were commanded to "absolutely" guarantee the truth of their news to maintain their authority as the representative of the Party.

However, several party organs' journalists use the word "delicate" to describe their relationship with the Internet. A reporter in *CCTV* said that, "Our senior editorial leaders always required us not to spend our time to find news on the Internet;

however, they will not be pleased if we miss important or interesting news stories published on the Internet." In addition, *People's Daily* has established Fifth Page as a new edition that pays great attention on online public discussions. And *People's Daily* even makes full use of their People.com to promote the interaction between the public and the party organ. An editor of *People's Daily* also admitted the "delicate" relationship between the Internet and their newspaper, the online public opinion cannot be ignored since the Internet was also a kind of reference framework. However, he also admitted that journalists should fully obey to the guidance from the senior leaders on how to report important news disclosed on the Internet, especially those related to politics or those of great influence, which the Central Propaganda Department would set the tone on such events. He also says that, "We are quite cautious in selecting news on the Internet, because *People's Daily* is mainstream media. We are always reminded that *People's Daily* should serve for Party."

As to the marketized media, propaganda controls are relatively loose on them, and reporters in marketized media have strived for their job autonomy as a professional. They use the Internet to detect news tips ignored by the party organs. They care the civil livelihood and like digging out social problems, so as to bring some changes to the society. These news practices also compose a part of their improvising reform activities to win the media market. However, there is much intension embedded in their practices. The marketized media have to cater the popular mass and online opinions which even change journalists' news judgment, such as "Zhao Wei vexillary

event". In addition, quite a number of editors directly translate or edit some sensational international or entertainment soft news or feature stories to attract readers' attention. Although not allowed in principle, this editorial activity has been shared as a hidden rule among editors. In addition, the marketized media's editorial decision is often under the pressure of advertising and local bureaucratic interests, so the Internet has little impact even in these media which are under looser propaganda control. An editor in *Beijing Youth Daily* described the disclosure of certain important news events as a struggle of different interests groups, "the strong interest group is always passive and only moves when pushed. The Internet is a good platform to present their fierce struggle, or even fighting." So it is not surprised that many journalists in the interviews only regard the Internet "just as a tool" although they have benefited from the Internet to cover influential reports in news making.

What should also be mentioned is that many journalists in the party organs and the local televisions are occupied by routine reports in their daily work, and they are well paid as long as they finish all the routine works. So it is not necessary for them make use of the Internet to do more for a better or professional journalism.

In sum, the Internet is not fully routinized by the different media organizations, and it has only been partly incorporated into the newsroom. Also, there is no rule to guide whether or how to make use of the Internet for journalistic practices. So the Internet usage can only be explained more as informal or improvising practices, and thus its

empowerment effects depend on the specific media under different conditions. In such situations, the facilitating factors as "motivation of serving the audience to win media market", "professional aspiration" and the constraining one as "mass media regulation and propaganda control" intertwine and interact to determine the final outcomes.

Location specific: "Throwing a ball onto the Internet, anyone who is able to catch it takes the responsibility"

Owned by the Party-state, both newspapers and televisions in China are under the guidance of party propaganda departments. Central party organs are under the direct control of the Central Propaganda Department, and the local newspapers and television stations, although still guided by the Central Propaganda Department, are under the direct supervision of different provincial or municipal propaganda departments or offices. So in most time of their daily news work, journalists' reporting work in different provinces or municipals may follow different guidelines set based on local social situations. Usually, media in different cities will probably respond differently towards the same events due to the different propaganda requirements from specific direct propaganda leaders.

In addition, the traditional local culture also matters. Although, in principle, propaganda policies are the same towards the nationwide media, propaganda policies often meet local adoption or resistance when they are implemented. Beijing and

Guangzhou are such cases. As the capital and political center of China, Beijing is "bureaucratic power oriented (guan benwei)" and media in Beijing are conservative in politics. However, Guangzhou enjoys relatively liberal atmosphere benefited from its traditional Canton culture and the earliest economic reform openness. The different culture backgrounds make the journalists in these two cities have different self-censorship and perceptions on journalists' role, which, in turn, affects journalists' Internet usages during news making. Some of the reporters in *Southern Metropolis News* and *Guangzhou Daily* once worked in Beijing's media commented that: "Reporters in Beijing are more political conservative. Actually, the so-call 'news forbidden areas' are not that many as we guessed, and most of the constraints are imposed by journalists themselves." An editor in *Beijing Youth Daily* also admitted that journalists in Beijing are greatly influenced by the bureaucratic tradition, and journalists in the South are relatively liberal in their daily news practices due to different cultural background.

A social news reporter in *Beijing Youth Daily* recalled once her interviewed on a mine disaster in Daping city of Henan Province in 2004. Most of the media got the news from the Internet, and journalists were soon sent to Daping from different provinces. When she just arrived there, the Beijing Party Propaganda Department issued a circular forcing the Beijing local media to stop reporting due to Beijing municipals' local interests concern. So she and a reporter in *Jing Hua Daily* had to stop their work immediately and flied back, but reporters from other provinces had

not received any propaganda command and were able to continue.

The influential event "Sun Zhigang's death" also reflects the regional differences. An editor in *Beijing Youth Daily* said they heard about the news of Sun Zhigang on the Internet at the same time as the reporters of *Southern Metropolis News*. However, their editorial leaders considered it a sensational event and not suitable for reporting due to the political concerns, so they kept silent on the events at the beginning. But journalists in *Southern Metropolis News* successfully disclosed the death of Sun Zhigang and won the professional fame. The reporter in *South Metropolis News* said, his reports to disclose Sun' death was motivated by "justice", and as a professional journalist he had the responsibility to serve the public. While he also expected that reports would have a positive impact on market, "when our newspaper wins the professional reputation, it will also win the audience and market."

These local differences lead to the possibility of the cross-city supervision by public opinion, in which the Internet has played an important role. As journalists described, "Once appearing on the Internet, the news clue would be probably notified by nationwide journalists. Although it may not be available for any media, the news clue has become a 'ball', being thrown onto the Internet, and anyone who can catch it may take the responsibility to carry out the report. For example, an event happened in Shanghai, but the Shanghai local media are allowed to touch it, or even Beijing's media are warned not to touch it as well; but surely there are still some media which are outside the scope of influence of certain interest groups, so there will be much

more chance to disclose social problems than before." In addition, journalists often make use of the Internet strategically to "publish ahead of the propaganda order" (qiangxian bao) and "win the time-lag"(da shijian cha). The cross-border information transformation and easy access to the Internet enable the nationwide journalists to cooperate in reporting certain news events.
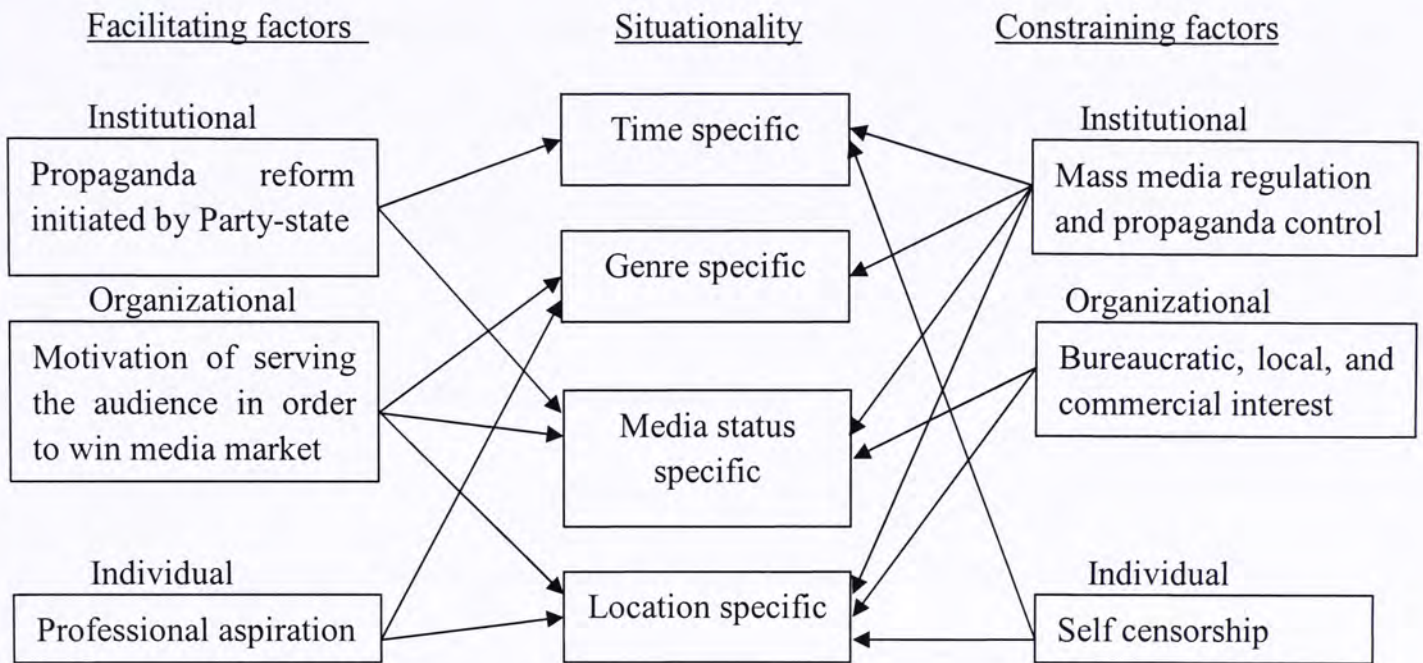
Generally speaking, the Internet will empower journalists on the cross-city supervision, and the empowerment is more likely to happen in areas far away from related interests groups and with relatively looser propaganda control. However, the local differences are not fixed, which may be flexible on different news cases due to the specific local interests, or even the media's own advertising interests concerns. "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen" is such a case. The event happened in Shenzhen, which is far away from Beijing but closely connected to Guangzhou, so the propaganda commands from Guangdong provincial leaders and newspapers' advertising concerns in Shenzhen led *Southern Metropolis News* to keep silent at the beginning. The reporter in *Beijing Youth Daily* also told that, "Besides propaganda lines, the constraints on reports are mainly advertising, bureaucratic interest and local commercial interests. For us market is a two-edged sword." In addition, she added that, "Sometimes we did not touch certain news if it would undermine our organization's own interests, no matter how important the news was and how fierce it was discussed by the public."

In addition, a reporter in *Guangzhou Daily* said the editorial line of *Guangzhou Daily* was different under different editors-in-chief, "Our former leader Li Yuanjiang considered himself as a businessman, so he ran the newspaper as a commercial enterprise. He did not care much about the propaganda requirements, and often treated propaganda punishment as a necessary payoff to win the market. In his time, *Guangzhou Daily* is much more liberal than before. But now things have changed a lot after the appointment of a conservative leader. "

As discussed above, the differences in response to propaganda control and in journalists' self-censorship make it possible for the Internet to empower journalists through the cross-city supervision. When achieving the success of supervision by public opinion, the media win not only the professional fame but also the audience and market. However, media are facing the dilemma in the organizational level, that is, on one hand media should make their efforts to serve the audience because of the market concern; on the other hand they also have to deal with the local, commercial and bureaucratic interests. This dilemma leads to the journalists improvising practices in their media organizations, so the reports are finally accomplished by specific media in specific locations. Just like a kind of "guerrilla warfare", the situational empowerment by the Internet is also location-specific.

Table 7-1 Mediation in situational empowerment

7-1-1: Mediation factors in different situationality

Facilitating factors   Situationality   Constraining factors

Institutional

| Propaganda reform initiated by Party-state |

Organizational

| Motivation of serving the audience in order to win media market |

Individual

| Professional aspiration |

Situationality boxes:
- Time specific
- Genre specific
- Media status specific
- Location specific

Institutional

| Mass media regulation and propaganda control |

Organizational

| Bureaucratic, local, and commercial interest |

Individual

| Self censorship |

7-1-2: Characteristics of situationality

Situationality	Facilitating situation	Constraining situation
Time specific	- Propaganda reform period initiated by Party-state (i.e. The Closenesses) - Relatively loose political environment	- Sensitive time period (i.e. double conference) - Specific propaganda circulars issued
Genre specific	- Problematic social news in the "yellow-light zone" - General social or economic news in "green-light zone"	- Sensitive news or political issues in "red-light zone"
Media status specific	- Party organs undergoing top-down editorial reform or supervision by public opinion - Marketized presses strongly motivated by market to serve the public	- Party organs under tight propaganda control on - Marketized presses intervened by bureaucratic and advertising interests
Location specific	- Relatively liberal and commercialized media environment - Multiple and relatively free cultural background	- Political conservative media environment - "Bureaucratic power-oriented" cultural background - Locally or trans-locally bureaucratic interest conflicts

In conclusion, the situational empowerment by the Internet is characterized as

"time-specific", "genre-specific", "media status-specific" and "location-specific". These four components are not independent of each other. They are connected with each other to determine the final outcomes together. The interactions between the facilitating factors and constraining factors, and the characteristics of the situationality are summarized in the following table (Table 7-1).

Social mechanisms of situational empowerment

As elaborated in above discussions, the Internet empowers journalists in specific social context, composed of specific time, news genre, media status and location of media organization. The situational empowerment of the Internet has been categorized in different patterns as "reinforcement of the media's surveillance role" (Pattern one), "facilitation of news value reorientation" (Pattern two), and "promotion news timeliness" (Pattern three). That is to say these three empowerment patterns are the consequences of situational mediation by the facilitating and constraining factors, and behind the mediation consequences are the social mechanisms that lead to the Internet's possible empowerment. In addition, according to the conceptualization, "improvement of news making efficiency" (pattern four) is a non-empowerment case.

Let's examine the patterns of empowerment once more. In the first pattern of "reinforcement of the media's surveillance role", the strong forces that support the

Internet's amplification of cross-city supervision by public opinion are: (1) motivation of serving the audience to win media market; (2) professional aspiration; (3) relatively weak propaganda regulation in news decision process. That is to say, in this pattern, the facilitating factors in the organizational and individual levels are much stronger than the constraining ones, especially in the institutional level. In the second pattern, "facilitation of news values reorientation", the strong forces that facilitate the redirection of news values are: (1) propaganda reform initiated by the Party-state; (2) motivation of serving the audience to win media market; (3) comparatively weak propaganda control. That is to say, the facilitating factors in the institutional and organizational levels are dominant factors of the journalistic practices in this pattern. The same as the second pattern, the third one, "promotion news timeliness" is dominated by the facilitating factors in the institutional and organizational levels. This is summarized in Table 7-2 below.

Table 7-2: The social mechanism of empowerment by the Internet

Empowerment by the Internet	Mechanism
Reinforcement of the media's surveillance role (Pattern one)	- Motivation of serving the audience to win media market *(organizational)* - Professional aspiration *(individual)*
Facilitation of news value reorientation (Pattern two)	- Propaganda reform initiated by the Party-state *(institutional)* - Motivation of serving the audience to win media market *(organizational)*
Promotion of news timeliness (Pattern three)	- Propaganda reform initiated by the Party-state *(institutional)* - Motivation of serving the audience to win media market *(organizational)*

The general principle of mediation

In the intertwining and interacting process between the constraining and facilitating

factors at institutional, organizational and individual levels, the general principle in the mediation is found through the above analysis: First, the institutional factors are the strongest, the organizational factors are the second strongest, and the individual ones are relatively weak. Second, when the facilitating institutional factors are strong, such as the propaganda reform initiated by the top leaders, no matter how the factors in other levels are, the institutional ones will dominate the outcomes of the journalistic practices, as shown in the empowerment pattern two and three. Since the institutional facilitating factors mainly affect the specific time and specific media status, we can see that this kind of empowerment has taken place in propaganda reformative time period and in the party organs. Similarly, when the constraining institutional factors are powerful, the logic remains the same. The Internet can only improve the news efficiency without effect on adjusting the news routine to empower Chinese journalists, as shown in the fourth pattern of Internet's impact. Third, when the factors of institutional level are relatively weak, the factors at organizational and individual levels will have strong influence, and dominate the final mediation consequences. The first pattern of empowerment belongs to this category. Since the facilitating factors at organizational and individual levels strongly affect the specific news genre, media status and location in certain situation, it has been found that this empowerment pattern takes place in marketized presses' social news reports in certain cities.

To summarize, whether and how the Internet can empower Chinese journalists are

determined by the dominant mediation factors in a specific social context. This is also the general mediation principle of the Internet's impact on Chinese journalistic practices.

So whether the Internet can empower journalists is not a simple yes or not. The answer is contingent upon the social situation under which the news making takes place. The social situation is a result of the mediation of the factors in the three-level clusters. General speaking, the empowerment takes place when the constraining factors are relatively weak compared with the facilitating ones. What's more, there are two kinds of mechanisms leading to relatively weak constraining factors. The first kind is "top-down" through propaganda reform, and the second one is "bottom-up" through commercialization.

Top-down: Initiated in the hegemonic propaganda reform

When the propaganda itself is challenged or threatened by the outside society, it will take action to perform hegemonic internal reform, which provides journalists a new discourse resource to legitimate their improvising activities, and encourages media's reformative attempts on their news routines to meet the new propaganda needs. The Internet incorporates this propaganda reform and helps media to achieve the initial goals set by the propaganda leaders.

The consecutive propaganda reform is marked by the "Three Closenesses" in recent

years, and the "Three Closenesses" is the major reformative force. Due to the commercialization, globalization and development of new technology, the traditional propaganda has already faced the crisis of its legitimization and has to adapt to the changing situations of media and society. In addition, Li Changchun, China's highest official in charge of ideology and media policy, said in a meeting of senior media and culture officials in January 2004 that media reports "must have substantial and reliable content as well as news value". He also urged journalists and cultural workers to satisfy the needs of people: "We must propagate the party's views, uphold (the principles of) unity and stability, and concentrate on making positive propaganda." In public and private meetings with senior media personnel in the past few years, relatively liberal cadres such as Hu Jintao and Zhu Rongji have praised journalists' responsibility in exposing the "dark side of the society", particularly corruption among officials. In this trend, the editorial reforms have first taken place in *People's Daily* and *CCTV*, and nationwide media interpreted the policies for their own needs. In addition, the central propaganda has commanded the party organs "to occupy the public opinion plateau on the Internet" since the Internet is booming in China and playing more and more important role in affecting public opinion.

All these have legitimized the journalists' use of Internet, especially to meet the propaganda reform purpose of the media. This, with the help of the Internet, leads to the born of "Focus News" in *People's Daily*, and "immediate" foreign affair news releasing in *CCTV*. All these efforts help the party organs gradually regain some

authorities in their news reports. As their reporters often say, good media should have not only rich news contents, but also a good form of presenting the news, "the party organs own quite a lot of unique news resources, and they should change to meet the public needs in order to regain its authority".

However, all these reforms are under the hegemonic control by propaganda. A political news reporter in CCTV told that: "Only the top-down reform, in which the editorial leaders change their minds, can gain a fruitful result; all other bottom-up reformative attempts in party organs will face the "cool treatments" (leng chuli) and fail in the end."

In the top-down approach, the Internet acts as an activated tool outside the execution of policies to empower journalists. Objectively, the media should be able to achieve a positive liberalizing outcome in their journalistic practices. When considering the factors in the three clusters, the facilitating institutional factors dominate the whole process, assisted by the facilitating organizational factors.

Bottom-up: motivated by commercialization

The second one takes place in a different way, namely, from the bottom to top. Journalists strategically make use of the Internet to access the news in the "yellow-light zone" and amplify it in order to weaken, circumvent, and erode the hegemony of propaganda. Besides their improvising practices, commercialization is

also a powerful force in bottom-up empowerment.

In the trend of media marketization, advertising and other profit making activities are the lifelines of the media. Journalists have to win their media professional reputation in order to attract more audience and expand the media market. Journalists in the marketized media often take the "bottom up" reformative actions to push forwards the propaganda boundary in the name of professionalism. Journalists take the social responsibility, no matter voluntary or not, to act as an adversary to supervise the government by public opinion. Their fame as "responsible media" also rewards the media with high commercial profits. So many journalists make their attempts to report significant events and disclose social problems that may be influential.

In this approach, the Internet is an active agent in journalists' news making: it acts as an indispensable cooperator to provide the news source, amplify the events to raise public opinion, and legitimize the improvising practices. Although empowerment is contingent upon specific social situation, the successful events and reports have become "hot moments" (Pan and Lu, 2003) among the journalism profession. Such as "Sun Zhigang' s death", "Niuniu scandal", and "Nandan disastrous mine blast", other journalists treat them as their exemplars which will probably influence their following news practices.

Looking into the interactions of the three-cluster factors, it is the facilitating

organizational and individual factors that dominate the whole process, under relatively loose constraining institutional factors.

In addition, it should be further elaborated that, the bottom-up empowerment motivated commercialization is ahead of the "top-down", and it gives pressure to the conservative propaganda to take reform actions. In other words, competing in the same media market, the commercialization indirectly affects the party organs through marketized presses, and the party organs have to modify their news practices to adapt to the changing media environment and respond to the market shared by all media. The "top-down" through propaganda reform and the "bottom-up" through commercialization are the underlying social mechanisms for which the Internet's empowerment becomes possible. Behind the interaction between the two approaches is still the tug of war between the hegemonic political propaganda and liberalizing market.

Concluding remarks

Chinese journalists' news practices are full of ambiguity. The rule-by-men propaganda control, "serving two masters" in the media organizations, and improving journalistic reform activities are their characteristics. Under such a complex social context, the facilitating and constraining factors at institutional, organizational, and individual levels intertwine with each other, and determine the

Internet-assisted news making. So the Internet's impacts are quite different in specific time periods, news genres, media status and spatial locations, and from the viewpoint of "mediationist", the Internet's empowerment is contingent upon specific social situations determined by the factors mentioned above. Although the empowerment is situational, it will probably be inspired and motivated by the "top-down" propaganda reform and the "bottom-up" liberalizing commercialization. Behind the interaction of the two mechanisms is still the tug of war between the hegemonic political propaganda and liberalizing market.

Chapter 8   Conclusion and Discussion

Song Yan, the news editor from the *Beijing Youth Daily* in the story told at the very beginning of the thesis, emphasizes that most journalists in her news agency are adept at using the Internet as an aid in their everyday news making. Some of them have even established web pages to improve their work. "Journalist Zheng Zhi" is one such example, being the homepage of Zheng Zhi, a journalist with the *Beijing Youth Daily*. She has published on it her personal feelings on interviews, her news analysis, and backstage news editing stories. It is interesting that her name in Chinese happens to have the same pronunciation as "honest" (zheng zhi). Her website is well known among her journalistic peers in Beijing, and it has gradually become a virtual platform from which journalists learn from each other and improve themselves, becoming more responsible and honest. Nowadays, through such weblogs, growing numbers of journalists are communicating with each other and carrying on news practices. The impact of information technology on journalists is ongoing; despite the fact this research explores part of the journalistic field over only a short period of time, the findings will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the whole situation.

This research uses in-depth interviews and case studies to explore the Internet's impacts on Chinese journalists, aiming to answer the research question whether and how the Internet can be an agent of empowerment in news making. In the news

making process, including newsgathering, decision-making, news dissemination, and other related activities, the Internet plays an important role as news resource, reference framework, and supplementary channel. In news gathering, the Internet helps journalists access more news clues, build up wider news networks, and enrich the background information; in decision making, the Internet is used to locate the appropriate time for news publishing, to generate public opinion, as well as to reinforce the journalists' knowledge framework as professionals; in news dissemination, it becomes an alternative channel for certain news that can not be published in the traditional media, and it also helps the reports in traditional newspapers reach a wider audience.

The consequences of universal usage of the Internet among journalists are four-fold: firstly, the Internet reinforces the media's surveillance role by amplifying supervision of the government by the public; secondly, it facilitates the reorientation of news values; thirdly, it promotes news timeliness as an external pressure; finally, it improves the journalists' working efficiency. It can be seen, from the different impact patterns, that the Internet is not an absolutely liberalizing force that empowers journalists. The empowerment effects are contingent upon certain social situations which are the interaction results of the mediation factors.

The social mediation factors consist of both constraining and facilitating factors at three levels: that of the individual, the organization and the institution. The

constraining factors include propaganda controls, organizational concerns on the local, bureaucratic and commercial interests, and the journalists' individual self-censorship; the facilitating factors are the possible new policies and propaganda reform, organizational concerns for marketing and the mission to serve the public, and the journalists' professional aspirations. Since propaganda controls on the media are generally in the form of rules while within the media journalistic reform activities are based upon improvisation, the interaction result between the constraining and facilitating factors is largely contextual and situational. As a result, under such complex social conditions, the Internet can only empower journalists situationally; that is, the Internet's empowerment effects are time-specific, news-genre specific, media status-specific, and media location-specific. So the Internet empowers journalists to push the propaganda boundary rather like a form of "guerrilla warfare", taking place only when the constraining factors are weaker than the facilitating ones. Such empowerment is motivated by bottom-up commercialization, as well as by propaganda-initiated top-down reforms. The two social mechanisms interact with and influence each other.

A mediationist perspective on the Internet's impact on Chinese journalists

The "mediationist" perspective interprets the social impact of the Internet as a process in which juxtaposing adversaries interact with each other and affect the outcome. The juxtaposing adversaries here are the facilitating factors and

constraining mediation factors in journalists' news making, and these factors are embedded in the Internet and social context. Historically, Chinese journalism has been restricted by the Party's propaganda and ideological control, often described as "dancing with foot shackles". The Internet's intrinsic properties, such as its immediacy, interactivity and ability to cross borders, make it a potentially liberalizing force in China's journalistic practices. So in the mediation process, the actual utilization of the Internet in certain given society gives rise to new means of journalistic practices which operate in neither complete defiance of nor total compliance with the existing journalistic routines or social order. The facilitating and constraining factors at the individual, organization and institutional levels interact with each other and shape the outcomes, leading to situational empowerment by the Internet. The Internet enables journalists to push the propaganda boundary, for example by reinforcing the media's surveillance role, facilitating news value reorientation, and promoting news timeliness in news making; in addition, it helps journalists increase the efficiency of their news making. As far as mediation consequences are concerned, whether and how the empowerment can be achieved is contingent upon the contextual situations in which mediated factors interact with each other. The empowerment only takes place in certain situations, in specific time periods, news genres, media organization types, and media locations. When constraining factors dominate, journalists' attempts to push the propaganda boundary will end in failure. As long as a reform is initiated by the propaganda itself, the media will gain more autonomy to adopt new journalistic practices. When institutional

constraints are looser, such as in less sensitive periods, in the social news genre, or marketing media, there will be more opportunity to empower journalists. However, the specific propaganda commands, organizational concerns, and the journalists' or editors' individual characters will affect the final results.

Although complex social factors have a great influence on the impact of the Internet on the news making of Chinese journalists, the positive influence of the Internet on journalistic practices, and the subsequent higher degree of journalistic autonomy, is remarkable. The Internet's liberalizing power can be realized through bottom-up commercialization, or top-down propaganda reform. These two processes interact with each other and work together to facilitate the journalists' guerrilla-like attempts to test and push the propaganda boundary that limits journalistic autonomy.

From the mediation perspective, the time frame of this study may have influenced the research findings. This research, conducted over two months, finds that social mediations have played a significant role in shaping the impact of the Internet on journalistic practices in current China. If a longer time period is studied, enabling us to observe from a historical perspective, more empowerment cases facilitated by the Internet might be found. We may also find that the technology actually plays a more important role in shaping social development. Yet, even though only a short time period is studied, the significance of the research findings is remarkable. China is an authoritarian country with little journalistic autonomy. If the Internet can be an agent

of empowerment under certain conditions, whether this is to a greater or lesser degree, or situational or categorical, researchers can be more optimistic about the future due to the ongoing routinization of the Internet and journalistic reform.

Implications for China's journalism reform

Influential Internet-assisted reports, such as the "Sun Zhigang case", the "Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen" and the "Nandan mine blast", have become professional exemplars in journalistic practice.

In the *Southern Metropolis News*, according to a social news reporter, the report on Sun Zhigang's Death exemplifies the social responsibility of professional journalists. He considers that media should be the "fourth estate" and believes in democracy, the liberal market, and pluralism. Journalists in this newspaper pay great attention to online information, especially those journalists who would bring possible social change to the existing unequal institutions. In the *Guangzhou Daily*, two reporters add that the Internet provides them an independent knowledge framework which is quite different from that provided by the party organs, enabling them to gain more independence in their value judgments. Reporters and editors refer to "civic news about the people's livelihood", and use the Internet to give a news voice to the grassroots and help create solutions to problems. An editor at the *Beijing Youth Daily* believes journalists should take social responsibility and bear in mind such principles

as being "people-oriented (yiren weiben)", "rational (lixing)" and "constructive (jianshe xing)".

Professionalism in China has historically formed along the triangular dynamics of party ideology, media marketization and western professionalism (Pan and Lu, 2003). One of the benefits of the Internet is that journalists have gained ground through their "guerrilla" tactics in such "hot moments" (Pan and Lu, 2003) of journalistic history as Sun Zhigang's death and the Nandan mine blast, with the former changing the penitentiary system and the latter winning the "top ten civic news in China 2001" and "top ten breakthroughs in news communication in 2001" awards. Journalists are then likely to follow the exemplars as they carry on their everyday practices; the Niuniu scandal in Shenzhen is such an example. The Internet facilitates the growth of professionalism in China by providing a new communication tool with a liberalizing potential. It gradually improves news timeliness, facilitates the news values reorientation, and in an evolutionary way reinforces the journalists' perception of the media's role in surveillance. All these imply an ongoing shifting of the journalistic paradigm in current China.

Due to the fast development of E-commerce, the Internet, in a broader sense, is booming as a kind of news economy in China. Similarly, China's ambition to build a highly technological state means it has invested heavily to build up information infrastructures in urban and rural areas. In view of this, Internet development in

China will increase in pace. Because of this trend emphasizing technology, together with other mechanisms such as commercialization and internationalization, China's media must become more liberal than before.

China here can represent authoritarian countries because of its lasting communist rule and ongoing reforms to establish a market economy which are under authoritarian political control. In China, as distinct from countries in North America and West Europe where the overwhelming majority of current research about the Internet is based, the Internet's empowerment is not only at the technical level of promoting job efficiency or improving newsroom management as most western researchers have discovered. The Internet can also increase liberalizing potential significantly in non-democratic societies. Through the mediation of social factors embedded in a certain society, it is possible for the Internet to function as a new communication technology, able to break up political or social constraints and bring liberalization to authoritarian countries. Although the factors will differ from one society to another, and the situation of empowerment will be presented differently in different social contexts and interaction processes, the mediation mechanism will be shared and the liberalizing potential can be expected. It therefore follows that the Internet's impacts in China, as a typical case, may be a reference for other authoritarian countries around the world.

Limitations of the research

The research has several limitations regarding the interviewees and the cases chosen for analysis.

The interviewees, chosen by snowball sampling, may be too alike in terms of their age and occupation. Most of my interviewees are twenty-five to forty years old and at the junior or middle level of the organizational hierarchy. Since relatively few journalists in the upper level, that is, those involved in news decision making, have been interviewed, there is more indirect data on the decision-making than direct data. This will affect some arguments and discussions.

The case studies focus on analysis of certain media; however, nationwide media may also play a role and the specific processes may be different. From this point of view, the Internet's impact patterns in journalism do not provide a complete picture of the situation as a whole. To improve this, more media should be included in order to elaborate on the possible empowerment and possible mechanisms behind it.

In addition, the research focuses on newspapers and television, and these do not fully represent all media or all journalistic practices in China. Specialist magazines and other tabloids will be differently, perhaps even more significantly, affected by the Internet. Also, the relationship between Internet news media and traditional media may change the media ecology in China, with the result that the mediation factors,

processes and consequences could be much more complicated.

A proverb claims that "sparks can kindle a prairie of fire (xingxingzhihuo keyi liaoran)". Similarly, the Internet's empowerment, although situational in its current phase, cannot be ignored because it implies the progress of, and even a potential breakthrough in, Chinese journalistic practices, perhaps in the very near future.

Appendices

Appendix 1:   Information about the interviewees

1. Liu Ningjie, junior reporter, Industrial and commercial news group, Social news department, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 8th, 2004

2. Peng Lan, Professor in Journalism School, Renmin University of China, Beijing, interviewed on December 9th, 2004

3. Zhu Shisong, junior reporter, Quality supervision news Group, Social news department, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 10th, 2004

4. Gao Weiqiang, senior reporter, Arts and cultural news groups, Social news department, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 10th, 2004

5. Ye Lei, junior reporter, Policy and law news group, Social news department, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 10th, 2004

6. Liu Nan, junior editor, Seven o'clock News Broadcast Program, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 11th, 2004

7. Feng Zhuo, senior reporter, Current political news group, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 12th, 2004

8. Song Yan, senior editor, National social news department, Beijing Youth Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 12th, 2004

9. Min Dahong, Profession in Journalism and Communication Research Institution, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, December 13, 2004

10. Wu Yue, junior reporter, Financial news group, News center, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 13th, 2004

11. Wang Jun, junior editor, General editorial room, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 13th, 2004

12. Chen Hua, administrative official, Internet regulation department, Information

Office of Beijing Municipal Government, interviewed on December 14th, 2004

13. Ji Yalin, junior editor, General editorial room, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 14th, 2004

14. Su Xianlong, junior editor and reporter, Social news department, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 14th, 2004

15. Liao Wengen, junior reporter, Technology news department, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 15th, 2004

16. Yang Jian, senior reporter, Technology news department, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 15th, 2004

17. Sheng Ruowei, junior reporter, Domestic political news department, Technology news department, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 15th, 2004

18. Shen Wei, senior producer and reporter , Weekly Quality Supervision Report Program, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 16th, 2004

19. Tang Song, junior editor and commentator, Commentary department, People's Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 16th, 2004 (Telephone interview)

20. Fan Yu, senior reporter, Current political news group, News center, Beijing Television Station, Beijing, interviewed on December 17th, 2004

21. Ma Guoying, junior reporter, economical and financial news group, News center, Beijing Television Station, Beijing, interviewed on December 17th, 2004

22. Guo Jia, junior reporter, cultural news department, Beijing Youth Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 18th, 2004 (Telephone interview)

23. Zhang Tianwei, senior editor and commentator, Commentary department, Beijing, interviewed on December 18th, 2004

24. Yu Dan, junior editor, International News Press Program, International news department, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 19th, 2004

25. Xie Lijian, junior editor, International News Press Program, International news department, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on December 19th, 2004

26. Li Xiao, junior editor, International news department, People's Daily, Beijing,

interviewed on December 20th, 2004 (Telephone interview)

27. Chen Lidan, Professor in Journalism School, Renmin University of China, Beijing, interviewed on December 21th, 2004

28. Li Qiao, junior editor, Oversee news center, Beijing Television Station, Beijing, interviewed on December 21th, 2004

29. Lu Chun, junior reporter, Domestic economical news department, Beijing Youth Daily, Beijing, interviewed on December 22th, 2004 (Telephone interview)

30. Le Qian, junior reporter, National social news department, Beijing Youth Daily, interviewed on December 22th, 2004

31. Wang Xi, junior editor, International news department, Beijing Youth Daily, interviewed on December 22th, 2004

32. Yuan Guofeng, senior editor and reporter, Domestic economical news department, People's Daily, Beijing, on December 25th, 2004

33. Hong Jiachun, junior producer and editor, On-the-spot Record Program, China Center Television, Beijing, interviewed on January 10th, 2005 (Telephone interview)

34. Wang Yue, former junior reporter, social news group, Zhongshan news station, Pearl delta news center, Zhongshan, Guangdong, interviewed on January 12th, 2005 (Interview conducted in Hong Kong)

35. Tan Min, junior editor, General editorial room, Guangzhou Daily, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 15th, 2005

36. Ren Shanshan, junior reporter, healthy news group, Current political and cultural news department, News center, Guangzhou Daily, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 15th, 2005

37. Bu Songzhu, junior reporter, cultural news group, Current political and cultural news department, News center, Guangzhou Daily, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 15th, 2005

38. Tang Yinchun, junior reporter, medical news group, Current political and cultural news department, News center, Guangzhou Daily, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 16th, 2005

39. Qiu Min, junior reporter, traveling news group, Economical and financial news department, News center, Guangzhou Daily, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 16th, 2005

40. Peng Junjie, junior reporter, stock market news group, Economical and financial news department, News center, Guangzhou Daily, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 16th, 2005

41. Wang Qian, junior reporter, Current political and economical news department, News Center, Guangdong Television Station, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 17th, 2005

42. Feng Feng, junior editor, Current political and economical news department, News Center, Guangdong Television Station, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 17th, 2005

43. Huang Yu, junior reporter, Civil and social news department, News center, Guangdong Television Station, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 17th, 2005

44. Xie Hua, junior editor, Evening news broadcast Program, News center, Guangdong Television Station, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 17th, 2005

45. He Ming, junior editor, Evening news broadcast Program, News center, Guangdong Television Station, Guangzhou, Guangdong, interviewed on January 17th, 2005

46. Li Haihua, senior reporter and commentator, Social news department, Southern Metropolis News, interviewed on January 18th, 2005

47. Le Guoxing, junior reporter, social news department, Southern Metropolis News, interviewed on January 18th, 2005

48. Huang Yi, junior reporter, Economical news department, Southern Metropolis News, interviewed on January 19th, 2005

49. Zhou Ningquan, junior reporter, Economical news department, Southern Metropolis News, interviewed on January 19th, 2005

50. Lv Zhuo, junior editor, Economical news department, Southern Metropolis News,

interviewed on January 19th, 2005

51. Lin Jingwen, junior editor, International news department, Southern Metropolis News, interviewed on January 19th, 2005

52. Li Yan, junior reporter, Current political news department, Southern Metropolis News, interviewed on January 20th, 2005

Appendix 2: General questions asked the interviewees

1. To the reporters and editors:

(1) 能不能描述一下每天的使用互聯網的情況？一般用互聯網做些什麼，怎麼樣使用它？

(2) 主要上那幾類網站看新聞呢？國內的還是外國的，或者 BBS 其他？

(3) 除了工作需要外，自己平時喜歡上什麼網站，愛上網幹什麼？（包括 BBS，寫 Blog）

(4) 平時的新聞源是什麼？是不是把互聯網當作新聞線索的來源？可不可以舉一些例子。

(5) 互聯網上獲得新聞源之後一般如何處理？單位有什麼規定？領導對這種以互聯網為新聞源的做法有什麼態度？

直接採訪 （單位有規定，處理的基本原則是什麼）

編前會 → 通過 （"通過"有什麼條件）

不通過 （是不是用其他的方式傳播新聞）
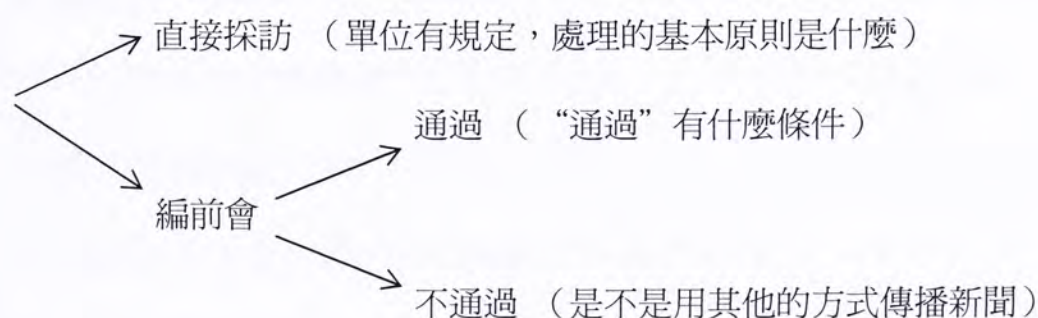
(6) 對於那些網上別討論得很熱烈的是事件或者披露的問題，你們一般會怎麼樣反映？ 有沒有因為互聯網上的輿論而引起的重大事件報導？

(7) "妞妞"事件等，但是你們是怎麼開始報導和在自己的媒體上處理這件事情的？（對於時政、社會新聞的記者提問）

(8) 如何看待互聯網的這種資訊快速傳遞和輿論形成對傳統媒體座位黨的宣傳事業的衝擊？

(9) 周圍是不是有記者利用互聯網的一些特點嘗試去打破傳統作新聞的底線

呢？

(10) 你覺得互聯網對新聞記者能夠有多大的解放作用，讓記者能掙脫原有的體制束縛去進行輿論監督？你覺得目前最大的限制在什麼地方？是不是你所在的媒體有它的特殊性？

(11) 在互聯網在資訊傳遞和輿論形成發揮越來越大的作用的時候，你覺得媒體和記者應該怎麼樣給自己定位，發揮什麼樣的作用呢？

2. To the professors and administrative official:

(1) 互聯網這種互動性強、資訊傳遞快速的媒體，對於作為當的喉舌的黨報和大眾化的市場報紙的新聞製作會有一些什麼樣的影響呢？您如何看待這種影響？

(2) 您覺得互聯網是不是可以幫助記者來加強輿論監督呢？如果可以的話，是通過什麼樣的方式來實現呢？如果不行的話，主要的限製在什麼方面呢？

(3) 您覺得互聯網有沒有可能幫助新聞記者打開一些新聞體製上的限製，使得記者的專業工作空間能相對增大相對自由一些？

(4) 中國媒體在現階段主要發揮的作用是什麼呢？在新聞改革的背景下，它的發展方嚮是怎麼樣的呢？

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